

# *Regaining Personal Control*

## Meditation and Mindfulness Practice

Mindfulness practice offers a way to disengage from the hectic world around us by focusing attention inward. The socially isolating experience of COVID19 has interrupted our routines which gave us meaning and purpose each day, threatening our trust in relationships, employment, society and ourselves. In mindfulness practice, we learn to use breath as a vehicle to create more inner peace and isolate the things that are simply out of our control. The meditation exercise offered to you on the next page is one way to promote personal wellness, lessen the threat from the outside world, regain a sense of control and take care of yourself during this turbulent time.

The only way to enhance personal control is by letting go of control: the paradox of surrender. Rather than trying to control the uncontrollable, surrender involves noticing that there is nothing one can do to change the situation. However, surrender does not mean giving up. When there is nothing that one can do to change a given situation, this does not mean that one cannot deal with the situation in an active way. One may still deal with the emotions that result from the experience, reframe the meaning of the situation or engage in other activities to cope with the consequences of the situation. The key to develop a “healthy” level of personal control seems to be by gaining accurate understanding of one’s possibilities and limits of control. This accurate self-knowledge about personal control allows the individual to invest time and energy in actions that lie within the spheres of personal control and avoid wasting time on actions that cannot be controlled.

By connecting to breath, we can disconnect from upsetting thoughts, emotions and other stressors that disrupt inner peace. However, like many abstract concepts, the concept of inner peace may be difficult to grasp especially during this unplanned for time of turbulence in our households and society.

In this meditation, the concept of inner peace is clarified by using a hurricane as a metaphor. Within the strong, turbulent winds of a hurricane is the eye, a calm, quiet, centered space.

The goal is to explore inner peace by using our breath to become like the eye of the hurricane; the silent part of ourselves that can notice difficult or challenging experiences without getting caught up and carried away by them. This tool guides you to a state in which you’ll become an observer that is able to notice what is happening from moment to moment with a sense of calm and clarity and it only takes 10minutes.

### Advice

- The concept inner peace is reasonably abstract, and thus you may need to try this exercise more than once to fully grasp the metaphor.

You will likely be very familiar with the ‘thinking self’ - the part of you that generates thoughts, beliefs, memories, judgments, dreams, plans, and so on - and less aware of and unfamiliar with the silent, ‘observing self’ - the aspect of you that is aware of whatever you are thinking, feeling, sensing, or doing at any moment.

- If this meditation causes your mind to feel unsettled, you may return to your breath as an anchor.

- It is advisable to incorporate real-time stimuli from the surrounding environment into the flow of meditation guidance. For example, sirens or jackhammers, television or music, kids fighting or playing, hallway happenings or the sound of heating and air conditioning, can be incorporated into the hurricane metaphor distinguishing the eye of the storm from the turbulence around it.

- In this meditation, you allow the mind to observe whatever surfaces during the meditation. This may cause issues that have been deeply repressed to begin to rise to the surface or more familiar issues that cause emotional discomfort like anger, resentment, victimization or regrets.

This tool provides you with the opportunity to address them consciously and then decide whether or not you want to address them with professional help or discuss with someone you trust.

A large body of research supports the use of mindfulness meditation for psychological distress and emotional wellbeing (Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt & Walach, 2004).

## **THE EYE OF THE HURRICANE MEDITATION**

- Find a comfortable meditation position, either sitting on a cushion on the floor, on a chair or even on your bed or in the bathtub. Sit comfortably w shoulders relaxed. And let your hands rest in your lap, and gently close your eyes.
- Let's take three deep, slow breaths to begin.
- Become aware of your body, sitting here. Notice the sense of contact between your body and the surface beneath you... notice the weight of your body... notice what's touching your skin.
- Now let's consider a metaphor. Within the strong, turbulent winds of a hurricane, the eye, the center of the hurricane, is quiet. There is no wind and no movement there. For a moment, picture this idea in your mind. Can you visualize the strong, turbulent winds of a hurricane, and the inner core that is peaceful and quiet?
- Let's see if YOU can become like the center of the hurricane. Your current circumstances, your thoughts, your feelings, and the sensations throughout your body, can be compared to the winds of a hurricane. Is it possible for you to let go of all of these things for a moment, so that you are no longer taking part in them... like the center of the hurricane is not taking part in the turbulent surrounding winds.
  
- To do this, start by focusing on your breath. Simply breathe in and breathe out. Focus inward.
- Just like the eye is deep within the hurricane, your eye is deep within you. Use your breath to connect to this part of you. Simply breathe in and breathe out.
- Stay connected to your breath. If anything stressful happens in this moment, such as negative thoughts, unpleasant feelings, annoying sounds, difficult life events, memories... try to look at them as if they are the turbulent wind of the hurricane; whirling around, continually changing, unpredictable in nature...
  
- Notice that you are not them. You are the silent center of the hurricane, the part that is peaceful, despite what is happening around you.
  
- You are the silent center of the hurricane, peaceful and at ease.
- You are not reacting, you are simply observing. Like the wind of the hurricane, these experiences are constantly moving and changing. These experiences are out of your control. You, on the other hand, are stable. You are not moving or being carried away by them.
- As you are breathing, notice how you move more and more towards the center of the hurricane, towards the eye. Just like the turbulent wind of the hurricane, your thoughts, your feelings and whatever is happening outside yourself is still going on, but you are no longer part of it. You have control of yourself in the eye.

You are in a safe, peaceful place... Breathing in, breathing out.

- As you sit here, connected to your eye, notice whatever arises. Notice the wind of the hurricane, but do not participate. You can co-exist with a storm that rages outside of you. Stay in the eye. You are safe. You have the strength to protect against the elements. Notice thoughts... notice feelings... notice sensations... continue to watch the ever-changing nature of the world inside and outside you. Watch from a distance, with curiosity, and without judgment... without reacting to what you see.
  
- No matter how intense or bad the hurricane gets, the eye is always centered, calm and at ease. Even the most turbulent hurricane cannot hurt or harm the eye; the eye is safe. Whenever you feel you need to restore peace, use your breath to connect to this silent part of yourself.

Just breathe in and breathe out.

It may help to visualize the hurricane, with yourself in the center. It can be difficult to see the eye of the hurricane at times, and sometimes we forget the eye is there... However, it is always there. If we examine closely enough—even the strongest, darkest hurricane—sooner or later we'll see the eye, centered and constant. You are centered and constant.

- Now, when you feel ready, slowly open your eyes.

