The Art of Easing into Change

*Change is inevitable, yet it's often met with resistance. Through mindfulness, we can cultivate an attitude of acceptance, and regain some agency.*

By Theo Koffler

Change is inevitable. Winter turns to spring, high school seniors become college freshmen, and college grads are transitioning into the workplace. Though it can be exciting, there is no denying that for most of us, change is hard. It requires a willingness to be uncomfortable as one adjusts to new circumstances. It asks us to venture out of our comfort zones and forces us to grapple with new and unknown situations, feelings, and environments.

One need look no further than our current political environment to see the intricacies of change in action. For some, the new presidency elicited feelings of joy and excitement—for others, fear and anger. However, no matter what one's political leanings may be, there is no denying that one can see the reverberations of change across the globe.

**Rethinking How You Approach Setbacks**

As scary and difficult as it may be, change forces us to look at our lives, our communities, and ourselves, with fresh eyes. It is in the face of change that we accomplish things we never thought possible and develop resilience. Change is powerful because it inspires people to defend their values. The Women’s Marches that recently took across the globe were a response to the election—a need to engage with others, and communicate across a divide. Though many of the Marches participants may have shown up in frustration or anger, ultimately, the March was an experience of unity. People of all ages, genders, and political persuasions found each other and harnessed a power they hadn’t realized they had. Democratic and Republican, pro-life, and pro-choice, men and women, young and old—all it took was a slight shift and suddenly all these people (many of whom had been diametrically opposed) saw each other as allies.
The March is just one example of a positive outcome made possible by what many may have thought of as a negative change, but there are plenty of small-scale examples playing out in each of our daily lives. Moving to a new town might be scary, but brings with it a chance to meet new people, re-establish oneself, or learn to accept help from others during a vulnerable time. The end of a relationship is sad and traumatic, but just beyond the sadness lays the opportunity to get to know oneself in new ways. Breaking a leg might waylay one's dreams of becoming captain of the basketball team, but perhaps it opens the door to a newfound love of art or makes room for hours of sitting on the couch with a family member and creating a stronger familial bond. This is not to negate the difficulty of life changes. Moving to a town where you know no one can feel lonely, break-ups are incredibly hard, and watching a long-held dream evaporate due to injury is painful. But just beyond the initial event lies possibility. Change has a funny way of turning the world on its head, offering a new perspective. It illuminates options, relationships, and growth opportunities that we may have not noticed before, and it can heighten attention to important matters. Change has the potential to endow us with an immense amount of personal and relational transformation.

Changing Your Relationships to Change — Two Ways In

1) Honor feelings of discomfort

Think of the ways you handle change in your own life. How do you deal with feelings of excitement, fear, and/or anticipation? It is entirely normal to cycle through some of the negative or fearful emotions that go along with change, but rather than getting stuck in the fear and discomfort, try to look beyond.

- What doors have opened for you?
- How has your worldview evolved?
- What options and possibilities lie ahead?
- How can you grow as an individual?

Honoring the unease and discomfort that goes along with change is important, but taking the initiative to move past these emotions and master the art of change allows you to feel like you have agency and power in your life. You don’t need to be fearful or “just go along for the ride.” In fact, each and every change you encounter is a new opportunity for you to be a significant player in shaping the newfound world you now inhabit.

2) Practice Mindfulness of Breath

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Paying attention to the breath is a core mindfulness practice. In TAKE FIVE, we use five fingers of one hand to count each breath cycle, hence the name TAKE FIVE. In this practice, a breath cycle consists of a gentle in-breath ending in a momentary pause, followed by a gentle out-breath that also ends in a momentary pause. The breath cycle repeats itself five times. We notice the body expanding with each in-breath and contracting with each out-breath. In so doing, we withdraw our attention from distracting thoughts and bring our attention back to the present moment.

Here’s how:

- Sit in a comfortable position. Allow both soles of your feet to connect to the floor and rest your hands on your lap.
- Gently close your eyes or look for a point somewhere on the floor where you can return your eyes when you get distracted.
- Turn one hand palm up to the ceiling. This will be your counting hand. At the end of each breath cycle, you will fold one finger on this hand into your palm until all five fingers are folded.
- Gently take a breath in to fill your lungs. Notice the pause that happens naturally once the in-breath is complete.
- Gently breathe one long breath out until you notice the natural pause again. Fold your first finger. This is TAKE ONE.
- Gently take another in-breath to fill your lungs. Notice the pause that happens naturally once the in-breath is complete.
- Gently breathe out until your breath comes to a pause. Fold your second finger. This is TAKE TWO.
- Breathe in again, filling up your lungs until you feel the pause.
- Breathe out to empty the lungs until you feel the pause. Fold your third finger. This is TAKE THREE.
- Breathe in; notice the pause. Breathe out; notice the pause. Fold your fourth finger. This is TAKE FOUR.
- Now, breathe in following the whole length of the breath. Breathe out, following the whole length of the breath. This time, turn your counting hand palm down. This is TAKE FIVE.
- Continue to breathe in and out.
- You don’t need to breathe in a special way. Your body knows how to breathe.
- When you are ready, slowly bring your attention back to the council, and take a moment to notice how you feel.