

Dear Students:

Although we will review the following exercise in our 8/29/13 class session, I wanted to provide you written instructions for the 10 minutes of breath-focused mindful attention that you will practice both prior to and following each of the reading assignments.

Begin by sitting in a chair that has some seat padding, but preferably not too deep and with a straight back (e.g., a kitchen-type chair or desk chair). Sit up straight without slouching either forward or back, and place both feet firmly on the floor. Take a few moments to feel your bottom on the seat and your feet on the floor, and sense how you are grounded and supported.

Place your hands in your lap, the right hand resting in the left hand, palms up, with the thumbs gently touching each other, as though you were holding a soft tissue between the tips of your thumbs.

Tuck your chin down slightly, imagining that there is a string attached to the back crown of your head, gently lifting it and straightening your spine. Sit up straight in a dignified and alert way, but not tense or tight.

Close your mouth gently, with teeth together but not clenched. Rest your tongue easily at the top of your mouth, behind your upper teeth.

Either close your eyes fully, or gaze softly (without hard focus) about 3 feet in front of you and allow the eyelids to remain slightly open. If you close your eyes and find that you get drowsy, open them partially and try to bring some alertness and vividness to your attention.

Take two deep, full breaths, and with each outbreath allow your shoulders to drop and relax, while remaining in your upright sitting posture. Relax the abdomen and allow it to extend in a restful, natural way.

Attend to your body, and discern whether there are any areas of discomfort or tension. If so, rest your attention gently for a few moments in each such area, not trying to change anything, but simply allowing whatever additional relaxation may occur.

Once you feel reasonably settled, relaxed, and alert. Move your attention to your breath, wherever you feel it most vividly. For some of you, this may be the rising and falling of the lower abdomen with each breath. For others it may be the cool air at the tip of your nostrils with the in-breath, and warm air with the outbreath. Breathe normally, and don't try to manipulate your breath in any way. Only gently rest your attention on your breath.

You will likely find that your attention quickly drifts from the breath. This is no problem. Once you notice that your mind is somewhere other than the breath, gently, without judgment or self-criticism, bring it back to the breath. The real "gold" of this practice is in the moment of noticing that the mind has drifted and bringing it back to your focus. Each time this happens is a

moment of practice and learning in the stabilization of attention. Don't be concerned with any goal or outcome, only with the process of repeatedly bringing your attention back to the breath.

Don't try to inhibit or invite any bodily experience, sensory experience, thoughts, images, or feelings that may arise. Simply acknowledge these and each time release the experience and gently return attention to the breath.

You may find that silently counting each outbreath, from one to ten and then starting over, helps to stabilize your attention. Again, when you find that your mind has wandered from your breath counting, as it inevitably will, gently bring your attention back to the breath.

Stay with this breath focus for approximately ten minutes. With increasing practice, you may find yourself wanting to lengthen the practice period. However, initially limit your breath-focused awareness session to no more than ten minutes.

At the end of this interval (you can set a timer), slowly open your eyes fully, bring your vision back to sharp focus on the environment, and move about to avoid any stiffness or discomfort. Then, if you have done the practice before your reading, begin reading the article or chapter, allowing your mindful attitude to maintain. Be aware of and acknowledge any thoughts, images, or feelings that arise as you read, release them, and gently return your attention to the page.

After reading, engage in a second ten minute period of breath-focused mindful attention. Then, maintaining the mindful attitude of the practice as your grounding, write your reflective journal commentary on the article(s), as instructed in the syllabus.

Breath-focused mindful attention should not feel forced or strained. Rather, allow it to be a practice of joy and ease.