

Mindfulness Worksheet - From Big to Small (to Big)

In this worksheet we'll explore how our mind works, and in particular how our attention changes when we move from the big picture to a small area of single-pointed focus.

Mindfulness is about staying present and aware. We can do this on a grand scale, aware that it's morning versus night, for example. And we can do this on a small, detailed scale, aware of this one particular fraction of a second.

While meditating, we might find that at first it's easier to do one than the other. It may be easier to meditate on the body as a whole, versus holding awareness of just our pinky toe.

Playing with attention and awareness in this way builds our capacity for mindfulness and teaches us more about how our mind works.

As we move closer and closer towards 'single pointed focus,' a single point becomes more difficult to find. Even the tiniest of objects, or their atoms, can still be broken down into their parts.

Thus, by turning from the big picture to the smallest one, we end up with a big picture view again. This time, we notice that nothing exists the way we think it does, and that everything is dependent upon the construction of our minds.

We'll use the following meditation to play with shifting awareness from the big picture to smallest detail, noticing what happens along the way.

Big to Small (to Big) Meditation

- Find a comfortable and quiet place to sit
- Close your eyes and turn attention inward towards your breath
- Breathe steadily and quietly in and out through your nose
- Notice the breath on a gross level, just breathing in and breathing out
- Notice how the entirety of the body moves with each breath in and out
- Stay with this sensation as long as you'd like to - breath as it's felt by the whole body
- Then, focus in on the movement of the breath through the nose only
- Stay with this sensation for as long as you'd like to - breath through the whole nose
- Then, zero in on the one small part of the nose where you notice the breath the most

- Stay in this small area for as long as you'd like to - breath through one small part of the nose
- Then, can you zero in even further? Can you hold your attention within a smaller area?
- Is it possible to feel breath as it moves past one single nose hair?
- Keep following attention inward to the tiniest detail you can
- Rest your mind in the spaciousness of that detail until your meditation is complete

What Did You Notice?

- Describe your experience with the meditation in general
- At which point in the meditation did you find it most comfortable to hold attention on your breath?
- As your attention narrowed to a smaller point of focus, did focusing become easier, or more challenging?
- As attention turns toward a more detailed point of focus, is there any end point to how far you can go?
- Is your mind seeing/sensing/experiencing the tiniest of detail, or imagining it? What's the difference?
- What does it mean to rest in the 'spaciousness of detail'?
- If everything can infinitely be broken down into smaller and smaller parts, how might our mind be the 'glue' that holds reality together?
- Do we see things as they are, or do we see things as we are?
- How does 'playing' with awareness teach us more about how our mind works?
- How might this meditation be of benefit to you outside of the practice?

Using the Body

You can do this meditation using any area of the body. Decide before you begin what your final point of focus will be, in this example, the left pinky toe. Then, begin with an overall awareness of your form, your outer silhouette. Slowly move attention to the lower body only, then to the left leg, the left foot, all the toes, the left pinky toe, one tiny area of the left pinky toe, and so on. What happens when we visualize the body at the molecular level? Where does the body go? Rest the mind in spaciousness as the detail opens up again.

Using Time

On another day, try the big to small (to big) meditation using time. Begin by noticing the year, or the season you're in. Then shift to the month, the day, the time of day, all the way down to the fraction of a second that you label as "now." What happens as you further break down the

fractions of a second into even smaller parts? Each moment of time has an earlier part, a middle part, and a later part. At some point, the mind can no longer keep track, and opens into a feeling of spaciousness. Rest your attention with that sensation.

Review

Things are not as solid as they seem. Everything that's within our perception is also dependent on us, the perceiver. The mind works to make sense of our reality, and organizes what we notice into structures and concepts based on our past experiences and the names we give to things.

We see the world as we are. Once we recognize that what we perceive depends on the perceiving mind, we realize that by changing our minds we can change our world. There is great freedom in knowing that nothing is fixed. Everything has potential to change for the better.