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Get comfortable in your chair, let your shoulders drop and gently push your feet onto the floor, and get a sense of the ground beneath you, and you can either soften your gaze on a particular spot in front of you or close your eyes, whichever you prefer.

Just take a moment to notice how you are sitting. And notice how you are breathing. Notice what you see, even if your eyes are closed. And notice what you can hear. Notice what you can feel against your skin and the way your body presses into the chair. And notice what you can taste or sense in your mouth. Notice what you can smell or sense with your nostrils. By settling into the moment and into your body, you are inviting your mind and your ability to recognize into the present moment with you.

Take a moment to become aware of your breathe and the gentle movement in and out as air is exchanged in your nose, mouth, and lungs. Noting the sensation in your belly or chest as the gentle movement of air creates a rise and fall. Simply allowing yourself to notice sensations as a curious scientist that has never encountered breathing before.

Now see if you can notice the movement of your mind as you're observing these sensations, with no need to change or do anything about them. See if you can observe the activity of the mind becoming more evident as you notice yourself noticing your sensations.

You will find this hard because your mind is a masterful storyteller. It will tell you all sorts of interesting things to grab your attention and pull you away from what you are doing. See if you can let those thoughts come and go, as if they are merely trains passing through a train station - just passing through as you observe the station itself. Keep your attention on the breath. Notice your breath flowing in and out. When a new thought arises, see if you can notice the thought as just another train passing through. Simply notice - without judgment - as it goes by, continue to feel the rise and fall of your chest. From time to time, your mind will succeed in distracting you with a new and interesting thought, and you'll lose track of your breathing. This is normal, natural, and will happen repeatedly. Once you notice this has happened, take a moment to note with curiosity what hooked you and gently return back to focusing on your breathing.

Now allow yourself to come back to your breath. Notice the movement of air in



## Leaves on a River (from RIO Seminar #2)

Get into a comfortable position where you are sitting. Perhaps sitting upright with your feet flat on the floor, your arms and legs uncrossed, and your hands resting in your lap or on your thighs, whichever is more comfortable.

Allow your eyes to gently close. If you would prefer to keep your eyes open soften your gaze and gently focus on a spot a few feet in front of you. Take a few moments to Arrive by getting in touch with the physical sensations in your body, particularly the sensations of touch or pressure where your body makes contact with where you are sitting.

Be aware of your feet, of your body being supported by the chair, and how your hands feel with how they are making contact with your body.

Now, **Gathering** your attention by simply focusing on your breathing. Slowly breathe in, and slowly breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out. Notice the rise and fall of your belly and chest as you breathe in, out. In, out. It's okay for your mind to wander away to thoughts, sensations, or feelings. Simply observe that your mind has wandered, observe your thoughts and feelings, acknowledge their presence, and then return your attention back to the breath. Passively observe the flow of your thoughts, one after another, without trying to figure out their meaning or their relationship to one another.

As best as you can, bring an attitude of gentle acceptance to all of your experiences. There is nothing to be fixed or worked on at this time. Simply allow your experiences to be your experiences, without needing it to be other than what it is, as you find it, in this moment. You might even catch a glimpse that there is a part of you noticing what you are noticing.

Now, allow yourself to imagine a beautiful, slow-moving river, the water flowing along. Notice how wide or narrow it is. Notice the color of the water.

Imagine the day. Is it sunny or overcast? Warm or cool? What season is it? Imagine you are sitting underneath a tree on the bank of the river. Perhaps your back is resting against the trunk, gently supported. Take a deep breath. See if you can smell the richness of the earth beneath you or perhaps the scent of the land around you.

Take a moment to look up into the tree. Notice the leaves rustling in the gentle

breeze. What color are the leaves? What shape do they have? Listen to the sound of the gentle stirring of the leaves. Notice that once in a while you observe a leaf dropping onto the river and flowing away. Now gaze at the river, notice leaves floating by on the surface of the water. Look at the leaves and watch them, slowly drifting along downriver.

