



3 MINDFULNESS EXERCISES

FOR HELPING PROFESSIONALS

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Welcome

It is a great pleasure to offer you this compilation of mindfulness exercises. During the past years, Positive Psychology has gained an increasing amount of attention, both from helping professionals and researchers. This attention has resulted in many valuable insights in what contributes to a happy, fulfilling life. In addition, positive psychology has given us many tools not only to flourish, but also to cope with difficult times in life.

Since 2013, our aim with PositivePsychology.com has been to contribute to this field by disseminating the science to psychology practitioners and educators alike.

We hope that the mindfulness exercises presented here may inspire you too to increase your own wellbeing and the wellbeing of the people around you. Please feel free to print and share this document with others.

For those who like what they see, make sure to also check out our online searchable database with all kinds of similar practical positive psychology tools:

<https://positivepsychology.com/toolkit/>

All the best!

Seph Fontane Pennock
Hugo Alberts, Ph.D.



Using the tools

This product contains 3 different mindfulness tools. Each tool is structured in the same way, consisting of a background section, a goal description, advice for using the exercise and suggested readings.

On the first page of every tool, a legend is shown, consisting of several icons:



- The first icon displays the main category the tool belongs to.
- The second icon shows the type of tool. The following options are available:
 - » Exercise (a tool that describes an activity that is done once, during a session)
 - » Assessment (a tool that aims to assess a trait or characteristic of a person)
 - » Overview (a tool that provides an overview or list of something; research findings, facts, etc.)
 - » Advice (a tool that is directed at the helping professional providing advice on how to carry out a certain activity)
 - » Meditation (a tool that describes a form of meditation)
 - » Intervention (a tool that describes an activity that needs to be done more than once during a certain period)
- The third icon provides an estimation of the duration of the tool. In other words, how long it takes to complete the exercise. This is always an estimation of the total time it takes. Note that for some tool types, like overview, advice, protocol and intervention it is difficult if not impossible to provide an estimation of the duration. In these cases n/a (not available) is written.
- The fourth icon describes the intended audience for this tool; available options include client, coach or group.
- The last icon indicates whether this specific tool has been tested at least once in a scientific study and has been published in a peer reviewed journal (yes or no). Note that if there is a strong theoretical and scientifically tested basis underlying the tool, but the tool itself in its current form has not been directly addressed in research, the icon will still indicate “no”.

Important note

Please note that the tools in this give-away are not a substitute for a clinical or coaching certification program, which we recommend you take before you call yourself an official “therapist” or “coach” and before you see clients or patients.

Note that you are advised to use these tools within the boundaries of your professional expertise. For instance, if you are a certified clinician, you are advised to use the exercises within your field of expertise (e.g. clinical psychology). Likewise, a school teacher may use the exercises in the classroom, but is not advised to use the exercises for clinical populations. PositivePsychology.com B.V. is not responsible for unauthorized usage of these tools.

Practicing a mindfulness exercise can sometimes result in unpleasant experiences, such as agitation, anxiety or discomfort. Although these experiences are often a natural part of the process, we advise you seek psychological support if your emotional reactions are unusually strong.

These exercises should not be used as a substitute for professional psychological advice, diagnosis or treatment. If you are currently under psychological treatment, please consult your psychologist first before using these exercises.

PositivePsychology.com assumes no responsibility or liability for any consequence resulting directly or indirectly from any action or inaction you take based on the information found in these exercises.

Mindfulness

Meditation

30 min.

Client

No

The Wheel of Awareness

The key ingredient of mindfulness is awareness. Dr. Daniel Siegel created the Wheel of Awareness practice as a way to practice becoming aware of all that we can be aware of, at once (Siegel, 2018). The Wheel offers a visual metaphor for the way the mind works. The center of the wheel, the hub, is the area from which we become aware.

From the hub, we can choose to focus our attention on (i.e., become aware of) experiences both within and outside ourselves. Awareness of internal experiences is represented by areas of the wheel that house our thoughts, images, feelings, and bodily sensations. Awareness of external experiences is represented by an area of the wheel that houses our sense of connection to others. Put simply, within the metaphoric hub is the sense of knowing; within the rim of the wheel is that which is known—such as our five senses, the sixth sense of our bodily sensations, our mental life of emotions and thoughts, and our relations to people and the planet.

