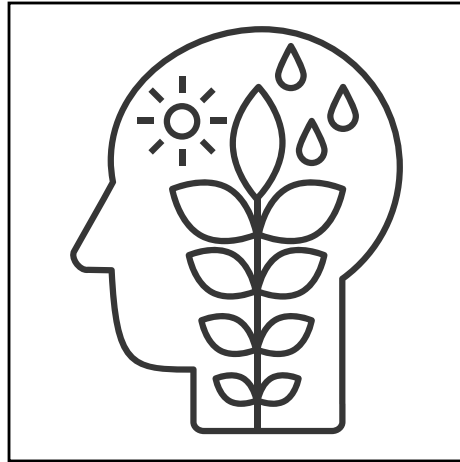


PROCESS NOT PERFECTION



Process one

GROUNDING

If you have ever been in therapy or treatment before, you've likely heard your provider talk about *grounding*, a vital skill in trauma recovery, mental health recovery, and addiction recovery. It's also very likely that at one time or another you looked at your treatment provider with a sense of confusion about what the word means! Let's discuss some ideas and definitions, including some insights on why grounding is such an important part of any recovery path, before launching into our first formal process.

While noticing the literal ground below can be a good place to start exploring the meaning of this skill, that definition may be incomplete for you. There can be times when you literally look down at your feet and know, at least in a rational sense, that you are in the here and now. However, other parts of your experience may be pulling you into the past or projecting you into the future. One of my favorite, comprehensive definitions of grounding comes from Margaret Postlewaite: *Coming into the here and now by using our bodily sensations*.²

In this process, we will explore many sensory channels and their combinations as we work through the various practices. It will be useful for you to observe and take notice of which senses, which experiences, and which practices are most powerful in bringing you home into the present moment. Keep an open mind and an open heart as experiences that resonate for you on one day or during one season of your life may change over time.

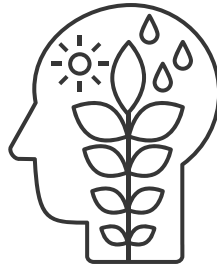
There are several reasons why the skill of grounding is vital to recovery, regardless of which path of recovery you are pursuing. Depending on where you are at in your journey, learning the skill of grounding and becoming familiar with it may feel like big, important work in and of itself. If that is where you are today and you are not concerned about going deeper yet, embrace where you are right now and focus on grounding. Even if you already know that deeper work is going to be required sooner rather than later to help you to reach your health, wellness, and recovery goals, having the ability to use a combination of senses and experiences to come back into the here and now, to return to equilibrium, is crucial. So many clients and

³ Postlewaite, M. (2016). "Grounding: Coming into the here and now by using our bodily sensations." In Scott Simon Fehr (Ed.), *101 interventions in Group Therapy* (2nd ed.) New York: Routledge, pp. 78-80.

students alike have expressed trepidation about feeling emotions and diving into trauma work because they fear it will overwhelm them or it may suck them in so completely, they won't be able to come back.

Therefore, we learn grounding first. More than that, we practice grounding in daily life to develop the confidence that no matter how many stressors may come at us, we can find our ground in the reality of the present moment. Join me on this discovery in the practices that follow.

J A M I E M A R I C H , P h D



PRACTICE ONE

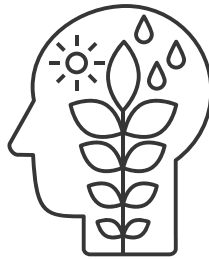
GROUNDING TREE VISUALIZATION

A famous quote attributed to the late martial artist Bruce Lee teaches, “Notice that the stiffest tree is most easily cracked, while the bamboo or willow survives by bending with the wind.” Trees can be powerful, metaphorical experiences for the practice of grounding. You may learn in your own experience with these first several practices, including the *Grounding Tree Visualization*, that trees have many lessons to teach us. Are you willing to listen?

- Whether you are sitting or standing, notice the connection of your feet to the ground below you. Take a few moments here. Maybe pump your feet back and forth a few times and then let them come to stillness. Really notice the connection.
- If this works for you, imagine that roots are coming out of your feet and shooting into the earth below you, like the roots of a tree.
- Notice the roots moving deep, deep, deep into the earth, through all of the different layers. Take a moment to just be with this experience. Think of yourself being firmly rooted in the earth, in the here-and-now.

MODIFICATION NOTES:

- ✓ You can name what kind of tree you are, such as an oak, a banyan, an elm, or a pine tree. This might make the process even more real for you!
- ✓ If you have earth elements around your office, such as essential oils like Cedarwood or Pine, or even a Mason jar full of dirt (try it, it smells like the “good earth”), consider bringing those in to this practice—it can add to the grounding experience.
- ✓ If you need a guided audio/video experience to help deepen your connection to this practice, go to: **www.traumamadesimple.com/pnp**



PRACTICE TWO

TREE POSE

In Hatha Yoga (the yoga of deliberate, physical postures), tree pose is one of the classic postures taught to develop balance. If you are already judging yourself along the lines of “I have terrible balance,” rest assured, you have to start somewhere. When I began my own yoga practice over ten years ago, even after having been a figure skater in my youth, I was shocked by how poor my balance was. Over time, through staying patient and non-judgmental with myself and the process, I acquired a much better sense of balance.

Some days the quality of the balance can still feel challenged, and that’s okay. Practicing yoga poses is never about being perfect. Rather, allow the poses to teach you about life and how you relate to life. In that spirit, please be gentle with yourself and give tree pose a try:

- Begin in a posture of standing meditation, preferably keeping your eyes open. Notice the connection of your feet to the ground below you. If you can, think about an energetic connection moving up from the ground into your feet, up your legs, and through the rest of your body, keeping you in the here-and-now.
- As you feel ready, shift the weight slightly to your right leg. You can use a chair or a wall to help you for balance at any point in this pose. You can also use your arms in whatever way works for you to help with balance.

- Once you experience reasonable steadiness on the right leg, turn the left foot out, placing the left heel on your right ankle. Your left knee also turns out slightly, moving away from your body.
- You can keep the pose here or if you want more challenge, you can also place the left foot against the side of your right lower leg. The knee is still turned away from the body. Continue to use the wall or chair for balance as needed. If you try the pose at this “setting” and become frustrated, go back to the lower setting with the foot against the ankle or give yourself permission to use the chair or wall. Using these assists does not diminish the value of the pose.
- For maximum challenge you can place the left foot against the right inner thigh, keeping the knee turned out. It is very important not to place the foot directly against the knee—if you can’t bring the foot to the upper leg; it’s perfectly fine to keep it at the lower position.
- Repeat the same process, using the left leg as your foundation. Notice any differences you may experience shifting sides. It’s completely normal for the experience to feel different on the other side.
- Starting with one attempt at the pose on each side of your body is fabulous. As you become more familiar with the pose, see if you can work up to three attempts, alternating right and left sides.

MODIFICATION NOTES:

- ✓ If standing up and doing this exercise feels too much to you at first (or if injury or disability inhibits you from standing up), you can achieve the same tree-shape posture laying down on a yoga mat or even in your bed. Laying down, keep one leg straight, as if you were standing, and turn the knee of the other leg out, bringing the sole of your foot to your ankle, calf, or thigh.
- ✓ See the photos that follow for additional guidance as needed.
- ✓ If you need additional instruction and require more visual cuing, go to:
www.traumamadesimple.com/pnp

TREE POSE VARIATIONS



Tree Pose: Ankle Variation



Tree Pose: Thigh Variation

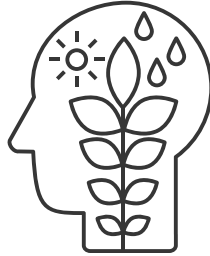


Tree Pose: Calf Variation



Tree Pose: Half Lotus Variation

J A M I E M A R I C H , P h D



PRACTICE THREE

MOVING THE BRANCHES

American naturalist John Muir once observed, “I never met a discontented tree. They grip the ground as though they liked it, and though fast rooted they travel about as far as we do. They go wandering forth in all directions with every wind, going and coming like ourselves, traveling with us around the sun two million miles a day, and through space, heaven knows how fast and how far.”⁴

In this next practice, let us continue to work with the wisdom of the tree as we play with the concept of moving the branches. Perhaps think of your arms, head, and other limbs as branches of the tree meeting the winds of life. Notice what you notice about how you may respond to the reality of the wind, a powerful metaphor for the flow of life and all that it brings.

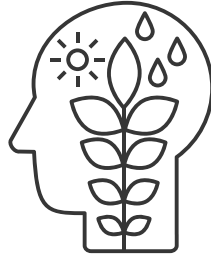
- In this *Dancing Mindfulness*-inspired practice, we’ll first start in tree pose, at whatever level or setting you can comfortably maintain.
- Deliberately start with the arms in a steady position (e.g., hands together at heart’s center/prayer, hands gently at the sides, hands in “okay” position at the sides)
- As you feel steadier, begin to move the arms away from the body or above the head. If you are using the wall or a chair for balance, keep one arm on the wall and begin moving the free arm.

⁴ Wolfe, L.N. (1979). *John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, p. 321.

- Think of what it means for branches to grow and to sway—if possible, let yourself embody that experience.
- If you like, put on music—music/sound that conjures up associations to nature settings with trees can be nice. You may even have music on hand that directly references trees.
- Continue with the process of moving the branches and if it feels organic, begin to move through space, letting a dance or other creative movement unfold.
- Focus on the sensation of still being grounded and connected to the earth, even while moving.
- Notice your experience, knowing that you can come back to standard tree pose or standing meditation at any time.

MODIFICATION NOTE:

- ✓ This practice can be done standing up, sitting, or lying down. If you need to lie down for the practice, move your arms/branches above you so that your field of vision can notice what you are doing with your movement.



PRACTICE FOUR

GUSH ART

Before you engage with this next practice, it may be useful to take a few moments and silently think about what the word *gush* may mean to you.

For me, it means not having any deliberate direction or expectation. It is the pure art form of just *going with it*, literally making art outside of the lines. Just as we cannot predict where the flow of the wind or the breezes of life will take us, neither can we predict where the flow of our art is going to take us, or what it is going to teach us, if we let ourselves surrender to this process.

- *Gush art* is a term used in expressive arts therapy to suggest uncensored creation with art—notice what the word “gush” means for you and allow that to unfurl on the page using materials you have available (crayons, markers, pastels, paints, etc.). That is the only prompt you are going to receive for this practice: Get out the materials and go! Gush!
- As is the case with many forms of meditation, it can be useful to set a timer for the gush art experience. This can help you keep your focus on the process of the experience instead of the outcome. When the timer expires, check in and notice whatever it is you notice about the experience and/or move along to the next practice.
- *Gush art* can be done without much direction as a pure stream-of-consciousness activity, or you can set a theme to the experience.

