

SESSION 2

A New Relationship with Discomfort

Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional.
—BUDDHA

Materials

- Bell
- Whiteboard/markers
- Handout 2.1: Common Challenges in Meditation Practice (and in Daily Life)
- Handout 2.2: Noticing Triggers Worksheet
- Handout 2.3: Session 2 Theme and Daily Practice: A New Relationship with Discomfort
- Handout 2.4: Daily Practice Tracking Sheet
- Audio Files: Body Scan, Urge Surfing, Mountain Meditation

Theme

This session focuses on recognizing triggers, and on experiencing them without automatically reacting. We begin by learning to identify triggers, and we observe how they often lead to a chain of sensations, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Mindfulness can bring this process into awareness, disrupting automatic reactive behaviors and allowing greater flexibility and choice.

Goals

- Continue to practice awareness of body sensations.
- Bring awareness to physical sensations, thoughts and emotions in reaction to triggers.

- Explore how these experiences can lead to a chain of habitual, reactive behaviors, and can cause us to lose our present-moment awareness.
- Introduce mindful awareness as a way to create a “pause” in this typically automatic process.

Session Outline

- Check-In
- Body Scan (Practice 1.2)
- Home Practice Review and Common Challenges
- Walking Down the Street Exercise (Practice 2.1)
- Urge Surfing (Practice 2.2) and Discussion of Craving
- Mountain Meditation (Practice 2.3)
- Daily Practice
- Closing

Practice for This Week

- Body scan
- Daily Practice Tracking Sheet
- Noticing Triggers Worksheet
- Mindfulness of a daily activity

CHECK-IN

Facilitators may wish to start with a brief one- to two-word check-in (“Name one or two things you notice—a physical sensation, thought or mind state, or an emotion that you observe in this moment”). This is best kept brief. It can help for the facilitator to model this (e.g., “relaxed and excited” or “chilly feet”).

BODY SCAN

Starting in this second week, each session begins with a 20- to 30-minute formal mindfulness practice, followed by inquiry about experiences during the practice. Beginning with formal practice at the start of each session, prior to any discussion,

reinforces the experiential nature of the course. The body scan practice from Session 1 (Practice 1.2) is practiced again at the start of Session 2.

HOME PRACTICE REVIEW AND COMMON CHALLENGES

By Session 2, participants have experienced their first week of practicing the body scan meditation on their own using the audio recording and have typically already begun to encounter some challenges. Thus, one objective of this session is to acknowledge and discuss these challenges, address concerns and questions, and clarify misconceptions about meditation. The format and style of this discussion are similar to those described in the previous session, reflecting a sense of curiosity and nonjudgment about whatever experiences participants offer. Some of the most common issues that arise in practice are physical discomfort, drowsiness and sleepiness, feelings of restlessness, self-judgment, and expectations about the practice creating a sense of peace and relaxation.

These challenges reflect those described in traditional Buddhist teachings. Although it is not necessary (nor recommended) that facilitators refer to Buddhist terminology in MBRP, this framework can be a useful way to identify the challenges that often arise for practitioners of mindfulness meditation (Handout 2.1). Traditional mindfulness meditation teachings describe five categories of challenges (or “hindrances”): (1) “aversion,” which could include fear, anger, irritation, resentment, and all of their varied forms; (2) “craving and desire,” or the experience of wanting, which may be as subtle as wanting to feel relaxed and peaceful and as extreme as an intense urge to use a substance; (3) “restlessness and agitation,” which may be experienced physically, as a strong desire to move, or as mental agitation; (4) “drowsiness or fogginess,” which may be in the form of sleepiness, mental sluggishness, or lethargy; and (5) “doubt,” which may be personal doubt, or doubt about the practice and its purpose or utility.

A common experience when these states arise is for a meditator to attempt to get rid of them so that she or he can reengage in the meditation, believing that these experiences are problems that are getting in the way of practice. Although there are skillful ways to work with these states, observing them *is part of meditation practice*, just as observing body states is part of the body scan practice. We are learning to recognize these states and cultivate a curious attitude about them, rather than resist or attempt to eradicate them.

