Leaves on a Stream Exercise

This is the leaves on a stream exercise.

The purpose of this exercise is to notice a shift from looking from your thoughts, to looking at your thoughts. And as you are looking at your thoughts, to notice that you don’t need to control or change those thoughts in any way, but that those thoughts will come and go naturally, without having to do anything to control them.

I invite you to get as comfortable as you can, hopefully with both feet on the ground, sitting comfortably in a chair, and allowing your eyes to close, or maintaining a soft gaze in front of you.

As you settle into the chair, I’d invite you to take three deep breaths

*(pause for 5 seconds)*

And with each inhale, maybe noticing how the air feels a little cooler, or cleaner, as it goes in

*(pause for 5 seconds)*

And with each exhale, noticing how the air is a little warmer . . .

*(pause for 5 seconds)*

And now I’ll invite you to turn your attention to your body as it’s sitting in the chair.

Notice where your body is touching the chair. Some places lightly, some places more fully . . .

And notice that it doesn’t take any effort at all to just be where you are.

*(pause for 5 seconds)*

And now I would like you to picture in your minds eye, a beautiful field . . .

And as you bring that image to mind, see if you can imagine that the room around you fades away and that you find yourself in the middle of that pleasant field

*(pause for 5 seconds)*

Perhaps on a warm sunny day . . . perhaps you can feel the sun on your skin.

Maybe you can feel a little breeze in the air . . .

Or maybe smell some coolness in the air . . .

*(pause for 5 seconds)*

And as you look across this field, at the far distant end of that field, you see a tree . . .

And you start walking toward that tree . . .

And with each step, you become more, and more present with where you are . . .

*(pause for 5 seconds)*
And finally, you start to approach that tree . . . and you go over to it and notice that it is on the edge of a creek bed . ..

So you decide to take a seat next to that creek bed and you place your hands down on the ground and you can feel the coolness of the earth against your hands . . .

As you make your way to that seated position you look up and you can see the sun peeking through the trees . . .

And you can see the leaves rocking back and forth in the treetops as the wind makes its way across them . . .

*(pause for 5 seconds)*

And as you look below, you notice a stream and can see it flowing gently around rocks and trees, descending downhill . . . and you can hear the sound of the water trickling and splashing against the rocks . . .

And once in a while, a big leaf drops into the stream and floats away down that stream . . .

And you watch it float by, at it’s own pace . . .

*(pause for 5 seconds)*

And now I’ll invite you to become conscious of your thoughts . . . and each time a thought pops into your head, I’d invite you to imagine that it’s written on one of those leaves . . .

If you think in words, you can put those words on a leaf . . .

If you think in images, put those on the leaf as an image . . .

*(pause for 15 seconds)*

The goal here is to stay beside the stream and allow the leaves on the stream to keep flowing by . . .

Don’t try to make the stream go faster, or slower . . .

Don’t try to change what you find on the leaves or in the stream . . .

So every time you have a thought, that goes on a leaf . . .

*(pause for 10 seconds)*

Maybe you have a thought “This is really relaxing” and that goes on a leaf . . .

Or maybe you have a thought, “I don’t know if I’m really doing this right” and that thought goes on a leaf . . .

*(pause for 20 seconds)*
When your mind wanders and you notice that you stop having thoughts on those leaves, just notice that and try to bring yourself back and put that thought on a leaf: “I stopped having thoughts on a leaf.”

(pause for 25 seconds)

Notice that it doesn’t take any effort at all, that without any struggle, your thoughts will come, and then they will go. . .

And notice what it is like to watch your thoughts from this more detached place . . . to look at your thoughts, rather than from your thoughts . . .

(pause for 25 seconds)

Now I would like you to see maybe the last few leaves as they come down the stream . . . and put your final thoughts on those leaves . . .

(pause for 10 seconds)

And then I’d invite you to bring your awareness back to your body . . .

Seeing if you can have a sense of what it’s like to be sitting there on that creek bank. And you stand up, feeling more present and grounded. And you start to walk back across the field . . .

(pause for 5 seconds)

And you get to the end of the field from where you started . . .

I’d like you to now bring your attention back to your breath . . . taking a few deep breaths . . .

And without opening your eyes, I’d ask you to bring your awareness back to where your body is now, sitting in that chair.

Picturing in your minds eye what the room will look like around you when you do open your eyes . . .

(pause for 5 seconds)

And when you are ready, go ahead and open your eyes . . . and I invite you to carry the intention of bringing this mindfulness into your life throughout the rest of your day . . .