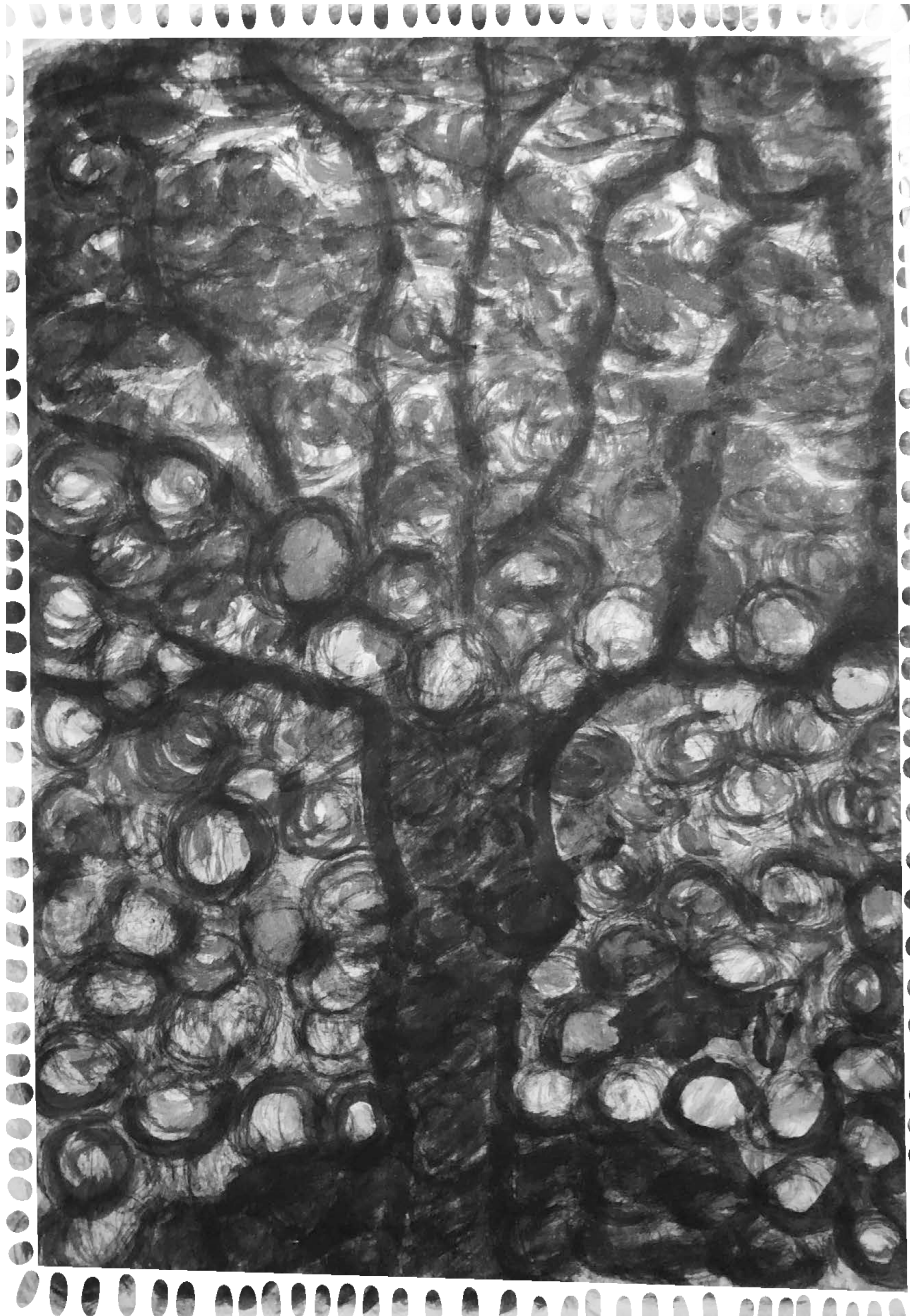
In this case, working with the theme of tree or grounding for a set period of time is a nice option. Setting the timer can keep us from being too outcome oriented with this or other practices. When the timer rings, as they say on many of the cooking shows: Put it down and walk away. Observe that what you express in the set period is what the creation is meant to be in this moment.

- If you are inspired to continue it later, you may, although know that it's not a requirement. What you *gush* in this process may simply be meant to exist as an imprint of this present moment.

MODIFICATION NOTE:

- ✓ If the thought of “gushing” with all available materials feels too much for you at first, pick one medium or implement (crayons, colored pencils, or markers, etc.). Starting smaller may give you the extra comfort you need while still giving yourself sufficient challenge.

GUSH ART EXAMPLES

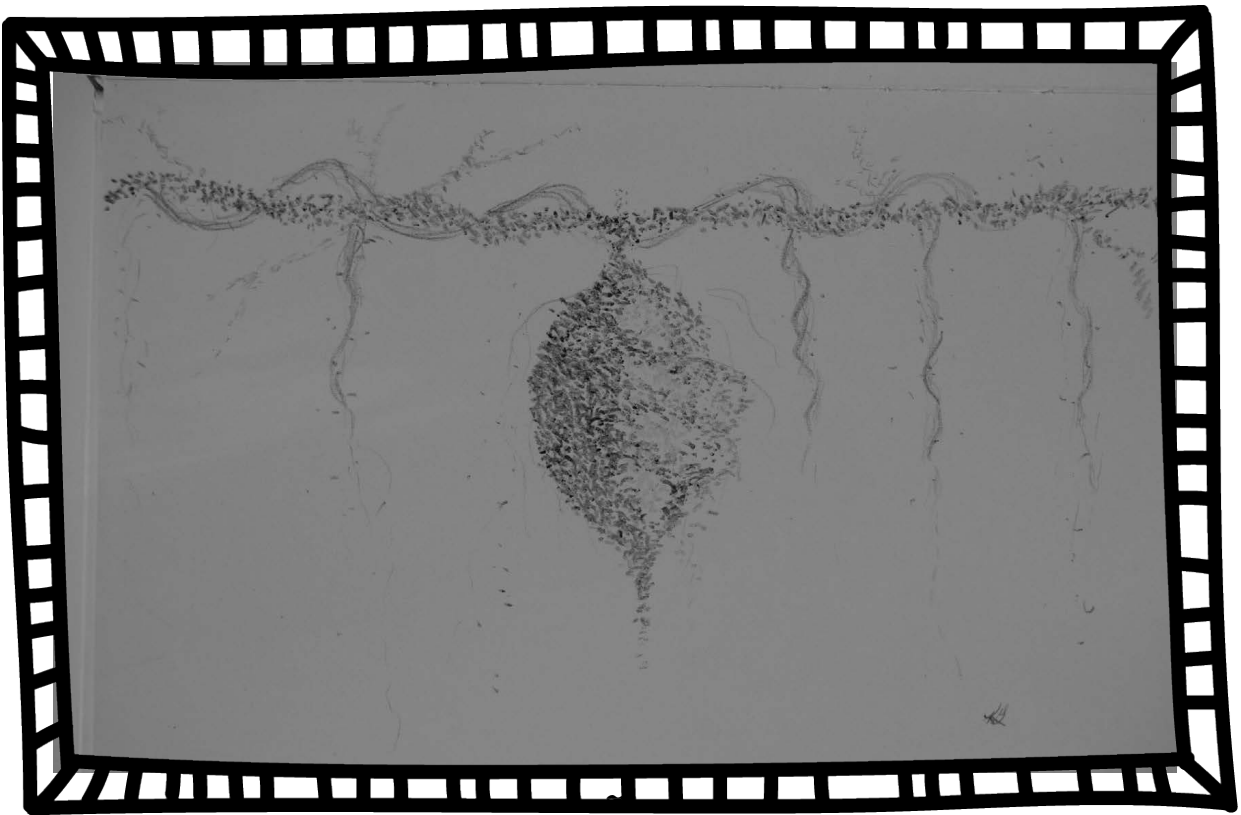


~ DR. JAMIE (PRAGYA) **MARICH**



~ ALEXIS RAE **BURROW**

PROCESS NOT PERFECTION



~ KATIE **GIFFORD**

JAMIE MARICH, PhD



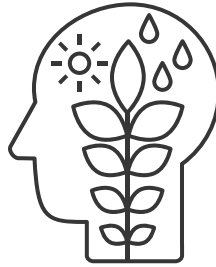
~ PEYTON MARNIE **CRAM**

PROCESS NOT PERFECTION



~ TRACEE **MOSS**

J A M I E M A R I C H , P h D



PRACTICE FIVE

TAKING IT TO THE PAGE

To continue the multi-art process, we will now move on to writing. There is a good chance that previous therapists or treatment providers have encouraged you to journal. If you work a 12-step program, it's likely that sponsors have had you write before: lists, inventories, step work. You may love to write, or you may despise it. Your feelings may exist somewhere in the middle. Regardless of your previous experiences with the written word, see if you can approach this expressive arts practice of writing with a beginner's mind.

- There are a variety of places that you can go with this writing experience, depending upon your group or the needs of the individual.
- Setting a timer for a period of free writing/journaling, or assigning time to work on poetry or a short story experience is an option. You may consider setting a timer to make sure that you keep writing and avoiding judging yourself too harshly. Even if what you're writing feels like nonsense, commit to writing for the period of time that you set. If the timer rings and you have the time to keep going, you may do so, or you can practice putting it down and walking away for now.
- A common technique in expressive arts therapy is to focus on the page and notice which element from the art making is attracting your attention most. Once you've noticed, take 3-5 minutes to write from the

perspective of that element (e.g., I am a tree, I am a green tree, I am tall and powerful, etc.). As alternatives, you can add qualities to the statements, such as “I bring blessings,” or “I dance with the wind” (e.g., I am the green tree, I bring blessings), or think about those elements directly delivering messages to you (e.g., I am the green tree and I have come to tell you how beautiful you are).

- When the timer expires, engage in the same process with a second element on the page, making sure the time allowed is equal.
- In conclusion, allow 3–5 minutes for a dialogue to unfold between the two elements that you just spent some time writing on, not forcing an outcome, and notice whatever the dialogue may reveal.

MODIFICATION NOTE:

- ✓ For this and any writing practice in this book, you can choose to physically write in a paper journal using a pen or any other color implement, or you can type your writing using a computer or smartphone. I ask you to notice which method is most helpful for you to get in touch with your feelings and experiences. This may involve trying out all options and then deciding from there. Speaking for myself, I do most of my personal process in a handwritten journal format first and then will often word process it later if there's more to be explored.

TREE POETRY EXAMPLES

I Am The Tree

I come from the ground,
reaching down and out, touching
more than you can see

the each moves around me,
in me, feeding & protecting me
holding me in place &
encouraging me to be more

I stand strong and firm, course &
immobile, twisting & turning
in ways that only make sense to
me

I am a home for those both permanent &
transient. I take those that I can
and offer all that I am. I am scared and I am strong

I move & bend & break & survive.
I blossom & die & return, again & again
I am not defeated. I will protect, I will grow. I will change & adjust.

I will be here.

I am the Tree.

~ ALEXIS RAE **BURROW**

Gnarly

Rooted and tangled

Unapologetically beautifully rough

Two in one

No need to decide, no choice to be made

I can be rooted and fly

I can flower and die

~ RACHEL **WEAVER**

Wild Heart Expressions

They tried to tame you.

For many seasons,

They cut away at your scraggly parts,

Plucked apart your uneven petals

Sheared back your branches

In attempts to fit you in their neat rows of hedges.

They called your tendrils ugly and a nuisance-
always sneaking to and fro.

Vines wild and far-reaching -

They tried to keep you small for so long.

You felt this was your duty-

to blend in unnoticed,

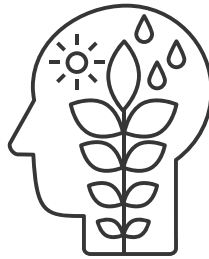
to squeeze your shoulders into confined shrubbery, bordering an English garden.