Aversion

The first opportunity to work with aversion often arises in the form of physical discomfort. By the end of this first week of practice, participants may have become

more acutely aware of both the sensations of discomfort in the body and their reactions to these sensations. Irritation, self-judgment, and a desire to “fix” or “get rid of” the discomfort are common. Participants may also experience confusion, doubt, and disappointment about mindfulness practice based on prior assumptions and expectations about the “pleasant” or “blissful” experiences that should accompany meditation. There is often a need for repeated emphasis on the purpose or intention of these practices, especially in beginning sessions. In this second week, we emphasize increasing awareness and acceptance of all phenomena, including uncomfortable or unwanted experiences, as well as reactions to these phenomena. We also inquire about some of these experiences, regardless of whether participants voluntarily raise them in discussion, emphasizing that no experience is “right” or “better” than any other. Failing to address these experiences may leave participants feeling as though they “don’t get it” or “aren’t doing it right.”

PARTICIPANT 1: I was really distracted by an itch on my knee and couldn’t focus on the instructions. I was trying to ignore the itch, but my mind kept going back to it.

FACILITATOR: What did the itch feel like?

PARTICIPANT 1: It was annoying. I wanted to scratch it.

FACILITATOR: So you noticed the itch, then some annoyance, and an urge to scratch the itch. What did the urge feel like?

PARTICIPANT 1: Like restlessness. I felt like it was getting in the way of my doing the exercise.

FACILITATOR: Was there a thought?

PARTICIPANT 1: Yes, I thought, “This is getting in my way. I can’t concentrate.”

PARTICIPANT 2: I felt the same way about the tension in my back.

FACILITATOR: Okay, great—thank you. This is a common experience: some discomfort arises, and then a desire to make it go away. The thing about this practice is we get to bring attention and curiosity to whatever is happening, even if it’s something we didn’t necessarily want or expect. Just noticing, what does an itch really feel like? Is it tingling? Is it hot? Of course, you can scratch or shift positions if you need to, but just noticing it for a moment before you do that, instead of immediately reacting as we usually do—why do you think we might want to do that?

PARTICIPANT 3: I don’t know. Why would I want to be with something uncomfortable, especially if I can make it go away really easily?

FACILITATOR: Right, most of us don’t want to feel discomfort. So what might be the value of practicing staying with it?

PARTICIPANT 1: Not just reacting automatically, I guess.

FACILITATOR: So to practice pausing before reacting. How do you think this might be useful in your life?

PARTICIPANT 1: Well, when I have a craving, I usually react just automatically without really thinking about it. Like scratching an itch.

FACILITATOR: Yes. Other thoughts?

PARTICIPANT 2: Avoiding pain is one of my biggest reasons for using. Not just physical pain, but also emotional pain. And look where that got me. The avoiding just doesn't work. Or I guess it works for a brief period, but then makes it worse.

FACILITATOR: In a way it gives the pain more power, doesn't it? And sometimes the struggle against pain is worse than the pain itself. This isn't about punishing ourselves by sitting with pain; we're practicing bringing gentleness to it, making space for it, so that we have some freedom and we can change our relationship to it and respond in the way we'd really like to.

Here the facilitator introduces the idea of becoming aware of sensations of discomfort as simply another phenomenon that is occurring in the present moment and reminds the group that the idea of the practice is not just remaining focused on the breath to the exclusion of all other experience, but noticing and becoming curious about all phenomena, including discomfort. The facilitator ties this into the experience of craving and our tendency to react automatically. The facilitator also emphasizes that mindfulness is not necessarily about changing one's experience, but about creating a different relationship to it. This includes creating space for difficult experiences, which may help participants begin to discover that what is so painful is sometimes not the sensation or feeling itself, but the aversion to it or ongoing attempts to control it.

