

Easy Rest Reference Manual

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Section 1: Introduction

BASIC MINDFULNESS AND EASY REST

Most people begin their training in Basic Mindfulness by learning how to do a technique I call Easy Rest. Easy Rest is a simplified version of Focus on Rest, which is one of the “5 Ways” that make up the core curriculum of Basic Mindfulness. The name Easy Rest is an abbreviation for “Focus on Rest: Easy Version.”

When you do Easy Rest, you allow your attention to move back and forth between two soothing experiences that can be easily found or created, hence the name Easy Rest. The two experiences are “Blank” and “Relaxed.” Blank in this context refers to the darkness, brightness, or gray that you see when you close your eyes. Relaxed refers to any sense that *at least some of* your muscles are relaxed or that you are *at least somewhat* settled into your posture. We will refer to Blank and Relaxed collectively as “restful states.”

In theory you could begin your Basic Mindfulness Training with any of the 5 Ways, and indeed some people do begin with more elaborate techniques such as Focus In or Focus Out. But there are a couple of reasons why many people start off with Easy Rest. First, Easy Rest is a technique that can be learned quickly and applied immediately in your life. Second, Easy Rest serves as a user-friendly introduction to the art of Noting.

Noting is the general apparatus for focusing used in four of the 5 Ways. When you note, you let your attention freely float among some predefined set of sensory experiences. As you do this, you try to be clear about which of those experiences you’re focusing on at any given moment.

When you do Easy Rest, the set of experiences you note is rather small—just the two restful states, Blank and Relaxed. Later on in your training, you’ll learn the standard version of Focus on Rest. That involves noting six types of restful states instead of just two: Blank and Relaxed plus four others. You will also learn other techniques that involve Noting:

Focus In (Noting Feel, Image, Talk)

Focus Out (Noting Touch, Sight, Sound)

Focus on Change (Noting Flow and Vanishing)

MORE ABOUT BLANK AND RELAXED

Now let’s talk a bit more about the meaning of Blank and Relaxed.

In the description that follows it will be helpful to use the slash symbol (/) to mean “and/or.” So A/B (pronounced A and-or B) will mean one of three things:

- Just A
- Just B
- Both A & B at the same time

When you do the Easy Rest technique, “Blank” is defined as the background field of darkness/brightness that you see in front of/behind your eyes after you close them. For most people this takes the form of a marbled mixture of dark patches, bright patches and grays. But for some people it tends to be more pure darkness or more pure brightness (hence the description darkness/brightness). This background field represents a blank mental screen—something you can focus on to clear your mind.

Of course when you close your eyes you may be aware of visual experiences other than darkness/brightness. For one thing, you may be aware of visual thoughts (i.e., image activity) or patterns of color (typically pinks and purples). When you do Easy Rest, if mental images arise, try to look behind (or through or around) them to the background blank, which is always there. If colors are present, try to focus on how dark or bright they are rather on the color itself.

So to find Blank, all you have to do is pay attention to what happens to your visual experience when you close your eyes and ignore any visual thoughts or colors that may be present. What you’ll be left with is either...

- A uniform and soothing sense of darkness or
- A uniform and soothing sense of brightness or
- An interesting mixture of both.

You can consider gray to be a kind of brightness. Also consider any of the above three possibilities to be as good as any of the others.

Defined in this way, Blank represents the simplest possible form of visual experience—what happens when you ignore color and form and just tune into the general level of illumination.

“Relaxed” is just an abbreviated way of saying “physical relaxation.” As defined within the context of Basic Mindfulness, Relaxed refers to *any* level or *any* spatial extent of muscle relaxation as well as any sense that you are physically settled into your posture. Notice that, by this definition, you don’t need to eliminate all tension, discomfort or agitation in order to experience being relaxed. Something as simple as dropping your shoulders will create enough Relaxed to focus on.

Blank and Relaxed are naturally present anytime you close your eyes and settle into a posture, whether standing, seated or lying down. In fact, relaxation can even be experienced as you move around if you “relax into the movement.” Indeed relaxing into a movement is the essence of grace. If you can consciously tune into the actual sensation of relaxing into your movements you can experience a kind of bliss as you go about ordinary activities.

