

Four Stages of Meditation

Mindfulness Worksheet

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



Meditation is by no means a competitive sport, and wherever you are along the path right now is perfect. There is no final goal in mindfulness, it's the process of paying attention. And yet, it can be helpful to have milestones to look for as we move from a novice to practiced meditator.

As mindfulness practitioners, we're often asked to be present with paradox. Among these is balancing acceptance of where you are, with looking ahead to where you'd like to be. Understanding the classic four stages of meditation can be an inspiration for your practice.

LAZINESS

In the earliest stages of our mindfulness practice, our biggest hurdle is laziness. Just sitting on our cushion and setting a timer sometimes takes extraordinary effort. Laziness is frequently disguised as busy-ness. When we say we're too busy to meditate, are we really? More likely, we're just being lazy.

To overcome laziness, remember why you are meditating. Recall the benefits you receive from meditation. Finally, the better you get at meditating, the more likely you are to do it, another paradox!

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FORGETTING THE INSTRUCTIONS

Sometimes we just can't stay focused. We sit down to meditate on the breath, but ten minutes go by and we've noticed just about everything but the breath. Without an intention, you're not actually meditating. You're just sitting still and thinking, although it might feel nice.

To meditate is to intentionally focus on the instructions. Be clear what your intention is each time you get to your cushion.

FAILING TO APPLY THE ANTIDOTE

Sometimes it's ages before we notice we've become distracted. Sometimes we notice we've become distracted, but it's ages before we turn our minds around, back to the instructions. When we notice distractions, but let them go unchecked, we're falling victim to the wandering mind.

Remember, the practice of meditation is in the turning around. Mindfulness is great, but only in that it changes our behaviour.

PRACTICED EASE

The final stage of meditation is practiced ease. With effort, we reach a state where everything is perfect. We practice often. And when we do, it's not that we're no longer distracted, it's that we notice right away, and then come back to the instructions.

Meditation feels joyful because we've gotten good at it.

Try the following meditation, and then answer the questions below to bring greater awareness to your experience.



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FOUR STAGES OF MEDITATION

- Sit comfortably in a quiet place
- Breathe quietly in and out through your nose
- Commit to noticing your breath for a set period of time, setting a timer is recommended
- Recognize that you've overcome laziness
- Rejoice in the fact that you are here, and that you're committed to staying
- Continue to watch the breath
- Any time you notice the mind has wandered, remember the instructions
- Return to watching the breath
- Notice the quality of your attention to the breath
- If you notice that your attention
- has become to dull, or you've become to agitated, apply the antidote right away
- If you notice you're off chasing pleasant thoughts, or fighting against unpleasant ones, apply the antidote right away
- Continue to stay present with breath, equally aware of the quality of your attention
- Adjust the quality of your attention as needed
- Remembering too, to cease adjusting once you have reached practiced ease

WHAT DID YOU NOTICE?

