

# **DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 2**

## **Guidelines for Accepting Reality: Observing-Your-Breath Exercises**

### **OBSERVING YOUR BREATH:**

Focus your attention on your breath, coming in and out. Observe your breathing as a way to center yourself in your wise mind. Observe your breathing as a way to take hold of your mind, dropping off nonacceptance and fighting reality.

#### **1. DEEP BREATHING**

Lie on your back. Breathe evenly and gently, focusing your attention on the movement of your stomach. As you begin to breathe in, allow your stomach to rise in order to bring air into the lower half of your lungs. As the upper halves of your lungs begin to fill with air, your chest begins to rise and your stomach begins to lower. Don't tire yourself. Continue for 10 breaths. The exhalation will be longer than the inhalation.

#### **2. MEASURING YOUR BREATH BY YOUR FOOTSTEPS**

Walk slowly in a yard, along a sidewalk, or on a path. Breathe normally. Determine the length of your breath, the exhalation and the inhalation, by the number of your footsteps. Continue for a few minutes. Begin to lengthen your exhalation by one step. Do not force a longer inhalation. Let it be natural. Watch your inhalation carefully to see whether there is a desire to lengthen it. Continue for 10 breaths.

Now lengthen the exhalation by one more footstep. Watch to see whether the inhalation also lengthens by one step or not. Only lengthen the inhalation when you feel that it will give delight. After 20 breaths, return your breath to normal. About 5 minutes later, you can begin the practice of lengthened breaths again. When you feel the least bit tired, return to normal. After several sessions of the practice of lengthened breath, your exhalation and inhalation will grow equal in length. Do not practice long, equal breaths for more than 10 to 20 breaths before returning to normal.

#### **3. COUNTING YOUR BREATH**

Sit cross-legged on the floor (sit in the half or full lotus position if you know how); or sit in a chair with your feet on the floor; or kneel; or lie flat on the floor; or take a walk. As you inhale, be aware that "I am inhaling, 1." When you exhale, be aware that "I am exhaling, 1." Remember to breathe from the stomach. When beginning the second inhalation, be aware that "I am inhaling, 2." And slowly exhaling, be aware that "I am exhaling, 2." Continue on up through 10. After you have reached 10, return to 1. Whenever you lose count, return to 1.

*(cont.)*

## **DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 2 (cont.)**

### **4. FOLLOWING YOUR BREATH WHILE LISTENING TO MUSIC**

Listen to a piece of music. Breathe long, light, and even breaths. Follow your breath; be master of it while remaining aware of the movement and sentiments of the music. Do not get lost in the music, but continue to be master of your breath and yourself.

### **5. FOLLOWING YOUR BREATH WHILE CARRYING ON A CONVERSATION**

Breathe long, light, and even breaths. Follow your breath while listening to a friend's words and to your own replies. Continue as with the music.

### **6. FOLLOWING THE BREATH**

Sit cross-legged on the floor (sit in the half or full lotus position if you know how); or sit in a chair with your feet on the floor; or kneel; or lie flat on the floor; or take a walk. Begin to inhale gently and normally (from the stomach), aware that "I am inhaling normally." Exhale in awareness, "I am exhaling normally." Continue for three breaths. On the fourth breath, extend the inhalation, aware that "I am breathing in a long inhalation." Exhale in awareness, "I am breathing out a long exhalation." Continue for three breaths.

Now follow your breath carefully, aware of every movement of your stomach and lungs. Follow the entrance and exit of air. Be aware that "I am inhaling and following the inhalation from its beginning to its end. I am exhaling and following the exhalation from its beginning to its end."

Continue for 20 breaths. Return to normal. After 5 minutes, repeat the exercise. Maintain a half-smile while breathing. Once you have mastered this exercise, move on to the next.

### **7. BREATHING TO QUIET THE MIND AND BODY**

Sit cross-legged on the floor (sit in half or full lotus position if you know how); or sit in a chair with your feet on the floor; or kneel; or lie flat on the floor. Half-smile. Follow your breath. When your mind and body are quiet, continue to inhale and exhale very lightly; be aware that "I am breathing in and making the breath and body light and peaceful. I am exhaling and making the breath and body light and peaceful." Continue for three breaths, giving rise to the thought, "I am breathing in while my body and mind are at peace. I am breathing out while my body and mind are at peace."

Maintain this thought in awareness from 5 to 30 minutes, according to your ability and to the time available to you. The beginning and end of the practice should be relaxed and gentle. When you want to stop, gently massage the muscles in your legs before returning to a normal sitting position. Wait a moment before standing up.

*Note.* Adapted from *The Miracle of Mindfulness: A Manual of Meditation* (pp. 81–84) by Thich Nhat Hanh, 1976, Boston: Beacon Press. Copyright 1987 by Mobi Ho. Adapted by permission.

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