

In The Zone

Part One

When an athlete has an outstanding performance and they're interviewed after the game they often say that they were 'in the zone;' that their performance was effortless and they felt like they could do no wrong. Skill and will are the necessary foundations for an athlete to perform exceptionally. You or I couldn't golf seven under par or hit four home runs in a baseball game or score fifty points in a basketball game. Each game an athlete can exert their skill and will, though it's only occasionally that they'll find themselves 'in the zone.' Skill and will alone cannot bring an athlete into the zone.

There are times in the day that I feel 'in the zone.' In the zone for me has a feeling of ease, like I'm being carried. The sense of ease is very calming. My mind is slower; not going in the usual gear. My body is more tingling; feeling more alive and more relaxed. My movements are slower and feel more flowing. This time feels special.

The times of feeling in the zone almost always happen to me. I'm just going about through my day and I notice the feeling that I described above. I find myself in the zone. There are times after meditation or when I'm at the ocean that these activities seem to trigger being in the zone, though mostly I find myself in the zone during very usual daily functions.

During the time of being in the zone, I don't try to extend it. Any trying to extend this state is from a self-effort. Self-effort didn't get me there and won't keep me there. Actually self-effort is a 'deal breaker;' a sure way to have this state disappear. I know that I'm being carried. I'll be dropped off sometime back to a more ordinary state. There is a liking of this state, though not an attachment. Attachment, like self-effort, shortens being in the zone. As I'm typing, I'm feeling in the zone. It's very pleasurable.

Part Two

Pema Chödrön says that if there's only one practice that she could recommend, it would be to breathe three breaths with awareness, and to do this multiple times a day. This practice interrupts, to some degree, our usual way. There is no goal to attain in doing this practice. There is no attachment to whether we feel different. There is simply the intention of coming back, again and again, every day to this practice. Pema says that if we do this repeatedly for months and years that we'll begin to have more gaps; more time that we're not in our usual state.

This practice of breathing three breaths with awareness can slow down our usual momentum of thought and increase our awareness of our body. Not being as much in our mind and being more in contact with our body are two elements of being in the zone.

By repeatedly doing this practice of three aware breaths we can open ourselves to being more connected; less disjointed. *And from here many other practices may spontaneously become effortless.* We may want to meditate more; without the use of our will. We may care better for ourselves, and be less critical of ourselves and others, again without any effort. These two practices of meditating more and being less critical-judgemental are two practices that people struggle to cultivate. These two practices are natural when we're in the zone.

Part Three

For me, being in the zone is Grace. Yes, there has been effort and some skill has developed to be more present, though it's Grace that brings me into the zone. And it's me not being attached that keeps me from interfering and shortening the time of being in the zone.

We can help make it more possible for 'being in the zone' to occur. Meditation, being in Nature, being with ones we love, being in our compassionate heart, having slower and deeper breaths into our belly; all of these can make more fertile the zone to appear. Effort is needed on the spiritual path, and then there's a time for effort to not be there; for an openness and a receptivity to Grace.

The zone comes and goes. I'm grateful for these times. Being in the zone feels like a time of atunement. I'm resonating at a different vibration; a very pleasant vibration. A feeling of contentment comes. There is a serenity with contentment.

May all Beings find themselves in serenity and contentment.

P.S. After the above was written, I checked email (while still feeling in the zone) and this is what appeared newly in my inbox. The writing reflects what some may experience while being in the zone. Paul wrote this from a Christian perspective:

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. – The School of Paul, Ephesians 4:1-7, NASB