



Mindfulness is learning how to be fully aware of your body, mind, and feelings in the present moment without bias or judgment.

JUST BE

You can just sit and be. Use a bench or comfortable “no thinking” spot on the ground. Forget “to do” lists or multitasking.

THEN . . .

BE KIND TO YOURSELF AND OTHERS

Think or say kind, compassionate words about yourself, your friends and family, or community, or those who need your care of concern. You could also choose to name them in a prayer.

BREATHE DEEPLY

Breathe in through your nose, hold your breath as you count a chosen number of times, then breathe out through your mouth. If you wish, say a word or sound of your choice and REPEAT. Experiment with the length of time you hold your breath. Instead of counting, you could choose to say a given list of persons you wish to remember or pray for.

TRY A WHOLE BODY SCAN

Become aware of different parts of your body, one part at a time. Begin either at your head and move toward your feet or at your toes and move up to your head. Move, exercise, or notice the feeling of each body part.

DO A MINDFULNESS WALK

Walk “aimlessly” to wherever your feet will take you in the area near your station. Pay attention to your feet and legs and the surface under them. What sights, sounds, smells, and feelings do you experience along the way near the station? Some people also choose to do prayer walking.

USE EACH OF YOUR FIVE SENSES, ONE AT A TIME

Look and see – shapes, sizes, colors, light and dark, location. You don’t need to name or identify, just notice likenesses and differences.

Hear and listen – Pitch, tone, volume, intensity of sound in the world around you, animals, people, wind, water, rustling or crunching.

Touch and feel – coolness and warmth, roughness and smoothness, hardness and softness.

Sniff and smell – plant fragrances, animal smells, soil, air freshness or pollution, smells of industry, danger.

Taste – but only if you are SURE something is safe to taste.

Special Things to Do or Observe at This Station:

Station M is located in a quiet section of the trail as it winds through a pine forest.

Visitors to M can try any of the suggested general activities but can also use this site to REFLECT AND REVIEW WHAT THEY HAVE DONE AT OTHER STATIONS or can plan and question as a starting point before they go to the other sites. While the user can meditate at all of the seven stations, this setting provides an opportunity to choose a preferred form of mindfulness. That could be a faith-based approach that could include prayer walking or meditating on individuals in Scripture who also communicated with their God as they walked in the wilderness. Others might choose approaches used in the Orient or those used by Native Americans.

FOREST BATHING

Station M is a good place to practice forest bathing or shinrin-yoku, an approach to mindfulness that originated in Japan. It promises to bring health benefits and stress reduction to people who currently live or work in cities and spend most of their time indoors in spaces where they constantly use digital devices or go outside to areas covered with pavement or blacktop.

The Japanese government began using the term forest bathing in 1982 to encourage urban workers to connect to a forest for even short time periods to rejuvenate. In the Orient, it was inspired by Buddhist and Shintu practices but as it was later used in locations worldwide it was simply adapted and studied by others.

Scientists have documented the real benefits of being in contact with the sights, smells, sounds and chemical properties of trees, especially evergreens, on both animals in captivity and on humans. They have measured decreases in blood pressure and stress hormones, a boost to the immune system, accelerated recovery from surgery or illness, less anxiety, and increases in creativity and the ability to focus.

Basically, the practice involves the choices of deep breathing of clean forest air, the use of all five senses one at a time and the other items described in the introduction above, but especially in contact with TREES. It can be done out in nature centers or parks but also in your own backyard with a nearby tree.

DARKNESS AND LIGHT

Station M is the site where a person is most likely to experience a real sense of darkness and, at times, cold and dampness in the shade of numerous pines. Small glimpses of light may be seen when looking toward the school or the open field, but there may be a sense of relief when coming out into the open sunlight at trail's end or on the agricultural area. Note that there is less vegetation under the trees and that some lower branches may have lost their needles. An Indian pipe plant does not have chlorophyll and does not need sunlight to grow.

There are varying amounts of light depending on the height of the pines. This is a result of “ecological succession,” a situation where seeds from one very large pine at the west end of the property reseeded the entire pasture. That pine had been left to shade animals in what was then an open pasture. Seeds in the cones it dropped grew up beneath it. These, in turn, seeded more young trees, and over the years the entire open area was replanted in trees. Each new group of seedlings was noticeably shorter than the earlier group. What kind of continuity and change has taken place in your life?

Our lives have periods of darkness. Reflect on times of darkness and pain in your life or the lives of others. We may not really appreciate the light in our lives until after we have experienced a period of darkness. Think of the hope for light ahead. Reflect on persons who may need to be thought of kindly or kept in your prayers.

While some visitors might see their experience at this site as a place from which to emerge from darkness into light, others may welcome the peace and fragrance of the whispering pines as a favorite place to come to after a day filled with loud, harrowing events.

AIMLESS WALKING

The gravel trail close to this station drops on a steep incline that sometimes causes it to wash out and may have muddy areas below. Returning to the bench requires an uphill climb. What sensations do you feel as you walk?

When pine branches are coated with hoarfrost or snow, they provide unusual visual views or photo opportunities.

An earthen mound left from when the trail was constructed has sometimes been a “midden,” where squirrels insert harvested nuts in small holes. What animals might use the small brush piles as a shelter?

Examine the fine needles of the white pine. They grow in clusters of five. Although the tree remains green all winter, in autumn some of the needles turn brown and fall off.

Shuffle through and feel the thick carpet of needles under some of the trees. Pine needles contain tannic acid and make a fine mulch for plants needing acidic soil. They can be used as a winter cover and later raked into paths to keep weeds down.

Crush and smell the needles. Green pine needles are safe to nibble. Smell the pitch that flows from injured parts of the bark. Listen to the wind singing through the boughs. Find a pinecone that still has seeds in it. Why do the seeds have little wings?

Plant a seed in a cup of soil and let it grow there until you can plant it in a chosen spot. How long might it take for the seed to grow as tall as you are?

Spruce, red pine, and other evergreens have been planted along the trail and the school boundary.

COMMUNITY SERVICE OR CREATION CARE

The trail near Bench M has an extensive growth of an invasive species, both American and European Buckthorn. This shrub or small tree gets its leaves before other plants in spring and retains them longer in fall, thus choking or shading out many wildflowers, vines and bushes. Its laxative berries are not

edible for humans but are eaten by some birds and spread widely. Trying to control it with Round-up or other herbicides is hazardous for people and animals. Cutting, girdling the bark of larger specimens, or pulling young growth continue to be important means of control. Identifying the invasive species and NOT cutting a desirable plant, such as winterberry holly, with similar berries and leaves is important.

Volunteering to help control buckthorn is an important way to help to keep the nature trail diversified and there for community education and enjoyment.

MEDITATION PRAYER

Dear Lord,

Help us to join all creation in singing your praise. As we see the changes that have taken place in our environment, help us to also know your unchanging love. You have promised to be with us to the ends of the earth, in dark times and in good times. Thank you for your endless love. Amen.