

MINDING THE BEDSIDE: NURSING FROM THE HEART OF THE AWAKENED MIND

EXERCISE # 1 – RIDING THE BREATH

Sitting on a straight-backed chair or couch or on a cushion on the floor, allow your body to become still. The back is straight without being stiff; the posture is relaxed, awake, and dignified. The hands can rest gently on the knees or in the lap. The eyes are open, simply resting the gaze on whatever is in front of you, without thinking too much about what you're viewing. Settling into this moment, begin watching the breath.

Become aware of the fact that you're breathing. Become aware of the movement of the breath as it flows into and out of the body. Feel the breath as it comes into the body and as it leaves the body. Simply remain aware of the breath flowing in and flowing out, not manipulating the breathing in any way. Simply being aware of it and noticing how it feels.

When your mind becomes distracted—and it will become distracted—simply return to the breath. No commentary. No judgment.

Allow yourself to be with this flow of breath, coming in and going out. Notice the feeling of the breath as the lungs fill with air on the in-breath and deflate as you breathe out, the chest expanding and collapsing. Perhaps feeling the breath in the abdomen, rising as you breathe in and flattening and sinking as you breathe out. Allow your attention to gently ride on the sensation of each breath, not thinking about breathing, without the need to comment. Simply watching your breathing.

Allow the breath to naturally breathe itself, not needing to change it in any way, giving full attention to each breath. Observe the full cycle of each breath, locating the very beginning of the breath, as it enters the nose or mouth, and following it as it fills the lungs and expands the chest and the abdomen, then comes to the gap where there is neither in-breath nor out-breath, before it turns around and makes its journey out of the body. Simply remain present for the cycle of each breath, being there, letting your attention gently float on the awareness of your breath.

After a short time, you may notice that the mind wanders off to thoughts of the past, fantasies, memories, or regrets. Or it may move to anticipation of the future, planning, wishing, and judging. You may find yourself thinking about what you'll do after this exercise, what you have to do at work, things that you have to do.

As soon as you become aware that the attention has moved off the breath, guide it back to the next breath with a gentle and firm awareness. There's no need to give yourself a hard time, saying, "How did I become so distracted?" Simply come back to this breath. Watching the breath and the arising thoughts without judgment, simply observing. Once again, bringing the attention to this breath, in this moment. Breathing in with the in-breath, breathing out with the out-breath. Feeling the movement in your body. The breath anchoring the attention in this moment.

When the mind wanders, bring your attention back to the breath, knowing that you can always use the awareness of your breath to refocus your attention, to return to the present. Whenever you notice that you have drifted from the present—when you become distracted, preoccupied, or restless—the attention on the breath can be a powerful anchor to this moment and to this state of awake stillness.

And now, for the time remaining, let go of all particular objects of attention, allowing yourself to simply be here, simply present. Breath moving, sensations in the body, sounds, thoughts, all of it coming and going...allowing all of it...and dropping into being, into stillness, present with it all, as it unfolds, complete, as you are, whole.

And...relax.

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