Each morning they'd be back at it-
raking fingers through your weeds,

When these were what you needed to grow wild.
Heart, you were meant to express these beautiful seeds.
You were meant to grow free, untamed-
to sprout dandelions,
for tiny, white feathered petals to fly above in a flurry of wishes.
For roots to dive and search deep underground-
to mix and mingle with the earth, the dirt.
Making neighbors with the moss and berries.
Hosting bees and butterflies and ladybugs and long slimy earthworms.
You were meant to make the wind sing as she passes through your cattails,
to murmur through your tall grasses,
to whisper as she rushes over your heather.
You were made to be rough like bark,
smooth like the cap of mushroom.
Delicate as iris and dangerous as ivy.
You were meant to dance in the winds,
twirling as your seed falls to earth like samara, seedling of Elm and Maple.
Meant to collect silence like thick, boggy mud, softly holding all of Nature's
impressions like a secret to discover.
Wild heart, you were meant to be mysterious,
layered in thicket and winding through shadows.
Periwinkle petals a startling delight.
Silver threads of Spider's web twinkling in moonlight.
Thorned vines and briars and thistles.
Crooked stems, multi-colored buds, and blooms.
You were meant to come alive with passion,
Wild Heart,
never to fall still.

~ MEG **HARBIN**

J A M I E M A R I C H , P h D



PRACTICE SIX

HOLD YOUR GROUND

For some of us, grounding is best practiced by literally holding the ground. Maybe you like to go outside and lay in the grass, walk in your bare feet, run your hands through the sand or along trees or plants. A healer I worked with once literally advised me to go outside and hug a tree each morning as a deliberate, intentional connection with the earth, with nature, and with my sense of grounding. Although a variety of these direct contact points with nature may work for you in the spirit of this practice, consider this variation to wrap up our formal process on grounding:

- Holding an object with a hard or firm texture is a popular way for many people to connect with their sense of grounding and anchoring to the moment.
- Look around your house, your office, or whatever space you are in and start holding various objects in your hand. Notice the texture and the weight of them. While rocks, stones, and other objects with weight are conventionally used for this practice, literally anything can work that resonates with you as far as feeling a sense of connection to texture.
- Once you have found a texture you like, take as much time as you like (try at least a minute) and simply breathe as you notice the experience of the texture in your hand. Be present with the sensations and the connection.

- If you have nerve damage or other medical issues that make connecting with an object in your hand impossible, consider using your foot or another body part where you may have greater sensation to make contact with the object.
- To take this practice a step further into the expressive arts realm, consider having some stones on hand in your home or office that can easily be decorated with a Sharpie®/marker or other arts materials as your own personal processes may move you.
- Like with other art forms discussed in this book, you can decorate it, perhaps making the anchoring stone more meaningful for you. This process can be as simple as writing one word on the stone that is representative of a special resource—for example, “Trust,” “Acceptance,” “Strength,” or “Faith”.
- You may wish to conclude the practice with a simple affirmation such as, “Today I choose to hold my ground” as you look at the object in your hand and notice the weight/sensation of it against your skin.

MODIFICATION NOTE:

- ✓ Although taking a rock or another object generally works great for portability and carrying it with you into life, you can achieve the same spirit of this exercise by going outside and actually touching a tree. If you do that, notice its bark, the branches, the leaves, or the texture of any other fruit coming from the tree. Keep the texture as your focus and maybe even repeat one of the affirmations you developed as you engage in this practice. Like with many practices here, if you like it, you can turn it into a daily ritual.

PROCESS NOT PERFECTION

OBJECT EXAMPLES



J A M I E M A R I C H , P h D

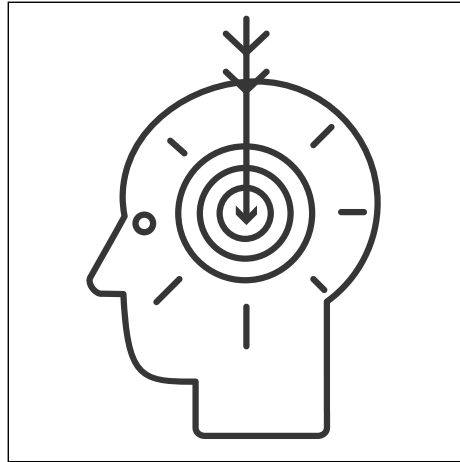
REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOLLOWING THE PROCESS OF GROUNDING

At the end of each chapter, I provide a series of reflection questions for your personal study. How you use them is largely up to you. Journaling on them in a conventional sense is an option, or you may choose to share your insights with a trusted friend, sponsor, fellow creative, or your therapist. In sharing your reflections or even the specific pieces you created in your process, it is important to release the attachment you may have to receiving positive feedback in the vein of, “Wow, what you made is so beautiful,” or “You’re such a great writer!” Ask your sharing partner, instead, what came up for them emotionally or what they related to as you share your work or your responses to these questions.

- Describe your personal experience with the process.
- What did you discover in your process?
- What did you learn about yourself in the process?
- What did you notice about judgment or self-criticism during the process?
- What role did the multi-modality of the art forms play in discovering what you discovered in your process?
- Which of the skills explored in this process can be applied to your overall trauma recovery or wellness plan?

J A M I E M A R I C H , P h D

PROCESS NOT PERFECTION



Process two

BREATHING

Breath is life force dancing through us. Some days it may feel like your life force is trudging or moving very slowly, and some days you may not be very aware of your breath, let alone your “life force.” As human beings, breath is vital to our survival, so vital that we sometimes forget how important it is. The typical adult takes anywhere from 15 to 20 breaths each minute—on the lower end that makes 20,000 breaths a day. Each year, the tally is anywhere from 7 to 8 million complete cycles of inhale-exhale.

Stress in our body often results from and is routinely worsened by not breathing deeply enough. The ill effects of hopelessness and lack of motivation that can plague us are made worse when we do not access the healing potential of our breath. In Eastern systems of medicine and wellness, being cut off from our vital life force, referred to as *prana* in yoga and several other traditions, explains why we can find ourselves overstressed and hyper-aroused. On the other end of the spectrum, this cut-off from prana can result in feeling lethargic, shut down, or otherwise hypo-aroused. Our breath, the carrier of our life force, is a marvelous gift that lives inside each of us. Living and breathing on autopilot is like saying we don't want this marvelously inherent present to help us deal with life and transform our experiences of life. Heck, many of us are too unaware or too indifferent to even unwrap this present!

In this process, we will be exploring various practices for embracing the gifts of our breath and using them to help us deal with life more effectively. You may have tried breathing exercises before, especially if you've seen a professional counselor, been to treatment, or attended a yoga class. If you like what you've learned about breath so far, my hope is that in this process you will explore some new ideas and practices in the spirit of beginner's mind. I've designed this process to integrate some creative and fun angles to working with breath, going beyond the standard instruction you may have received before. Perhaps you've tried and liked the gift of breath and yet you frequently forget to deepen the breath at the moments you most need it. This is akin to keeping the beautiful gift that we know can work unused! If this sounds like you, try to approach this practice as a way to become reacquainted with your breath and explore what blocks may be keeping you from using your breath to its maximum potential.

You may be the reader who can't stand deep breathing exercises, especially if you've tried them before and feel they didn't work. There are many reasons

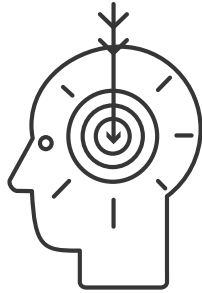
people may feel this way. Sometimes if breath work doesn't instantly relax us, we can jump to the conclusion that it will never work for us. Like many great healing strategies, breath work takes practice and that practice needs to be ongoing—exploring several different types of breathing and playing with possibilities and variations. Some people think that if breath strategies aren't working, they are doing it wrong and so must be flawed in this area. A client of mine once declared, “I’m such a screw up, I can’t even breathe right!”

Although the practices shared within this process will give you some ideas and insights on proper technique and help the breath work to its maximum intended potential, there is no such thing as doing them “right.” As Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, one of the leaders in the secular mindfulness movement and founder of the *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program*, observes, “as long as you are breathing, there’s more right with you than wrong with you.”⁵ As every yoga teacher I’ve ever studied with adds, “If you are breathing, you are already doing yoga!” I would emphasize that if you are aware of your breath right now as you read this, you are already engaged in the first practice of this process, so congratulations and welcome!

A final potential barrier I would like to address (and one that may apply to many readers) is the legitimate fear you may experience of your own breath. You may fear that your breath can make you too relaxed and thus spiral out of control. Many clients have shared with me over the years that breathing exercises can make them so relaxed they feel as though they can no longer be vigilant or protect themselves if they need to. Hypervigilance of this nature can be normal if you are early in your trauma recovery, and I want to validate that. However, I hope you don't let it discourage you from giving this process a try.

⁵ Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). *Full Catastrophe Living (revised edition): Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. New York: Bantam Books.

I can recommend a few strategies that may help you to feel safer and more supported. First, do these exercises with your eyes open. That way you can still see your surroundings. Moreover, closing the eyes may make you feel claustrophobic or too relaxed too quickly. The second major safeguard is to go slowly. With each breath practice in this process, start with 1-2 breaths, and then, if you are feeling unsteady go back to one of your grounding practices. Some of the most successful breath practices I've seen people develop start very slowly and grow over time. Be kind to yourself as you engage in this process of exploration. You can open the gift as slowly or as quickly as you like.



PRACTICE ONE

MEETING YOUR BREATH

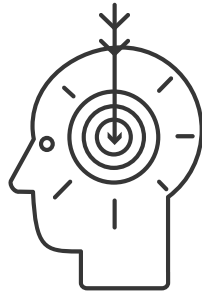
Many people set themselves up for frustration because they jump into doing deep breathing too quickly. This can be overwhelming, especially if your brain is not used to receiving so much oxygen. In this practice, we will begin very slowly by engaging in the simple practice of breath tracking—literally paying attention to your breath as it is right now, in these moments. This practice can be described as simple and yet not easy, so make sure that you are sufficiently grounded before tuning in and saying “hello” to your breath, as if you are meeting your breath for the first time.

- Come into a comfortable position that you can sustain for a few minutes. While it’s common in meditation settings to sit cross-legged with your spine straight, how you sit in this practice is completely up to you. If you have a cushion to sit on, many people find that elevating the hips slightly is helpful. You also have the option to sit with your back against a wall or in a chair; if you elect this option, attempt to keep your feet on the ground if at all possible. You may lie down if you need to due to illness or injury, although I highly recommend that you first attempt this practice while seated.
- Find a space that is as quiet as possible so you can tune in and listen to your breath.

- Breathe naturally—you do not have to do anything special with your breath.
- Notice your breath as it naturally flows through your body, paying attention to every little detail.
- Notice the natural rising and falling of your stomach and chest on your inhale and your exhale. Notice if the breath makes a sound. Notice if it has a temperature: would you describe the breath as warm, cool, or neutral?
- How does the breath feel entering through your nostrils? Are there any other parts of your body that seem to draw your attention when you breathe? Are there any other subtle vibrations or sensations you are aware of when you breathe?
- Continue this practice for 3–5 minutes, setting a timer if possible.

