

Week Three: Working with Your Inner Critic (13 minutes)

00:01: This practice is about working with self-judgment as opposed to being afraid of it. So start with three slightly deeper inhales and slightly deeper exhales, and with each exhale, allowing yourself to find a comfortable posture with some degree of ease. And it can be helpful for this practice to have the eyes closed, but it's not required. So if you'd rather keep your eyes open and allow them to be open with a soft gaze.

00:56: Now noticing if there's any place of ease or well-being that you can sense in this moment. It might be noticing the ease of your body or the stillness of your posture or just sensing your own aliveness, that there's an inherent well-being in being alive.

[30 second pause]

01:35: Now from sensing this well-being and ease, allowing yourself some time to really settle and connect with your own breath, with your own breathing. So as much as you can, resting your attention with soft belly breathing, and as much as you can, really relaxing into the rhythm of your own soft belly breathing, noticing all the qualities and the sensations of each in breath and each out breath. (short pause) And if your attention wanders, goes to some other experience, then simply notice that without judgment, coming back to reconnect with your own breathing.

[35 second pause]

03:14: Now imagine that you are settling back into awareness itself. So this means allowing your attention to be open and wide. And notice that you can be aware of the felt sense of breathing, all of the different sensations of your body, and even sounds, the sounds of my voice that are appearing and then disappearing back into the silence. So noticing all of this changing flow of experience with an open and receptive quality of attention. Wide open. You might even imagine it like the night sky. All of the different experiences of sensations, thoughts, sounds. Appearing and disappearing, like different stars in the night sky, points of reference. But held in the vastness of the open, empty night sky.

[20 second pause]

04:48: Again, each time your attention gets caught or it drifts, just noticing with a real gentleness and ease. And then settling back into the field of knowing, back into this field of awareness. Wide, open, receptive, not needing to struggle with any experience.

[10 second pause]

05:30: Now, in this open space of your own mind, recall one of your judgments or self-criticisms. This is some belief or thought that you may have. About yourself, about your life. And as you recall this, remember to stay with this open and vast awareness. And see if you can hold the judgment or the self-criticism, just as if it was a passing cloud in the night sky.

[10 second pause]

06:38: Not needing to get entangled or to make an identity out of it. But holding it with this very open, wide, spacious awareness.

06:58: And now you might try recalling another judgment or another self-criticism. And again, holding it with this open, spacious quality of mind. And maybe even being curious about noticing how the judgment or the criticism lacks substance. It's mostly empty. You might even label it with a simple note. Believing, we're thinking, we're judging.

[10 second pause]

07:49: And noticing how you might even be able to rest more with the body as you can feel the sense of the judgment or the criticism, almost like the echo of it in your own body. If you notice that you're getting pulled into the judgment or the criticism, then see if you can sense that constriction. See if you can sense that limitation, that feeling of no longer resting with an open awareness, and gently reminding yourself that judgment or this criticism is just a passing experience. And that you have the ability to untangle to step back from that judgment or criticism. And this is a normal process for all of us. That judging ourselves for something that we did wrong for not knowing what to do, or for any other way that we limit or constrict how we think about ourselves. It's part of being human. And when we can turn towards it without denying, without needing to fix, but being able to be with it, holding it with an open spacious awareness, we notice that it can dissolve from the presence of our attention. Its nature is to pass away.

10:11: So in these last couple of minutes, take another deep breath, deep out-breath, allowing your body to settle again into a comfortable and relaxed posture, and taking a moment to appreciate your willingness to try working with judgment and criticism. So however your experience was difficult or easy, remembering that you are developing a new skill, and this takes patience, lots of self-kindness, and also practice, you're learning to shift from self-criticism to self-acceptance. Recognizing that failure in perfection, worry, and fear are part of being human. And that you're not alone. Everyone has these experiences at some point in their life. So learn to change your relationship to this inner criticism or judgment, so rather than fearing it, we can learn to be okay with it even when it's present. Not needing to believe it or react to it, rather holding it in the space of an open and receptive mind. Allowing it to pass by without taking it as our identity. Just like a cloud is mostly empty space, lacking substance, but from afar, from a distance, it can look solid and intimidating. So our judgments and criticisms are mostly empty thoughts and beliefs. And when we get close enough to be with them, they dissolve on their own just from the spotlight of our awareness. So taking one last deeper inhale and a deeper exhale to end this mindfulness practice.