

Listening Practice



Sometimes when anxiety is high, focusing on the breath is NOT helpful, can even make it worse. You might already be hyper-aware of your shallow breathing, rapid heart rate, tightness in the chest, sweaty palms. *Listening Practice* can soothe the nervous system, slow the heart rate, allow contact with the broader world.

After you're familiar with the practice, you can do this anywhere: in the midst of a panic attack on the bus, after a microaggression at work, stepping away for a minute in the midst of family conflict, struggling with melancholy alone in your apartment. This practice is about tuning into the world around you. When you tune in, you'll notice that there's a lot going on outside of your body. You're actually part of a much larger world. In Aldous Huxley's novel *Island*, there are parrots filling the trees of an idyllic island. They fly around calling all day, "Here and now, here and now." Listening practice can be a

different bridge **into the here, into the now.**

Have a read through these instructions, then set them aside. Time can move in funny ways when we slow it down. If you set a timer (5-30 minutes), then you can simply relax into the practice without the impatience or curiosity to check how long you've been *listening*. You can do this practice for as little as a few breaths: at your desk at work, on the bus, a moment waiting for the WALK sign before crossing the street, after leaving the grocery car sitting in your car. Even in a few breaths, it can help settle agitation and anxiety.

- This can be done sitting, standing, walking or lying down. Notice your feet on the ground, your body connecting to the chair or the earth.
- Tune into the sounds around you. Sounds will come and go. Notice their coming and going. 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, crows, garbage or recycling collection, and traffic outside.
- As your attention settles, sounds will change. Your attention might expand to take in sounds farther away; distant fog horns, industry or railroad, ambulance sirens.
- Try opening your eyes with a soft focus and alternate with closing your eyes after a few minutes. How does this influence your awareness of sound?
- You can shift between close in and far away. Notice any changes in your anxiety or agitation and honor what seems most calming. Continue for 5-30 minutes.

However you conclude your *Listening practice*, gently transition to your next activity. Remember, you can tune back into the world around you at any time. If you feel your anxiety increasing as you do this (or any suggested practice), STOP. Shift to a practice that works for you. I would encourage some physical movement like walking or stretching. Or focus a bit stronger on your feet while doing active *Listening*. I always welcome questions & comments.

Amy C. Darling

Acupuncturist, Herbalist and Health Educator

Medical Dental Building

509 Olive Way, Suite 1358 • Seattle, WA 98101

amycdarling.com • amylac@amycdarling.com • 206.920.9929

