

## **The Breath**

Breath is life. You could think of the breath as being like a thread or a chain that links and connects all the events in your life from birth, the beginning to death, the end. The breath is always there every moment, moving by itself, like a river.

Have you ever noticed how our breath changes with our moods – short and shallow when we're tense or angry, faster when we're excited, slow and full when we're happy, and disappearing when we're afraid. It's there with us all the time. It can be used as a tool, like an anchor, to bring stability to the body and mind when we choose to become aware of it. We can tune into it at any moment during everyday life.

Mostly we are not in touch with our breathing – it's just there, forgotten. So one of the first things we do in mindfulness is to get in touch with it. We notice how the breath changes with our moods, our thoughts, our body movements. We don't have to control the breath. Just notice it and get to know it like a friend. All that is necessary is to observe, watch and feel the breath with a sense of interest in a relaxed manner.

With practice, we become more aware of our breathing. We can use it to direct our awareness to different aspects of our lives. For example, to relax tense muscles, or focus on a situation that requires attention. Breath can also be used to deal with pain, anger relationships or the stress of daily life. During this programme we will be exploring this in great detail.

**Karen Ryder, Instructor, Stress Reduction Clinic, University of Massachusetts Medical Centre**

## Mindfulness of Breathing - Instructions

1. Sit in a comfortable posture, with your spine erect; let the shoulders drop.
2. Close your eyes if it feels comfortable or soften your gaze to a spot on the floor, a few feet in front of you
3. Bring your attention to you belly, feeling it rise or expand gently on the in-breath and fall or recede on the out-breath.
4. Keep the focus on your breathing, 'being with each in-breath for it's full duration, as if you were riding on the waves of your own breathing.
5. Every time you notice that your mind has wandered off the breath, softly note what it was that took you away and then gently escort your attention back to your belly and the feeling of the breath coming in and out of your body.
6. If your mind wanders from the breath a thousand times, then your job is simply to bring it back to the breath every time, no matter what it becomes preoccupied with. It is just as valuable to become aware that your mind has wandered and to bring it back to the breath as it is to remain aware of the breath.

Adapted from Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990) Full Catastrophy living