MODIFICATION NOTES:

- ✓ Remember that the amount of time you spend in the practice, particularly during the first trial, is up to you. If 3–5 minutes seems overwhelming, start with one minute, or even 30 seconds.
- ✓ If you truly have difficulty staying focused on the breath, you can record yourself asking the questions presented above in this description and listen to them back on your phone or another recording device to help you stay guided.
- ✓ A classic teaching of the Buddha offers us another splendid guide for this practice: “As I breathe in, I know I am breathing in. As I breathe out, I know I am breathing out.” Many people find using this teaching valuable, saying it to themselves as they inhale and exhale. Some of my clients and students adapt it simply by saying “In” to themselves as they inhale, and “Out” as they exhale.



PRACTICE TWO

WRITING A LETTER OR THANK YOU NOTE

Now that you are more fully acquainted with your breath, I invite you to use this practice to communicate in response to your breath. In many of our cultures, upon meeting someone for the first time, it is common to say “nice to meet you.” If the first meeting was more extended, we may even send a quick note, email, or text expounding upon this sentiment. What is it you would like to say to your breath right now? You are not bound to follow the typical, clichéd “nice to meet you” vibe in any way. If you find the breath to be an intriguing or challenging new acquaintance or if you have some other things to say to the breath, especially if you have felt abandoned by or cut off from it, this practice is your chance to express those feelings.

- Get out a piece of paper or open to a blank page in your journal. You may even elect to find a blank greeting card or thank you card for this practice.
- Having just met or become reacquainted with your breath, express with words what you need to say. You can also use some symbols or drawings in your communication if words evade you.
- Take as much time as you need with this practice, although you may want to consider setting a timer for 10 minutes in order to prevent yourself from overthinking, obsessing about outcome, or getting too analytical.

MODIFICATION NOTES:

- ✓ Although you are encouraged to try this first as a written exploration, you also have the option of recording your spoken voice. In modern times we often send “voice texts” or recorded audio messages to people, so that is an option for your approach to this practice.
- ✓ Rest assured that your note or expression does not have to be long. A couple of lines or even a couple of words will suffice.

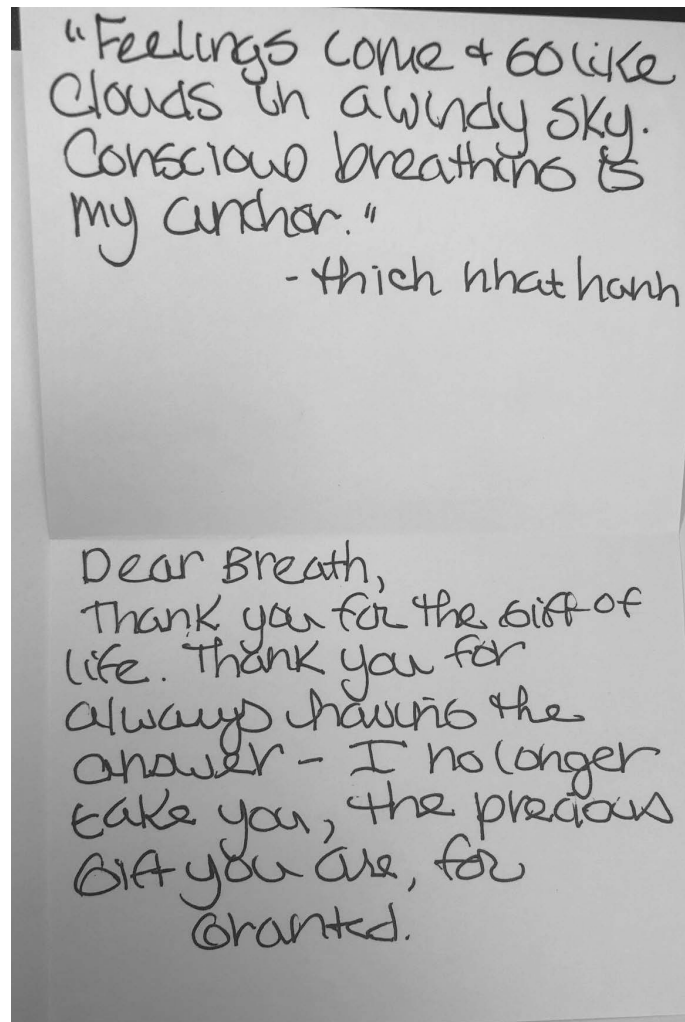
THANK YOU NOTE EXAMPLES

Dear Breath,

I know that I don't always give you the attention you deserve but I wanted to take a minute & thank you for always being there for me. I'm so lucky that you always seem to know when I need you most. I can always count on you.

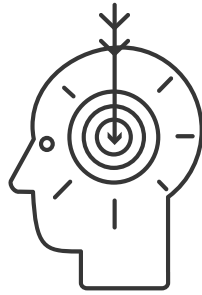
Thank you, Lexi

~ ALEXIS RAE **BURROW**



~ TRACEE **MOSS**

J A M I E M A R I C H , P h D



PRACTICE THREE

BREATHING TO THE MUSIC

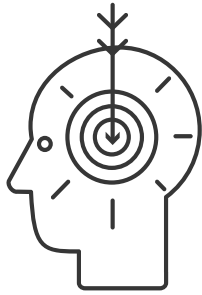
Some people find that breathing in silence is the most distracting and challenging aspect of getting acquainted with breath. While silence can be important for fully listening, it is not imperative. In this practice you are invited to encounter the breath once again, this time while listening to music. You may regard this practice as the act of breathing along to the music.

- Intentionally choose a piece of music for this practice. Some people like to pick songs or instrumentals that directly reference breath or elicit images of breath. There is no shortage of Top 40 songs that have referenced breathing over the years: Just go to Spotify, iTunes, or YouTube, type in “breath” or “breath songs” and you will literally have hundreds of options. Another method is to think of an instrument like the flute or the harp that reminds you of breath.
- You do not have to choose a song with direct connections to breath. You can pick any song that you like or you can access easily.
- Listen to the music you selected and as you do, notice what happens to your breath.
- For the remainder of the song, see if you can “breathe to the music,” synchronizing the rhythm of your breath to how you are hearing the music and how it moves in your body.

- If you chose a more up-tempo song and it leaves you feeling more agitated at the end of the practice, try the practice again with a slower paced song.

M O D I F I C A T I O N N O T E S :

- ✓ Some people have difficulty listening to music and not dancing or moving in some way. If you notice movement rising in your body as you listen to the music that is wonderful. While you are encouraged to go with it, keep attention to your breath the primary focus.
- ✓ If you are so led, you may write your breath another letter or thank you note after this new practice and perhaps compare the qualities in the two notes.



PRACTICE FOUR

THE BREATH PRAYER OR POEM

The breath prayer is a contemplative Christian practice dating back to the 6th century. After a period of stillness, being especially mindful of the breath, the practitioner simply notices the first 3–5 words that come up. The words of your breath prayer may change over time as the breath allows, or you may find that the 3 to 5 word prayer serves as an anchor prayer for your ongoing practices. Some examples of well-known breath prayers in the Christian tradition include: *Holy Wisdom, guide me; Lord have mercy; Holy one, heal me.* Eastern practitioners may notice similarities to the practice of meditation and mantra. The Buddhist teaching “*As I breathe in, I know I’m breathing in; as I breathe out, I know I’m breathing out*” (referenced in Practice 1 of this Process) also qualifies as a breath prayer. I am calling this practice the Breath Prayer or Breath Poem, giving you the choice to approach it from the perspective you prefer. If the word “prayer” is tricky for you and brings up some unpleasant connotations, please approach this practice as a poem.

- Come into a comfortable position sitting or lying down that you can sustain for a few minutes.
- Tune in to the breath and really listen. You’ve spent the last few practices becoming acquainted with your breath, now listen to what the

breath may have to say to you in return. Take as long as you like in this part of the practice.

- What are you noticing? Is a certain line or series of words revealing itself on the inhale and another on the exhale?
- Take a few moments to jot down on a piece of paper or in your journal the words that are revealed to you as you listen to the breath. This becomes your breath prayer or breath poem.

MODIFICATION NOTES:

- ✓ You can use music for this practice although you are highly encouraged to select an instrumental if you do. Lyrics may compete with the natural words that want to reveal themselves as you breathe.
- ✓ Length is not important. Some of the most potent breath prayers can be one line in and one line out (e.g., “Help”- inhale, “Me”- exhale)

THE BREATH PRAYER EXAMPLES

The breath dances

The dance breathes

~ DR. JAMIE (PRAGYA) **MARICH**

Breath's Purpose

Purposeful, with intent

Connect me to all that I need;

To a higher level of consciousness.

To a higher level of calmness,

Take me where I need to be.

Closing my eyes...

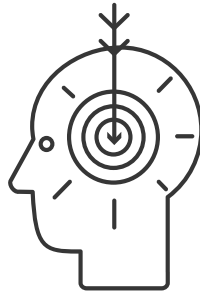
I fill myself with the most beautiful gift of life.

Purposeful breathing leads to my soul's purpose in life.

How blessed I feel.

~ TRACEE **MOSS**

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PRACTICE FIVE

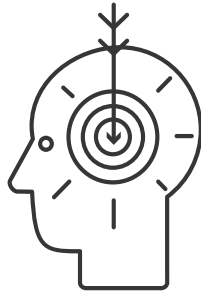
THE DANCING BREATH PRAYER OR POEM

Now that you have received your breath prayer or breath poem, consider expressing the words of your prayer through a simple movement sequence. If the word “dance” still brings up some blocks for you, regard this as a movement sequence or a gesture prayer, a common term used in liturgical dance.

- As you inhale and bring up the first line of your breath prayer, what movement or series of movements are flowing through your body?
- As you inhale and notice the second line of your breath prayer, what movement or series of movements are flowing through your body?
- If your breath prayer does not correspond with a specific inhale-exhale flow, that’s okay. Your movements do not have to match the breath exactly. The imperative in this practice is that you allow your prayer or poem to be expressed with movement. Allow the movement to link with breath wherever possible.
- Continue with this practice for as long as you like, giving yourself at least three full rounds or repetitions of the movements.
- Take a moment after the movements stop to stand or sit in stillness. Notice the stillness following the movement, paying special attention to the quality of the breath in the stillness.

MODIFICATION NOTES:

- ✓ You can do this practice standing up, sitting down, or lying down. Notice what makes the most sense to your body and to your breath, and follow that guidance.
- ✓ You can do this practice along to music if you wish. As in Practice 4, avoid using songs with lyrics so that the words of your own breath prayer/poem serve as the main guide.



PRACTICE SIX

THE LEGEND OF THE BREATH (WRITING EXPLORATION)

One of my favorite stories from the Hindu tradition involves the deities of Sita and her husband Ram. In Hindu tradition, female and male deities are usually referenced together symbolizing the sacred unity between energy (feminine) and consciousness (masculine). One day the demon Ravana (who represents the ego mind) lured and captured Sita to exploit her for his own benefit. Ram called upon his devoted servant, the beloved monkey deity Hanuman, who represents the heart, the breath, and the ability to adapt or shapeshift to any situation depending on how he is needed. Hanuman called upon the forces of his entire monkey army and they found Sita at the southern tip of India, rescuing her so she could be reunited with her beloved. Hanuman's role in this story represents the power of the breath to reunite energy and consciousness. In this powerful fusion of energy and consciousness joined by the breath, order is restored and we are deeply healed.