So, Blank and Relaxed are intrinsically present whenever you close your eyes or settle into a posture or a movement. In addition, you can intentionally do things to create or deepen these restful states. For example, some people find that briefly opening then closing their eyes enhances the darkness/brightness. And most people can create or enhance relaxation by intentionally relaxing individual body parts, such as the face, jaw, shoulders, arms and so forth. Some people find it helpful to tune into how the rib cage and abdominal muscles relax when they breathe out.

Sometimes the Blank may be stable; other times it may swirl or flow. And likewise for the relaxation sensations; sometimes they stay in one spot, but sometimes they circulate through your whole body. Either possibility can be used to your advantage. If a restful state is

unchanging (stable), let that stability inform your consciousness, stabilizing it. If a restful state flows and circulates, become fascinated, enchanted with how it moves. Either case should increase your sense of being highly concentrated on that restful state.

MORE ABOUT NOTING IN GENERAL

Now let's talk a bit more about what it means to "note" Blank or Relaxed.

Noting consists of a sequence of "acts of noting." Each act of noting consists of two parts:

- A moment of clear acknowledging, during which you recognize that a particular sensory event is present, and
- Several seconds of intense focusing on that sensory event (unless it vanishes too quickly to do that).

The clear acknowledging can be aided by speaking or thinking a word or phrase that describes the sensory event. The intense focusing can be aided by controlling what part of that sensory event you concentrate on and how narrow or broad you choose to make that focus.

Speaking or thinking a word or phrase that describes the sensory event is called labeling. Intentionally narrowing your focus to a small piece of that sensory event is referred to as zooming in. By way of contrast, intentionally broadening your attention to cover the whole of that sensory event is referred to as zooming out. For example, if at a given moment you are aware of being relaxed, you could say out loud or to yourself "Relaxed" to clearly acknowledge its presence. Then as you intently focus on that relaxation, you could zoom in to an area where the relaxation was particularly pronounced or zoom out to cover relaxation as broadly as it may be present in your body.

Labeling and zooming are options associated with the act of Noting. The term option reminds you that, although they are sometimes helpful, they are never required! All that is required for Noting is that you make a sequence of clear acknowledgings and intent focusings.

Noting is a very general apparatus for developing concentration, clarity and equanimity. As you proceed through Basic Mindfulness Training, you'll learn to apply this apparatus to many categories of experience, subjective as well as objective, active as well as restful, impermanent as well as stable.

For more details about Noting, please read *How to Note and Label*.

CUSTOMIZING LABELS TO YOUR TASTE

Some of the sensory categories used in Basic Mindfulness have a standard word in ordinary English, others do not. In the technical vocabulary of Basic Mindfulness, Relaxed means exactly what it means in ordinary English. But there's no single word in English that means "the darkness/brightness in front of/behind your closed eyes." I have arbitrarily chosen to call it Blank (short for Blankness). If that works for you, fine! If not, feel free to create your own word for it. As long as you are clear about how a category is defined, you can label it in whatever way works for you.

Some people, for example, prefer to use "Background" or "Ground" instead of "Blank." Also if it's primarily dark, you may prefer to label it "Dark" instead of Blank. Likewise, if it's primarily bright, you may prefer to label it "Bright" instead of Blank.

Even when it's a mottled mixture of both, you may wish to tune into just the overall bright aspect of the mixture or zoom in to a small bright patch within it. In that case the specific label Bright may seem more natural than the general label Blank. Likewise for the reverse situation. If you're tuning in to the overall dark aspect of the mixture or zooming in to a small dark patch within it, you may prefer the label Dark.

Notice that "Relaxed" is an adjective. Some people prefer the shorter form "Relax," and some people prefer a longer form "Relaxation."

FREE FLOATING VS. RESTRICTED NOTING

The basic way of doing Easy Rest is to freely float between Blank and Relaxed. "Freely float" is actually a technical term with a well-defined definition that involves a few subtleties. To freely float between two or more sensory experiences, you let your attention go to whichever draws you without attempting *much* control. However, you can exert *some* control.