As you sit beneath the tree on the bank of this river, become aware of the thoughts that are passing by in your mind. You might notice planning for something later today, reminding yourself not to forget something, remembering something that has already happened, or even judging or evaluating this exercise. Whatever you notice, each time you become aware of a thought, imagine yourself placing the thought on one of those leaves. If you think in words, put them on a leaf in words. If you think in images, put them on a leaf as an image.

Whenever a new thought enters into your mind, put each one on a leaf, observing each thought as it is on the leaf, passing in front of you, and then watching it moving away from you, eventually drifting out of sight down the river. Allowing the river to move along at its own speed.

Return to gazing at the river, waiting for the next leaf to float by with a new thought on it. When one comes along, again watch it passing in front of you and then let it drift out of sight. The river is ever flowing, carrying each leaf along. The river is doing what is natural for rivers to do and that is to carry along whatever is floating on the surface. Think whatever thoughts you think, observe them, place them on a leaf, and allow them to flow freely along downriver, one by one.

Now, when you are ready, allow yourself to take a different perspective. Allow yourself to become the riverbed. Imagine yourself as the riverbed, holding the river and each of the leaves on the surface of the river, and even the thoughts that each leaf carries as it flows by.

As the riverbed, be aware that you are the container for the river, the leaves, and the thoughts. Perhaps even become aware that you do not begin or end at the banks of the river. That you extend beyond the banks of the river into the earth itself.

Imagine what the riverbed must see, experiencing the river, the leaves, and thoughts floating along. Wonder what it's like for the riverbed when the river is rushing by or when it's barely trickling, wonder if the riverbed even cares since it





## **Belly (or Diaphragmatic) Breathing**

You can do this exercise in any position, but it is helpful to do this exercise while lying down when first learning belly breathing.

1. Lie comfortably on your back, with a pillow under your head, your knees bend and your back flat. You can stretch your legs out if that's more comfortable.
2. Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your upper chest.
3. Inhale slowly and expand your belly as you breathe so that your lower hand moves with your belly. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.
4. Slowly exhale, focusing on the movement of your belly and lower hand as it returns to its original position.
5. Repeat steps 3 & 4 for several minutes, always focusing on the movement of the belly as you breathe. If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to your breathing.

## **Breath-Counting Exercise**

This exercise focuses on the use of counting with the rhythm of the breath. Start with a short period of time and gradually increase the time. Set a timer so that you don't have to worry about when to stop.

1. Find a comfortable position. Take several deep breaths and settle into yourself. You may either close your eyes or keep them open, depending on your own comfort. If you keep them open, fix them on an object or a spot on the floor about four feet in front of you. Your eyes may either be focused or unfocused.
2. Take deep, comfortable breaths. Notice your inhalation. The pause between inhaling and exhaling, your exhalation, and the pause before starting again.
3. As you inhale, count, "one." As you exhale, count, "two." Inhale, "three." Exhale, "four." Continue until you reach 10 then start over.
4. If you lose count, simply begin with "one" on your next inhalation.
5. If you notice your mind has wandered, gently notice this, and return your focus back to counting your breath.
6. If you notice any body sensations catching your attention, focus on that sensation until it fades. Then return your attention back to counting your breaths.

## Metaphors for Getting Unstuck

### *When trying to over-control your internal experience*

Imagine you are in a pool, playing with a beach ball. The ball is your thoughts, memories, and feelings. At some point, you decide you don't want the beach ball anymore, so you try to push it under the water and out of your consciousness. Every time you push the ball under, it pops back up so you have to keep pushing it down and holding it under. Struggling in this way keeps the ball close to you, and you become tired and frustrated. Imagine yourself letting go of the ball and allowing it to just float on the surface of the water. It may float nearby or float away. Either way, your hands are free and you can now enjoy a swim in the pool.

### *Clarifying your values*

A professor stood before his class with a large jar on the table in front of him. He filled the empty jar with ping pong balls and asked the class if the jar was full. They all agreed that it was.

Then the professor picked up a container of small rocks and poured them into the jar so they filled the space between the balls. Again, he asked the class if they jar was full. The students responded with a unanimous yes.

