

PRACTICING AWARENESS OF YOUR EXPERIENCE

Often the buzz of mental activity draws us in, and we become thoroughly caught in it. Sometimes this is so thorough that we can become intensely insensitive to our own moment-to-moment experience. The following meditation allows us to practice observing the buzz of mental activity without doing anything about it.

1. Assume a comfortable sitting position. Try to find a position where you are sitting straight and your shoulders are relaxed.
2. Either close your eyes or arrange yourself so that you are looking at something nondistracting, like a blank wall.
3. Center yourself. Bring yourself to this room you are in, to this space and time. Visualize your physical location: on your block, in your house, in your room, and in this chair. Become aware of your body, of the physical position of your arms and legs, of your feet and hands. Notice the feeling of your body pressing against the chair, of the muscles around your eyes and jaw; notice the feelings of your skin.
4. Become aware of your breathing. Follow a breath as it comes in through your nose, travels through your lungs, moves your belly in and out, and leaves in the opposite direction. Ride the waves of your breathing without attempting to alter it: just notice it and pay attention as it happens.
5. Now, do nothing but observe what comes up. Practice awareness. As sensations emerge in your body, just watch them. As feelings emerge in your awareness, just notice them. As thoughts come into your awareness, just watch them. Watch them come, and watch them go. Don't grab at anything, and don't push anything away.
6. If your mind wanders, if you find yourself getting angry or sad or imagining something you want to say to someone and slipping into fantasy, just notice that you have wandered off and bring yourself back in touch. Notice how you get sucked into the content of your thoughts and start to fuse with them; notice your analytical, judgmental mind. Just notice yourself getting sucked in, and bring yourself back again, gently and without judgment. If you have judgments about how well or how poorly you are doing, just notice these too. Your "job" is simply to practice awareness. This means that if your mind wanders 100 times, then your job is to gently bring it back to this moment 100 times, starting with the present moment.
7. Allow yourself to deeply experience the present moment. Be deeply present with yourself. Even if you are having thoughts or feelings that you don't like, try not to push them away. Adopt an attitude of acceptance toward all parts of your experience: treat every experience gently, even if the experience (the thought or feeling) itself is undesirable. Gently be present with yourself.