For example, if more than one of the events draws your attention at the very same time, you should just choose one of them to focus on. People often assumed that they are supposed to go to whichever experience is most intense. That's not necessarily so! You may be drawn to one of the experiences because it's interesting or because it's mild and therefore soothing.

When you note, you freely float among a predetermined set of sensory events. On any given occasion it could of course happen that only some of those events actually occur.

For example, it might happen that all you're aware of is Blank without the *hint* of relaxation being present. In that case you would just note Blank over and over again, focusing on it and enjoying it without worrying about the fact that you can't find or create any relaxation.

A superficially similar (but actually quite different) situation is the following. Blank and Relaxed *are* both accessible, but for some reason you find you're only noting Blank and never acknowledging the Relaxation. In that case, you should exercise some control and at least occasionally note Relaxation so that you don't lose contact with the "big picture" of restful experience. Noting each restful state, at least occasionally, is the basic way to do Easy Rest.

On the other hand, you have the option to *intentionally restrict* the events you choose to note. For example, when you do Easy Rest you could decide for a period of time to only note Blank or only note Relaxed. So Easy Rest actually comes in three versions:

- Basic version – Freely float between both Blank and Relaxed (assuming both are available)
- Restricted version 1 – Just note Blank for a while (even though Relaxed may be available)
- Restricted version 2 – Just note Relaxed for a while (even though Blank may be available)

A natural question is, "How long is a while?" I would say at least 10 minutes to avoid becoming frenetic as you shift among options.

Why might you want to intentionally restrict yourself to just Blank or Relaxed for a while? One obvious reason is to get a closer look at an individual flavor of rest, becoming more intimate with

it so that when you go back to freely floating among both (the basic version), things are sharper, clearer and deeper.

When you practice Easy Rest in motion or in life with your eyes open, Blank as we have defined it will not present. (Later on, when you learn the standard version of Focus on Rest, you'll learn about a second type of Blank that *is* available even when your eyes are open.)

DISCOVERING EXPERIENCES THAT TRIGGER RESTFUL STATES

Blank and Relaxed are two of six restful states defined in Basic Mindfulness. The others are mental quiet, emotional peace, listening to external silence and soft focusing your external vision. One interesting thing about restful states is that one of them will often trigger another. For example, you might discover that looking at the Blank causes your body to relax, or that relaxing your body increases the darkness or brightness.

One of the insights that people get from Mindfulness is an appreciation of how one sensory event can trigger (cause, set off) another. The most obvious examples are when objective active states (Touch, Sight, Sound) trigger subjective active states (Feel, Image, Talk). For example, the sound of a bird chirping may trigger a mental picture of it in Image Space, a pleasant smile in Feel Space or a mental comment in Talk Space.

But it can also happen that an active state such as Sound can trigger a restful state such as Relaxation or mental Quiet.

Learning which active states trigger restful states can be useful. If, for example, you know that sound tends to cause relaxation, then you can use that to go deeper, letting the sounds in the background constantly take you deeper and deeper into rest.

When you investigate which active states trigger restful ones you may make surprising discoveries that run contrary to what you would expect. For example, some people discover that thinking (Image/Talk activity) causes them to subtly relax! In that case, instead of immediately getting lost in thoughts, you can continuously focus on the Relaxation they trigger. That will keep you deep and restful even though thoughts are occurring.

So learning which active states trigger restful states is a “trick of the trade” that you can use when you want to focus on rest. Instead of the active states pulling you away they immediately “redirect” you to rest!

A related topic is how a restful state may trigger some other restful states. For example, you might discover that your body tends to subtly relax each time you note Blank. You can use that knowledge to deepen your experience of rest. Things get really interesting when the triggers loop back, for example, if you discover that Blank triggers Relaxed, and Relaxed also intensifies the Blank. In that case, you can then get into a “restful feedback loop” that goes around and around automatically, requiring very little effort to maintain it.



