



Svaroopaa® Vidya Ashram

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Quick Fixes #5

The Inner Threshold

By Sadguru Swami Nirmalananda Saraswati

Go, Go, Go. Sprinting through life, you barely have time to enjoy your meals much less breathe. Naturally you look forward to crashing on the couch in the evening, a way to come to a much-needed stop. It is a necessary respite from your mind.

It's your mind that propels your frenetic pace. You can prove it to yourself by simply stopping in the middle of the day. Cease all physical activity for 3 minutes; set the timer on your phone. Even though you're physically still, your mind doesn't stop. It keeps going and going, prompting you to get moving again. You could blame your upbringing for your crazy mind, or the stresses of life or the people around you, but the ancient yogis said this problem existed 5,000 years ago. Patanjali defines yoga as the quieting of your mind:

yoga"s-citta-v.rtti nirodha.h — Yoga Sutras 1.2

Yoga is the stilling of the mind's activities.¹

Busy mind — busy life. This is the human dilemma, a feature of human life throughout time, not merely part of our modern "civilized" lifestyle. You do things, lots and lots of things, simply because you want them to make you happy. This means that you're not already happy, so you're looking for something to fix how you feel. What you really need is a Yogic Quick Fix.

What does a Quick Fix do? It turns your attention within so you get replenished by your own deeper essence. It's like you become nuclear powered instead of having to periodically refill your gas tank or plug in your car. The energy of aliveness comes from an inexhaustible source within, your own Self. Your Quick Fix taps you into that source, which fills you up and makes you more "you." It does all this within 2 or 3 minutes.

Pracchardana-vidhaara.naabhya.m vaa praa.nasya — Yoga Sutras 1.34

Exhaling and stilling your breath

[is one way to calm a disturbed mind].¹

It's a familiar feeling, something you experience when you spontaneously sigh. A quick uptake of breath, followed by a longer exhalation and then a pause... a Divine pause... as you settle into your Self, or at least peek inside. Yoga says you can do this any time you want (or need) to calm or quiet your mind. You could even do it now, a nice slow sigh. Then hover in the space at the end of the sigh. It's not your breath's movement that yoga focuses on. It is the pause between your breaths that makes the difference. Other yoga texts draw out the point more fully, explaining that you have an inner pause and an outer pause.

After each inhalation, even short and shallow inbreaths, there's a momentary pause before your breath moves out again — antara kumbhaka (the inner pause).

A similar pause awaits you at the end of each exhalation — bahya kumbhaka (the outer pause).

Even if your pause is short, it still happens. It's like backing up your car but shifting gears while it's still slightly moving; your car does come to a complete halt before it goes forward again.

Something magical happens in the pause. That magical, mystical moment of complete stillness is completely rejuvenating. It refills and restores you in just a few moments. You can gently extend into the pause, relaxing into it without "holding" your breath. Leave the inside of your throat open and soft, yet letting your breath move whenever it's ready. In that few seconds of sweet suspension, you hover

¹ Rendered by Swami Nirmalananda Saraswati

in the threshold between inside and outside, a needed and refreshing change. You can even use this as an entry point for the inner exploration that is yogic meditation.

Some meditation systems well-known in the West have you focus on the movement of your breath. This is beneficial, even proven by research, but it keeps your mind focused on movement. The problem is that your mind already knows how to “go, go, go.” Fortunately, watching your breath does begin to slow your mind, even calming and soothing it somewhat. But yoga promises inner stillness. For this, you have to look into the pause instead of watching your breath. First you find the inner pause, then your breath moves; now you find the outer pause, then your breath moves. Repeat.

As tangible as the pauses are, relatively easy to find after a few minutes of paying attention, it's not merely about finding the pauses but actually peeking into them. When your car is stuck at a railroad crossing with a train going by, you get a peek of what's on the other side by looking into the spaces between the moving cars. Similarly, you can peek inward by exploring into the spaces between your breaths. It is a doorway into the Self, a way of diving into a deep meditation. It helps you bypass your mind and discover there is more to you, inside.

My Guru taught this meditation method, known as “hamsa” or “so'ham” breath meditation. His detailed teachings revealed the mystical secret that few knew: breath meditation is not about the movement of your breath. It is about the pauses between your breaths. This is why the advanced levels of pranayama (breathing practices) emphasize the pauses. Most significantly, the outer pause is emphasized, just as the sutra gives us — the pause after your exhale.

Why? Either pause gives you a moment of inner stillness, which is very beneficial. Either one can be used as a doorway to a meditative immersion into the Consciousness that you are. Yet it is the outer pause that gives you the experience of surrender: a melting, softening and settling into your Self. It is the yogic surrender that makes you a Realized Master. We teach this yogic surrender in every Shavasana, at the beginning and end of every *Svaroopa*[®] yoga class.

Though a Master of the method, Swami Muktananda taught this approach to meditation infrequently. In the seven years I lived and studied with him, I heard him teach it only 5 or 6 times. Yet he taught mantra-based meditation 150-250 times every year! Mantra is a more powerful way of getting into meditation, especially with the mantra of our lineage, empowered by the Meditation Masters who preceded you on the path.²

One difference is that you bypass your mind when you peek or sense your way into the pause between your breaths. Yet at the end of your meditation, you come back to your mind, still as crazy as it ever was. Repeating the enlivened mantra in order to get into meditation engages your mind in the process. It takes you deeper than your mind, while your mind is being transformed by playing its part in the process. The power of these meditation practices is time-tested and proven, over millennia.

In the midst of your day, when you realize you're trapped in your mind, you need something that makes an immediate change. You need a Yogic Quick Fix. Of course mantra would help, but sometimes you can't even do that. Yet, even when you're flabberjolted, you're still breathing. So just sigh.

If there are other people around, you might need to sigh quietly, but you can still sigh. Peek into the pause at the end of your sigh. Hover in that sweet spot, the liminal zone, the threshold between outside and inside. Let your breath move when it's ready. Allow a couple of easy breaths and then do another. Do a total of three sighs. It will take 2 or 3 minutes all together. Then notice how you feel.

Notice who you feel yourself to be. You're more you.

That's what yoga is all about. Do more yoga.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES ON “QUICK FIXES”

To reach our teachers or to learn more about *Svaroopa*[®] Yoga & Meditation, contact
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² To receive the mantra, visit svaroopa.org/mantra-card and request a free mantra card from Swami Nirmalananda.