This tool includes a script and audio recording of the Wheel of Awareness practice, as well as a visual representation of the Wheel for clients to denote their unique experience. The aim of the tool is to help clients increase mindful awareness of themselves and also the outside world.



Author

This tool was created by Hugo Alberts (Ph.D.) and Lucinda Poole (PsyD).



Goal

The aim of the tool is to help clients expand their awareness from themselves (being aware of internal experiences) to their outer worlds (being aware of external experiences) so as to have a full and encompassing sense of connection and knowing.



Advice

- Often, clients struggle with the idea of “becoming aware of the present moment”, which is at the heart of mindfulness practice. This tool can be used to clarify what present moment awareness entails by clarifying the different aspects that one can become aware of.
- Advise clients that meditation is simply a task of becoming aware of the present moment, and we can be aware of one or more present moment anchors simultaneously (like the breath and bodily sensations and the sense of observing mental activities). Let clients know that it is normal and natural for their mind to wander off into the past or the future during the practice; instruct them to simply guide their attention back to the practice when they notice they have wandered off, and to do so gently and with compassion so as not to give themselves a hard time.
- This is a guided meditation practice, and guided meditation may be more convenient and easier for some people, however, clients can choose to read through the script and practice themselves without the audio. They might be more comfortable self-guiding in this way after listening to the guided practice a few times.
- In this exercise, clients first imagine the wheel of awareness during the meditation before seeing an actual image of the wheel of awareness. Some clients who struggle visualizing may find it helpful to first have a look at the image before meditating. When doing so, the practitioner may briefly explain the setup of the wheel of awareness to clients in order to familiarize them with the concept.
- Note that what is introduced as “connecting to the hub” in this meditation, refers to a process that has been referred to as decentering (Safran & Segal, 1990), reperceiving (Shapiro & Carlson 2009) and deautomatisation (Deikman, 1982) in the scientific literature. These terms all refer to the ability to entering an observer mode, from which one can “step outside of one’s immediate experience.



Suggested Readings

- Deikman, A.J. (1982). *The observing self*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Safran, J.D., & Segal, Z.V. (1990). *Interpersonal process in cognitive therapy*. New York: Basic Books.
- Shapiro, S.L., & Carlson, L.E. (2009). How is Mindfulness helpful? Mechanisms of Action. In: S.L. Shapiro & L.E. Carlson (Eds.), *The art and science of mindfulness: Integrating mindfulness into psychology and the helping professions*. Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.
- Siegel, D. (2018). *Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence - The Groundbreaking Meditation Practice*. Penguin.
- Siegel, D. J. (2010). *The mindful therapist: A clinician's guide to mindsight and neural integration*. WW Norton & Company.

Tool description

Introduction

In this mindful awareness practice, you will visualize a wheel; and this wheel has a central hub, an outer rim, and four quadrants in between. In this metaphor of how the mind is structured, the hub represents our experience of awareness, and the quadrants represent anything we can be aware of, including sensory awareness (i.e., what we see, hear, smell, taste and touch), bodily awareness (i.e., what we can sense physically), mental activities (such as emotions, thoughts, memories, and urges), and our sense of connection to things outside ourselves (such as other people and other things). The purpose of the practice is to cultivate a full sense of connection and awareness to both yourself and the world around you.

N.B. The subtitles (bolded text) in Part 1 do not need to be read out as part of the meditation - these subtitles are in place to give the practice structures. Practitioners need only read the text in italics.

Part 1: Wheel of Awareness meditation

1. Get into position

To begin, find a comfortable meditation position. Either sitting on a cushion on the floor, or in a chair. Allow your spine to be straight and long, and let your shoulders drop, relaxed. Rest your hands in your lap, and gently close your eyes.

2. Breath awareness

Become aware of the rhythm of your breathing. There's no need to change your breathing in any way, simply notice it exactly as it is.

3. Visualize the wheel

Now, bring to mind the image of a wheel. This wheel has a center, known as the "hub", and four sections, or quadrants, surrounding this hub. There is a rim that encompasses everything - the four quadrants and the hub. For each part of this practice, you will zoom in on one portion of the wheel, and become aware of its contents with my guidance.

4. First quadrant: connect to the five senses

I'd like to invite you to first turn your attention to the top, left quadrant, which houses your five senses. Zoom in on this area of your wheel by engaging your sense of hearing... what can you hear? And now your sense of touch... what can you feel? And now your sense of smell, and taste... what can you notice? Now gently open your eyes for a moment... what can you see?

