

R.E.S.T. - A Guided Practice for the Tired & Weary

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Intro

Is mindfulness really for everyone? It depends on whose voices are allowed to respond to this question. Western mindfulness often presents practices as universally beneficial, making the obvious answer seem to be yes. But does mindfulness mean the same thing to everyone? Do all practices fit all people? Have we fully considered ancestral grief, transgenerational trauma, nervous systems, and brain science when we define mindfulness practice? Although we frequently use words like diversity and inclusion in mindfulness communities, are we truly mindful of how complex and neurodiverse we are as human beings?

Often, in my personal practice, I contemplate the fact that many people experience a great deal of stress while trying to focus on the breath and control their attention for long periods of time. In fact, mindfulness practices that instruct people to confront their inner world directly, and to quiet the mind, can feel very disorienting for BIPOC, trauma survivors, people from marginalized communities, and even those of us who are simply exhausted due to hardships and life. Not to mention, many of us who find ourselves living in the abovementioned identity locations and communities are survivors of a racist, capitalist, and patriarchal society that devalues our bodies, rest, relaxation, and our very existence.

It's unrealistic to assume that our psyches are somehow magically separate from the ever-present social and political chaos that we are forced to exist in. The impact of systemic injustice lives in the tissues of our bodies and within the corners of our psyches. And these are the realities we should consider when discussing mindfulness and meditation.

As this is further compounded by the fact we're in the middle of a global pandemic, and the rise of white supremacist terrorist groups, it is essential—now more than ever—that we find ways to pause, grieve, and feel the fullness of reconnecting with the ritual of resting and being aware. As a whole, our culture has failed to provide ways for us to return to and remember the natural rhythm of rest that we often see so beautifully

reflected in nature and in many Indigenous cultures around the world. I hope the “R.E.S.T.” practice will be a refuge for many who may find slowing down difficult during these challenging times.

What Is R.E.S.T.?

R.E.S.T. is an antidote to capitalism-fatigue and self-improvement, in that it focuses more on being than doing. This practice is intended to help us integrate moments of personal intimacy and awareness into our daily lives. R.E.S.T. is an invitation to become more familiar with our inner spaciousness—and give ourselves permission to pause and relax into this space, without guilt.

R.E.S.T. is neither a form of sleep therapy, nor a call for us to take more naps—which can easily become an escape from reality. Instead, it is an invitation for all people to rediscover belonging and awareness in “just being.” In this practice, our natural state of restfulness is our starting and finishing point. As such, there is no longer the burden of needing to “calm down” or “manage your emotions”—phrases that are often reflective of the language used by white racist culture to silence the voices of BIPOC who openly name and speak out against injustice, hate, and violence. We learn to experience ourselves in a new and liberated way, where the pleasure of resting in awareness is sacred and healing. There are no prerequisite practices for awareness; we are awareness. Resting naturally and embracing spaciousness is the practice, and the four pillars of R.E.S.T. will help us reimagine meditation, liberation, and rest as one.

Release, Empty, Surrender, Trust

There are many options for working with the practice of R.E.S.T. Some may prefer to follow these pillars in order as a complete practice, while others may find it better to spend time with one pillar for an extended period of time. Ultimately, these pillars should become living mantras in everyday activities or during any informal meditation session. I encourage testing the pillars as a formal meditation practice, then spending time with specific points that speak to your needs at the moment.

R is for Relax your attention. Release.

E is for Exhale all striving. Empty.

S is for Sense the silence. Surrender.

T is for Tune in to awareness. Trust.

Relax your attention. Release. The R serves as a gentle reminder to allow your attention to rest naturally, not focusing on anything in particular. Another way of conveying this message is “Be as you are.” Your attention is constantly being pulled to sights and sounds as it is used to complete various tasks throughout the day, but seldomly is it invited to relax. When you release your attention, as opposed to turning your attention outward to attend to something, a spontaneous feeling of relaxation arises. As your attention settles and relaxes more deeply in its natural state, you will recognize awareness as a place for all your mental and emotional activity to rest.

An image that comes to mind for R is a pebble gradually sinking in a bottomless body of water.

Exhale all striving. Empty. The E is an invitation to let go of all imagined ideas of what should and shouldn't be happening in the moment and in life. Opening to and being accepting of the present moment is how we let go of unnecessary efforting. Embodying the E can be challenging because many adopt the belief that success in meditation practice is based on the ability to achieve some form of fulfillment. One common example of striving is attempting to clear the mind in order to reach a state beyond thinking or feeling. When such an intention is adopted, a natural gap between the moment and the desired state is created, leaving the practitioner no choice but to strive to fulfill our imagined sense of lack.

An image that comes to mind for E is someone riding a bike down a hill and pedaling with lots of effort, and then letting go of pedaling by enjoying the ease of naturally being carried by the momentum of the hill.

Sense the silence. Surrender. The S points to silence—the natural quietness that seems to hide in the background of the mind. This silence is

not dependent on the ceasing of external sounds or inner thoughts and feelings. We can sense the silence of the mind during all experiences, no matter how intense. Sensing, here, means becoming aware of this ever-present silence and also feeling the spacious quality of the silence. Once the S is mastered, you will learn that this silence and spaciousness can never be overpowered by any experience or turned off by any noise.

An image that comes to mind for S is looking at the space around the objects in a room and then feeling the space in the room.

Tune in to awareness. Trust. The T calls you to trust your personal experience of being aware. When you tune in to awareness, you recognize that you are aware of the fact that you are aware. Awareness is the knowing quality of your mind found in all experience. Being aware is an effortless experience, yet it feels like effort is needed. It is inherent to being, just like heat is inherent to fire. Because the content within awareness can be so distracting, it may seem like you have to do something in order to cultivate awareness. However, the invitation to tune in to awareness encourages us to notice that we are awareness, and awareness is always present.

An image that comes to mind for T is the sun effortlessly shining during all weather conditions.

R.E.S.T Instructions

- 1. Find a comfortable posture of your choice.** This could be a sitting posture, standing, or lying down.
- 2. If you choose to keep your eyes open,** let your gaze rest, lowered on a point in front of you. If you choose to keep your eyes closed, rest your eyelids comfortably.
- 3. Set your intention** toward relaxing and effortlessness.
- 4. Whenever you notice yourself shifting** into “doing” or “thinking,” simply return back to your original intention, and begin again.
- 5. Relax your attention.** Release any fixation that you might have on any object. Be as ordinary and natural as possible. If you notice that your attention becomes fixated or distracted, simply relax.
- 6. Exhale all striving.** Empty yourself of any effort toward achieving a particular outcome or result. Remain open and accepting to the present moment. Let your experience be as it is.
- 7. Sense the silence.** Surrender all attachment to what you notice, and feel the intuitive sense of silence within you. Be aware of the silence and feel the vastness of the silence.
- 8. Tune in to awareness.** Recognize that you are naturally aware, and you are conscious of this awareness. Trust this effortless knowing and the silence. There’s nothing to do, and nowhere to go. Just rest.
- 9. When you are ready to end the practice,** gently bring your attention to your surroundings and invite simple movements to your body.

Notes

Source

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About this e-book

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