Craving and Desire

The challenge of craving or desire often arises in the form of a longing for peacefulness or relaxation. It is a common belief among beginning mindfulness practitioners that deep concentration and bliss mean "good" practice and anything less is "bad" or "not working." It's easy for meditators to feel that something is wrong with their practice when they notice they have been repeatedly distracted. Similarly, many beginning meditators come with the idea that the purpose is relaxation, and they expect immediate freedom from stress, struggle, and discomfort. They are often disappointed when practice does not immediately bring about these states. Thus, it is helpful to remind participants that we practice to increase our awareness and to develop a spacious, nonjudgmental attitude toward all experience,

including discomfort, distraction, or stress. Experiences of peace or relaxation are explored in the same way that discomfort might be, with careful attention to any misconceptions that these states are the goal of practice.

PARTICIPANT 1: I found this practice very relaxing.

FACILITATOR: Okay. Were there particular sensations you noticed in your body?

PARTICIPANT 1: Just a feeling of ease. I was also less anxious. I noticed my mind wasn't wandering as much. It really worked this time.

FACILITATOR: What do you mean when you say it "worked"?

PARTICIPANT 1: I felt calmer. Usually my mind is just all over the place, and that is one of my biggest triggers for drinking. Just coming back to what is actually going on in the moment. I was really surprised by how well it worked.

FACILITATOR: So you noticed that your mind wasn't wandering quite as much and that you were feeling calmer.

PARTICIPANT 1: Yes.

FACILITATOR: And it sounds like you believed this meant it was "working." Do you think it will always be relaxing when you meditate?

PARTICIPANT 1: (*laughs*) No, probably not.

FACILITATOR: It sounds like a very pleasant experience. And it is also helpful to remember that every time you do it, it is different. Sometimes you might find yourself feeling peaceful and relaxed and experiencing all these pleasant sensations, other times you might feel sleepy or restless or agitated. This does not mean that the meditation is "not working" or that we are doing something wrong. It is simply what's happening, and we are practicing being more aware of it, and maybe a little less reactive.

Restlessness and Agitation

Restlessness is a common experience in meditation, experienced both physically and mentally (e.g., racing thoughts, excessive planning or rumination). As with all these challenges, we turn attention toward the experience rather than attempt to suppress or control it. One might begin by acknowledging its presence and approaching it with curiosity, perhaps noticing where it lives in the body and if there is any reaction to the experience.

PARTICIPANT 1: I got tired of the repetition in the audio recording, hearing the same thing over and over again. I noticed that at one point last night I got really agitated. So I just turned it off.

FACILITATOR: Okay, interesting! What did the agitation feel like?

PARTICIPANT 1: Just restless and like, “When will this end? I just want to turn it off.”

FACILITATOR: So it sounds like there were some sensations in the body, and also the thought “I want to turn this off”? If you all remember what we talked about last time: Whatever comes up is part of your mindfulness practice. That includes the agitation, the thoughts, the urge to act on thoughts, all of this. It may be interesting to check that out for a bit: the experience of agitation and the sensations and thoughts that go along with it, even just an extra moment or two. What else did people notice?

PARTICIPANT 2: Sometimes when I am practicing, I find that my mind gets caught in thinking about the instructions . . . why is she saying this or that, why is there such a long pause, what’s coming next? And then I catch myself and try and come back to the practice.

FACILITATOR: So you noticed the mind getting caught up in questioning or analyzing, and then you guided your attention back. When that happened, was there any judgment?

PARTICIPANT 2: Yeah, like, “Come on, there you go, overanalyzing things again.”

FACILITATOR: Okay. Did you notice any emotion?

PARTICIPANT 2: Yeah, some frustration.

FACILITATOR: All right, thank you. Again, and we will return to this repeatedly throughout the course, the idea here is not to get rid of the thoughts or even judgment that comes up. We’re not fighting or getting rid of anything. We’re just pausing and noticing, becoming aware of whatever is going on. So when you find yourself going into analyzing or creating a story about what’s happening, the moment you become aware of that, that’s a moment of mindfulness. Each time you become aware, simply letting go and beginning again . . . without forcing or struggling, even if you have to do this over and over again. And if you become aware of struggle, just noticing that with the same gentle attention, letting go of that, starting again.