5. Second quadrant: connect to bodily sensations

Good, and now close your eyes again, and bring your wheel back into your mind's eye. Take a deep slow breath here. Now I'd like to invite you to turn your attention to the top, right quadrant, which houses your "sixth sense", which is the inner sensations of your own body. Take a few moments to scan through your body from head to toe, becoming aware of any and all physical sensations throughout. Tingling, heat, tension, numbness. Take your time to move through each body group. Just noticing, being curious, just observing.

6. Third quadrant: connect to mental activities

Good, let's take another nice deep breath here. And next, I'd like to invite you to turn your attention to the bottom, left quadrant, which houses the activities of your mind itself, including your emotions, thoughts, memories, hopes, beliefs, dreams, attitudes, and intentions. First, simply become aware of everything that is entering your mind at this moment. Welcoming this mental activity into your awareness. What thoughts and feelings are showing up right now? [30 second pause]. Next, begin to examine how these internal experiences arise and pass... do they come up suddenly or gradually? Do they stay constant, or fade in and out? Are there gaps between the different mental activities, or do these exist as one long stream of consciousness?

7. Hub: awareness of awareness

Good, let's take another nice deep breath here. And we'll now bring our attention to the center of the wheel, the hub, which is where your awareness stems from. The hub is the 'you' that has noticed everything so far in this practice - the part of you that is observing, listening, looking, focusing, sensing. Take some time here, as cultivating this "awareness of awareness" takes practice.

8. Fourth quadrant: connect to others

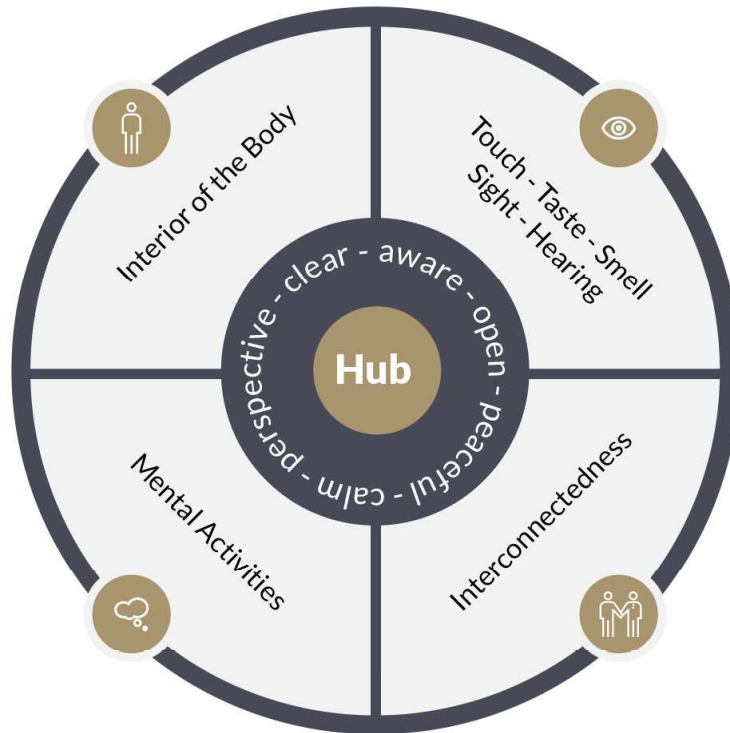
Good, let's take another deep, slow breath here. And then turn your attention to the bottom, right quadrant of your wheel, which houses your sense of connection to the outside world. First, notice the sense of connection to the people physically closest to you right now [15-second pause]. Then, expand this sense of connection to people further away [15-second pause]. And then tap into your sense of connection to your loved ones, wherever they may be right now [15-second pause]. Then, widen your sense of connection step-by-step to include those who live in your neighborhood, city, country, continent, in the whole world, and finally to all living beings on earth.

9. Ground yourself

As the meditation comes to an end, simply bring your attention back to your breath, as you did at the beginning of the practice. You might like to take a few deep, slow breaths here, to ground yourself back into this moment. Then, when you are ready, gently open the eyes.

Part 2: Reflection

Now take a look at the wheel of awareness, displayed below.



Below, reflect on what you noticed during the meditation (Part 1). Write down as much as you can remember from each of the four quadrants and from becoming aware of awareness itself (the hub). There are no wrong answers here! Everyone's wheel of awareness experience is unique.



