

Space Between Notes

The philosopher Alan Watts once said, *“When you hear music, most people think that what they hear is a succession of notes. They ignore the space in between the notes. If all you heard, when you listen to music, was a succession of notes, you would hear no melody and no harmony. You would hear nothing but a succession of noises.”*

Imagine your favorite song, from the Beatles to Beethoven, and remove the space in between the notes. The greatest music of all time would be reduced to mere noise. It would be unrecognizable, unlistenable and undanceable. It would cease to move you as it once did. The music that previously was the source of inspiration, joy, and fascination would become chaotic, irritating noise.

We can see how the space in between the notes is just as valuable and essential as the notes themselves, just as instrumental to the composition of the music as the stroke of a piano key or the strum of a guitar. And yet, upon honest reflection, how many of us ignore the space in between the notes, thinking they are unimportant? We think it's the notes that do the whole job. We believe the notes are the music.

We can easily carry this misunderstanding into how we conduct our daily lives. How often do we find ourselves moving from one thing to the next, to the next, in an endless succession of activity? And without space in between the “notes” of all that we do, how soon the music of our lives becomes reduced to mere noise. We feel disconnected from the melody and harmony of our lives, wondering what happened to our joy, our groove, our song.

The good news is we are the conductors of our lives. We can practice scattering space throughout our days. With the wave of our conductor's wand, we can orchestrate our lives differently. In between the notes of our daily doing, we can create space at any time by pausing for a moment here, taking a micro-break there, and in so doing, begin to restore the melody and harmony in our lives. Why not try it now?

Pause for a moment. Take a micro-break from reading and just listen to the sounds that surround you. Don't “do” anything. Listening requires no effort. Allow the sounds to come to you. What do you hear? Far off? Close by? Within? Now, shift your attention and notice the vast field of silence that holds the entire symphony of life's sounds. Notice how all sound arises, crescendos, and returns to this vast field of silent space. Allow yourself a moment to just breathe and listen.



We truly are the conductors of our lives. We can, in between the notes of activity and responsibility, scatter space throughout our days, pausing to listen to the music of life without and within. No need to wait until your coffee break, your lunch break, the weekend, or the holidays. Why not give it a go? I dare you. Mix business with pleasure. Take a moment—hell, take five. Scatter a pause here and a micro-break there throughout this day, and see if in the end, it doesn't just end up changing your tune.