Drowsiness/Sleepiness

Drowsiness is another common experience in meditation practice, particularly in the body scan, which often involves lying down with eyes closed. This may be in part just the natural response of the body to settling down and taking a break from the hectic pace of our lives. However, sleepiness and drowsiness can be included in our attention. One might observe the experience of drowsiness itself: What does

it feel like? Is it possible to pay attention to the moments when we are startled into wakefulness? What is the mind's reaction to feeling sleepy? Is there self-judgment? If sleepiness is persistent, we might also offer suggestions for ways to work with this mind state.

PARTICIPANT: I made the mistake of doing the body scan in my bedroom and I fell asleep.

FACILITATOR: What was your response when you noticed you'd fallen asleep?

PARTICIPANT: Well, at first, it was fine because it was just relaxing, but when it happened a few times I got frustrated with myself.

FACILITATOR: Do you remember any thoughts or physical experiences that went with that frustration? How did you know you were experiencing frustration?

PARTICIPANT: Just kind of a feeling of agitation and feeling like I'm not listening to the instructions.

FACILITATOR: So a physical feeling of agitation and the thought, like, "I'm not listening to the instructions"?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

FACILITATOR: What do you think it would be like to just bring curiosity to the experience of frustration, to that drowsiness right before you fall asleep, or the startled response when you first wake up, noticing the thoughts that go through your mind and the emotional and physical feeling of frustration?

PARTICIPANT: I don't know. I usually try to fix it or just get frustrated.

FACILITATOR: It's possible to make all of that part of your practice; in fact, it *is* your practice in that moment because this is what is happening. We are practicing observing whatever our experience is with curiosity, a more open and relaxed awareness, and without judgment of this experience as "right" or "wrong." Just letting it be what it is. You might play with that this coming week.

If you notice sleepiness happening over and over again, though, it might be helpful to sit up straight and be in a more alert posture. You could even practice in a standing posture. You can also keep your eyes open while you are practicing to let some light in, or try practicing at a different time of day. Just experiment with it and see what happens.

Once again, the facilitator draws attention to observing the present moment, including the experience of sleepiness, and encourages curiosity about both its

qualities and the mind's reaction to it (e.g., self-judgment, irritation, frustration). She also offers ways to work with it if it repeatedly arises.

Doubt

As stated earlier, doubt may express itself in different forms, including doubt about the practice itself and/or about one's ability to engage in it. Self-judgment is a particularly common manifestation of both aversion and doubt in these beginning stages of meditation. It often accompanies, or is experienced as, a reaction to one of the other challenges such as sleepiness, restlessness, or discomfort. It may also occur in reaction to a thought, sensation, or emotional state. We find it useful to repeatedly inquire about experiences of judgment, particularly in response to anything challenging or unpleasant that arises (e.g., sleepiness, pain, or anger). Inquiring about doubt or self-judgment not only encourages greater awareness but conveys a wider, gentler, more compassionate stance toward oneself and one's experience. It is also an opportunity for participants to recognize the universality of these experiences as they hear it reflected in the comments of their fellow group members.

WALKING DOWN THE STREET EXERCISE

The intention of this exercise (Practice 2.1) is to allow participants to observe the initial, often habitual, response of the mind to an ambiguous stimulus, and to identify the cascade of thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, and urges that follow. The scenario is purposely very simple and intended to be presented briefly. *It is important to leave the key stimulus ambiguous*; that is, the failure of the imagined person in the scenario to return the greeting should be presented with a neutral tone and language so the facilitator does not suggest any explanation for the behavior (i.e., "the person just continues to walk by and does not wave back"). This allows the mind to project its own story onto the situation.

Following the exercise, participants are invited to describe any thoughts that went through their minds and any feelings, sensations, or urges to react. It may be helpful to list these on the whiteboard. We often use columns to differentiate thoughts, physical sensations, emotions, and urges, and to illustrate the ways these experiences affect one another (e.g., a thought eliciting a feeling). As discussed previously, we sometimes inquire whether the reaction is familiar, encouraging participants to begin recognizing patterns of thoughts, assumptions, or reactions when encountering triggers or situations that may be unclear or unsettling in some way.

