

Are you ready? Are you balanced?

The alarm fails to go off. You're late - you jump into the shower. Someone turns the tap on downstairs, the water scalds you in the shower. You leave the house without a proper breakfast. Tailgated by the car behind you on the way to work, every traffic light seems to change to red as you approach it.

The meeting has already started and your notes, prepared the night before, are still on the kitchen table.

The rest of the day is the normal mix of emails, urgent phone calls and unrealistic deadlines.. At 4pm you have a dreaded meeting, with a member of staff to deal with an issue, which you are expecting to be confrontational. The meeting goes exactly as you thought, the staff member appears aggressive and unresponsive and inevitably you end up losing your temper!

So what can we do to help ourselves?

The path back to the real you is never but a few breaths away. Try this as an exercise. It's taken from a Zen meditation exercise which will help you to take a rain-check to see if you're are ready to deal with stressful situations as they arise. *This exercise can be carried out in any position but for now lets assume you are sitting comfortably.*

The Practice

Start to bring your awareness to your breathing

On an out-breath count the number 'one' mentally.

Say the word 'and' as you breathe in and count the number 'two' the next time you breathe out.

Repeat the cycle until you have reached 'four' on your respective out-breath and start again from 'one'.

If you lose count - start again

If you find you have gone beyond four - start again

If you get distracted - start again

You will find that your breathing starts to slow down and that the gaps between counting (the words) will get longer as you become aware of the beginning and end of every in-breath and out-breath.

Let's re-visit our nightmare day again!

Each incident is an opportunity for mindfulness and breath awareness. Constantly assessing your body and mind through your breathing. Instead of seeing a red light as an irritating occurrence, see it as a chance to bring yourself back to the breath. There are so many occasions like this. Waiting for a lift, on your way to the next meeting, when the phone rings. All of them are opportunities for mindfulness and breath awareness.

Remember, good health is never more than a few breaths away. When facing a difficult situation practise this simple Zen Meditation exercise to see how mentally balanced you are before proceeding. If you get distracted before you count to 4 – you're not ready, go beyond 4 – you're not ready.

Try to achieve 3 rounds, which will take less than 2 minutes.

This is a great practice you can take anywhere and use in any circumstance it will help bring your mind back home and achieve a sense of balance.