

The Significance of Restful States

In our classification of sensory experience, each basic space is assigned a distinctive restful aspect in addition to its more obvious active one. There are several reasons for including these restful categories in what we note. Here are a few of them.

1. If “nothing much is going on,” there is still something you can productively focus on – the restful flavors. In other words, when nothing much is happening, four highly significant things are happening.
 - Your mental screen is blank
 - Your head is quiet
 - Your body is physically relaxed
 - Your body is emotionally peaceful
2. Focusing on restful states can create a positive feedback loop that strengthens your concentration power. The better you concentrate on restfulness, the better you feel, motivating you to concentrate even better...
3. Restful states create a kind of container within which the active states can come and go with less resistance and grasping. In other words, the restful states tend to induce equanimity, and equanimity is one of the central goals of mindfulness practice.
4. Learning to detect, enhance, and concentrate on restful states increases your ability to be fulfilled independent of circumstances. Restful states can be cultivated as a kind of self-contained contentment that you can access any time, independent of external circumstances. This becomes important when a life situation deprives you of ordinary external sources of fulfillment for a period of time. And it becomes crucial to your very existence if the conditions of your life become permanently and severely limited, for example, by chronic illness and so forth.
5. The restful states are frequently present in daily life, but most people fail to notice and enjoy them because they have neither the concepts nor the vocabulary needed to recognize them. Now that you have terms like Relaxation, Peace, Blank, and Quiet, you are in a position to notice and appreciate when these states occur spontaneously during the day.
6. Noting states in a given domain (i.e., freely floating between the active and restful states) is, technically speaking, a form of *shamatha vipashyana yuganaddha*. What this imposing Sanskrit phrase signifies is an approach to meditation that intertwines (*yuganaddha*) the tranquilizing side of the practice (*shamatha*) with the clarifying side (*vipashyana*). Explicitly including restful states as standard categories to be noted along with the more obvious active ones brings flavors of tranquility into the cultivation of clarity. Conversely, discriminating six flavors different flavors of restfulness brings clarity into the cultivation of tranquility.

The reason I like to use the *yuganaddha* approach is that it solves one of the most common complaints that people have when they try to do mindfulness as opposed to

other simpler forms of practice such as mantra, breath focus, choiceless awareness, and so forth. The complaint usually runs like this.

“When I just focus on the breath (mantra, choiceless awareness, etc.) it seems like I am in a state of meditation. I get a sense of going deep. When I try to note my experience, I can do it, but it does not feel like I’m in a meditative state. I can’t seem to go deep *and* keep track of detail.”

Including restful states like Relaxation, Peace, Blank, and Quiet as categories to be noted along with active states like Touch, Feel, Image, and Talk automatically tends to create a sense of going into a zone or deep state.

7. Including the restful states as categories to be noted addresses another common complaint about mindfulness—that it makes one acutely aware of how uncomfortable the body is and how chaotic the mind is. Of course, from a certain perspective, a heightened sense of the misery of bodymind is fine because it represents insight into the first Noble Truth, the truth of suffering. On the other hand, there is nothing wrong with adding a little sweetness and gentleness to leaven the process of self deconstruction. *Shamatha vipashyana yuganaddha* represents a “kinder gentler form of ego death.”
8. There are two standard methods of focusing used in Basic Mindfulness: noting states and even coverage. If I only gave you active categories, then you could only cover spaces where activity is occurring. A sensitivity to the restful aspect of each space makes it feasible to cover any combination of basic spaces at the same time, even when little is going on in some of the spaces. Thus, for example, you can evenly cover the entirety of BIT Space even if your screen is Blank, your head is Quiet, and your body is devoid of emotional Feel.
9. The restful states can be looked upon as attenuated (i.e., “thinned out”) versions of the active ones. In other words, Relaxation, Peace, Blank, and Quiet are very toned down versions of Touch, Feel, Image, and Talk. Just as Touch, Feel, Image, and Talk weave together to create a gross sense of self, so do Relaxation, Peace, Blank, and Quiet weave together to create a subtle one. But this subtle, attenuated version of self is more porous and penetratable than the gross one. The classic “absorption” path to enlightenment involves abiding in that attenuated restful self, then penetrating it with so much clarity that it dissolves into flow, and eventually vanishes, leading to insight into no self—the heart of Buddhist enlightenment.
10. Working smart: restful sequences and loops

It’s not hard to see that active states can trigger off other active states. For example, an external Sound will often trigger a mental Image of its source. Or negative Talk in your head may trigger uncomfortable Feel in your body.

Somewhat more subtle, but highly significant, is how one restful state may trigger another one. For example, (with your eyes closed) looking at the soothing darkness or brightness in Image Space may trigger Relaxation in Touch Space. Or listening to mental Quiet in your head may trigger emotional Peace in your body.

In fact, you may discover that a certain restful state *consistently* triggers a certain other restful state. Knowing your own patterns of “rest to rest interactions” allows you to ride

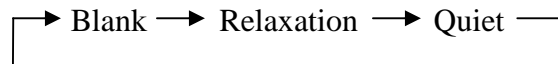
on delicious sequences of predictable pleasantness that repeat themselves over and over. For example,

Blank → Relaxation → Peace

or

Quiet → Peace → Relaxation

Things get really interesting when the tail of such a sequence circles back to re-trigger the head. For example,



This creates a self-sustaining positive feedback loop that takes you deeper and deeper without the need for a “you” (i.e., a meditating self) to keep it going! You just sit back and let nature do its thing until you disappear for awhile into “the peace that passeth understanding.”

The Significance of No Restful States

Having said all this, however, it is of the utmost importance that you not develop a preference for the restful states over the active ones. When restful states are available, you can use them as doorways if you wish. When they are not available, let yourself become utterly fascinated with the active aspect of your senses.