EASY REST IN A NUTSHELL

So, to do Easy Rest, you close your eyes, settle into your posture and let your attention freely float between “Blank” and “Relaxed.” If both of these restful states are present at the same time just choose one to focus on for that moment (to keep things simple). It doesn’t matter which one. As you note these restful states, other sensory experiences will probably occur—mental images, internal talk, external sounds and physical or emotional body sensations. It is of the utmost importance that you not try to get rid of or shut out those experiences. Let them happen in the background while in the foreground of attention you are fascinated with and enjoying the restful states. This is usually not difficult because restful states are by nature pleasant and interesting.

To sum it up in a sound bite...

Easy Rest involves letting your attention go back and forth between an easily found experience that clears your mind and an easily found experience that soothes your body.

Section 2: 5 Point Summary

- 1. Start by placing some attention in the darkness/brightness in front of/behind your closed eyes and some attention over your whole body.**
- 2. Then begin to note “Blank” or “Relaxed.”**
 - If all you’re aware of is Blank, note “Blank.”
 - If all you’re aware of is Relaxed, note “Relaxed.”
 - If, at any given moment, both are available just choose on to focus on. It doesn’t matter which one.
 - Focus on that Blank or Relaxed for a few seconds (unless it disappears immediately).
 - After those few seconds, note again either the same experience or a different one.
- 3. Let other things arise in the background if they wish.**
 - As you note Blank or Relaxed, other things (Touch, Feel, Image, Talk or Sound) may arise, perhaps quite intensely. That’s perfectly okay. Let them arise but in the background of your attention while the foreground of attention is occupied by Blank or Relaxed.
 - If you get pulled away into one of those distractions, gently return to the Blank or Relaxed. Spoken labels may help
- 4. You can still focus on rest even when there is a lot of “unrest.”**
 - Remember that to experience Blank does not require that mental images be absent. And to experience Relaxed does not require that your body be free from all discomfort, tension or agitation. You can have a lot of unrest in your mind and body and still be doing the technique perfectly!
- 5. Remember you have options.**
 - You can speak or think labels or note without labeling, whatever works for you in a given moment.
 - You can zoom in, zoom out or zoom both ways or not intentionally zoom, whatever works for you in a given moment.
 - You can intentionally restrict what you note to just Blank or just Relaxed, or you can use the basic format of free floating between them.
 - You can create restful states by...
 - Opening then closing your eyes to enhance the darkness/brightness.
 - Intentionally relaxing individual body parts to create local relaxation, or straightening up and settling in to create whole body relaxation.

Section 3: Practical Uses

You can use Easy Rest to...

Increase your general level of concentration power

The more continuously you concentrate on restful states the better you feel, motivating you to concentrate even more continuously. This clever strategy creates a positive feedback loop that revs up your concentration power. Thus Easy Rest is an easy way to get a sense of what a highly concentrated state “tastes” like. As you become familiar with that, you’ll find that you can get the same taste during other endeavors such as study, work, interpersonal relationships, exercise, sports, music, lovemaking, prayer and so forth.

Deal with physical discomfort

Focusing on restful states such as Blank and Relaxed creates a container of equanimity. Within that container physical discomforts (pain, fatigue, heat, cold, sleepiness, hunger...) can come and go with less “stickiness” and hence less suffering. Even though you are not paying attention to the discomfort you are still processing it and purifying consciousness. The main factor that breaks up blockages is equanimity, and you’re using the restful states to induce equanimity. (For details on the concept of equanimity, please read *What is Equanimity?*)

Deal with emotional discomfort

The concept here is essentially the same as that for physical discomfort. Emotional discomfort arises through one or a combination of bothersome images/negative talk in your mind combined with unpleasant feel flavors in your body (i.e., body sensations of anger, fear, sadness, shame, impatience, disgust...). The Blank helps to create equanimity in Mind Space and the Relaxation helps to create equanimity in Feel Space. Just as in the case of physical discomfort, even though you are focusing away from the sensory challenge you are still reducing suffering and purifying consciousness through the power of equanimity. It requires (and thus creates) a lot of equanimity to let a “FIT storm” play itself out without needing to do something about it. (FIT is my abbreviation for Feel-Image-Talk activity.)

