

## Pausing Compulsions

Compulsivity, the urge to rashly act in ways that harm others, life, and the Earth, arises within multiple situations. When someone out of the blue vents their anger upon us for no discernable reason, we give them a taste of their own medicine. Walking past a store display, an object catches our eye, and we buy something we don't need. If someone blocks us from doing what we want to do, we demonize them. Seeing someone on the street who does not measure up to our standards, we judge them less than us. Driving past a well-manicured mansion, we want what they have. The list goes on.

Every time we acted out our willingness to harm others for self-benefit by thought, word or deed, we know we have degraded ourselves and feel remorse for what we did. However, if we can catch ourselves having these harmful thoughts and urges to act just when they first surface in our awareness, we can quickly and easily recover from them. Right there at that moment, before we empower a compulsion by indulging it, we can pause, the all-important pause.

Within that pause, we come back to the breath. At first the compulsion may have more energy than our attention and distract us from our breath. Yet if we can stay with the breath, we will override the compulsion's sense of urgency. We recover from our compulsive willingness to harm by reminding ourselves of our commitment to further life on Earth. Once recovered, we can deepen and renew our understanding of the threatened values.

Having the capacity to pause depends on our knowing that we need to pause and that our attention has a higher energy level than that of the impulse. Compulsivity comes on bold and strong and continues to increase its energy level until we have acted upon it or paused it. We increase our attention through a daily breath meditation practice, in which we continue to come back to the breath whenever distracted from following the breath. If we do not have a high enough attention energy level, the compulsion will overpower our best intentions and do what it wants us to do.

Knowing that we need to pause depends upon our resolve to adhere to our values.<sup>1</sup> Also, breath meditation makes us more aware of distractions, which sensitizes us to early compulsive thoughts and urges. Because we have repeatedly experienced the harms we generated from acting upon our compulsiveness, we would rather not do that again. And so, we pause.

With a firm adherence to our values and a high enough attention energy level, we pause as soon as we become aware of a compulsive reaction. Because we can pause, we can see the compulsion as an object and no longer identify with it as something we want to do. We do not want to do it because it

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<sup>1</sup> **Common values of furthering life on Earth (work in progress):** loving awareness of the sacred and the sacredness of all life and the Earth, reverent contentment and wonder for arising experience, humbly surrendering to the sacred knowing of how to further life on Earth, compassion, harmoniously interacting with others by knowing the sacred equality, unity, and interdependence of life on Earth, of life, equitable sharing of the Earth commons, acting in valued ways that further life on Earth, restoring and renewing our balance with Earth and life to preserve our mutual wellbeing. By living in these ways, we deepen our loving awareness of the sacred and sacredness of all life and the Earth.

harms others, life, Earth, and ourselves. Nipping the impulse early enough in the bud by taking away its emotional energy puts an end to it.

Pausing works most effectively when it first appears. If we become aware of a compulsion only after it has gained power over us, we still need to impose a pause, but to do that takes a much higher attention energy level and effort on our part.

Westerners live one compulsive reaction after the next. Compulsivity defines Western culture. The culture has conditioned us to blindly advance whatever we want to do without considering the consequences. Westerners look upon not acting impulsively as abnormal. How dare we not live the American Dream.

Of course, we still wonder where that impulse came from. This should not cause us to denigrate ourselves for having the compulsion. Instead, we should celebrate that we have learned how to return to the breath within the breath, the sacred way. Through compassion for ourselves, we can discover the causal conditions for the compulsion and then act to change the conditions that gave rise to it.

The sacred path transforms our behavior so that we no longer willingly harm others for self-benefit. We live our lives aligned with values that further life on Earth. Let us consider ourselves a work in progress on a steep learning curve, moving step by step on the path to living harmoniously with the sacred Earth Interbeing.

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