Next, the professor picked up a bag of sand and poured it into the jar, filling the spaces between the rocks and balls. When he asked if the jar was full, the classroom agreed it was.

The professor said, "This jar represents your life. The ping pong balls are the important things, your family, physical health, friendships, passions, things that if everything else was lost and only remained, your life would still be full. The small rocks are the other things that matter, like your career, your home, and your car. The sand is everything else, the little stuff. If you put sand in the jar first, you won't have room for the rocks, let alone the ping pong balls. The same goes for life. If you fill all your time and energy on the little stuff, you won't have space for the things that are the most important to you. Make time for things that are crucial to a meaningful life. Play with your pets. Call your grandmother. Take time to get a checkup. Laugh with your friends. Go on vacation. There will always be time to do the chores around the house and change the light bulbs. Prioritize the ping pong balls first, the things that really matter. The rest is just sand."

## *You are greater than your internal experiences*

Imagine yourself as the sky, and your thoughts, feelings, and other internal experiences are the weather. The weather changes continuously, but no matter how bad it gets, it can't hurt the sky. The mightiest thunderstorms, hurricanes, and blizzards rage through the sky and yet the sky remains unharmed, unchanged. And no matter how big the storms get, the sky has room for it. Plus, sooner or later, the weather always changes, leaving the same beautiful blue sky in its wake.

## *Committing to Action*

Imagine you are the driver on a bus that is on the route of your life. Passengers, like thoughts, memories, feelings, get on and off, and you continue to drive. Some of the passengers are scary. Maybe they shout "You're useless!" or "You're going the wrong way!!" What if they start threatening you, telling you they'll hurt you unless you do what they say?

It's as if you've made a deal with the passengers, and the deal is, "You sit quietly in the back of the bus where I can't see you, and I'll do whatever you say." So, you drive the bus on a different route, one that keeps the scary passengers quiet, you can almost forget they're there. At some point, you get tired of this route and try to turn onto a new street. Immediately the scary passengers jump up, shouting and threatening again. They seem bigger and scarier than before, and you immediately keep going where they want you to go.

What if you turned anyway? The scary passengers haven't ever hurt you. In fact, they can't hurt you without stranding themselves. Imagine you decide to turn. You brace yourself, check the mirror, and turn onto a new street. The passengers yell, threaten, and get right up in your face. And you keep driving. You make it back to the route you truly wanted to be on, and the passengers eventually get tired of yelling and sit back down. Every once in a while one of the passengers tries to threaten you again, but you don't allow it to push you off course. This is your bus, and you want to get back to living your life, to driving on the route you have chosen for your life.

## **Online Resources**

Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society

<http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm>

Mayo Clinic Stress Reduction Website

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/mindfulness-exercises/MY02124>

Meditation Oasis

[www.meditationoasis.com](http://www.meditationoasis.com)

Mindful

[www.mindful.org](http://www.mindful.org)

WebMD

<http://www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management/tc/stress-management-breathing-exercises-topic-overview>

## **Apps for your Smartphone, Tablet, or Computer**

ACT Coach (iOS only)

Breathe2Relax (iOS, Android)

Breathing Techniques by Hemalayaa (iOS only; videos available on You Tube)

CBTi-Coach (iOS, Android)

Mindfulness (iOS only)

Mindshift (iOS, Android)

T2MoodTracker (iOS, Android)

Take a break! (iOS, Android)

## **Books for Further Reading**

The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook by Bourne (2011)

Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life by Hayes & Smith (2005)

The Mindful Way Workbook by Teasdale, Williams, Segal, & Kabat-Zinn (2014)

The Mindfulness Workbook: A Teach Yourself Guide by Langley (2013)

The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook by Davis, Robbins, Eshelman & McKay (2008)

ACT Made Simple: An Easy-to-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy by Harris (2009)

## **Scientific References**

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# Acknowledgement and Gratitude

\*University Counseling Services at California State University, Northridge, would like to acknowledge and thank our colleagues at Counseling Services, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, for so generously sharing their RIO program with us.\*