Feel good

Cultivating the restful states allows you to have a source of sensory satisfaction that is available anytime you want, no matter what your situation may be.

Weaken urges that lead to behaviors you regret

When the urge to do an undesired behavior (overeating, use a substance, procrastinate on a responsibility...) comes up you can weaken its power by focusing away from it on to the restful states. The idea is to keep focusing on the relaxation and blankness and derive fulfillment from them until the urge passes. If you do this consistently enough, the urge will eventually lose its power over your life. So Easy Rest is not just a way to feel good subjectively, it’s also a way to improve how you behave objectively.

Manage stress

Focusing on restful states is an obvious way to dissipate stress and prevent things from building up during your day. It's a systematic and efficient way to briefly chill out whenever you want.

Deal with difficulty sleeping

Many people have difficulty getting to sleep, staying asleep or getting good sleep. However, the real issue here is not actually getting a good night's sleep (losing consciousness for the night). The real issues is getting a good night's rest (whether you lose consciousness or not). Noting Relaxed and Blank will allow you to get a deep, refreshing and satisfying night's rest, whether or not you actually fall asleep. Paradoxically, as you focus on enjoying the Blank and Relaxation and worry less about getting to sleep, you may find that you end up actually falling asleep!

Get a "power rest"

Noting Relaxed and Blank for a few minutes is a good way to get a quick recharge during the day.

Section 4: When to Practice & For How Long

INTRODUCTION

It is recommended that you do a *minimum* of 10 minutes of formal practice most days. It's best to do it in the morning because that sets up the day for Practice in Life. If for some reason it is not possible to do your daily practice in the morning then fine, do it whenever you can during the day. Something is always better than nothing. Of course it's great if you can do more than 10 minutes, say a half hour or even an hour, but 10 minutes of real quality practice almost every day is no small achievement! Remember, if your practice period is short, you may need to speak labels out loud in order to get down to business immediately.

Some people like to use a timer. If the sound of the timer bothers you, you can mute it under a pillow. You'll still be able to hear when it goes off.

People will often drop daily formal practice during the following three circumstances.

- Their usual routine gets interrupted (due to travel, guests, moving, etc.)
- They're not feeling well physically (have a cold, etc.)
- They're going through some sort of crisis.

I cannot emphasize too strongly how important it is *not* to let your daily practice drop to nothing during any of the three situations mentioned above. Consider instead the following.

- No matter how frenetic and chaotic your days may be it's always possible to get 10 minutes of practice in sometime if you really want to. Relative to nothing, 10 minutes of practice is enormous! It's not just better than nothing, it's *infinitely* better than nothing... $10/0 = \infty$ (poetically if not literally).
- The value of a practice period is not measured by how well you are able to focus or whether it was pleasant or whether it was easy. Certainly it is true that for most people, *in the long term*, practice will *in general* tend to become easier and more pleasant as they get more experienced. But with regard to any individual practice session, your experience may fluctuate wildly between heaven, hell and purgatory. Remember, the definition of a good meditation is any meditation that you did!
- It's precisely when the doodoo hits the fan that whatever formal practice you *do do* will be most transformative.
- It's also true that when real stuff happens in the real world, even very experienced practitioners may find it difficult to maintain a formal technique.
- On the other hand, rank beginners can often sustain deep and long periods of formal practice even when facing huge challenges, *if* someone guides them "in real time" through as they practice a technique.

The first 3 points are meant to motivate you to continue formal practice during situations mentioned above. The last 2 points allow you to deduce what to do if you still can't (or won't).

In that case, reach out! Call me or anyone qualified and get some interactive guided practice. That will virtually guarantee your getting back on track.