Even if this story from this particular tradition does not speak to you, I encourage you to do some online searching or other research to explore how the breath and its emissaries are presented in the folklore and legends of other cultures. Many legends speak to the fire-breathing potential of dragons to destroy and annihilate, although sometimes this destruction is not intended for evil, but rather for the positive effects of clearing away blocks or

vanquishing villains. Other legends reference ghosts and other mythical creatures gaining sustenance by stealing the breath of human beings, a testament to how coveted the human breath is because of the power it contains. In many of the creation stories in global folklore, wind gods like Enlil (symbolizing breath) in the Sumerian tradition used their breath to separate the heavens and the earth, making life possible for the human race.

- In this practice, you are invited to write your own story, legend, or myth about the powerful and healing potential of the breath. Allow the characters that develop in your story to symbolize different qualities, like Hanuman representing the rescue and integrative potential of the breath in the opening example.
- You can do some of your own research online or using other sources, although that is not required if your expressive juices are already flowing. You may find that doing additional research negatively impacts your organic process.
- You do not have to use characters from specific religions, cultures, or legends. Make this story totally original if you wish, although you are free to draw upon other sources for inspiration.
- If the breath ends up getting taken or stolen in your story, how is it discovered and restored?
- If an ambassador or character symbolizing breath in your story saves the day and plays the role of hero, what do you notice about your own breath as this plot point develops and you bring it into existence on paper?
- Take as much time as you need for the practice, even if this unfolds over several days.

MODIFICATION NOTES:

- ✓ There is no length minimum or maximum to your story. Some of the most impactful stories, legends, fables, and myths are less than a paragraph.
- ✓ If telling this story visually makes more sense to you, bring in an art medium like drawing or painting in place of, or in addition to, the writing.
- ✓ Vocalizing the story may also make more sense for you than writing it. If so, record yourself telling the story in place of, or in addition to, the writing. Reading your own words after writing them can be a powerful experience.

THE LEGEND OF THE BREATH EXAMPLES

Fink, a dryad of note, loved to stay with her folk in the mountains. The air was different here & she spent hours dancing on the wind she would jump among the trees allowing their gossip to reach her ears. That is how she kept up with the humans.

Humans would travel to her mountain ranges from all over. For peace & quiet & to breathe the fresh air. Sometimes the trees would gossip about the humans & Fink would become so enthralled she would visit the humans. If she liked them enough she would leave some of her with them as a calling card to remind them of her mountains, the trees & the fresh air.

~ ALEXIS RAE **BURROW**

Wildwoods Breath

“You have no idea what it is that you’re missing,” Juniper growled.

“I know exactly what I’ve been missing!” Imogen was growing angry, it seemed to be the only emotion she could experience lately. She couldn’t get over her mother’s deceit, the Wildwoods theft, and all she had missed. She was weary. Clenching her fists, she faced Juniper head on, clenching her jaw and sucking down her exhaustion.

Juniper’s voice softened, the hard edges of her face relaxing as she frowned, “Little girl, I don’t think you realize how broken you are.” Juniper extended her hand. “Here, let me show you,” her hand patiently remained poised, waiting for her to take it. Imogen took a step back, caught off guard and eyed the woman standing before her. Bringing her arms to her chest and hugging herself, she dropped her head. Her anger falling away to despair. The desire to go home stirred in her chest and forget about the whole journey was enticing.

It felt like a lifetime, but Juniper remained stationed in front of her, waiting with her neutral expression. She approached her and slowly placed her hand into Juniper's. She noticed the woman's callouses from a lifetime of work and sought comfort in the small contact. Something about the roughness reminded her of grounding. Before she could finish her thought, the air around their hands began to shift and warm. Her eyes widened as she looked from their hands to Juniper and back to the hands. It was almost like she could see the breeze whipping around their hands like a ball. Silver. Their hands were glowing silver. Her gaze traced up Juniper's silver glowing arm and it was turning wispy. She swore she could see the chair through her. Juniper's hair danced in tune with the breeze swirling around them. The last thing she noticed was her eyes. A bright silver rim around her iris pierced through Imogen and she tried to gasp but couldn't fully inhale. She was stuck in a choke.

She began to cough and tried to pull away, but Juniper began gripping her hand tighter the more she tugged away. "Let go," she managed between gasps. Juniper continued to grip her hand, even as Imogen fell to her knees. Tears stung her eyes, making her vision blurry. The funnel of air began to travel up her arm, its coolness causing the hair on her arms to stand at attention. Even though it was cool, there was a sense of comfort trickling up her arm. Her muscles were relaxing with every area the breeze touched. Managing to open her eyes, she thought her vision was going. The lack of air was about to kill her. Her arm looked wispy, just like Juniper's.

Her vision began to blacken around the edges and swaying on her knees. The tunnel of her vision only saw the shocked expression on Juniper's face as her lungs greedily accepted a full breath and she had the feeling of free falling. She was free falling. The weightlessness wrapped itself around her body and overtook her senses. Before she knew it, she hit the table behind her, shattering the glass top. The lights were out, shattered as well.

Fumbling around in the dark, grasping at anything that could steady her, she pulled herself up with the table frame. She let the perspiration on her

forehead roll down her temples and felt sweat roll down her spine and embraced the cool table frame as she tried to stop the trembling in her arms and legs.

What was that?

Juniper's voice struck her to the core in the silence of the room, "I had to show you what you were missing."

Missing. The word rolled around in her skull with bitter resentment.

"You've been learning about the different magic types. I'm born of the Hetreah. What you experienced was a full breath."

Her mind was racing. She was getting tired of learning new information, new secrets. Anger began to churn in the pit of her stomach, warming her chest, and gritting her teeth. Gripping harder, her knuckles began to scream with the strain as she felt emotion boil up her throat. A feral yell escaped past her teeth until she had no breath left. Until she felt the empty release. Peace chasing after on her inhale. Her breath. Not her breath.

Juniper spoke gently, "You and others before you have experienced this same pain." She began taking small steps towards Imogen, watching her movements.

Others before her. Others before her learning that they had been holding their breath this whole time and that it was still not theirs. That it will never be theirs. Despair crept into Imogen's anger and overflow onto her cheeks. "It's not fair," her voice breaking and ending on a sob.

Easing her way around the glass shards, Juniper stood by Imogen and pulled her into a hug, "I know honey. It wasn't fair for them and it's not fair for you." Imogen sunk into Juniper's embrace and buried her face into her shoulder, letting the tears run their course.

~ PEYTON MARNIE **CRAM**

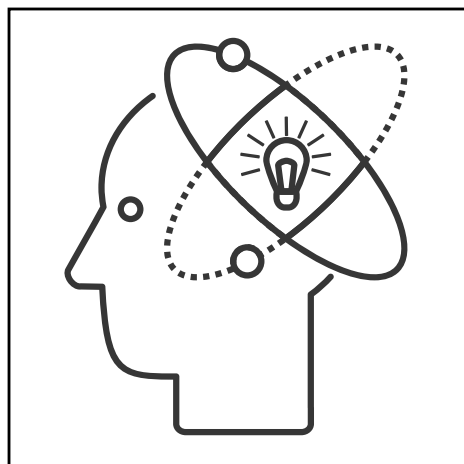
REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOLLOWING THE PROCESS OF BREATHING

As explained at the conclusion of Process One, these reflection questions are for your own personal study. How you use them is largely up to you. Journaling on them in a conventional sense is an option, or you may choose to share your insights with a trusted friend, sponsor, fellow creative, or even your therapist. In sharing your reflections or even the specific pieces you created in your process, it is important to release the attachment we may have to receiving positive feedback. Ask your sharing partner, instead, what came up for them emotionally or what they related to as you share your work or your responses to these questions.

- Describe your personal experience with this process.
- What did you discover in your practice of this process?
- What did you learn about yourself in the process?
- What did you notice about judgment or self-criticism during the process?
- What role did the multi-modality of the art forms play in discovering what you discovered in your process?
- Which of the skills explored in this process can be applied to your overall trauma recovery or wellness plan?

J A M I E M A R I C H , P h D

P R O C E S S N O T P E R F E C T I O N



Process three

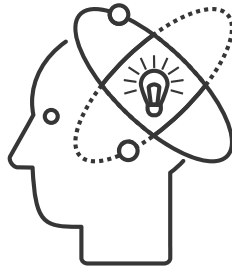
DISTRESS TOLERANCE

In the event that you are not already aware of this vital truth of recovery—from addiction (substances or behaviors), trauma/mental health concerns, or all of the above—I have some news for you: Just because you get clean and sober, or just because you decide to work on your trauma, life isn't going to get perfect. Life never will. Stressors will continue to bombard you. If you are living in an environment that is not very healthy, there's a chance you are still being subjected to trauma. And the current state of our world suggests we may all be vulnerable to traumatic injury due to forces outside of our control like natural disasters, violence (emotional or physical) by others, or accidents.

However, there is a critical skill that you can acquire called distress tolerance. Distress tolerance is a term used quite a bit in dialectical behavior therapy and other mindfulness-based and mindfulness-informed therapies. Distress tolerance widens our capacity to be with difficult emotions and body sensations, instead of going on autopilot and stuffing or numbing them. Many of us were effectively trained to go into “stuffing” mode or happened to develop this maladaptive reaction to stress as a way to deal with toxicity in our families of origin. The longer I have been a therapist helping people recover from trauma, the more I am convinced that stuffing or numbing emotions (especially with chemicals) may work as a short-term survival strategy, but in the long run, feeling the emotions we experience is the healthier path.

There’s an old saying that *the easiest way out is through*. You may have even heard a sponsor or a counselor share this with you and the saying may even cause you to roll your eyes. “Easier said than done,” you may protest. And yes, you have a point. We need to acquire skills and strategies to tolerate the *through* and ride out the pain and other uncomfortable emotions that keep us stuck. Distress tolerance skills not only empower us with this skill set, they give us ample opportunities to practice being with difficult emotions so that we can better handle them whenever they arise in life and along our recovery journey.

Another vital truth of the recovery process is that some of the strategies and treatments that can help us long-term: step work in a 12-step program (especially steps 4 and 5, and steps 8 and 9), or trauma-focused therapies like EMDR therapy, trauma-focused CBT, and Somatic Experiencing® can feel brutal. “Going there,” that is, taking that journey to the source of your pain in order to work on it can be the emotional equivalent of going through taxing physical therapy after an accident or injury. Thus, we will work in the distress tolerance process now because the skills acquired here will prepare you to tackle the deeper work to come and the naturally distressing emotions that come along with it.



PRACTICE ONE

CONTAINER VISUALIZATION

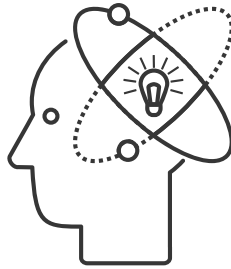
Containers come in various shapes and sizes and can hold things we are not quite ready to address. What are some examples of containers that you can think of? A Mason jar? A shelf with a drawer? A piece of Tupperware? A tin? A backpack? In this exercise, choose an image or idea that you can use to safely pack away memories, emotions, body sensations, or anything else that you are not quite ready to deal with on a specific day or during a therapy session. This is *NOT* about stuffing or avoiding, so do not choose a container like a lock box you will seal shut and lock up, throwing the key away in the ocean! Containers are for temporary holding, so choose something that you can open and shut as often as your needs require.

- Pick a representation of a container that works for you. Although many different containers may work for this purpose, try to pick something that has great meaning or significance to you.
- Imagine yourself opening the container and placing whatever you may need to store for now inside it. If you need to make a physical gesture of placing things in the container to help make the exercise more real for you, allow yourself to make those gestures. Remember your container is there to help you to manage the negativity until you are ready to deal with it.

