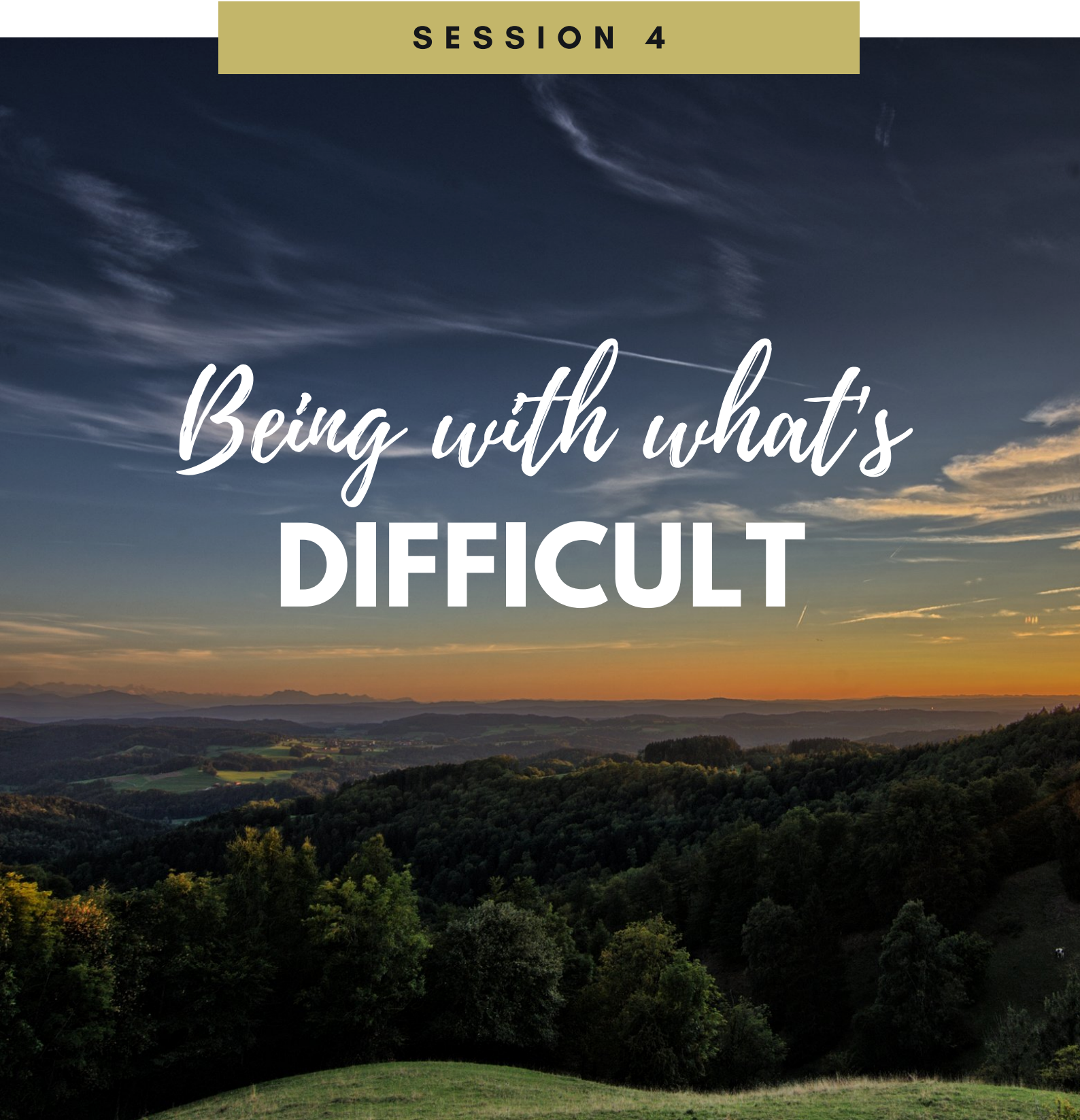


MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

STUDENT WORKBOOK

SESSION 4

Being with what's
DIFFICULT



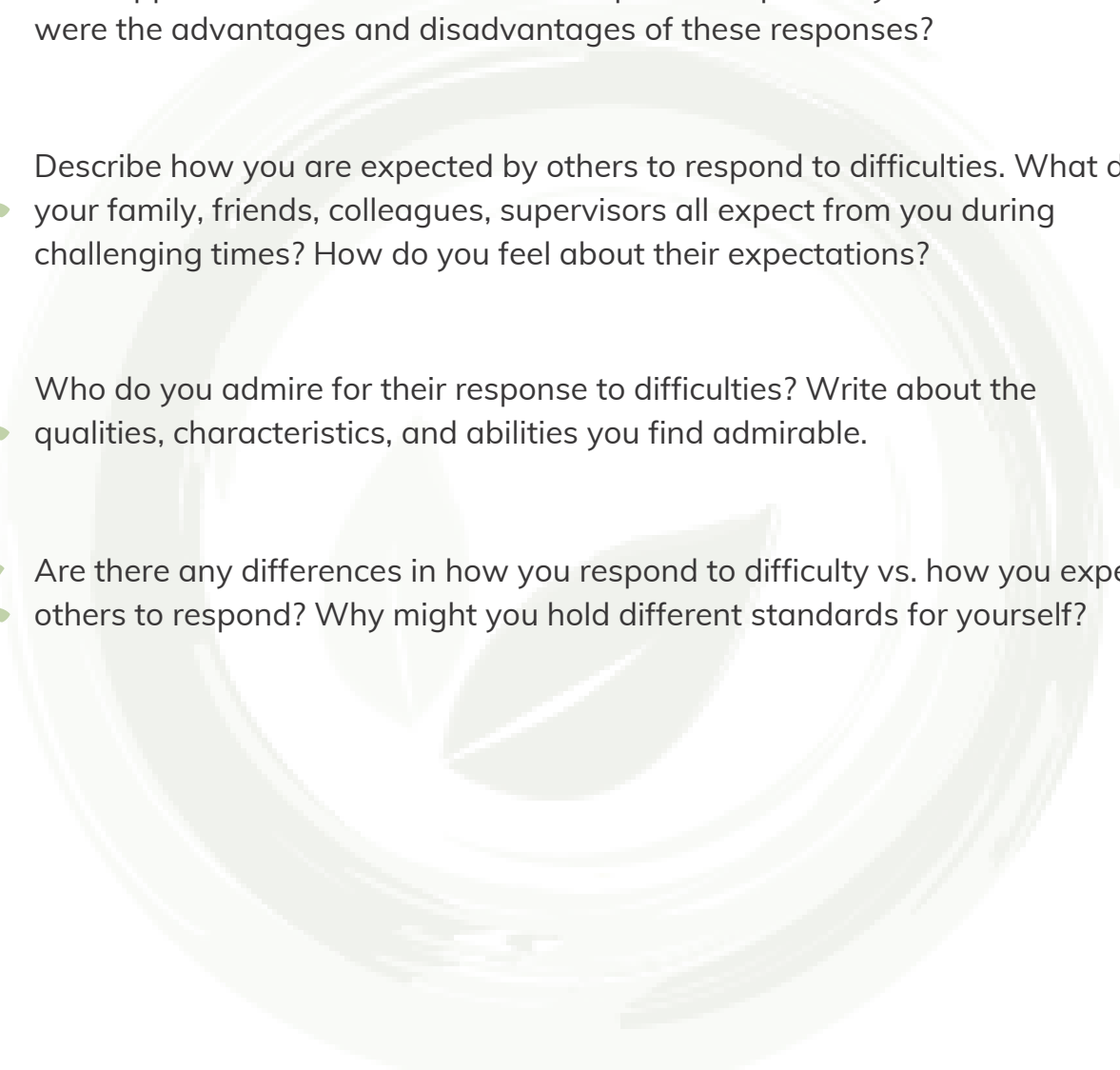
As we saw in the two previous sessions, positive and negative emotions and sensations are part of our human experience. In Session 4, we pay particular attention to what's difficult to carry, and offer ourselves patience, empathy, and loving kindness as we notice what's difficult. This week, in particular, give yourself rest and self-care. There are 6 worksheets to give yourself one day of rest or allow yourself to take extra time with any of them.

The following exercises, meditations, and journal topics will give you something to focus on each day between sessions. Feel free to complete them in any order you like, and even to repeat any exercise you find helpful or interesting. Let yourself be led by your needs and interests this week.