PRACTICE IN STILLNESS, IN MOTION AND IN LIFE

Mindfulness practice can be divided into Formal Practice and Practice in Life. During formal practice you attempt to maintain a continuous technique as you sit, walk and so forth. During practice in life you go in and out of a technique as you go about the activities of your day. Most of the day you won't be doing any intentional technique; you'll just be doing life. But every now and then—for 30 seconds here or for 2 minutes there—you reinstate an intentional technique, typically while doing something simple enough to make that feasible. For example, you might focus on the Touch, Sight, Sound of washing the dishes. Or you might do Easy Rest as you stand in line.

Formal practice itself can be further divided into Practice in Stillness and Practice in Motion. Practice in stillness is what most people think of when they hear the word “meditation.” As the phrase implies, your body is still and settled into a posture—typically either seated, standing or lying down.

Practice in motion involves maintaining a continuous technique for an extended period of time as you engage in some simple movement—walking (slowly or at a normal pace), exercising, a simple work task and so forth.

Practice in motion may sound a bit like practice in life, but they are different. Practice in motion is a formal practice, meaning that you attempt to maintain an *unbroken* focus technique for the entire time you are moving.

So a period of formal practice consists of one of the following...

- Just practice in stillness
- Just practice in motion
- Alternating between those two

People who “have a practice” come to see their existence in a way very different from those who don't. Their lives are an alternating cycle between relatively short periods of formal practice and what happens during the rest of the day, any part of which is a potential opportunity to do practice in life. Once you come to conceive of yourself as having a practice then you get to “have cake and eat it too.” You get to enjoy some of the spiritual rewards that come from a monastic lifestyle while still enjoying freedom of being a householder.

Practice in stillness can be compared to driving your car in an empty parking lot. Practice in motion is like driving on a quiet country road. Practice in life is like driving on the freeway at rush hour. You are strongly encouraged to explore each of these three “practice venues.”

EASY REST IN STILLNESS

This is straightforward. If you do Easy Rest while seated, be sure to take a moment to “straighten up and settle in” to your posture before you begin noting. The initial straighten up and settle in will tend to produce a global (whole body) sense of relaxation.

Doing Easy Rest lying down is really fun. That's because it's usually possible to find a *lot* of relaxation everywhere when you lie down. On the other hand, you have to be very determined not to get *even slightly fuzzy*, not to mention get drowsy or actually fall asleep! Remember, the purpose of this exercise is to develop concentration, *clarity* and equanimity.

When you lie down, physical discomfort does not build up the way it does when you're seated or standing, so you can remain utterly still for very long periods of time. The longer you go, the deeper you go. So doing Easy Rest while lying still for long periods of time can lead to really blissful states. Knowing you can do this is very empowering if for some reason you are unable to get to sleep or stay asleep. With practice, focusing on restful states while lying down can deliver as much refreshment as actually falling asleep.

As you'll recall, the Easy Rest technique allows you the option to intentionally create or enhance restful states. During seated practice, straightening up and settling in tends to produce widespread relaxation. During lying down practice, raising your limbs a few inches then limply dropping them produces a similar effect. You can do this with each individual limb, pairs of limbs or all four limbs at once.

Yoga sessions traditionally end in a period of "corpse posture." Many yoga masters say that this is the most important part of the whole routine. Unfortunately, people often tend to go semiconscious during this period and hence lose the deeper effects. But if you implement Easy Rest during your final lying down period, you'll be able to go deep but still remain focused, eventually achieving *samadhi*, the final goal of yoga according to the yoga sutras.

Doing Easy Rest while standing is in some ways more challenging than seated or lying down practice. The trick is to learn to settle into the standing position the same way you settle into the seated one. The obvious advantage of standing practice is that it helps keep you awake.

EASY REST IN MOTION

You can do Easy Rest during periods of walking. Some people can walk slowly even with their eyes closed. In that case you can do the basic version of freely floating between Blank and Relaxed. Otherwise you'll need to restrict the noting to just Relaxed because your eyes are open.

You can also do Easy Rest as a formal practice during periods of exercise. Especially good are things like treadmills, rowing machine, stationary bike and so forth where you can close your eyes. Of course many of your muscles must contract when you do exercises so don't drive yourself crazy trying to relax muscles that are contracting. But you can save a lot of energy and get really "blissed out" by deeply relaxing the muscles of your body that don't need to be working at a given moment—it's all about the right combination of simultaneous expansion and contraction!