- Close the container. You may also choose to use physical gestures to help you with this process. Notice the experience and any sensations that come up with closing the container. Remember to breathe evenly. What do you notice after breathing with those sensations?
- If you wish, you can give your container a name or a phrase. You can use this to remind you of the container whenever you feel distressed.

MODIFICATION NOTE:

- ✓ In teaching this exercise to clients, I've heard many say, "I have so many things to hold, no container would ever be big enough." The answer to this is quite simple: Your imagination powers this exercise. If you need to use a shipping crate, a massive storage unit, or visualize an entire train to hold your things for this exercise, do it!



PRACTICE TWO

MAKING A CONTAINER

Using whatever materials are available to you, the next step of the process is to physically make a container. This container can be something that you leave in your living space or office. The container might be something you bring to therapy or to meetings with a sponsor or another guide. You can keep the container open when you are working with your therapist or guide and then close it to signify that your time together is ending and the container now holds whatever emotions might be left over or lingering. If your container is small enough, it may be something that you can carry with you in your bag or keep in your car.

- Shoeboxes and other discarded boxes, jars, or canisters can work well for this process. Craft stores and online retailers sell cardboard, wooden, paper mache, and plastic boxes in a variety of shapes (e.g., circles, squares, ovals, hearts, stars, houses) just waiting to be decorated and designed.
- Consider what kinds of symbols, shapes, images, or colors you would like to put on the outside of your container to strengthen its power. You can use paint, markers, glitter glue, collage materials, scrapbooking pieces, or other items that you have hanging around your living space.
- You can decorate your container as simply or as intricately as you like. Maybe there's a color that carries great meaning for you; creating your

container may be the simple practice of painting a wooden box that color. You may also elect to go into full-on collage mode, expressing on the outside and inside of your container anything that may be helpful to you in holding difficult emotions or sensations until you are ready to work on them again. You can apply a sealant like shellac or *ModPodge*® to the outside of your work when you are finished to keep the pieces you've added from falling off.

- Give yourself plenty of time to let this process unfold. Notice what happens for you as you engage in this practice.
- If the full range of materials is not available to you to make the container you would like, consider drawing your ideal container as an alternative. Remember, this does not have to be a perfect piece of art; rather, it is something that you can access at any time as a visual reminder of your container.

MODIFICATION NOTE:

- ✓ If you needed to use a large-scale container in your visualization in Practice 1 above, making one in this practice may seem infeasible or impractical. You have the option to make a model-size version of that container. For example, you can make a model train to stand in for the actual train that you used for the visualization.

PROCESS NOT PERFECTION

CONTAINER EXAMPLES

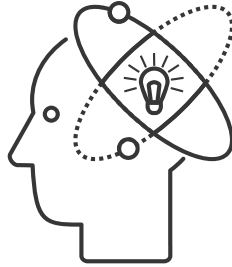


~ DR. JAMIE (PRAGYA) **MARICH**

JAMIE MARICH, PhD



~ ALEXIS RAE **BURROW**



PRACTICE THREE

COMPOSING A PLAYLIST

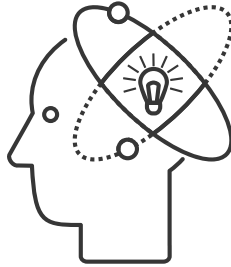
You are likely familiar with the process of making playlists, especially if you own a smartphone or use YouTube. Even before smartphones, mix tapes and CDs were a way for many to engage in the process of assembling meaningful songs together. I remember clicking PLAY + RECORD while listening to the radio when I was growing up in the 1980s to keep a set of my favorite songs in one place. Even basic mastery of technology in this day and age makes it easy to collect your favorite songs, especially those that may be helpful to your recovery process, in one place. If you don't have a Smartphone to use programs like Spotify, Apple Music, Pandora, or countless others that make gathering music easy, it's relatively simple to make a playlist on YouTube (and yes, there are YouTube videos that show you how to do this). If worse comes to worst, the old school method of getting a cassette tape and clicking PLAY + RECORD when your favorite songs come on the radio is still an option in assembling your own personal playlist.

- What songs are most helpful for you to hear when you are in a state of distress? Take a moment to brainstorm what has worked for you in the past. If you can't think of specific songs, what kinds of instruments or genre/vibe of music is most useful to you when you are in distress? Do certain types of distress warrant different kinds of music for you?

- Take as much time as you need to put a playlist together, noticing what the experience is like for you. Maybe there are several different themes of playlists that you wish to make (e.g., “Happy Songs,” “Spiritual Tunes,” etc.)
- Put this to the test in real life. Consider listening to one of your playlists before you go to sleep each night or the next time you are pelted with stress—put on one of your playlists and notice what you notice. You have the option of engaging in mindful listening, sitting or lying down as you listen to the playlist, or you may elect to keep the playlist running in your car or put on headphones as you take a walk.

MODIFICATION NOTE:

- ✓ There is no set length regarding how long a playlist needs to be, so as you start this practice do what works for you. A three-song playlist can be just as effective as a list with 25 songs.



PRACTICE FOUR

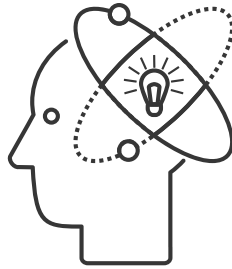
LISTEN TO MUSIC YOU DON'T LIKE

Are you a chronic channel changer? When you listen to the radio, or when you have listened to it in the past, and a song comes on you don't like or are not quite feeling, is your tendency to change the channel to find a better song? If you use a music service on your smartphone or computer and your music is set to shuffle, do you do the same thing? In this practice and its variations, your challenge is to practice listening to the songs you don't like or are not quite in the mood for. The challenge is to spend the 3-5 minutes that the song is on to just listen, perhaps using your breath to help you. I cannot think of a better metaphor for practicing distress tolerance in life and in recovery than this: You can't control what life plays on the radio or how life randomly shuffles the music. Distress tolerance requires us, metaphorically speaking, to listen to songs that we don't like or may not be the best fit for us at any given moment. So why not literally use this experience to help us practice the skill of distress tolerance?

- Start small if you wish (this is also the modification note for this practice). Perhaps challenge yourselves to pick a genre of music you don't like, an artist you don't care for, or an instrument that makes your skin crawl a bit. If you have trauma or trigger responses associated

with certain styles of music or songs, you do not have to go there with this practice. Just start with something you don't like. After all, life and recovery ask us to do many things that we don't like.

- After you've listened to the first song all the way through you have some options. You can elect to do this listening to "one song I don't like" as a daily practice, just for the 3-5 minutes.
- If you feel up for it and/or want to *really* practice widening your affective window of tolerance, make a whole playlist of songs, instruments, artists, or moods you don't like. This is excellent training for the rigors of deeper therapy and for the tough seasons of recovery.
- You can simply do what is suggested in the opening to this practice. Challenge yourself to listen to the radio continuously for one hour or keep your music set on shuffle for an hour, committing not to change the channel or advance to the next song. Perhaps notice how often you have the tendency to do that. When irritation or discomfort arises, breathe, notice it, and return your attention to listening without judgment.



PRACTICE FIVE

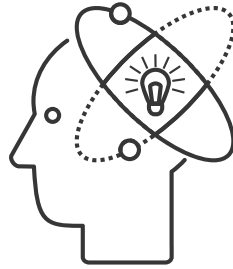
MOVE TO MUSIC YOU DON'T LIKE

In the previous practice, you were invited to listen to a song you don't like; to challenge yourself. You also had the option of making an entire playlist. This practice invites us into the natural blend of music and movement.

- Start by cuing up the original song you listened to in Practice 4.
- Instead of just listening to it, you are now challenged to move to it. This movement can take many shapes: You can dance, walk along to it, stretch, bop along, or just move your hands back and forth.
- In the spirit of non-judgment, notice what happens and what your movement may reveal as you move to the music.
- Remember, you can modify this practice by starting smaller, perhaps moving to just a segment of a song instead of the whole song.
- For optimal challenge, move mindfully to the entire playlist that you created in Practice 4. You may be surprised at what you discover!

To continue the multi-art exploration and wrap up this process we now move on to writing. There are a variety of places you can go with this writing experience, depending upon your personal needs right now. Honor what your emotions, your body, and your overall experiences are telling you that you most need.

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PRACTICE SIX

TAKING IT TO THE PAGE

- In this version of *Taking it to the Page*, following the movement practice invite a period of 5-10 minutes of free form journaling. You may consider setting a timer to make sure you keep writing and avoid judging yourself too harshly. Even if what you're writing feels like nonsense, commit to writing for the period of time that you set.
- You may choose to leave this process with the free form journaling or move on to composing another written form like poetry or a short story. Notice what you most need and see what flows naturally.
- After you finish this writing, write or draw on a separate page anything that surfaced during your writing practice that you might need to contain in the moment. This is a perfect opportunity to practice using the container you made. You can write whatever may be lingering for you on a slip of paper and place it in your container. Remember that putting such items in the container is not to avoid them or stuff them away. Rather, what you offer to the container is to be visited later.

MODIFICATION NOTE:

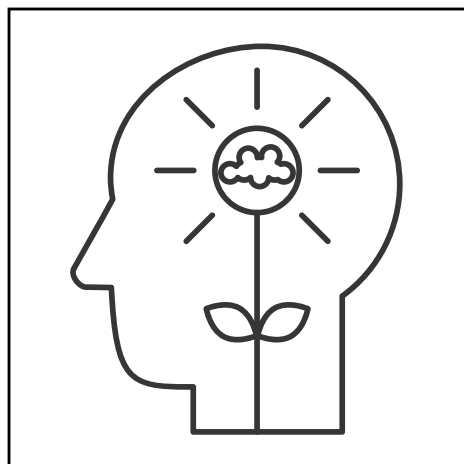
- ✓ For this and any writing practice in this book, you can choose to physically write in a paper journal using a pen or any other color implement, or you can type your writing using a computer or smartphone. Again, I ask you to notice which method is most helpful for you in getting in touch with your feelings and experiences. This may involve trying out different options and deciding from there. As a reminder you have the option to handwrite your work and then enter it into a word processing program later where more connections may reveal themselves.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOLLOWING DISTRESS TOLERANCE

- Describe your personal experience with the process of distress tolerance.
- What did you discover in your process?
- What did you learn about yourself in the process?
- What did you notice about judgment or self-criticism during the process?
- What role did the multi-modality of the art forms play in discovering what you discovered in your process?
- Which of the skills explored in this process can be applied to your overall trauma recovery or wellness plan?

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P R O C E S S N O T P E R F E C T I O N



Process four

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness has gotten a great deal of press in recent years. Twenty-five years ago, most people outside the spheres of Buddhist or yoga communities hadn't even heard of this ancient practice. Now, it seems to be everywhere. In 2014, Time Magazine ran a piece called "The Mindfulness Revolution," complete with a front-page cover featuring a person looking like she was in total bliss. As nice as it is for mindfulness to go mainstream, some of the ways in which it is marketed are problematic. You may have seen that Time Magazine cover (easily available through an online search) or other images of mindfulness and immediately say, "That's not me! There's no way I'll ever be

able to be that calm.” Indeed, if you do a search engine exploration of the word *mindfulness*, several very clichéd images display. Often you will see a beautiful lotus flower, the pristine ripple on a pond, a rock formation, or a Zen garden with the sand perfectly combed. Or, you may be treated to more images like the Time Magazine cover: perfect looking people sitting in a state of bliss, usually on a beach or underneath a tree somewhere.