Quadrant 1: Mental activities

My observations:

Quadrant 2: Interior of the body

My observations:

Quadrant 3: Touch - Taste - Smell - Sight - Hearing

My observations:



Quadrant 4: Interconnectedness

My observations:

General discussion

- How did you feel at the end of the practice?
- Did you learn anything new about yourself?
- When do you think this practice would be usefully applied in your everyday life?

Leaves on a Stream

Mindfulness

Meditation

10 min.

Client

Yes

Cognitive defusion, or defusion, is “the ability to separate from your thoughts and to let them come and go, instead of getting caught up in them, or allowing them to dictate what you do,” (Harris, 2009, p. 6). Defusion is a core component of mindfulness and is part of third-wave therapies such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 1999). Defusion involves creating distance between an individual and his or her thoughts. People learn to step back from their thoughts and view them as mental events passing through the mind rather than absolute truths; to look at rather than from their thoughts. In this way, defusion provides a powerful way to deal effectively with painful, unhelpful or self-defeating thoughts and beliefs. Research has validated the effectiveness of cognitive defusion techniques for psychological wellbeing. For instance, Masuda, Hayes, Sackett and, Twohig (2004) found cognitive defusion reduced both discomfort and believability in self-relevant negative thoughts more so than attempting to distract oneself from or control such thoughts.

This tool provides practitioners with a mindfulness script for Leaves on a Stream, a well-known cognitive defusion practice. This exercise can be carried out in session as well as set for homework, to help clients develop the skill of cognitive defusion.



Author

This tool was created by Hugo Alberts (PhD) (https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Hugo_Alberts) and Lucinda Poole (PsyD) (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/lucinda-poole-24a122121/>).



Goal

The goal of the exercise is to develop the ability to let go of problematic thoughts through practicing cognitive defusion.



Advice

- If clients report difficulty visualizing the stream, offer them alternatives (and adapt your verbal instructions accordingly) such as pieces of luggage on a moving conveyor belt, or cars driving past outside the client's house, or clouds or birds in the sky.
- Since the goal is for clients to improve their ability to unhook themselves from their thoughts, it is necessary to practice this technique with every thought that arises, both pleasant and unpleasant, helpful and unhelpful.
- This exercise can be used during moments of distress (i.e., in session when clients are experiencing rumination or are fused with particular problematic thinking) or as a skill building exercise (i.e., to build the skill of cognitive defusion, so that clients may apply the technique in daily life). If used in a skill-building capacity, practitioners may choose to begin sessions with a Leaves on a Stream practice and/or set it for client homework. Practitioners can shorten the length of the practice to 2-3 minutes if needed/preferred.



Suggested Readings

Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G. (1999). *Acceptance and commitment therapy* (p. 6). New York: Guilford Press.

Harris, R. (2009). *ACT made simple*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.

Masuda, A., Hayes, S. C., Sackett, C. F., & Twohig, M. P. (2004). Cognitive defusion and self-relevant negative thoughts: Examining the impact of a ninety year old technique. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 42(4), 477-485.

Tool description

Instructions

Part 1: Leaves on a Stream script

Sitting in a comfortable position, allow your shoulders to drop and relax, and plant your feet firmly on the ground... Or, if you are sitting cross-legged, feel the sense of contact between your feet and the seat and the floor beneath you.

Now gently close your eyes, and for the next few breaths bring your full focus of attention to your breathing. Notice the feeling of the air flowing in through the nostrils, down into the lungs, and down into the belly as you inhale... and on the exhale, feel the release of any tension as you let the air out slowly.

Now, imagine that you are sitting by the side of a gently flowing stream... This might be a stream that you know, or it might be something you create in your mind using your imagination. There might be a light breeze blowing as you sit here, dappled light glistening on the water, and soft green grass beneath you... imagine the stream however you like – it's your imagination (10 secs)

Now imagine that there are leaves floating on the surface of the stream, and these leaves are gently flowing past you, down the stream.

For the next few minutes, see if you can take every thought that pops into your head and place it on a leaf...

Now your thoughts may show up in your mind in the form of words, or pictures, or something else. However a thought arises, simply place it on a leaf, and let it float by.