Session 4 Contents:

- Journal Topics
- Acceptance of Our Circumstances
- Breaking Patterns of Self-Judgment
- Bringing Support and Peace to Pain
- Mindfulness of Negativity
- Self-Inquiry
- Self-Advocacy

Session 4 Journal Topics:

1. Reflect on how you were taught to respond to difficulty, challenge, hardship, or disappointment. What were the acceptable responses you learned? What were the advantages and disadvantages of these responses?
 2. Describe how you are expected by others to respond to difficulties. What do your family, friends, colleagues, supervisors all expect from you during challenging times? How do you feel about their expectations?
 3. Who do you admire for their response to difficulties? Write about the qualities, characteristics, and abilities you find admirable.
 4. Are there any differences in how you respond to difficulty vs. how you expect others to respond? Why might you hold different standards for yourself?
- 

Acceptance of our Circumstance

Date / Time:

So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

☐ Thoughts? ☐ Heart? ☐ Body? ☐ None

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



No matter who we are, things happen in life that arise in opposition to what we hope, dream, or plan for. As human beings, there is no way to escape this inevitable part of life. Sometimes we don't get the job we want.

Sometimes we lose someone without having time to prepare. Sometimes illness or accident intervenes with our visions of the future.

Learning to accept our circumstances regardless of what they are is not about denying our preferences. It is also not about denying our emotions. Much of what arises in life unexpectedly or in contradiction to our plans stirs emotions like grief, frustration, and anger. It is entirely natural for it to do so, but the question we might ask is:

*How might I frame this in a supportive way?
Where might I lean into greater acceptance?
In accepting this reality, where do I go from here?*

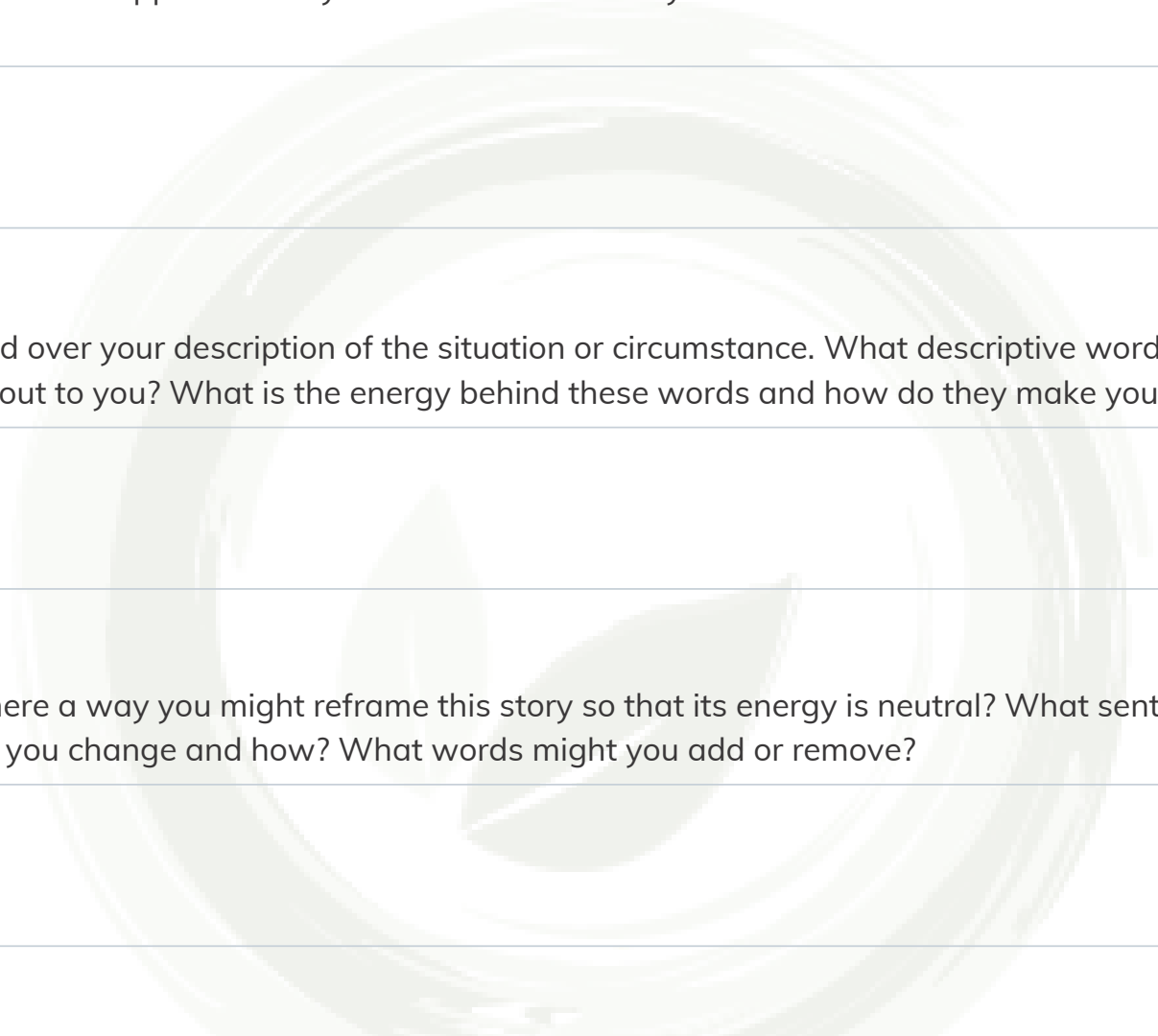
The following exercises offers a series of questions to deepen your understanding of where you might reframe your language or your perspective in order to find greater acceptance.