Not only do many of my clients and students roll their eyes when they see such imagery, I do too! I’ve practiced Eastern meditation in various systems for over a decade and I’ve practiced in contemplative Christian traditions for even longer. And yet, on most days my meditation, prayer, and yoga practices are still a struggle. If someone were to take my picture on any given day when I practice, they’d be more likely to encounter images of frustration and strain on my face. Trust me, I drop F-bombs and other expletives regularly when I stay in the moment with whatever life brings me. Most times I don’t like the (insert F-bomb) moment and the reality of living life on life’s terms. My practice has taught me to keep noticing without judgment, breathe as I stay grounded, and inevitably, whatever I’m experiencing will pass. Afterwards, when I step off the laboratory of my yoga mat or meditation cushion, I find myself better able to deal with whatever life throws my way.

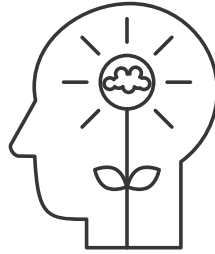
Mindfulness has been described by many scholars and practitioners as learning how to *respond* instead of react to stress. Mindfulness doesn’t make stress go away, rather, it teaches us how to better manage it or to roll with it. A common metaphor attributed to Jon Kabat-Zinn is that you *can’t stop the waves from coming, but you can learn how to surf*. Another variation on this age-old idea is encapsulated in the wisdom: *Life isn’t about waiting for the storm to pass; it’s about learning how to dance in the rain*. When you are suffering, these meme-worthy sayings may seem beyond your capacity to actualize. However, through practice and time, my lived experience has taught me that they are very true. They speak to the essence of how deliberately practicing returning to

the present while not pushing away our experiences of the moment can serve us in recovery and in life.

A major part of practicing mindfulness that we will explore fully in this process is to not judge yourself if you feel that you are failing at it. Yes, the process affords you several practices for learning to live in the moment, practices that are both traditional and more expressive. If you catch your attention wandering, simply bring your attention back to your intended point of focus. One of my favorite working definitions of mindfulness is drawn from the Sanskrit teaching and translation of the word—*the practice of coming back to awareness*. Awareness is our natural state, although we live in a world where we are constantly pulled away from awareness of the present moment. Moreover, our self-criticisms and judgments can keep us out of the experience of living a life of awareness and consciousness.

So, if your protest going into this process is something like, “I can’t be mindful, I can’t sit still,” congratulations! You are in good company. Because, on many days I can’t sit still either. And when I first began studying mindfulness and yoga in earnest, it was even more of a struggle. I am not impressed if you can sit still for 25 minutes in perfect harmony with your breath. What I do honor is your willingness to approach each of the following practices with a sense of curiosity and openness. Know that even if your head wanders away from the practice ten times a minute, at any given time you have the power to return home to focus on the moment. Working on and developing this skill will serve you well as you enter into the deeper stages of your healing to follow.

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PRACTICE ONE

DEEPENING THE BREATH WITH MINDFUL INTENTION

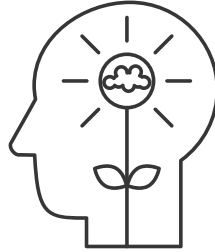
If you want to study mindful breathing with a perfect teacher, find an infant and watch them breathe. Babies naturally breathe with their bellies. Somewhere along the way as we grow up and become less mindful, this tendency to breathe with our natural state of awareness gets lost. Rapid, shallow breathing that originates in the chest can become the norm. In this practice, you are invited to explore the foundational breath of yoga: diaphragmatic breathing, sometimes called *belly breathing*. As with all elements of mindful breathing, belly breathing takes practice. If you tend to self-criticize for not “doing it right,” simply invite your breath pattern back to what seems like any natural beginning place. As the Catholic mystic St. Benedict taught (congruent with the Buddhist idea of beginner’s mind), *always we can begin again*. Here are some basic steps to begin the practice:

- Come into a comfortably seated position that you can sustain for the next few minutes. While you have the option to lie down, try the practice in a sitting position first.
- Put one or both hands on the upper area of your stomach so that you can pay attention to the motion of your diaphragm.
- As you inhale with your nose, allow your belly to expand outward as far as it will go.

- Exhale with your mouth, allowing the belly to pull back in.
- Continue this inhale-exhale pattern at your own pace, giving it at least 6–7 repetitions (about one minute) to find a rhythm and style that work for you.

MODIFICATION NOTES:

- ✓ Start small—if the suggested number of repetitions/time length seems too overwhelming, begin with just one full breath, reevaluate, and then decide if you wish to continue with additional repetitions.
- ✓ If you feel awkward or in any way out of control with the suggested pattern, consider starting with an exhale instead of an inhale.
- ✓ After initially experimenting with the breath and finding the rhythm that works for you, considering puckering the mouth slightly, and exhaling as if you are blowing through a straw. For some people, the mouth pucker, combined with a longer exhale, enhances their experience of relaxation.
- ✓ If paying attention to the breath on its own is not working for you, consider adding a count to it (e.g., In “1” Out “1,” In “2” Out “2,” and continue until you get to 10, and then start again at 1). Using numbers as an anchor can help you stay focused on the task at hand: breathing. You can also add a word or a special phrase (e.g., “*Satnam*,” “Amen,” “Help me,” “As I breathe in, I know I am breathing in; as I breathe out, I know I am breathing out”).
- ✓ You can put something like a Beanie Baby or a flatter type of stuffed animal on your stomach so there is a focus point while you observe the rise and fall of the belly. This works especially well if you want to try the practice lying down.
- ✓ If watching the video instructions would be helpful to you, a supplementary teaching is available at www.traumamadesimple.com/pnp



PRACTICE TWO

BREATHE WITH EXPRESSION

The classic breath techniques in yoga and other Eastern approaches to meditation begin with an inhale through the nose to allow for maximum benefit and flow of the breath. While many teachers and clinicians get into the conventional directive to “Inhale with the nose and exhale through the mouth,” there is a great deal of liberty with how you can expel the breath. In essence, the inhalation is standard (in through the nose as you expand the belly) while the exhalation affords us many options for expression! In this practice I will cover several yogic breath techniques aside from diaphragmatic breathing. However, practicing diaphragmatic breath first provides a solid foundation for deriving optimal benefit from this experience.

The modification notes for Practice 2 are written into the instructions for each specific type of breathing.

UJJAYI BREATH (OCEAN BREATHING OR “DARTH VADER” BREATHING)

- Pucker your mouth like you’re sucking through a straw or about to kiss someone. Attempt to contract the back of your throat so it feels slightly closed.
- Inhale with your nose; your belly ought to expand with this motion.
- Exhale with your nose. Try to keep the mouth closed and let the nose make the exhale.

- If your mouth is puckered and throat constricted, you ought to hear what sounds like the ocean within you.
- Attempt to keep your inhales and exhales even, especially while you're first learning this breath. Do not try more than five full repetitions during your first attempt. Starting slowly can be a valuable modification with all the breaths that have therapeutic benefit, and it's especially important with this very dynamic breath.
- It is completely normal if you feel somewhat light headed, but it should be a "good" light-headed. If it does not feel good, chances are you tried too many too soon, or your inhales and exhales were uneven.
- You can envision different characters with this breath, like Darth Vader, or a charging bull "huffing and puffing." Be open to whatever movie references or other creative anchors may come up for you.
- Get a mirror and see the steam of your breath on the surface (young people like this especially), attuning you to the idea of your breath as "the Force."
- You can visualize (on any breath) that you are breathing in a calming or soothing color and breathing out a color that represents stress. John Coffey from the movie *The Green Mile* is another favorite character that I like to intone when I do *ujjayi* breath with expression. In the film, every time he healed someone, he would raise his head and exhale (with sound) the pestilence or disease that he just took from the person he healed.
- If watching the video instructions would be helpful to you, supplementary teachings are available at www.traumamadesimple.com/pnp

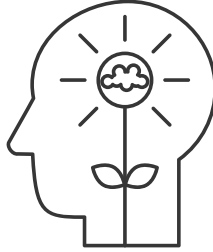
LION BREATHING

- Begin with a healthy inhale from the belly.
- Exhale vigorously, allowing the tongue to hang out. Feel the jaw and cheeks loosen. Open the eyes widely to help with this letting go. With your hands, make paws like a lion to complete the effect of a lion roaring.
- Try at least 5 full repetitions, although if one full breath is all you can manage at first that is okay.
- Consider how embodying the strength of a lion or enrolling in the character of a lion can help you breathe through a painful trigger with strength and confidence. For professionals, bringing in other expressive arts elements, like using a costume or acting out a scene, may help your client further develop the breath as a resource.
- If watching the video instructions would be helpful to you, a supplementary teaching is available at www.traumamadesimple.com/pnp

BREATHING OUT THE DRAMA OR “SIGH OF RELIEF”

- The lion paws are a fun element well known to many practitioners, although how you express your arms and face when you exhale vigorously is completely up to you.
- On this next round of breathing, continue by inhaling with the nose and expanding the belly like usual.
- Allow the expressions your body and your face makes on the exhale to flow out naturally, making a sound if possible.
- Many people describe this breath as the “sigh of relief” or being “dramatic” on their exhale. While you can use these examples if they work for you, don’t let them limit you in keeping an open mind and open heart to what the practice can reveal!