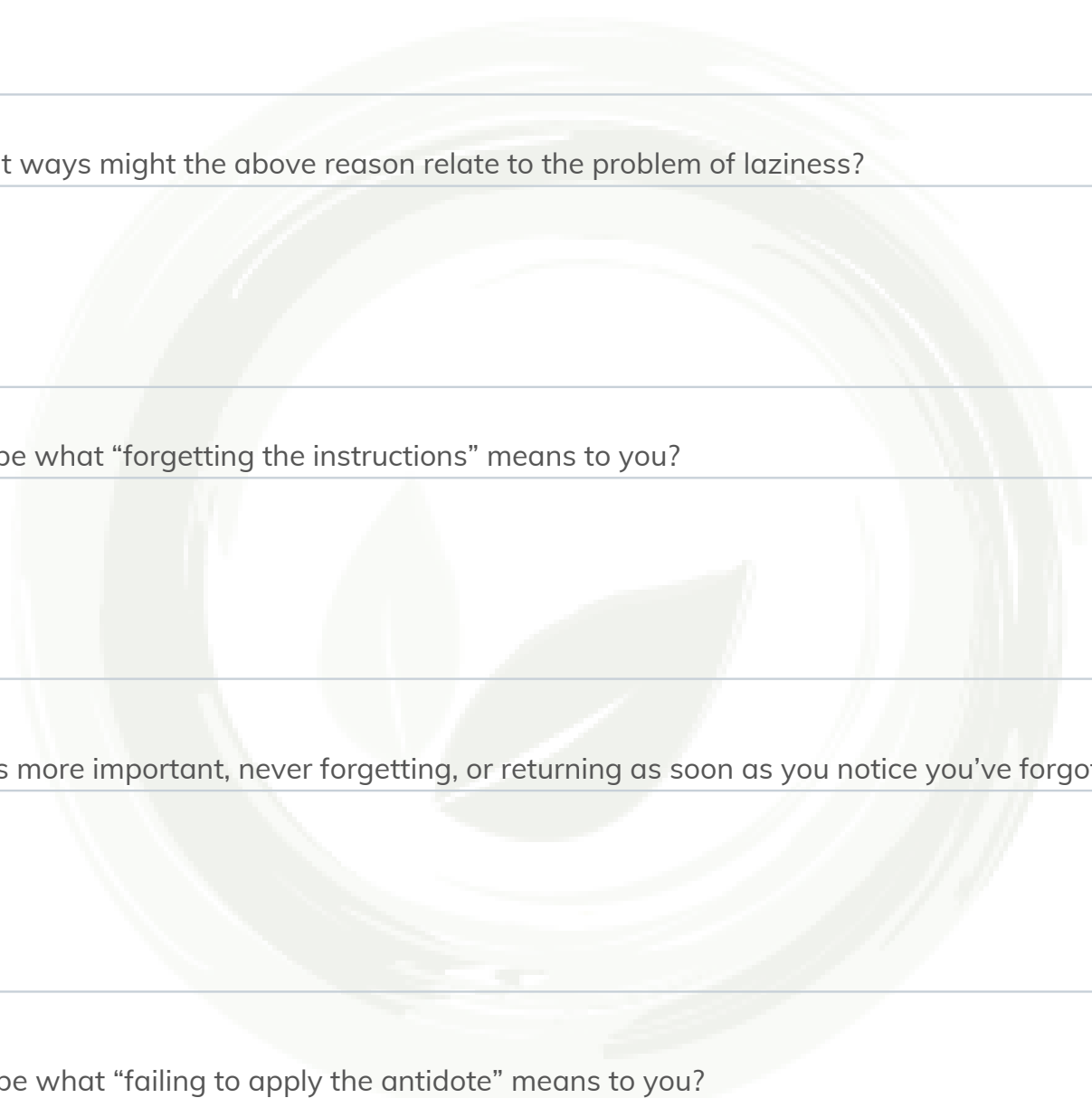
Describe your experience with the meditation in general

Do you meditate as often as you'd like to?

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On the days you do not meditate, what is the reason?



In what ways might the above reason relate to the problem of laziness?

Describe what “forgetting the instructions” means to you?