This exercise also allows participants to see the varying interpretations one

can make of the same event, and to recognize these as “interpretations” or stories rather than “facts.” Being able to recognize and label reactions in this way may help increase awareness of habitual reactions and create a pause in the seemingly automatic chain of experiences. We also use this exercise as preparation for the next practice, which involves becoming aware of one’s thoughts, feelings, and sensations in a situation that may be more challenging and can elicit cravings and urges.

FACILITATOR: What did people notice in that exercise? We don’t need to know about the person or the situation—I am curious about what you noticed about your reactions. [Facilitator notes experiences in separate columns on the whiteboard—thoughts/sensations/emotions/urges—as participants share.]

PARTICIPANT 1: I felt anxious.

FACILITATOR: Okay, and was there a thought associated with that feeling? What happened first, if you recall?

PARTICIPANT 1: First, I felt excited to see him. Then when he didn’t wave, I thought, “Why isn’t he saying hello to me?” and I felt anxious.

FACILITATOR: So you felt excitement when you first saw him, then had the thought “Why isn’t he saying hello?” What did the excitement feel like, do you remember?

PARTICIPANT 1: Kind of a light feeling, especially in my upper body.

FACILITATOR: Lightness, and then when he didn’t wave, you had a thought like “Why isn’t he saying hello?” and a feeling of anxiety. Is that right?

PARTICIPANT 1: Yes.

FACILITATOR: So how did you experience the anxiety? Were there thoughts? Sensations in the body?

PARTICIPANT 1: It wasn’t physical; it was more mental . . . racing thoughts in my mind, and “Why didn’t he wave back? Did he not see me?” or maybe it was personal, like maybe I did something.

FACILITATOR: It sounds like there was some self-doubt in there, an assumption that you had done something wrong. Is this reaction familiar?

PARTICIPANT 1: Yeah, it is. I tend to assume that when things go wrong, it’s my fault.

FACILITATOR: Okay. Did you notice any urges to react in a certain way?

PARTICIPANT 1: Yeah, I wanted to go home. Isolate.

FACILITATOR: Thank you for sharing that—anyone else have a similar or maybe different experience?

PARTICIPANT 2: I went after him, yelling to get his attention.

FACILITATOR: Okay. Do you remember right before you went after him what you felt or thought?

PARTICIPANT 2: Confusion, then the thought “Did he not see me?” Then this urge to run after him, to fix it.

FACILITATOR: So feeling confusion, then a thought, then an urge. Did you notice any sensations that went along with the urge?

PARTICIPANT 2: I noticed my breathing change. It got a little quicker, sort of more abrupt.

The facilitator might ask for a few more examples, using the whiteboard to list thoughts, physical sensations, emotions, and urges in separate columns. This may help participants begin to make these distinctions themselves, teasing apart the seemingly automatic and often overwhelming flood of experience. They may also begin to see how thoughts, feelings, sensations, and urges can proliferate, triggering one another.

FACILITATOR: So you can see here the range of different responses to the same event. Which one is correct? [Participants often comment that no one interpretation is “right.”] There isn’t right or wrong, is there? All just interpretation and reaction. Why might it be important to bring more awareness to these reactions? [The discussion might refer back to the previous week’s discussion of stepping out of automatic ways of reacting, giving ourselves more freedom to make purposeful choices.]

When people are asked what they learned from the exercise, they often comment that they recognize how their interpretations of an event affect their thoughts and emotions and how automatic this process often seems. They also begin to recognize how their interpretations may not be reflective of the truth and may cause them undue distress or lead to reactive behavior. This exercise lays the foundation for the following exercise in which participants are asked to pay attention to the same type of reactivity in a more challenging situation.

