The Container

Containment Imagery

Estimated Time: 12 minutes

An imaginal resource that addresses the need to compartmentalize distressing material in order to be present in the here and now. This is not repression or suppression -- it is a technique to allow one to attend to what needs attending to until the necessary resources are available.

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Script

Allow yourself to be comfortable...either lying down or sitting up -- with your back, neck and spine fully supported. Knowing that you will not be interrupted for the next little while, begin by gently closing your eyes.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

Now begin to bring your attention to your breath -- the direct experience of your breath -- however it is...and however it changes. Allow yourself to softly focus your awareness on to the breath that is arising right now...the in-breath and the out-breath...the rising and the falling. If you can, try to follow one full cycle of the breath -- from the beginning of the in-breath, through its entirety...the beginning of the out-breath through its entirety. Allowing yourself the time and the space to be in direct contact with the breath throughout one entire cycle.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

As you continue to pay attention to the breath, you may notice distractions that arise. Just allow yourself to notice...those distractions...any bodily sensations...any thoughts that may arise. If possible, allow yourself to become aware of the separateness of those bodily sensations -- notice how those sensations are separate -- distinct from your thoughts, your ideas and your words.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

Now, as you continue with this focused awareness, you will notice how often you lose contact with the breath...maybe you become caught in a thought or an idea or plan or maybe some other bodily sensation has pulled your attention. ...When this happens, simply notice that you have lost connection with the breath, and, gently bring your awareness back to the breath.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

We'll begin now with a deep breath in through your nose...inhaling slowly and deeply. Exhale through pursed lips until all the air has been released.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

Now we are going to be creating a container. It doesn't matter what kind of container it is, as long as it can hold "any and all disturbing material." If you were going to develop something like that, what kind of container would it be? Some people have used boxes, safes, trunks or chests, others have used book bags, knapsacks or other pieces of luggage. It can be anything

really, a tank, a submarine, an underground well...anything that suits you.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

Can you bring to mind an image of something like that...Something that would be able to contain any and all disturbing material? When you have one in mind, take a good look at it. What material is it made out of? How is it held together? How big is it? What color is it? Are there any markings on it? If there are markings, notice them, if not that's fine. But I'd like you to add something to this container. I'd like you to add in some way...whether it be a note or a sign or an inscription of sorts on it...I'd like you to add a note to indicate that this container will remain tightly sealed. It will remain tightly sealed, until you wish to open it and retrieve something from it, otherwise it will remain sealed. It can be opened -- but only by you....and it should be opened only in the service of your healing.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

So once again, look at your container. Does it have already have that message on it? If not, place it on there now.

[Pause — 10 seconds]

Now, how does this container open? Are you able to open it by yourself, or do you need help? Is there a lock on it? If not, feel free to put one or several on it now.

[Pause — 10 seconds]

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

Once the locks are in place, we'll experiment with opening and closing it, locking and unlocking it. As you do that, notice how much -- or how little -- effort it takes to open and close.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

When you feel comfortable handling it, I'd like you to think of something that you might put into the container...just for practice. Do whatever is necessary to open it up, and then place something in there. When I say "something"...I mean anything, really, anything that may be distressing or disturbing to you right now....it could be thoughts or worries, bad feelings or bad memories . . . it could be something that you have to do but not right this minute -- ...or it could be something that keeps you from being present with this exercise...It could be self judgement, doubt or pain...whatever it is, you're going to put it into the container...whatever you need to do to get it in there, do that now. ...

[Pause — 10 seconds]

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

> Once the disturbing material is in, close it up and lock the container.

[Pause — 5 seconds]

> Now, breathe deeply as you look at the locked container, securely holding anything that you need or want it to hold.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

> Notice how you feel in your body having set aside whatever distressing thing you put in your container. Can you sense that it is fully contained? Is there something that keeps it from feeling fully contained? If so, can we try opening your container and putting that in there as well? Remember that this container is yours and will hold any and every thing that you need it to hold for as long as you need it to.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

> Now imagine walking away from your container...so that it is no longer in your sight. Notice the feeling in your body now that you are no longer burdened by what you put in the container. Notice your breath, your in-breath . . . your out-breath . . . and any sensations of relief you feel in your body, maybe your shoulders have dropped a bit, or some of the tension in your neck has subsided. Whatever feelings of relief you notice, breathe deeply and just notice.

> Whatever you put in the container is now securely locked inside. It is for you to open whenever you wish to put things in or take them out.

> So now, just for practice, let's go back to your container. Once you have it in sight, look closely...see if you can read what is written on the outside.

[Pause — 10 seconds]

> Continue focusing on your breath as you continue to approach the container. When you are in reach, unlock it and open it up. ...as you open it notice that what you put in there, is still there, separate from you. You might want to put something else in, or maybe even a few things. Or you may just wish to lock it back up. Whatever feels right and safe to you, do that now.

[Pause — 10 seconds]

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

> And once you're finished practicing putting things in your container and securely locking it back up . . . you can walk away from the container...as you walk away begin to bring yourself and your awareness back to this room. Knowing that this resource -- this secure container -- is available to you at any time. Knowing that you can use it to hold any and all disturbing things. Knowing that all of the things that you have chosen -- or anything that you choose to contain in the future, will be secure and will remain secure. You can access the material whenever you feel resourced to do so, ...but for now, you may leave it, knowing it is safely and securely contained.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

> And now, whenever you are ready, gently bring yourself back to the room by counting up from one to five. When you reach the number five, your eyes will gently open. You will be awake and alert, and feeling only peace. One....Two....Three. Take a deep breath....Four....And five.

"The Container" by Linda Curran

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