Nothing you write down can be right or wrong; simply use what arises here as a way of getting to know yourself better.

Acceptance of our Circumstance

■ EXERCISE:

1. Consider one situation or event that happened in contradiction to your hopes, dreams, or plans. What happened? Let your hand free-flow as you write down whatever comes to mind.



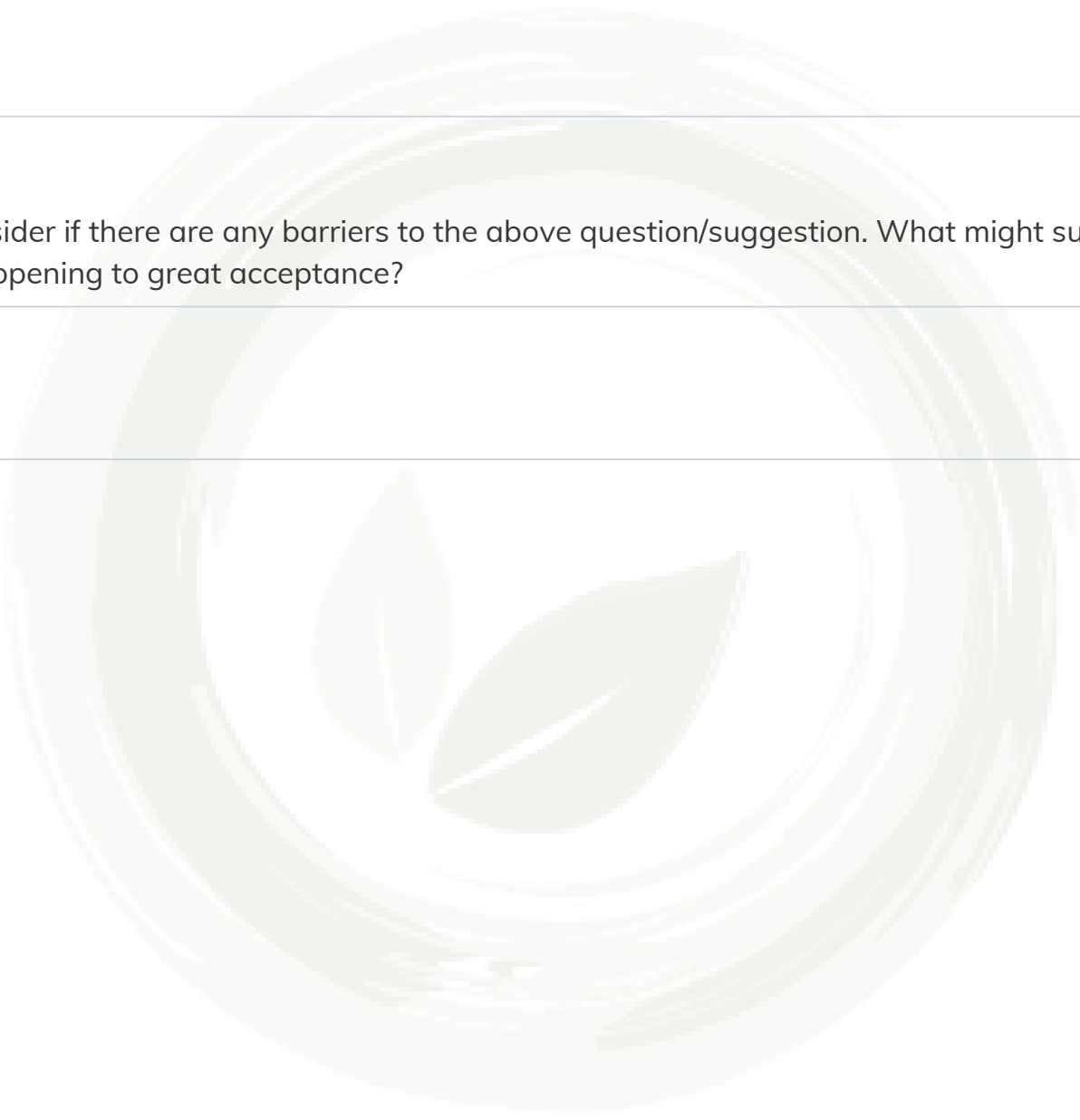
2. Read over your description of the situation or circumstance. What descriptive words stand out to you? What is the energy behind these words and how do they make you feel?

