

SELECTIVE THINKING

You have probably discovered by now that the mind often, if not always, has difficulty settling down. It's like the mind has a *mind* of its own and thoughts or images just keep arising. A skillful way to deal with this is to begin a meditation session with the following exercise. This is an example of what I call *selective thinking*.

This meditation was taught to me by the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh who, in 1967, was nominated for the Nobel peace prize by Martin Luther King. It is an excellent way of “giving the mind something constructive to do until it settles down”.

- As you breathe in you think to yourself
- ◆ Breathing in: I know that I am breathing in
As you breathe out you think to yourself
- ◆ Breathing out: I know I am breathing out
As you breathe in you think to yourself
- ◆ Breathing in: I feel my breath becoming deep
As you breathe out you think to yourself
- ◆ Breathing out: I feel my breath becoming slow
As you breathe in you think to yourself
- ◆ Breathing in: I feel myself becoming calm
As you breathe out you think to yourself
- ◆ Breathing out: I feel myself at ease
As you breathe in you think to yourself
- ◆ Breathing in: I smile at myself
As you breathe out you think to yourself
- ◆ Breathing out: I release all my tensions
As you breathe in you think to yourself
- ◆ Breathing in: I know I dwell in the present moment
As you breathe out you think to yourself
- ◆ Breathing out: I know it is a wonderful moment

After you have memorized these phrases, all you will need to think are the underlined words as you breath in and out.

In - Out
Deep - Slow
Calm - Ease
Smile - Release
Present Moment - Wonderful Moment

Try this exercise for ten or fifteen minutes per day for a few days in a row. Be particularly mindful of how the key words resonate within the body – and how this evolves with each consecutive round. Be mindful as various physical, emotional and mental stresses melt away. Pay attention as you begin to feel a calm presence emerge and once you feel that this calm state is well established, let go of the words and shift attention to the rhythm of the in and out breaths. Over time, our mental “anchor” naturally shifts from the breath to the awareness of calm. If something disturbs this, gently cycle through the words again, feeling their meaning until that sense of stillness has been reestablished.