Do this regardless of whether the thoughts are positive and enjoyable, or negative and challenging. Simply place each on a leaf, and let it float down the stream... (10 secs)

If you notice that your thoughts stop momentarily, just continue to watch the stream. Sooner or later your thoughts will start up again... (20 secs)

Allow the stream to flow at its own rate. There is no need to try and speed it up. The aim here is not to wash the leaves away – the aim is to allow them to come and go in their own time... To just sit and watch. (20 secs)

If your mind says something along the lines of “I can't do it” or “This is stupid”, place those thoughts on leaves, and let them float by... (20 secs)

If a leaf gets stuck, let it hang around. There is no need to force it to float away... simply sit and watch as sooner or later another leaf will come along and give it the nudge it needs (20 secs)



If a difficult feeling arises, such as boredom, impatience, or anxiety, simply acknowledge it. Say to yourself “Here is a feeling of boredom”, “Here is a feeling of impatience”, “Here is a feeling of anxiety”, and place those words on a leaf... (20 secs)

Now from time to time, your thoughts will hook you, and you will lose track of the exercise. This is normal as our attention naturally wanders, and it will happen time and time again... As soon as you realize this has happened, simply come back to your stream... (20 secs)

Continuing to place each thought that pops into your mind on a leaf, and watching it slip by... (30 secs)

Again and again, your thoughts will hook you. Remember, this is normal. As soon as you notice this has happened, simply come back to your stream... (30 secs)

As the exercise comes to an end, begin to let go of your imagined stream and bring your attention back to where you are... notice what you can hear... what you can feel... and when your ready, open your eyes and notice what you can see...

You might like to take another minute to sit quietly before carrying on with your day... holding on to this sense of presence and spaciousness from thinking.

Part 2: Debrief

Discuss the following questions:

- What did you notice?
- How did you visualize your thoughts (i.e., words, images, or something else)?
- Did your mind get hooked by thoughts? If so, were you able to unhook yourself and come back to the stream?
- Did any negative or painful thoughts show up? Were you able to place these thoughts on leaves and allow them to float by at their own pace?
- How do you feel now?

Eye of the Hurricane Meditation

Mindfulness

Meditation

10 min.

Client or group

Yes

Mindfulness practice offers a way for clients to disengage from the hectic world around them by focussing attention inward. In mindfulness practice, clients learn to use their breath as a vehicle create more inner peace. By connecting to their breath, clients can disconnect from upsetting thoughts, emotions and other stressors that disrupt inner peace. However, like many abstract concepts, the concept of inner peace may be difficult for clients to understand.

In this meditation, the concept of inner peace is clarified by using a hurricane as a metaphor. Within the strong, turbulent winds of a hurricane is the eye, a calm, quiet, centered space. The goal is to help clients to explore inner peace by using their breath to become like the eye of the hurricane; the silent part of themselves that can notice difficult or challenging experiences without getting caught up and carried away by them.

A large body of research supports the use of mindfulness meditation for psychological distress and emotional wellbeing (Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt & Walach, 2004).



Author

This tool was created by Hugo Alberts (PhD) (https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Hugo_Alberts) and Lucinda Poole (PsyD) (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/lucinda-poole-24a122121/>).



Goal

The goal of this tool is for clients to connect to a place of inner peace and calm. This tool uses the metaphor of a hurricane to guide clients to a state in which they become an observer that is able to notice what is happening from moment to moment with a sense of calm and clarity.



Advice

- The concept inner peace is reasonably abstract, and thus clients may need to try this exercise more than once to fully grasp the metaphor. Clients will likely be very familiar with the thinking self - the part of them that generates thoughts, beliefs, memories, judgments, dreams, plans, and so on - and less aware of and unfamiliar with the silent, observing self - the aspect of them that is aware of whatever they are thinking, feeling, sensing, or doing at any moment.
- If this meditation causes the client's mind to feel unsettled, the client may return to the breath as an anchor.
- It is advisable to incorporate real-time stimuli from the surrounding environment into the flow of meditation guidance. For example, sirens or jackhammers, hallway happenings or the sound of heating and air conditioning, can be incorporated into the hurricane metaphor. Comments like "Notice the sound of the siren, and see it become swept into the winds of the hurricane" and "Can you notice the stillness within you as the sound of the ambulance surrounds you?" can strengthen the observing mode of the client.
- In this meditation, the client allows the mind to observe whatever surfaces during the meditation. This may cause issues that have been deeply repressed to begin to rise to the surface. This provides clients with the opportunity to address them consciously. Allow the client to discuss any issues that have arisen after the meditation, during the reflection.



