

Training Exercise: Observer Exercise

This exercise will help you to practice observing that you are not your thoughts, your emotions, your sensations. We are larger than our thoughts and feelings.

First, just close your eyes or fix your gaze on something, and breathe in and out. As we move through this exercise, use your breath as an anchor. If you find your mind wandering, just come back to your breath and then back to the exercise.

Picture the most beautiful mountain you know, or know of, or can imagine, one whose form speaks personally to you. As you focus on the image or the feeling of the mountain in your mind's eye, notice its overall shape – the lofty peak, the base rooted in the rock of the earth's crust, the steep or gently sloping sides. Note as well, how massive it is, how unmoving, how beautiful, whether seen from afar or up close.

(About 10 seconds of silence)

When you feel ready, see if you can bring the mountain into your own body so that your body sitting here and the mountain of the mind's eye become one. Your head becomes the lofty peak; your shoulders and arms, the sides of the mountain; your buttocks and legs, the solid base rooted to your cushion on the floor or to your chair. Experience in your body the sense of uplift, the elevated quality of the mountain deep in your own spine. Invite yourself to become a breathing mountain, unwavering in your stillness, completely what you are, beyond words and thought – a centered, rooted, unmoving presence.

(About 10 seconds of silence)

Now, notice that the mountain endures many changes. Over the course of a day, the sun moves across the sky, but it's all the same to the mountain. The seasons change, summer to fall, fall to winter, winter to spring, just like thoughts will be constantly changing, but underneath it all, the mountain remains the same. Sometimes the mountain is covered with green trees, sometimes a coat of brilliant fall colors or wintry snow, but underneath the changing seasons, the mountain remains. Sometimes, the mountain is buffeted by intense storms, wind and rain, snow and ice, and sometimes the skies around the mountain are clear, but the mountain sits, unchanged by the weather around it. It does not struggle against the weather. The mountain cannot change the weather, just like you can sit, and the thoughts will come and go. The mountain sits and the storms pass, they will come again, and it continues to be the mountain despite the weather.

(About 10 seconds of silence)

We, too, experience storms. Stormy thoughts and feelings, sometimes of unthinkable intensity. But like the mountain, we needn't try to change the weather. Stormy thoughts and feelings will come and pass. Skies will clear again. Experience a feeling of strength and calm, a mountain amid the storms, unmoved by the weather of stormy thoughts. As light and weather and fog all change around us, we remain constant like the mountain.

Notice what it feels like to connect to the feeling of sameness, stability in the mountain, despite what thoughts or feelings come and go.

(About 10 seconds of silence)

When you're ready, open your eyes and come back into the room.