

Mindful Needs Guessing

Mindful need guessing, or active self empathy can be applied as a separate meditation or as a tool to deepen your regular meditation practice with an additional tool, especially for persistent thoughts.

Find a comfortable posture in a quiet place where you will be uninterrupted for 20-30 minutes. Close your eyes and bring your awareness to your breath (or to your body if this is easier.) Follow the inhalations and exhalations of your breath through the body. Feel the rise and fall of your chest or stomach, the passing of air through your nostrils. Literally try to feel the breath as it passes through your body.

After a short time you will no doubt notice some thoughts or feelings. You may even follow these thoughts or feelings such that you are no longer paying attention to the breath. When you awaken to this fact, note the content of your thinking or the type of feeling, and then gently return your attention to your breath.

If your mind returns to thinking, especially if it returns to the same topic you were thinking about previously, or the feeling continues or returns, linger with that thought or feeling. Allow it to be without trying to change it or stop it. Silently empathize with the feeling or thought. After a moment or two, if a thought is present, ask yourself, “What need is my mind trying to meet with this thought?” If a feeling, ask yourself, “What need is my body trying to meet with this feeling?”

Possibly, a need will pop in to your head right away with these questions. Or it might require some empathetic need guessing. Using the needs on the lists of universal human needs, you can make guesses to your self until one resonates. Ask gently, as if to a child. Many of these unmet needs are deep and old. Sometimes the resonance when a need is correctly guessed is so strong that tears may arise. Let it all in. Do not push anything away. Once the need or needs is identified, linger with the need. Feel how universal and special that need is and honor how important that need is for you. Notice how compassion might arise in you when you focus on the unmet need. Hold it gently, like a baby.

You may also notice that the needs trying to be met by your thoughts, especially planning or remembering, are the same needs that would be met if you were actually doing what you were thinking about. It is like the mind is trying to meet the need by pretending to take action. Empathize with the mind as if it were separate from you (which it is!) Treat it like a child. You may even use the second person with your mind, “What need are *you* trying to meet with that thought?”

After a short time the energy of the need will most likely decrease. Return to the breath. Stay with the breath until another thought or feeling arises. If the feeling or thought returns one or two more times, again try to identify the need that the mind is trying to meet or the need that a feeling is trying to connect you to. Again empathize with yourself by trying to guess the need and then linger kindly with the need. Return to the breath.