

Big Sighs

“Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.” — Maya Angelou

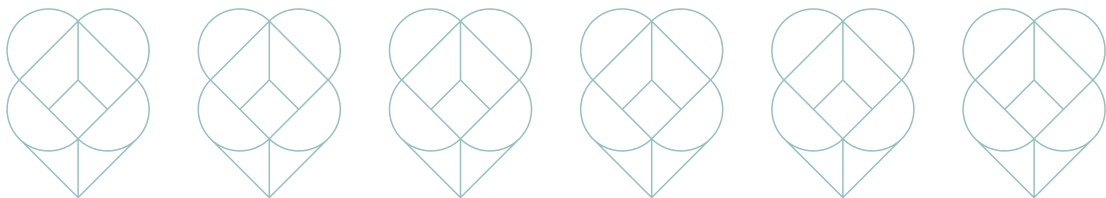
What to do:

Take a comfortable seat. Allow the frustration you are feeling to simmer. Fully feel your feeling of irritation or anger or whatever has you in an elevated state. Just feel it.

Then, slowly breathe in.
Hold your breath for a count of five.
Let it go with an audible sigh.

Do this a total of five times. Take a break for normal breathing and then do two more rounds.

Notice again how you feel. Are the strong emotions still present?



Why it is worth doing:

Strong emotions show up in disruptive breathing. This is how our body keeps homeostasis. We increase oxygen to prepare for fight or flight. The issue is, how do we get back down from that heightened state? Research suggests that sighing is our body's natural way of resetting our breathing. This exercise uses our natural reset in a purposeful way.

If you have more time:

Remember when you started this exercise and you had to think about what had you in that state of agitation? Now, take some time to really think about what got you riled up. If it helps, write it down. Slow down time and try to think back to that moment when things started to go offline. Ask yourself what fear you were responding to. What about the situation made you feel out of control?



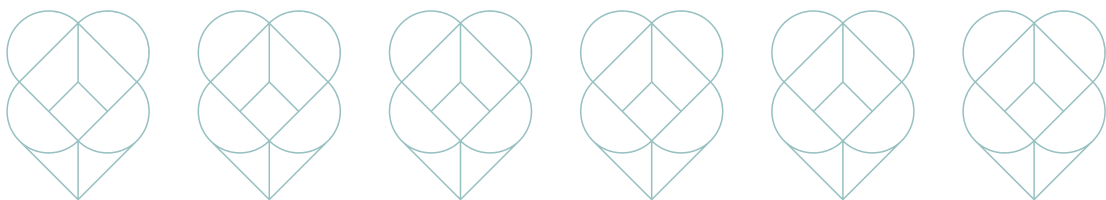
Body Scan Meditation

“When there is no enemy within, the enemies outside cannot hurt you.” — African Proverb

What to do:

- Find a comfortable seat on a chair or a cushion.
- Sit up straight while allowing your belly to soften.
- Close your eyes. Bring your awareness to your toes.
- Ask yourself some questions:
 - How do my toes feel?
 - Are they hot or cold? Painful or ticklish?
 - What sensations are present?
- Slowly move from your toes to the bottoms of your feet and ask the same questions or any others that come up.
- Follow along this progression as you gradually scan your entire body, stopping at each joint and turn: ankles, calves, knees, etc.
- When you have finished, notice if anything changed. Notice if your breath has slowed or quickened. Have your shoulders softened or tensed? Just be with the awareness of change and then open your eyes.

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Why it is worth doing:

This exercise is about bringing your awareness back into your wonderful, whole body. It's about noticing what you find and allowing it to be exactly as it is. Bonus: you may find that bringing awareness is enough to bring change. If you feel a change in your body, just notice it and continue on.

Sitting with your own discomfort without trying to change it gifts you with the ability to do the same for others. While the trauma response makes us want to fight or flee to disassociate from the body, body scan meditation does the opposite, bringing your body into the present moment. Sensing cold toes is only happening in the here and now. By staying with sensations, we gradually increase our ability to sit with bigger and bigger feelings. Becoming friends with your body is becoming friends with your whole self.

If you have more time:

Journaling about the sensations is a great way to allow your brain and body to communicate and process what has come up. You may notice connections between what you felt and what is happening, or recall a specific memory. You may also notice connections in your body (e.g., both my knee and hip are hurting, I wonder if they're connected.)

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Feel the Ground

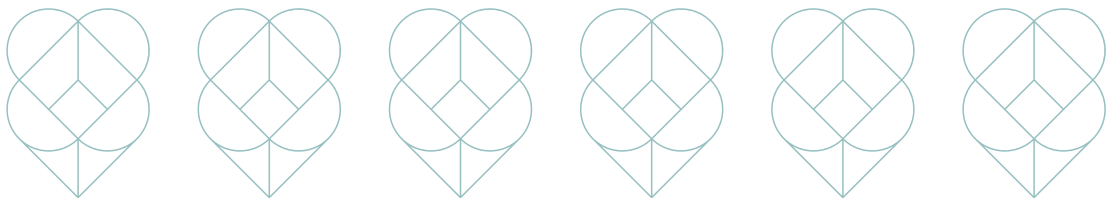
“Turn your wounds into wisdom.” — Oprah Winfrey

What to do:

This exercise may seem simple. You may even want to rush it, which is a human response. But this is about slowing down and really feeling. It cannot be rushed.

