

Leaves on a River Exercise (from 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.

Allowing 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. (Pause)

Taking a few moments to Arrive by getting in touch with the physical sensations in your body, especially the sensations of touch or pressure where your body makes contact with where you are sitting. Being aware of your feet, your body being supported by the chair, how your hands feel with how they are making contact with your body. (Pause)

Now, Gathering your attention by simply focusing on your breathing. Slowly breathing in...and slowly breathing out....breathing in....breathing out. Noticing 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 observing that your mind has wandered, observing your thoughts and feelings, acknowledging their presence, and then returning your attention back to the breath. Passively observing the flow of your thoughts, one after another, without trying to figure out their meaning or their relationship to one another.

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

Now, allowing yourself to imagine a beautiful, slow-moving river...the water flowing along... Noticing how wide or narrow it is...Noticing the color of the water (Pause)

Imagining the day – Is it sunny or overcast? Warm or cool? What season is it...?
(Pause) Imagining you are sitting underneath a tree on the bank of the river.
Perhaps your back is resting against the trunk, gently supported.

Taking a deep breath, see if you can you smell the richness of the earth beneath you or perhaps scent of the land around you. (Pause)

Taking a moment to look up into the tree. Noticing the leaves rustling in the gentle breeze. What color are the leaves? What shape do they have? Listening to the sound of the gentle stirring of the leaves. Noticing that once in a while you observe a leaf dropping onto the river and flowing away. (Pause) Now gazing at the river... noticing leaves floating by on the surface of the water. Looking at the leaves and watching them...slowly drifting along downriver. (Pause)

As you sit beneath the tree on the bank of this river, becoming 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, imagining yourself placing the thought on one of those leaves. If you think in words, putting them on a leaf in words. If you think in images, putting them on a leaf as an image.

Whenever a new thought enters into your mind, putting 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...

Returning to gazing at the river, waiting for the next leaf to float by with a new thought on it. (Pause) When one comes along, again watching it passing in front of you and then letting 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. Thinking whatever thoughts you think, observing them, placing them on a leaf, and allowing them to flow freely along downriver, one by one. (Pause)

Now, when you are ready, allowing yourself to take a different perspective.

Allowing yourself to become the riverbed. Imagining 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, being aware that you are the container for the river... the leaves... and the thoughts. Perhaps even becoming 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...

Imagining what the riverbed must see, experiencing the river, the leaves, and thoughts floating along. Wondering what it is like for the riverbed when the river is rushing by or when it is barely trickling, wondering if the riverbed even cares since it merely sets the context for everything to happen. Without the riverbed, there would be no river and no river to carry along the leaves and thoughts. Wondering if the riverbed cares if it is autumn with lots of leaves on the river, or spring with very few leaves. (Pause)

Now, letting go of those thoughts and images and gradually widening your attention to take in the sounds around you in the room...the feeling of the chair beneath you...the feeling of the breath in your lungs. (Pause)

Taking a deeper than normal breath and slowly exhaling. Taking a moment to make the intention to bring this sense of gentle-allowing and self-acceptance into the present moment ... When you are ready, slowly opening your eyes.