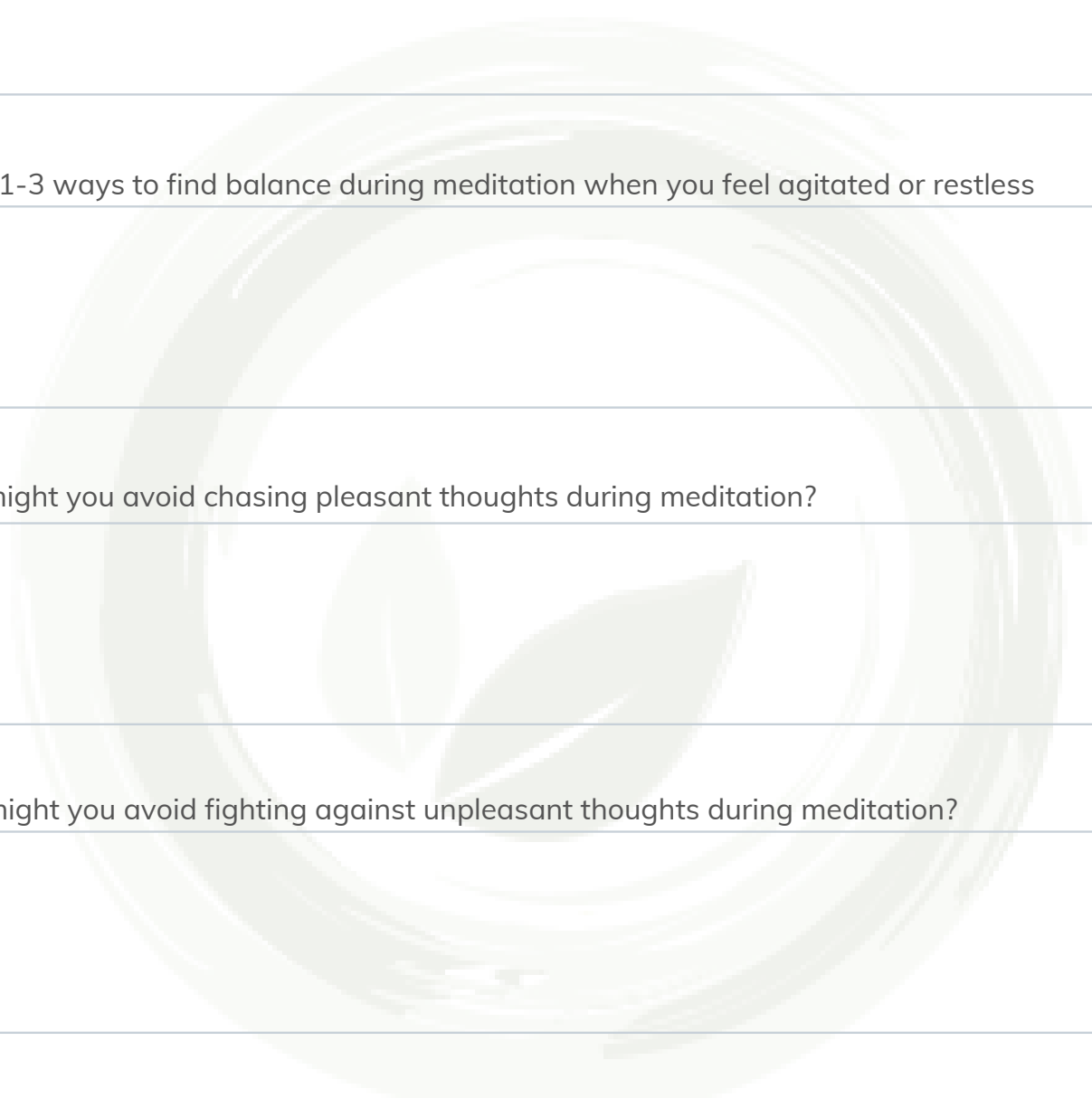
What’s more important, never forgetting, or returning as soon as you notice you’ve forgotten?

Describe what “failing to apply the antidote” means to you?

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Name 1-3 ways to find balance during meditation when attention feels dull or spaced out



Name 1-3 ways to find balance during meditation when you feel agitated or restless

How might you avoid chasing pleasant thoughts during meditation?

How might you avoid fighting against unpleasant thoughts during meditation?

Why do you think “practiced ease” is called that, and not just called “ease?”

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How might refining the quality of attention during meditation benefit you in day to day life?

How might getting good at meditation help you meditate more often?

REVIEW

In our mindfulness practice, we're asked to balance acceptance of where we are right now, with the desire to do better. Where you are right now is perfect. And yet, we can continually refine the quality of our attention.

As goal-oriented humans, we can use our attraction to goals as a carrot in coming to our cushion. Our desire for practiced ease in meditation can act as a carrot, encouraging continued effort along the path.

The better we get at overcoming our laziness, sticking to intention, and refining the quality of our attention, the more likely we are to continue meditating daily.