Suggested Readings

Grossman, P., Niemann, L., Schmidt, S., & Walach, H. (2004). Mindfulness-based stress reduction and health benefits: A meta-analysis. *Journal of psychosomatic research*, 57(1), 35-43.

Harris, Russ, 2009. "The Sky and the Weather." From *ACT made simple*, 2009 by R. Harris. 175. Used by permission of New Harbinger Publications.

Safran, J.D., & Segal, Z.V. (1990). *Interpersonal process in cognitive therapy*. New York: Basic Books. Softcover edition, 1996, Jason Aronson, Inc.

Shapiro, S. L., Carlson, L. E., Astin, J. A., & Freedman, B. (2006). Mechanisms of mindfulness. *Journal of clinical psychology*, 62(3), 373-386.

Tool description

Instructions

Part 1: Read mindfulness script (Eye of the Hurricane)

- Find a comfortable meditation position, either sitting on a cushion on the floor, or on a chair. Sit tall with your back straight, but shoulders relaxed. And let your hands rest in your lap, and gently close your eyes.
- Let's take three deep, slow breaths to begin.
- Become aware of your body, sitting here. Notice the sense of contact between your body and the seat beneath you... notice your feet on the floor... notice your clothes against your skin.
- Now let's consider a metaphor. Within the strong, turbulent winds of a hurricane, the eye, the center of the hurricane, is quiet. There is no wind and no movement there. For a moment, picture this idea in your mind. Can you visualise the strong, turbulent winds of a hurricane, and the inner core that is peaceful and quiet?
- Let's see if you can become like the centre of the hurricane. Your current circumstances, your thoughts, your feelings, and the sensations throughout your body, can be compared to the winds of a hurricane. Is it possible for you to let go of all of these things for a moment, so that you are no longer taking part in them... like the centre of the hurricane is not taking part in the turbulent surrounding winds.
- To do this, start by focusing on your breath. Simply breathe in and breathe out. Focus inward.
- Just like the eye is deep within the hurricane, your eye is deep within you. Use your breath to connect to this part of you. Simply breathe in and breathe out.
- Stay connected to your breath. If anything stressful happens in this moment, such as negative thoughts, unpleasant feelings, annoying sounds, difficult life events, memories... try to look at them as if they are the turbulent wind of the hurricane; whirling around, continually changing, unpredictable in nature...
- Notice that you are not them. You are the silent centre of the hurricane, the part that is peaceful, despite what is happening around you.
- You are the silent centre of the hurricane, peaceful and at ease.
- You are not reacting, you are simply observing. Like the wind of the hurricane, these experiences are constantly moving and changing. You, on the other hand, are stable. You are not moving or being carried away by them.
- As you are breathing, notice how you move more and more towards the centre of the hurricane, towards the eye. Just like the turbulent wind of the hurricane, your thoughts, your feelings and whatever is happening outside yourself is still going on, but you are no longer part of it. You are in a safe, peaceful place... Breathing in, breathing out.
- As you sit here, connected to your eye, notice whatever arises. Notice the wind of the hurricane, but do not participate. Stay in the eye. Notice thoughts... notice feelings... notice sensations... continue to watch the ever-changing nature of the world inside and outside you. Watch from a distance, with curiosity, and without judgment... without reacting to what you see.
- No matter how intense or bad the hurricane gets, the eye is always centered, calm and at ease. Even the most turbulent hurricane cannot hurt or harm the eye; the eye is safe. Whenever you feel you need to restore your inner peace, use your breath to connect to this silent part of yourself. Just breathe in and breathe out. It may help to visualise the hurricane, with yourself in the centre.



- It can be difficult to see the eye of the hurricane at times, and sometimes we forget the eye is there... however, it is always there. If we examine closely enough—even the strongest, darkest hurricane—sooner or later we'll see the eye, centered and constant.
- Now, when you feel ready, slowly open your eyes.

Part 2: Reflection

- What was it like to connect to the observing self?
- How do you feel now?
- Did you resonate with the metaphor of the eye of the hurricane? If not, can you think of another metaphor that would resonate with you more?
- Sometimes during meditation, issues that have been suppressed for some time begin to rise to the surface. Where there things that you noticed that you may have repressed in the past? If so, what kind of experiences did you notice? What was it like to notice them? How did you deal with them?