

When I heard the Venerable's robes rustle at what I estimated to be about forty minutes and yet she did not give the signal that our sitting meditation had ended, that's when I knew she would take us to the full hour. But my knees were complaining and my mind was bored with counting breaths. What to do in the time remaining? Suddenly a stray thought entered: *What if this were your last breath?*

Funny thing, I immediately began to breathe slower. Drawing in the air to fill every crevice of my lungs and then slowly pushing it out until there was nothing left to expel. "Well," I thought, "I must want to live."

Of course, when I got to the end of that "last" breath I was still there. So I began another breath, still asking, *What if this were your last breath?* There were flashes of regret—unfinished projects, loved ones grieving—but one breath isn't enough time to do anything about regrets. There was only enough time to experience the moment, to know that I was there, breathing.

Inhalation. Exhalation. When the moment passed, there was the next moment, and the next. In this way, I spent the remaining twenty minutes entirely in the present.

Outside of the meditation hall, we still plan for the future and think of the past. But so often we replay past regrets and worry about future events to the point where we're no longer present in the present. As the Venerable says, "We forget that we are breathing."

Meditation

When stuck in traffic, waiting in line, or anytime there's nothing to do other than be present, find a comfortable position in

which you can breathe freely.

What if this were your last breath?

Just for this moment, believe that this is all you have. No time to worry about the future or the past. Just enough time to know that you are breathing.

Draw it in.

Savor the sensation of your lungs filling.

Savor your heart beating.

Savor the sensation of your chest relaxing as you exhale.

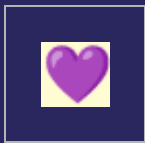
Inhalation.

Exhalation.

Here. Now. You.

Braver/Wiser is on summer hiatus to prepare for our new season, which launches on September 6th. This reflection was originally published on

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It makes our day when we can send your emails of thanks to the author (write those by clicking here)!





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