

THE PLANNED PRACTICE: A BRIEF GUIDE

Planned Practice is practiced with the intention to do a period between the routine activities of your day. It is best to start just with what seems easy and effortless – a few minutes at most – and to do less if this feels burdensome. When starting, more shorter periods are usually more helpful than an occasional longer block.

There are two alternating practices that form Planned Practice: the ‘Easy’ and the ‘Even Easier’ practices.

THE EASY PLANNED PRACTICE

1. Choose a sensation that will be the Focusing Anchor for this practice.

Typical anchors are an object you can see, a sound you can hear or a body sensation such as the feel of the floor under the feet (when sitting or walking), the chair or bed under the sitting bones or shoulders, sensations in the hands or sensations of the breath. Common breath sensations used as anchors include the feeling of movement as you breathe in the upper belly, the shifting sensations where the back makes contact with a chair or the feeling of the breath on the nostrils and upper lip. *(For more guidance on anchors see the Guide to the Connection Practice and the Focusing Anchor Checklist at www.friendlyfocusing.com).*

2. Decide on the finish by time – you may find you decide to stop before this but it is good to set a maximum time. Set a timer if you know you need to do something else after.

3. Start the Easy Practice – and have the intention to rest the attention on the chosen focusing anchor. Remember you cannot stop the attention being taken off elsewhere by the emotional brain – it is trying to do what it thinks is best for you. The Easy Planned Practice involves bringing a friendly interest to whatever we notice happening at all stages of the Attention Cycle. So, as we become aware of the attention having been taken off elsewhere, we notice that this has happened, acknowledge what the attention has been taken to and then gently return the attention back to the focusing anchor. A key aspect is giving room and space to whatever you experience at each phase of the cycle – even if just for a brief moment.

The more frequently the attention is shifted the better – we then have more opportunities to notice all the different parts of the Attention Cycle *(see the Guide to the Attention Cycle)*.

THE EVEN EASIER PLANNED PRACTICE

4. At any time you wish, take a break from the Easy Planned Practice and switch to the Even Easier Planned Practice.

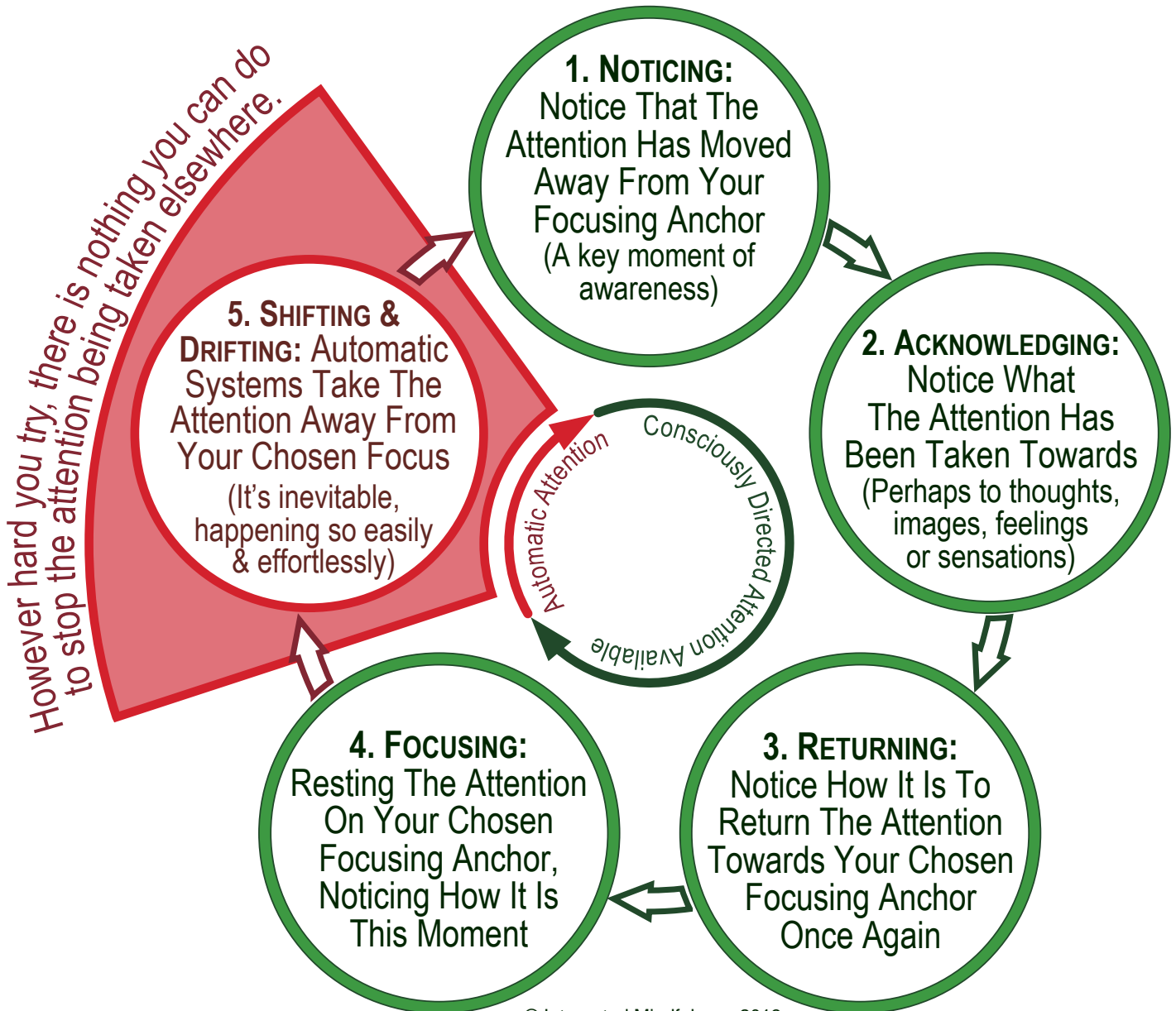
This just involves exploring being aware of whatever is present, with no particular agenda. Allow the attention to broaden – as if the narrow beam of a torch is being adjusted to spread out over a wide area – and just notice how the attention gets taken here and there. Whenever you find you have started to narrow in on just part of what you are experiencing here and now, just notice that this has happened, broadening the attention out again. It often seems easier to let go of what we have caught up in on an out-breath.

In this practice you are exploring what it is like to give room and space for whatever is around to just do what it is doing, be as it is and come and go in its own time. As you do this you can find there is an increasing awareness of that part of you that ‘does’ the noticing / observing’ and be more aware of how this ‘observing self’ is different from the thinking self.

Alternate as you will between the Easy and Even Easier Practices, spending as short or long a time as you wish with each phase.

5. Ending: notice what is happening for you as you bring the practice period to an end. This is a great time to notice what the thoughts and images get triggered as we start to re-engage with other activities.

THE ATTENTION CYCLE



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