Many forms of yoga are meant to be done with eyes closed so you can note Blank or Relaxed (with or without labels) as you do your asana sequence. The Blank keeps your mind restful and the Relaxed keeps your body reposed. Bringing in the zooming options may help you have an even deeper experience of yoga, exercise or sports.

(By the way, Runner's high + Somatic clarity = Flow = Chi = Prana = Insight into Impermanence.)

EASY REST IN LIFE

Doing Easy Rest for brief moments during simple tasks can keep you grounded and refreshed and helps prevent the buildup of tension during the day. You are especially encouraged to do this before an anticipated stressful event (to optimally prepare for it), and after a stressful event (to optimally process it).

WHEN TO SWITCH BETWEEN TECHNIQUES

Easy Rest represents a single technique. As mentioned previously, it is in essence a simplified version of Focus on Rest, one of the 5 Ways. It differs from that technique only in that the categories you note are limited to Blank and Relaxed. In the full version of Focus on Rest you'll be working with an additional four flavors: "Peace," "Quiet," "Light" and "Silence."

Eventually you will be learning 5 core techniques: Focus In, Focus Out, Focus on Rest, Focus on Change and Focus on Something Positive.

Some people only use one of these techniques on a regular basis. Some people regularly use a few, and some people like to go back and forth among all five. Some people even include more techniques in their toolkit. I encourage you to make use of whatever one or combination of approaches works for you, including techniques drawn from other traditions such as Self Inquiry, Shikantaza, TM, Christian Centering Prayer, Qigong and so forth.

When doing formal practice a natural question is, "What's the minimum amount of time I should stay with a certain technique before switching to a different one or winding up my session?" The answer to that is simple: if it's a Basic Mindfulness technique, about 10 minutes, in general.

A second natural question is, "How do I decide when to switch between techniques?" The answer to that is a bit more involved.

The general principles are contained within the following three guidelines:

- It's good to make decisions based on motivation.
- It's not good to make decisions based on drivenness.
- Whatever you do, try not to make a big deal about making decisions!

I realize that this is probably not totally clear, so let's fill in the details.

Switching from one technique to another is "motivated" if it is based on one or a combination of...

- Interest (to keep things fun)
- Opportunity (when nature opens a window for you)
- Necessity (something is so compelling that you simply can't focus elsewhere)

Switching from one technique to another is "driven" if it is based on one or a combination of...

- Craving
- Aversion
- Unconsciousness

The reason it's not good to make a big deal about decisions is that "it's all good." Any technique you practice will serve to develop your concentration power, sensory clarity, internal equanimity. Seen in this light, any technique is as good as any other.

Section 5: More About Options

OUTLINE OF OPTIONS

I LABELING OPTIONS

A Spoken labels (You say the label)

- 1 Whispered
- 2 Ordinary voice
- 3 Strong voice

B Mental labels (You think the label)

C No intentional labels (You clearly acknowledge each event but without intentionally saying or thinking a label.)

II ZOOMING OPTIONS

A Zoom in

B Zoom out

C Zoom both ways (in *and* out at the same time)

D No intentional zooming

III RESTRICTION OPTIONS

A Restricted version 1: You just note Blank

B Restricted version 2: You just note Relaxed

C Basic version: No restriction (You freely float between both Blank and Relaxed.)

IV INTENTIONALLY LOOKING FOR RESTFUL STATES

A To find Blank, just look at the darkness/brightness in front/behind your closed eyes.

B To find Relaxation in your face and four limbs, tune in to the intrinsic settledness of your still posture.

C To find Relaxation in your torso, tune in to the subtle relaxation that accompanies the out breath.

V INTENTIONALLY CREATING RESTFUL STATES

A To enhance Blank, try opening and then closing your eyes.

B To enhance global relaxation, straighten up and settle in.

C To enhance local relaxation, intentionally relax individual body parts.

