

Listening Practice

In my own work with patients and community members, I have witnessed that those in more acute states of anxiety do best with alternatives to basic breath meditation. They are often hyper aware and quite terrified of their own shallow breathing, rapid heart rate, surging sensations in the chest and upper body, sweaty palms etc.. Bringing more awareness to the body can actually heighten agitation. It may be more supportive to begin with *Listening Practice* as outlined below.

This particular practice needn't be done in a place where you will be undisturbed. Part of the beauty of this practice is to actually tune into the world around you, to notice that there's a lot going on. You are actually part of a much larger world of moving parts. In 1962, Aldous Huxley wrote a fiction novel entitled *Island*, painting an idyllic utopia blending elements of east and west. Parrots fill the trees flitting about chirruping repeatedly, "Here and now, here and now." Listening meditation practice can be a gentle bridge into the *here and now*.

Have a read through these instructions, then set them aside. Consider setting a timer for 20-30 minutes so you can simply relax into the practice without feeling agitated to check how long you've been *listening*. Having said that, this practice can be engaged for as little as a few breaths at your desk at work or a few minutes on the bus and still prove valuable in settling agitation and anxiety.

- Take a comfortable position sitting or lying down.
- Allow the eyes to remain open with a soft focus on the ground so your orientation is to stay awake.
- Start tuning into the sounds around you in a similar manner to noticing your breath. Sounds will arise and pass, come and go and you need only notice their coming and going away. Sounds you notice may initially be quite close; the sound of your own breath, the rustling of your clothing, sound of heating-cooling in your environment.
- As your attention settles and time passes, sounds will change. You might find yourself tuning into a much larger field of sound; traffic, distant fog horns, industry or railroad; the sound of someone's cell phone or your own cell phone going off in another room or in the purse at your feet.
- Experiment with closing the eyes after a few minutes. How does this influence your awareness of sound?
- You can oscillate between external sounds and those of your own body. Notice any changes in your anxiety or agitation and honor the orientation to sound the seems most settling.

When your timer signals the conclusion of your time *Listening*, gently transition to your next activity remembering you can tune into the world around you at any time.

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