

Surroundings: Mindful Awareness in Your “Special Place”

Introduction

Next time you go to a VA clinic or hospital look around—a little more closely. Notice what it looks like on the outside. Are there green areas? Flowers? And, what about the inside? Are there plants? Open spaces for sunlight? Chances are that some care has been taken regarding these spaces at your VA.

In fact, a number of VA sites around the country have made an effort to create green spaces. Some have walking paths in nature. Others have gardens. Still others have labyrinths—places for walking meditation. Still others have designed buildings and waiting areas where there is ample sunlight and open space. Some VA's bring in plants and therapy animals.

Now, before we get too far, let's be honest. Not all spaces are healing.

However, for here, in this practice, we will consider ways you can create healing spaces in your life.

There is a reason for this.

Spaces can help us heal, enhance our well-being, and reduce our stress level.

This is what this practice is about—creating healing spaces through your mindful awareness.

Practice

Let's begin this practice by finding a comfortable posture. This could be lying down, sitting, or even walking. See if it is possible to let your body to relax right now—just 5% more. This might mean letting your jaw soften or your shoulders release or your abdomen relax. Again, just 5%.

Next, as you are able, let's take three deep, cleansing breaths. See if you can breathe more deeply into the abdomen. It might resemble or feel like a balloon. If it is comfortable, hold the breath for a few seconds and then exhale, allowing the out-breath to be longer than the in-breath.

Repeat this two more times at your own pace.

(Pause)

Now, picture a special place in your mind's eye where you felt happy, safe and relaxed.

It might be a favorite fishing spot. It might be at a family member's house or a place where you used to live. A place in nature. Somewhere important from your childhood. It might be in your garage or in your kitchen. You don't have to work at it. Let your mind offer you that special place. Trust the practice to bring that place to you.

Again, the most important part of this practice is that this is a place where you felt happy, safe and relaxed. A place that is enjoyable, peaceful and easeful.

(Pause)

Next, as best as you can, see this special place in as much detail as possible. What do you see? What are the colors and shapes of this place?

(Pause)

See this place in as much detail as possible.

(Pause)

As best as you can, hearing the sounds in this special place. What do you hear? Are there sounds of people's voices? Of nature? Sounds of water or the wind? What sounds are available?

(Pause)

Hear the sounds in this place as best as you are able.

(Pause)

Many places have particular smells. Does the special place you are at have smells? Smells of fresh air? Perhaps, smells of food? Cookies out of the oven. What smells are present?

(Pause)

Smell the smells in this place as best as you are able.

(
Pause)

Now take one more breath. And, as you exhale or breathe out, let go of the place that you have been focused on.

(Pause)

Here, right now, let your body relax and just be. Soften your jaw, release your shoulders and relax the entire body as best as you are able.

(Pause)

Notice in this moment what you are currently feeling in the body. In the mind.

(Pause)

Knowing that wherever you go, you can choose to bring the power of this special and healing space with you. It always can be available for you for your healing.

(Pause)

Again, take one more cleansing breath. And, as you exhale or breath out, let the mind and body simply be. Just be as you are in this moment.

(Pause)

If your eyes are closed, go ahead and open your eyes and return.

(Pause)

Invite your body to stretch in the way it would like to stretch. .

(Pause)

This is the special space meditation or what some call, “My happy place” meditation.

Thank you!

Questions

1. If you practiced this activity regularly, what benefits might this have on your health, stress level, relationships, and well-being?
2. Where might you practice the special place meditation?
3. What are ways you might create healing spaces in your life? What is one thing you can do today to create such a space in your life?