3. Is there a way you might reframe this story so that its energy is neutral? What sentences would you change and how? What words might you add or remove?

4. When you tell your story of a difficult circumstance you once found yourself in, do you feel weighed down, victimized, demoralized, or hopeless? Or do you move into a defensive mode, arguing with your experience or feeling self-righteous? Again – none of this is to make you 'right' or 'wrong'. It is simply a tool for self-exploration.

Acceptance of our Circumstance

5. What might it be like to tell the story of your circumstance (or of your life as a whole) from a trusting, loving, forgiving frame of mind? What would it be like to fully accept things as they are?



6. Consider if there are any barriers to the above question/suggestion. What might support you in opening to great acceptance?

Breaking Patterns of Self-Judgment

Date / Time:

So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

☐ Thoughts? ☐ Heart? ☐ Body? ☐ None

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



1. What judgments did you make about yourself?

2. What circumstances were associated with these judgments?

Breaking Patterns of Self-Judgment

3. In what ways was your judgment grounded?



4. What pattern(s) of judgment(s) are you beginning to notice?

5. How will you take what you learned from this forward into your life?

Bringing Support and Peace to Pain

Date / Time:

So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

☐ Thoughts? ☐ Heart? ☐ Body? ☐ None

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



When we experience pain, whether it be emotional or physical, our vision tends to narrow in on this uncomfortable and challenging experience. Pain can feel all-encompassing, making it difficult for us to carry on with our day-to-day activities.

However, neither physical nor emotional pain needs to be as intense as the mind might make it out to be. In fact, numerous studies have shown that mindfulness and meditation can help to ease the degree to which we experience pain when it arises.

We can bring a sense of support and peace to our pain by envisioning love and care radiating out from others.

As we open our hearts to a full acceptance of external support, we remind ourselves that we are never alone in our experience; all of us share the same capacity for joy, pain, and all in-between.

The following visualization is a practice that explores this, exemplifying how through the power of the mind we can shift our experience of pain.

As you move through this meditation, refrain from denying or forcing your experience to be anything other than what it is. Be open to change and see where it takes you.

Bringing Support and Peace to Pain

PRACTICE:

1. Begin in a comfortable seated or lying down position. Either position is fine so long as you are comfortable and can stay peacefully alert throughout the visualization.
2. Close your eyes and take a few slow and steady breaths to center yourself. Soften the forehead and the belly to promote a deeper sense of relaxation.
3. Once you feel settled, call to mind the falling visualization:

Imagine that you are seated on a cushion or chair in a bright, spacious room. The room is light and airy, helping you to breathe a little bit deeper.

Around you is a circle of friends, family members, strangers, and any other loving beings that you know or have known in your lifetime (furry friends may be included).

All of these individuals have appeared to support you in gently alleviating your pain. Imagine that from their hearts, golden threads of healing light expand outwards.

These healing threads of light reach into any physical or mental areas of pain and tension, gently softening whatever friction is here. Spend three to four minutes embracing their support, remaining mindful of how your experience of pain might naturally shift.

