

## Brief Mindfulness + Leaves on a Stream

About the exercise:

*This is the same exercise from week one with "Leaves on a Stream," an ACT defusion exercise from ACT Made Simple (Harris, 2009), added to the ending. This is also the exercise that group members will do for homework between weeks two and three.*

Begin by sitting comfortably with your feet flat on the ground and your back supported by the back of the chair. Arrange your head, neck, and shoulders so that they are upright but not stiff. As we do this exercise, you can do one of two things with your eyes: you can either close them or, if you prefer not to, you can leave them open with your lids half closed and your eyes directed at a point approximately 30° in front of you. This is how we will conduct most mindfulness exercises this semester. This is not the "right" way to do it, but it's a useful way to start.

If you are comfortable, begin by allowing your eyes to close gently. In your mind's eye, turn your attention to your breathing... \*Simply observe the rising and falling of your breath in your chest and belly... Though you will likely be tempted, there is no need to try to control your breathing in any way. As best you can, allow your breath to breathe itself... Next, turn your attention to your body in the chair... Scan your body, observing the places where you make contact with the chair... Notice the sensations of touch or pressure there...

As you do this exercise, you will notice that your mind tends to drift off. That's completely normal: that is what minds do. Minds are prone to drifting off toward problem solving, predicting, worrying, planning, judging, and a variety of other activities. When you notice that you have done this, just gently bring yourself back to this moment and the area of your body or the environment to which I'm directing your attention...

Now, turn your attention to your feet inside your shoes... Notice the variety of sensations there: touch, pressure, temperature... See if you can pick out each individual toe... If it helps, wiggle your toes a little bit... Next, turn your attention to the places where your skin makes contact with the air – on your face, on your hands, wherever... Notice the sensations there... Next, turn your attention to the sounds around you... Both inside this room and, if you can pick them out, outside this room...

Bring your attention back to your breathing... Watch the rising and falling in your chest and belly as your breath flows in and flows out...

Now, please imagine sitting next to a stream... notice the sound there... notice the movement of the water. And notice, as you gaze at the stream, a number of leaves are on the surface floating by. Spend a moment watching the leaves slowly drift down stream, from left to right... Now, when a thought comes along into your mind, put each one on a leaf and observe each leaf come closer to you, and watch it slowly moving away, eventually drifting out of sight. Return to gazing at the stream, waiting for the next leaf to float by, with a new thought. If one comes along again, watch it come closer to you, and then let it drift out of sight... Think whatever thoughts you think and allow them to float freely on each leaf, one by one... Imagine your

thoughts floating by, like leaves down a stream... If you like, you can allow yourself to take the perspective of the stream. Being the stream, you hold each of the leaves and notice the thought that each leaf carries as it sails by. You need not interfere with them, just let them flow and do what they do. We will continue for a few minutes silently doing this practice (weight about 2 min.) Now, let go of those thoughts and gradually widen your attention to take in the sounds around you in the room, and take a moment to make the intention to bring this sense of gentle allowing and self acceptance into the present moment... And when you've made that intention, feel free to open your eyes.