- To begin, take five big deep breaths.
- Then slowly take off your shoes (if you are comfortable).
- Place your feet below your knees on the ground and sit up straight.
- Notice your feet. Feel and name the feelings you are sensing. Are your feet hot? Are they aching? Just notice.
- Then, begin to feel the bottoms of your feet and the surface below them. Feel the solidness of the earth. Feel the way your feet can rest upon it without worrying if it will support you.
- Name the qualities of the ground. Is it sturdy? Is it cold?

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Why it is worth doing:

We take our feet for granted every day. But they constantly are giving us information and keeping us in balance. By slowing down and listening and feeling the supportive earth below us, we begin to appreciate all the sensations we often ignore with our conscious mind. And, we find that just below that conscious level is another whole range of sensations, keeping us afloat and safe and stable in an uncertain world. Thank you, feet. Thank you, earth.

If you have more time:

This can be extended into a rooting and grounding meditation. Imagine your feet growing roots and extending into the earth. Notice how deep you can take your energy as you focus on those imaginary roots. Notice how much calmer you feel when you are firmly planted into the earth.



Gratitude List

“It’s a funny thing about life, once you begin to take note of the things you are grateful for, you begin to lose sight of the things that you lack.” —Germany Kent

What to do:

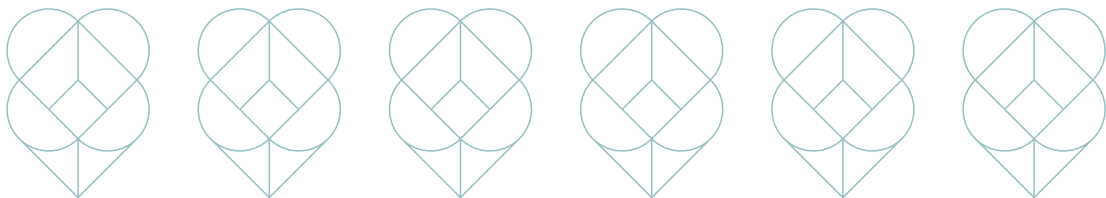
Create a list of all the things that you’re grateful for. Think more deeply about what you really want to be present in your life and what on that list is already there. Think about:

- What things have happened that have led you to this point?
- What missteps have you avoided?
- Who has come into your life that makes you feel at home in yourself?
- What generosity have you been shown?
- Who gave you a chance when you weren’t even sure about yourself?

Make this a growing list that you can keep with you at your desk or in your pocket. Be detailed and precise as you think about all the abundance you have in your life. And remember, there is no end to abundance. There is always more.

As you make your list, think about how these small and large things have made you who you are. Think about the way these things are in alignment with what you want and who you want to be.

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Why it is worth doing:

It's so easy to find ourselves looking for all that's wrong with the world. We're even evolutionarily wired for it to protect us from harm! But doing that doesn't really increase our joy or decrease our anxiety. However, gratitude is something that roots us in the here and now. It helps us narrow our focus on the ways things are going well, and helps us find the common thread in our tapestry of existence. You already are building the life you want. Count the ways.

If you have more time:

Make it a work of art. Write out your list of things you are grateful for in your best handwriting, and decorate it with tiny drawings or clippings that represent the various things. Maybe use paints or markers to bring color. But, make it something you want to see that reflects the gratitude you are feeling. Then frame it and hang it somewhere you can see it every day.

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List Attributes You Possess

“Courage is the most important of all the virtues because, without courage, you can’t practice any other virtue consistently.”

— Maya Angelou

What to do:

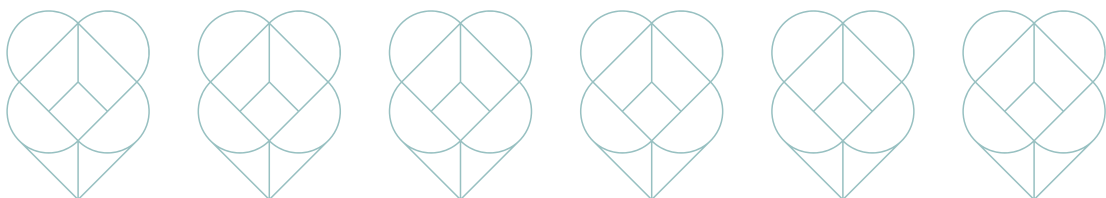
Think about the ways you are witnessing resilience, growth, and success in your life. Make a list of these. To help, think about:

- When do you feel you are most aligned with your values?
- How do you want to be in the world?
- What is YOUR definition of success?

If you’re having trouble, here are a few that might be true for you:

- I am tired, but I am here.
- I am working hard at processing my own trauma.
- I am showing up for my friends.
- I am proud of how I handled [a difficult situation].
- I have witnessed myself being kind.

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Why it is worth doing:

It's so easy for all of us to list all the ways we need to improve. And, sure, it helps to be aware of areas we need growth. But this exercise is about recognizing all the ways you are already witnessing resilience, growth, and success in your life. Research has shown that making progress, however small, is the number one thing that boosts mood in the workday. The more often people experience a sense of progress, the more creatively productive they are in the long run. By providing positive feedback about your progress and personal successes, you are providing creative feed for your own productivity.

If you have more time:

Write your attributes down as a list to keep with you. Pull it out when you're having moments of doubt and are feeling down. It's difficult to practice when you're not believing the affirmations, so by writing them in your own handwriting, you create a permanent reminder that you once believed them to be true. Deep inside, you still know them to be true. Repeat. Repeat again. You are doing great!