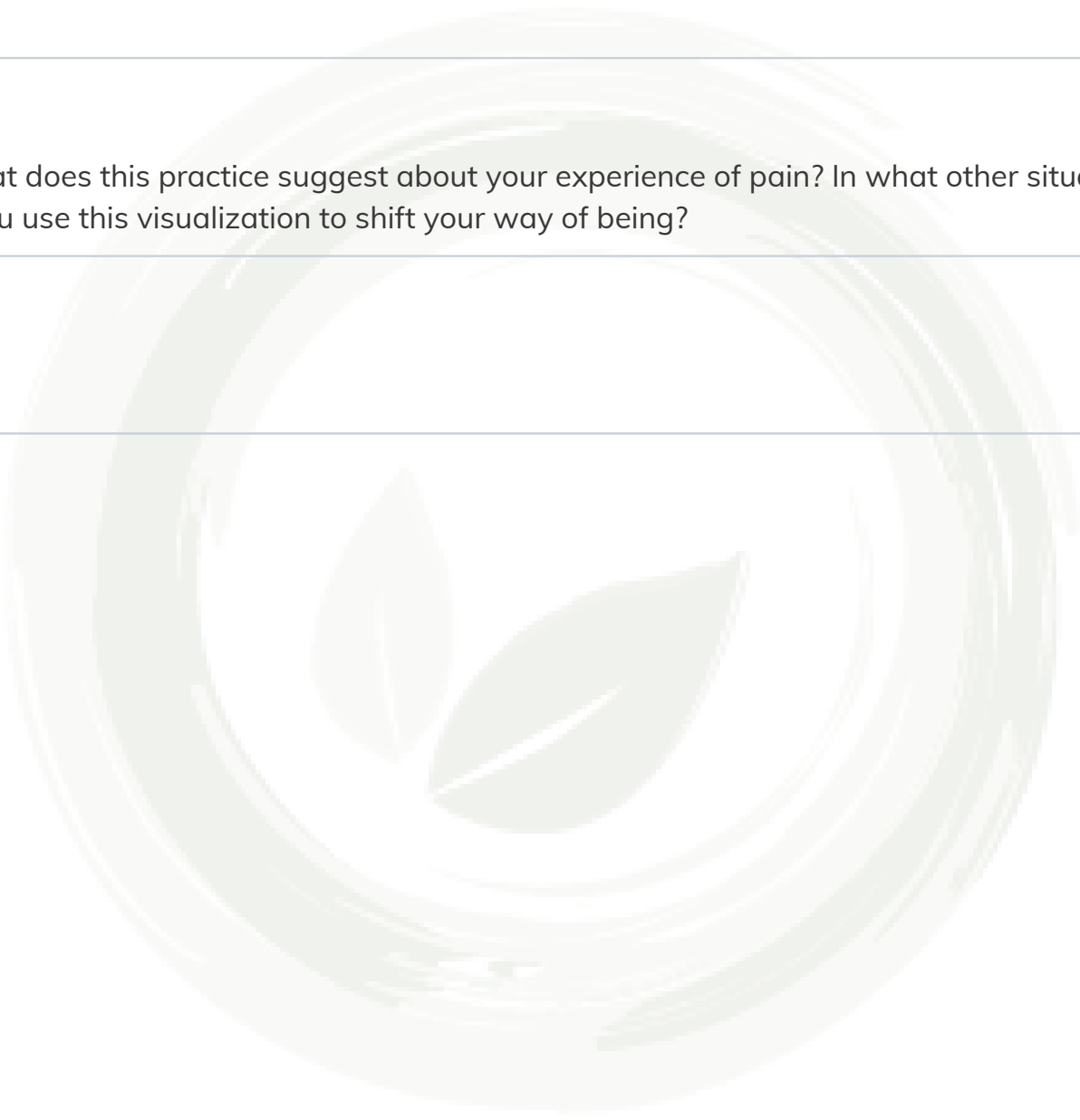
4. When you feel ready to end the visualization, come back to the breath for a few moments to ground yourself. Then, slowly open your eyes and consider the following reflection questions.

REFLECTIONS:

1. What was this practice like for you? Did you notice any shifts in emotion or physical sensations? Was any part of this visualization difficult?

Bringing Support and Peace to Pain

2. How did it feel to open-heartedly accept the energy of love, support, and compassion?



3. What does this practice suggest about your experience of pain? In what other situations can you use this visualization to shift your way of being?

Mindfulness of Negativity

Date / Time:

So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

☐ Thoughts? ☐ Heart? ☐ Body? ☐ None

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



1. Note each time you react negatively to some event, some person, or to yourself.

2. Also notice whenever you speak negatively about some event, some person, or yourself.

Mindfulness of Negativity

3. Do not judge yourself according to what you notice. Do not come to any conclusions by what you notice.



4. At the end of each day, quickly scan through your day and note again the incidents described in #2 and #3 above.

5. Be honest, complete, and non-judgmental in your observations.

6. How will you take what you learned from this forward into your life?

Self-Inquiry

Date / Time:

What have you brought mindful awareness to today? Check all that apply.

☐

Heart

☐

Mind

☐

Body

☐

Breath

☐

Environment

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
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Self-inquiry is a meditative technique of bringing awareness to the experience of 'I' – not to 'I' as the mind would define it but simply to that sense of inner awareness. It is a turning towards the 'I' that is aware of its experience.

