

So hello, welcome back. Today's topic I'd like to share with you a simple but powerful practice that could help you with your creative work.

But first let's do a simple experiment with mindfulness.

Mindfulness, I think of as the art of noticing where attention is. So if you feel comfortable, follow along as I do this.

See if you can feel where your body is breathing right now. It might be helpful if you put your hand just below your rib cage. You might feel your diaphragm.

And let's just take one minute keeping that feeling, keeping your attention on that feeling.

You ready? Here we go.

Okay, so how was that? What did you notice? Like most people you probably noticed that your attention didn't stay completely and solely on that feeling.

Other things would have come and grabbed your attention. Maybe sounds in the room.

Maybe other feelings, sensations, and thoughts. All kinds of thoughts might have come and pass through your mind.

Mental commentary, plans, judgments, doubts, maybe fears, future, past, other people, other places.

So this could be a really eye-opening experience if you've never done this kind of experiment before. To realize that our attention is shifting all the time and we don't really know where it's going most of the time because we don't have full control over it. It seems like our attention has a mind of its own.

Now this is something that also plays out in our creative work in any kind of creative practice. You can notice that we're in two states or alternating between two states.

The creative flow where the work is happening and all my attention and attention is engaged in the work in the creative process. But it also shifts into getting stuck, overthinking, fears, apprehensions, feeling blocked, feeling like my energy is getting drained. So with this practice that we're going to talk about today, we're going to look if there's some technique we can develop to help us get out of the creative block and into creative flow. So we just did this mindfulness of breathing exercise and let's see if I can break that down. We have a task, the work, which is to keep attention on this feeling of the breath. That's my task, that's my challenge, that's what I'm trying to do. But because I don't have total control over my thoughts, over my attention, I might notice at one point that I'm somewhere else.

Maybe I'm making plans for dinner. Maybe I'm worrying that I'm not doing this mindfulness of breathing task properly and I start getting into my self-talk mental commentary. And then I notice that all of a sudden I'm aware that I'm thinking where I'm supposed to be on my breathing and gently skillfully with practice I feel the breathing again. I bring my attention there and the more I do it maybe I start to notice the temperature of the breath. Maybe it feels warm.

Maybe I notice the sort of shape of the breath as it comes in, as it comes out. So that's the general idea with the mindfulness of breathing. And mindfulness in general is this idea.

I have my task. I recognize that I get distracted. That very noticing helps me come back to my task.

So in my creative work, I'm going through the same process.

When I'm engaged with the work, say I'm doing a painting, maybe I put out some colors.

I have some red color, blue color, yellow color, and the colors, they just feel really good. I like looking at them. I pick up my brush and I like the way it feels to manipulate the paint. I have my canvas and I start applying the colors on the canvas and I can see how they're working together. My thought process is supporting me.

I'm recognizing maybe patterns that I've done in previous paintings. I can tell if this color should move up or over.

I'm in the moment. Things are happening in a very aesthetic kind of way. But at some point, I might start thinking, well, is this painting any good?

Is anybody going to like this? Am I doing this properly? And this kind of mental commentary starts taking over. It becomes more of the forefront and my work is kind of blocked.

It's kind of tainted by this thought about the work. The thought is no longer supporting the work. It's kind of blocking the work.

But with my mindfulness practice, I might notice that.

I might just have a moment of I'm stuck in this mental commentary, which isn't helping me in any way. The noticing gives me a little bit of a distance so that the emotional pull of those thoughts sort of a little less. I have a little bit more space.

And through practice, I remember to come back to my direct experience and get some fresh colors, put some fresh paint out. Maybe I'll ask, what does this work really need? What could I do right now? If I don't know what to do, I have other habits that can help keep me in the zone. Well, maybe now would be a time to wash my brushes. Maybe now would be a good time to put this painting aside, get out a fresh canvas. Maybe I'll do some drawing, something a little simpler with less pressure. And I get back into the zone.

So that's the idea that I wanted to get across to you today. This idea of the mindfulness practice, supporting creative practice, being with the work, which is a sort of experience of the senses, something I can feel, something I can see.

Noticing when I'm getting bogged down in overthinking thoughts which are not helping, which are taking me away from my creative process, draining my energy. This act of noticing becomes its own sort of habit and the skill of gently returning back to the direct experience.

So that sounds maybe easier than it is. It takes a fair amount of practice. But if you have that framework in your mind, I'm hoping that it can help you with your own work. Thank you.