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PRACTICE THREE

MINDFUL COLORING

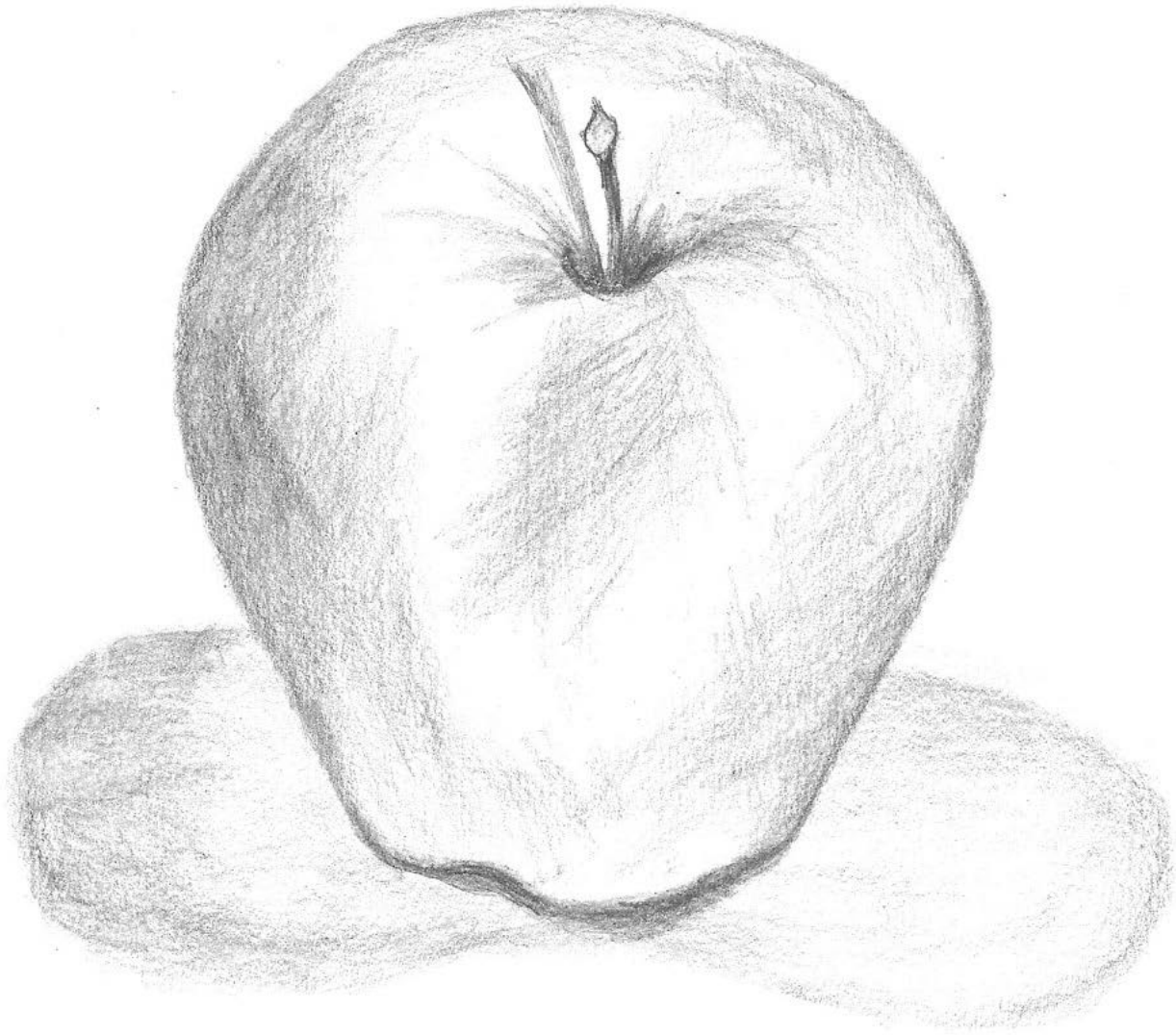
These practices are combined because part of my intention is for you to notice the similarities and the differences in creating through each form. What can having more containment and direction teach you about mindfulness and expression? What can the absence of containment and direction teach you about mindfulness and expression? These practices are designed to help you explore such questions. You are encouraged to set aside enough time to do both of these practices in the same sitting.

- The *adult coloring book movement* has become very popular as a stress relief activity in recent years. In this practice you are simply invited to color a page, either from a specialized book that you own, a source you find online (search “coloring pages” and millions will come up), or using a children’s coloring book. I’ve also provided three sample images (in the following pages) that you can use if you don’t have access to your own.
- You are encouraged to explore how engagement with coloring may help you to connect mindfully, especially with concentrated breath.
- Consider how such an exercise can be utilized as a containment strategy before moving into the more free-form gush art.

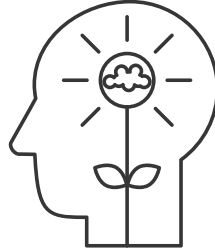


Coloring Page by ~ KATIE **GIFFORD**





Coloring Page by ~ KATIE **GIFFORD**



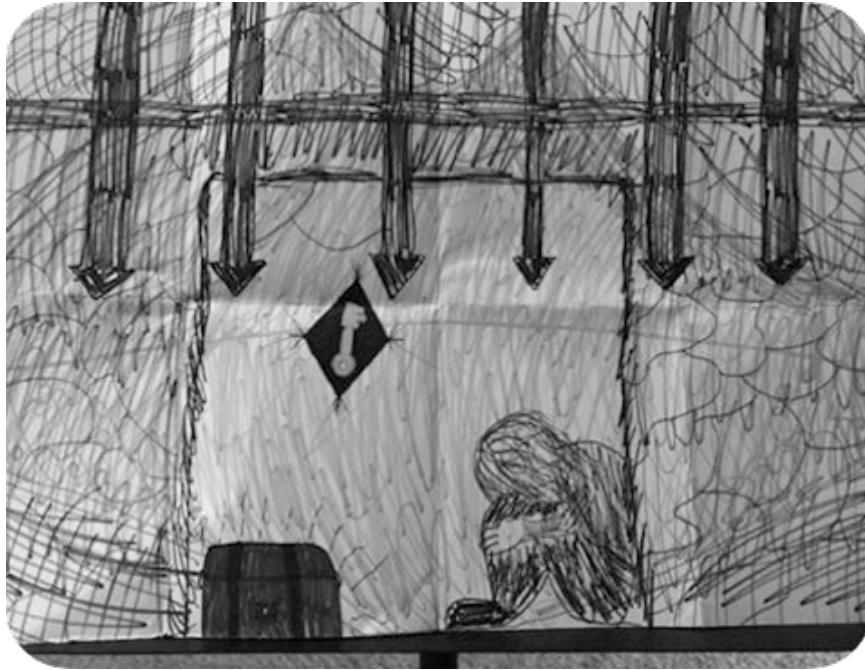
PRACTICE FOUR

GUSH ART

As noted earlier, gush art is a term used in expressive arts therapy to suggest uncensored creation with art—think of what the word “gush” means for you and allow that to unfold on the page using the materials you have available to you (e.g., crayons, markers, pastels, paints, etc.). Gush art was a part of Process One: Grounding. You are encouraged to release that experience and focus on this new experience of gush art and notice what it reveals for you, especially after Mindful Coloring.

- Like with many forms of meditation, it can be useful to set a timer for the gush art practice. This helps keep the focus on the process of the experience. When the timer expires, check in and notice whatever it is you notice about the experience and/or move along to the next practice.
- Set a timer for gush art (10–15 minutes) to avoid being pulled in to overthinking or being fixated on the outcome.

GUSH ART EXAMPLES



~ JENNIFER **HARWOOD**



~ TRACEE **MOSS**



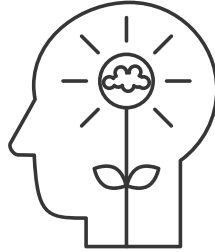
~ PEYTON MARNIE **CRAM**

PROCESS NOT PERFECTION



~ KAMALA **TAHYI**

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PRACTICE FIVE

EMBRACE-RELEASE-EMBRACE

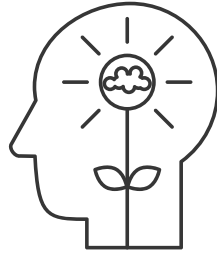
We can embrace the moment, embrace an emotion we are experiencing (whether it be challenging or pleasant), or embrace the pesky thoughts that pass through our rational mind. In this mindful movement practice, we work with the idea of learning to embrace whatever life brings. All mindfulness practice and indeed all of life is a process of learning to embrace (instead of resist or shove away) whatever may come, then learning how to let go of what we can and need to at any given moment. This movement practice will give you a chance to explore this natural flow.

- Come into a gesture of embracing yourself, if this works for you today. You know, the good old “give yourself a hug” posture. Moving consciously while giving yourself this hug may allow you to embrace whatever the moment is sending your way. Sometimes what surfaces in the moment is challenging to embrace. Often this challenge is dancing with experience from the past or an old story about self that keeps us stuck in a proverbial rut.
- You have a choice with this practice. You can use the posture of embrace to physically support the practice of noticing and receiving the moment without judgment, or explore whether the dance allows you to loosen the embrace and release the arms freely.

- If you choose to let go of whatever you've been embracing, you can allow the universe, Mother Earth, the God of your understanding, or whatever seems organic to you in that moment to take that which you are letting go. Can you allow the process of letting go to transform what you are releasing into something beautiful? In the next moments of dance or perhaps during some other practice when you feel ready, embrace the transformations fully and without apology.
- If the metaphor of this practice seems too much to start with, simply work with the gesture pattern of embracing-releasing-embracing, putting on whatever music you prefer for the practice. Notice whatever it is you may notice and consider going to one of your other art forms to help you process whatever this movement practice may conjure up for you, or to hold the emotion of this practice in containment until you can consult with your therapist or a trusted support figure.

MODIFICATION NOTES:

- ✓ This practice can be done in silence or with music. You may consider starting with silence to get the flow of the embrace-release-embrace pattern, and then putting on music of your choosing.
- ✓ If watching the video instructions would be helpful to you, a supplementary teaching is available at www.traumamadesimple.com/pnp



PRACTICE SIX

TAKE IT TO THE PAGE (WRITTEN DIALOGUE EXPLORATION)

This process concludes with a written exploration that will hopefully help you to crystallize your experience. For this practice in taking it to the page, you will need to have your coloring page and your gush art handy. Take a few moments to breathe and sink into the moment before you begin.

- Take about 2 minutes to fully observe the page you colored. This is an exercise in observation, not judgment or scrutiny. Notice which element of the colored page most catches your attention. Maybe it's one petal of one flower. Perhaps it's the color blue. It could even be the white space around what you colored.
- Set your timer for 5 minutes. On a blank page or in your journal, spend the time writing *as* the element you just noticed. In expressive arts practices, this exercise commonly uses the lead-in: "I am (e.g., the color blue), I . . ." Allow your free writing to flow from there. If you need more inspiration, think about the message that the element (like the color blue) may have for you today and write from that place.
- After the timer rings, put your pen or writing implement down and then take a minute to breathe and reset.

- Now take about 2 minutes to fully observe your gush art. Remember, this is an exercise in observation, not judgment or scrutiny. Notice which element of the gush art catches your attention most.
- Set your timer for 5 minutes. On a blank page or in your journal, spend the time writing *as* the element you just noticed. You can also use the lead-in “I am (e.g., the color blue), I am the one who . . . ” for this part of the practice.
- After the time rings, put your pen or writing implement down and then take a minute to breathe and reset.
- For the final portion of this practice, you are invited to set the timer for 10 minutes and allow the two elements—the one from the coloring page and the one from the gush art—to interact with each other. You can write a short scene like a play, a poem, a short story, or any other presentation of the written word that makes sense to you.

MODIFICATION NOTE:

- ✓ In trauma-focused practice, the amount of time that you spend in a practice is always variable. If the parameters presented in this set up feel too long for you, consider shortening them. I’ve seen people do great things with this exercise writing for only 1-2 minutes in each portion.

GUSH ART AND WRITING RESPONSE EXAMPLE



I am water in the ocean
that creates a wave that is
intense, forceful & fierce.
I have the ability to soothe, to
provide fun, to carry, to be gentle –
and the capability to destroy,
to drown, to injure, to ruin, to
damage, to suffocate, &
to choke
It all depends on the conditions
in my environment that dictate
the waves created.
What will I produce next?

I am a seed
that is often buried
Invisible, laying in the
dark
The seed I am becomes
something more; a flower,
food, vegetables, grassy earth.
How exciting to know what
I, a seed, will become
once the darkness fades.

Seed: I know! I stand so tall &
strong – I have you to thank; for
without your care, guidance, and
reliability; I would not have thrived.

Water: Even though you are fully bloomed; I am by your side
to continue to nourish; during
your whole life cycle; I will always
provide.

(Hand in hand; flower and water sat in the sun talked, laughed
and “allowed each other to just be”)

~ TRACEE **MOSS**

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOLLOWING MINDFULNESS

- Describe your personal experience with the process.
- What did you discover in your process?
- What did you learn about yourself in the process?
- What did you notice about judgment or self-criticism during the process?
- What role did the multi-modality of the art forms play in discovering what you discovered in your process?
- Which of the skills explored in this process can be applied to your overall trauma recovery or wellness plan?