The practice outlined below is a direct invitation into self-inquiry. Explore it with patience and openness.

PRACTICE:

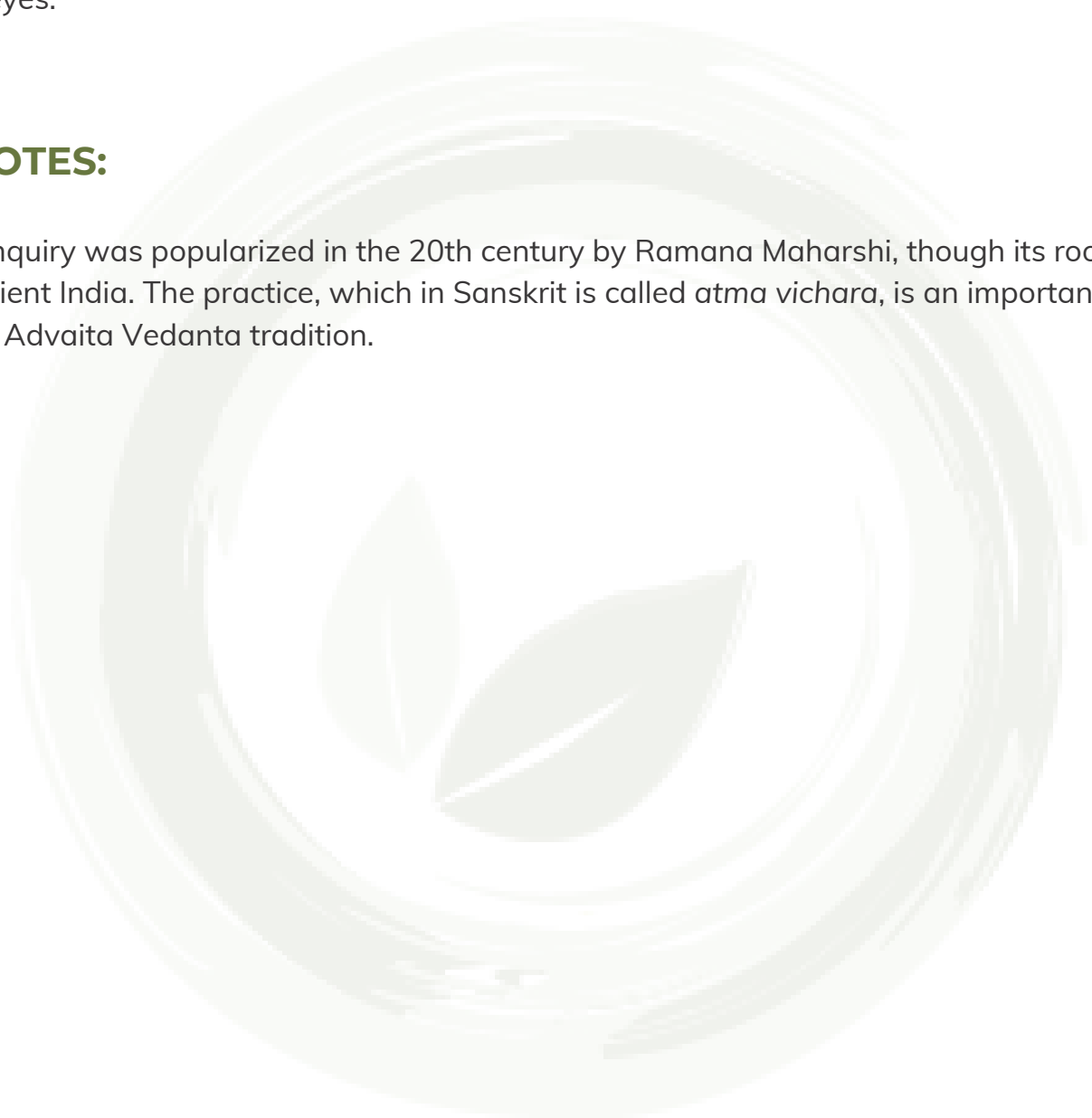
1. Come to a comfortable seated position, closing the eyes when you are ready. Let the body and mind begin to settle into the practice.
2. Now, instead of focusing our attention on any particular object like the breath or a mantra, see if you can let your awareness open to the inner feeling of being 'me' or 'I'. Again, this is not the 'I' that is a mother, that is a doctor, that was hurt or wronged. It is the 'I' that is aware of its experience.
3. If a thought arises, ask yourself: "To whom is this thought occurring?"

