explorations in mindfulness

open - monitoring meditation

# Open-Monitoring Meditation with Variations

By: Cera Meintzer (19 minutes)

In this meditation, Cera Meintzer leads an open-monitoring meditation, adding in physical and visual cues to help those new to meditation discover options for the practice that keep them focused. These tools also support seasoned meditators in deepening their practice.

The Process:

1. Go ahead and make yourself comfortable if you are not already there. You can take a moment to close your eyes if you would like to do that. It is a natural way to put a screen up to the outside world and tune inward. And then bring your awareness and your focus to your breath, that steadfast tool that we have at our disposal. Begin to lengthen the breath, and as you do so begin to relax the body ... Feel the shoulders move away from your ears … Feel the tongue and the jaw soften … Relaxing the eyes …Relaxing your belly … Allowing the breath to flow freely in and out, imagining and remembering the wonderful shape of our lungs … You can visualize and feel the 365 degrees that they exist in, top to bottom, front to back, circular. As you take those deep breaths, you can feel them expand their full capacity in all directions, and release to their full capacity …

2. With our breaths being one of the primary ways that our body releases toxins, this is one of the powerful reasons for meditation, especially a meditation that is focused on breathing. Think of it as a little toxin release session, those deep inhales and those deep exhales help us to clear our system from things that are not serving us, both physically and mentally and spiritually.

3. We're going to practice an open monitoring style of meditation today. I feel like this is kind of the most basic, foundational style of meditation, and it really helps to become aware of your mental chatter or your “monkey mind” as some people call it.

4. The first order of business in this style of meditation is to decide what you *do want to* focus on. You can choose your breath … You can choose a word or a phrase … You can choose an image or a visualization … So, it is not about NOT focusing on anything at all, it is about choosing *something* to focus on. I will give you my example. When I practice open monitoring, I imagine myself seated, and around me is a field. I am outside in a field and there are flowers and I have a little fire in front of me, kind of like a little campfire. And that is where I focus. I imagine what it feels like to be there. I watch the fire, I hear the birds, I notice the breeze, and so this is my focus. Within that I also keep my breath steady.

5. So, within this space that you have created for yourself, your goal is to stay focused on where you are, and *when* your mind wanders away from this space, these words, whatever you have created as your focal point, when your mind wanders away, you are going to notice what it was you were thinking of. So, I typically go towards planning. I have a big planning mind. I can think to myself when my daughter gets home, I going to have to give her her room back because she needs it as she has a phone call to make. Okay. I have just noticed that I have said that to myself. Planning mind…this is my planning mind. That is it, I am going to let it go and I am going to come back to my fire and my field. And again, my mind is going to wander, and I am going to notice what it is I am thinking about, and I am going to give it a label. The label is an anchor so that you can notice things when you are not in meditation, and then you can practice letting them go.

6. So, let us practice and then I will give some cues as we go along. Connecting to your breath, finding whatever anchors you be it a word, a visualization, or hanging onto your breath and counting your inhales and exhales … Begin to relax … and just sit with your anchor … …

7. The key to this practice is not to punish yourself when you notice your mind has wandered away, just accept it. This is what our minds are made of, and this is what they have practiced for so long. You are developing a new neural pathway, a different choice. So, it literally becomes a fork in the thoughts road of your mind that says “Am I going to go down this path of what I've always done? Or am I going to go down this path of allowing that thought to pass and coming back to my focus?” …

8. It is also okay to play with different forms of anchoring or to combine them. So, if you are not feeling like what you have selected as a fit, change it. You will find something eventually that feels right. If my field and my fire do not work, then sometimes I will add on counting my breath in and out, and I will use my fingers, my fingertips, to keep track. So, I will touch my thumb to my pointer finger, and I will inhale and exhale and say “One”, then I will touch my thumb to my middle finger, and I'll use my fingers to count. Sometimes a physical practice can be helpful as well. So, I am going to be quiet for about five minutes while we practice.

9. (Continue for 5 minutes …)

10. Taking a moment to check back in with your body … making sure that you are still relaxed … scanning through your muscles … noticing any clenching and then releasing it … Also keeping your breath flowing smoothly … nice deep inhales and exhales as you continue to work on focus while exploring the awareness of your mind … You are the sky, and your thoughts are simply clouds passing by … So, you can see them, and you can acknowledge them, but you do not have to become the cloud. You stay the sky.

11. (Continue for 5 minutes …)

12. Bringing your awareness now back to your body … take a moment to give yourself some gratitude for trying something that is not necessarily easy … And then when you are ready, begin to bring the awareness back to your body by moving a little … maybe even changing your breath … exhaling through your mouth … opening your eyes when you are ready and feel like you are in a place where you can come back to this day and this moment.