URGE SURFING AND DISCUSSION OF CRAVING

This practice (Practice 2.2) is designed to shift the relationship to experiences of cravings or urges to react unskillfully (e.g., use substances) from one of fear or resistance to that of “being with” in a curious and kind way. The exercise invites participants to explore the many elements of craving or urges, observing first the

physical sensations as well as the accompanying thoughts and urges, dismantling an often overwhelming experience that might typically elicit reactivity, feelings of defeat or fear, or attempts to control the experience. Participants practice a curious, compassionate approach versus a habitual or automatic reaction. They are invited to look “underneath” or “behind” the craving; underlying the overwhelming desire for a substance is often a deeper need—perhaps relief from challenging emotions or a desire for joy, peace, or freedom.

Participants are encouraged to choose a reasonable scenario for this exercise, that is, something that has been challenging or stressful but perhaps not the most challenging situation in their lives or their biggest trigger. We often suggest that on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the hardest thing they experience, they choose something around a 3 or 4. They are first asked to picture this challenging situation right up until the point at which they would typically react in some way, and then pause and observe thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations rather than immediately falling into familiar patterns or reactive behavior. It is suggested that they bring a similar exploration and curiosity to this experience as they did with the raisin or to bodily sensations in the body scan. In many ways, this practice encompasses the core of the MBRP approach; we practice recognizing both the discomfort and the accompanying reactions, including urges to escape it or change an unwanted experience. Then, rather than falling into immediate reaction or resisting the experience, we practice pausing and observing what the urge actually feels like. We then practice approaching this experience with gentle, non-judgmental curiosity rather than defaulting to habitual reactive behaviors.

The “urge surfing” is introduced as a metaphor to illustrate the possibility of staying present with the intensity of an urge without becoming subsumed or behaving reactively. Participants are asked to picture the urge as an ocean wave and imagine themselves surfing, using their breath as a surfboard to ride the wave. They are staying in contact with the experience but are not subsumed by it. They are able to balance, and they ride the wave through its peak and its decline. We have found that although some participants find this visualization helpful in relating differently to urges, others have difficulty with either visualization or staying present with the intensity of an urge or craving. We thus present it as simply one option with which to experiment and have encouraged participants to alter and change the metaphor to suit their individual needs. The primary intention in using the metaphor is to convey the possibility of observing urges and cravings without having to act upon or fight them. This practice not only reveals the impermanent nature of craving, but it also increases participants’ confidence in their ability to experience discomfort and stay present with intensity.

The practice instructions also include a suggestion that participants ask themselves, “What do I really need in this situation?” Craving or urges to react in response to a trigger can, at times, be primarily physiological. However, they may

also mask another emotional state (e.g., loneliness, hurt, resentment, or feelings of betrayal) with an intense desire to alleviate the discomfort. It may be a sign that our needs are not being met. When cravings or urges arise, it is sometimes helpful to investigate a little further what is really wanted or needed. We find, of course, that it is seldom the thing we are reaching for. The object of desire may be a poor substitute that satisfies us for a moment but inevitably leaves a deeper dissatisfaction in its wake, intensifying the future cycle of desire.

We begin inquiry by asking what specific physical sensations, thoughts, and emotions arose for people in this scenario, specifying that we are not so much interested in the scenario itself, but in what they noticed about their experience. We inquire whether there were emotions or sensations that felt intolerable, or urges to escape the experience. Maybe this was accompanied by a thought or belief that they “couldn’t stand it” or needed to “fix” it. This can help develop a curiosity about the experience, learning to relate to craving differently, perhaps even with curiosity. At this point, however, the main intention of the exercise is to offer an experiential understanding of “being with” the urge or craving rather than “giving in” to it.

Following some inquiry about experiences, it can be helpful to illustrate on the whiteboard the theory behind urge surfing (see Figure 2.1). When a craving begins, it might feel as though its intensity will continue to grow until we act on it (left-hand graph). However, if we wait it out, the craving may naturally ebb and flow, like a wave (right-hand graph). Eventually, it will subside.