Self-Inquiry

4. Return your attention to your inner awareness again and again.
5. Practice for as long as you'd like. When you are ready to finish your session, slowly open your eyes.

NOTES:

Self-inquiry was popularized in the 20th century by Ramana Maharshi, though its roots are in ancient India. The practice, which in Sanskrit is called *atma vichara*, is an important part of the Advaita Vedanta tradition.



Self-Advocacy

Date / Time:

What have you brought mindful awareness to today? Check all that apply.

☐

Heart

☐

Mind

☐

Body

☐

Breath

☐

Environment

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
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PURPOSE / EFFECTS:

Self-advocacy here means treating yourself (and demanding, albeit gently and reasonably, that others treat you) as if your worth is no less than any other being.

We live in a culture that alternately promotes self-esteem and equality while promoting interests that are often destructive to individuals and groups. Women, especially, are often taught as girls not to speak up and assert themselves for fear of being “unladylike.”

We often neglect our own needs and yearnings for the benefit of others. When this becomes pathological and crippling, it inhibits our true wills, and practice in self-advocacy is needed.

METHOD:

Summary

Learn compassion, advocacy, and lovingkindness for others, then apply it to yourself.

Self-Advocacy

Long Version:

Exercise #1: Basic Advocacy:

Sit in a comfortable meditative posture, relaxed and alert. While breathing gently and calmly, begin to think about something for which you have unequivocal good feeling. It could be a parent or a child, a pet or a friend, or even a place or a concept.

Begin to wish that person or thing well. You might want to use the lovingkindness techniques detailed here. Consider fully this sensation of caring. Fill yourself with this feeling of support for something and explore it.

Examine how advocacy of this sort makes you feel, how you think about the object of your advocacy, your emotions and attitudes. Perhaps slowly try to ramp up this feeling of goodwill. Love fiercely. Care strongly. Then, center your attention on the power of your caring and your commitment to this positive feeling.

You might also try to weaken the feeling to see how your mind behaves under those circumstances. Then dial it back up. Notice how your advocacy is something you have control over, and how good it feels to be fierce and strong about love.

Enjoy it; it is beautiful. This exercise reminds us of the warmth and pleasure that come from caring, especially caring strongly. It tells us about our own strength and determination. We also find in ourselves the capacity to love completely an imperfect thing. These skills will help us to then begin to self-advocate.

Exercise #2: Self-Advocacy:

Settle into the same relaxed and alert posture as before. Now, bring to mind yourself as a child. Focus on your many qualities, how worthy of love you were and how vulnerable. Consider how, even as a child, you were imperfect but good enough.

Have compassion for that young child. Then, gradually, move that compassion to yourself now as an adult. Have compassion for your foibles and misadventures as well as for the trauma, bad luck, and hard circumstances you've had to endure by virtue of your humanity.

Self-Advocacy

Settle into this compassion, allowing it to flow into you with each inhalation. Move on to lovingkindness, feeling it for the child you once were and moving it into adulthood. Feel lovingkindness for yourself now, expressing with your inner voice well-wishes and affection for the person you are, despite your flaws.

Finally, move toward advocacy. Return to the child you were, and think about how, if you needed to, you would protect that child and would help that child just as you would any child. See if you can bring this same advocacy to your adult self, empowering you to protect and help yourself and to advocate for your own wellbeing.

Consider how you will act in your best interest in the face of illness, bad luck, mistreatment, and suffering, just as you would for the interest of a child. Fill yourself with this powerful feeling of self-advocacy and enjoy it. Allow your mind to commit itself to advocating for you.

HISTORY:

Self-advocacy has its roots in 19th-century psychological and philosophical thought that questioned the self-sacrificing ideals of Western culture. The concept of will evolved from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (who often viewed it in rather bleak terms) into something positive and empowering with the movement toward self-esteem in the late 19th century.

CAUTIONS:

Do not confuse your selfish wants with things that must be advocated for. You, as a human being, have the right to advocate for equal treatment, freedom from abuse, the ability to follow your dreams, and respect from others. Self-advocacy does not mean that petty emotions and greedy desires are okay just because you think them.

NOTES:

Self-advocacy is also a term used in the disability rights movement expressing the right that people with disabilities (especially the developmentally disabled) have to control their own lives and to self-determine. The ability to speak up for oneself is crucial for human beings in order to feel empowered about their own lives.