DETAILED EXPLANATION OF OPTIONS

I LABELING OPTIONS

Use spoken or mental labels to help with...

- Concentration – The continuous stream of labels guarantees a relatively continuous concentrated state. Conversely, as soon as you stop hearing your labeling, that's a heads up that you're about to get spaced out.
- Clarity – The label words guarantee that you are clear about what you are focusing on.
- Equanimity – The gently matter-of-fact, almost impersonal tone with which you speak or think the labels will tend to induce a state of equanimity.

II ZOOMING OPTIONS

- If relaxation is widespread through your body, you may wish to zoom out to cover it with attention when you note Relaxed.
- Alternatively, it can sometimes be fun to zoom in to small areas where the relaxation is strongest.
- Some people like to zoom in to the local relaxation that they experience in their torso when they breathe out while at the same time (or a moment later) zooming out to experience how that local relaxation spreads to their whole body.
- If you have widespread darkness or widespread brightness you can if you wish zoom out to cover just the dark or just the bright. This creates an expansive flavor of concentration.
- On the other hand, if you have small patches of dark or bright, you can if you wish zoom in to one of those patches. This creates a contractive flavor of concentration.

III RESTRICTION OPTIONS

- In general, “freely float” between Blank and Relaxed. But you can if you wish make the decision to just note Relaxed for a period of time or just note Blank.
- When noting Blank you can restrict yourself to just tuning in to darkness or just brightness. In that case, you may wish to use the specific label “Dark” or “Bright” instead of the generic label Blank.

IV INTENTIONALLY LOOKING FOR RESTFUL STATES

- You can find Relaxation in your four limbs (2 arms, 2 legs) by noticing how they “enjoy” being limp and not having to work when you settle into a posture.
- You can find Relaxation in your head and face by noticing how gravity tends to smooth your facial expression when your head is upright.
- You can find Relaxation in the core of your body (central box, torso) by tuning in to how the muscles in your rib cage and abdomen automatically (albeit perhaps subtly) relax each time you breathe out. You can tune in to that relaxation just once or twice or note it over a sequence of many out breaths.

- You can find Blank simply by turning your attention to the area in front of/behind your closed eyes, ignoring any images or color hues that may be there.

V INTENTIONALLY CREATING RESTFUL STATES

- You can create or intensify relaxation over much or all of your body by straightening your spine and letting your whole body settle at once.
- You can create or intensify local relaxation by intentionally relaxing individual body parts such as face, jaw, shoulders, arms, belly and so forth.
- You may be able to intensify the Blank by briefly opening your eyes (without actually looking at anything intentionally) then closing them (either quickly or slowly). This may intensify the brightness, darkness or both.

Section 6: The Slogan

Each of the 5 ways that make up the core curriculum of Basic Mindfulness has associated with it a slogan that summarizes its essence.

Since Easy Rest is just a restricted version of the Focus on Rest: Standard Version technique, they share the same slogan.

“FOCUS ON REST: REFRESH & RELEASE”

The “refresh” part of the slogan is meant to remind you of two things:

1. The restful states are intrinsically pleasant. Once you learn how to detect, create and focus on them you will have a way of feeling good whenever you want.
2. You can use Focus on Rest to get quick power rest during the day, recharging your batteries in a few minutes whenever you need to without having to go horizontal or lose consciousness.

The “release” part of the slogan is meant to remind you of three things:

1. You can use Focus on Rest as a stress-reduction tool to release tensions so they don't build up during the day.
2. Focus on Rest creates a “container of equanimity” within which active states (Touch, Sight, Sound, Feel, Image, Talk) can pass through you with less “stickiness.”
3. Deeply held patterns from a person's past sometimes percolate up to the surface. This always involves one or a combination of physical-type body sensations, emotional-type body sensations, mental images (i.e., of memory or trauma) or internal talk (monologues or dialogues). If you choose to Focus on Rest, you won't be directly paying attention to such phenomena. But you *will* be creating a space of equanimity in which they can play themselves out. So under certain circumstances Focus on Rest can be used as a strategy for releasing stored poison and pain from the past.