FACILITATOR: Most of us have the idea that once craving or urges begin and there is that impulse to react, the intensity of it will continue to increase until we act on it or stop it somehow. We often imagine craving as a straight line continuing upward until we alleviate it by using (*drawing diagonal line sloping upward on the whiteboard*). In reality, craving is typically less like a line and more like a wave; it ebbs to a peak, and then, if we wait it out, it



FIGURE 2.1. The theory behind urge surfing.

will naturally subside (*drawing a line rising, reaching a plateau, then falling, like a wave*).

One way to get rid of an urge or craving is to engage in a behavior, such as substance use, in response to it. We might feel relief or happiness for a while, but this is a little like trying to quench thirst by drinking salt water: you are temporarily relieved, but then you are left even thirstier than you were to begin with. Attempting to fight the craving might be another way we try to control it. However, when cravings and urges are suppressed, they often just get stronger. So what happens if instead of trying to get rid of or suppress it, we just stay with it without reacting?

As we keep practicing this surfing, the intensity of the urge or craving tends to decrease a little bit (*drawing shallower curves*), and we get better at waiting it out and become more confident that we are able to ride this wave without getting wiped out.

PARTICIPANT: Maybe that would work to wait it out once, but then the craving just comes back again.

FACILITATOR: Sure, it probably will come back. And if you used alcohol or a drug to make it go away, wouldn't it come back too? Cravings might arise and pass many times in one day, and this way of being with the experience, or "surfing," may need to be practiced over and over again. It does get a little easier, and the cravings often become less intense because you're not feeding them or fighting them. Whereas when we use in response to the craving, we're feeding it, making it stronger, and when we attempt to fight it, we often wear ourselves down and are more likely to feel defeated and want to give up.

There's often the thought or belief "I can't do this." And we're learning that we are able to do this differently, but it takes practice. You've just done it here, you experienced craving or an urge and successfully stayed present without acting on it. Maybe it wasn't as intense as what you might encounter in the future, but just like when you are first learning to surf, you ride small waves first, you practice. Once those become easier, then you can take on bigger ones.

MOUNTAIN MEDITATION

The previous urge surfing practice sometimes elicits challenging experiences or arousal. We thus conclude the session with a stabilizing and grounding practice. We typically use the Mountain Meditation guided practice (Practice 2.3) adapted from a practice used by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994). The meditation involves visualizing

a mountain and calling to mind qualities of stability, strength, and dignity. Participants are asked to imagine merging with this image of the mountain, embodying these qualities as their own and experiencing a sense of poise and solidity, even in the face of changing circumstances, situations, and inner states. We have found that most participants respond favorably to this metaphor and have little trouble imagining qualities of strength and constancy. However, some express discomfort or difficulty imagining themselves as the mountain, either feeling incapable of experiencing such strength and solidity or having trouble with the visualization. Just as with any other practice, we encourage a gentle, kind awareness of the reactions that arise. It may also be useful to play with the metaphor, modifying it as needed. Picturing the mountain is just a vehicle to contact an experience of the qualities it holds, and to recognize these same qualities in ourselves. For those with difficulties visualizing, they might let go of efforts to find an image and instead simply invite in the qualities of rootedness, dignity, and strength.

PRACTICE FOR THIS WEEK

In addition to continuing daily practice of the body scan and engaging mindfully in a daily activity, participants are asked to use the Noticing Triggers Worksheet (Handout 2.2) to log triggers they encounter over the upcoming week and note any subsequent thoughts, emotions, and physical reactions (Handout 2.3). They are also asked to describe behaviors they engage in to cope with the experience. The purpose of this worksheet is to bring both the triggers and reactions into fuller awareness and to continue the practice of differentiating among thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations. The intention is *not* to track whether the reaction was “good” or “bad,” but rather to notice habitual or “automatic” reactions. Participants also complete the Daily Practice Tracking Sheet (Handout 2.4) to supplement their awareness of what they are learning and to give facilitators insight into any concerns or barriers.

CLOSING

Although we have found that typically by the end of the session any anxiety or craving participants experience during the urge surfing exercise has waned, we invite them to briefly state one to two words describing how they are feeling (sensation, mind state, or emotion). Again, it can be helpful for facilitators to model this by offering an observation of their own experience in the same one- to two-word format.