

Wellbeing Made Simple



THE WELLBEING TRIANGLE

Over the last year, we have been using a simple framework to help people think about their wellbeing. People have described this framework as ‘thought provoking’, ‘effective’ and ‘clear’ as a way of helping them think about their wellbeing.



The framework is shown as a triangle; a geometrically balanced shape that has three equally balanced and important parts. The soul is at the centre of our wellbeing triangle. This is an acknowledgement that we are all more than the ‘skin and bones’ we walk around in. The soul is the ‘non materials self’; the bit that cannot be seen or quantified. In many religious traditions it is thought to be the heart of a person; the seat of emotions and where personality originates from. What our wellbeing triangle proposes is that just as the body needs proactive care to thrive, so too the soul needs care and attention.

Our aim in everything we do at Space to Breathe is to help people to live well, live fully and live deeply. This is about thriving, not just surviving. The triangle is one of the tools we use as a way of helping people think about how this might be possible. It’s a proactive and preventative approach to our wellbeing that invites investment; that is, it’s not about waiting until the car is burnt out before we attend to its maintenance, but rather ensuring we’re checking the fuel levels and tyre pressures regularly. That said, we

do believe that if we are burnt out and awaiting repair, engaging in some of the activities that the triangle proposes will give us the best chance of survival alongside the specialist and professional support we might also need.

The triangle is all about connection. We believe that this is what the soul needs to do well. Over the next few weeks, we'll be exploring what connection to self, others and 'Other' might look like and we'll give you a simple activity to do which will help you to try it out. Our hope is that you will be encouraged to do more things that nurture your soul. Our hope is that you'll live a bit more well, a bit more fully and a bit more deeply.

THE WELLBEING TRIANGLE : SELF

In many jobs, there's the fun stuff and the not so fun stuff. What's interesting about this though is that not everyone would agree which bits are which. Talking to a friend about his work recently, I became really animated when we started talking about the policies and structures that might serve his organisation better. I love that stuff! He doesn't, and so our conversation was not a long one albeit an insight into both of our preferences!

Knowing and naming our strengths, passions, likes and preferences can be really good for our wellbeing. Only by knowing and naming them, can we be intentional about orientating our lives around them. Spending too much time doing tasks that are outside of our skill set can be immensely draining. Spending time too little time doing the things that we love can be frustrating.

Our wellbeing triangle suggests that we need a good connection with our 'self' in order to live well, live fully and live deeply. This involves being aware of the things that make us tick as well as the things that make the clock go slow. The world, our workplaces, our families, need a variety of skills, talents and personalities. It's important that we spend time noticing what it is that we have to bring to 'the party' and grow in confidence to bring it.

Increasing our connection with self involves valuing ourselves enough to give ourselves time alone to stop and reflect. This may be just be for a brief moment or for a longer period. The aim is always to grow in awareness of who we are, what brings us life and what positive contribution we can make in the world around us. The process should lead us to have a greater compassion for ourselves (none of us can do everything or be perfect all of the time) which we may also find creates greater compassion for

others (more about that in the next blog post!). Connecting with self is never an event, but part of a process of learning and growing.

“I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it.”

Maya Angelou¹

¹ Maya Angelou ‘Letter to my Daughter’ Virago 2004

#1 : BREATHING

Take a deep breath.

Focus gently breathing in and out.

Find a natural rhythm.

When you're breathing in, imagine gently sucking in air particles.

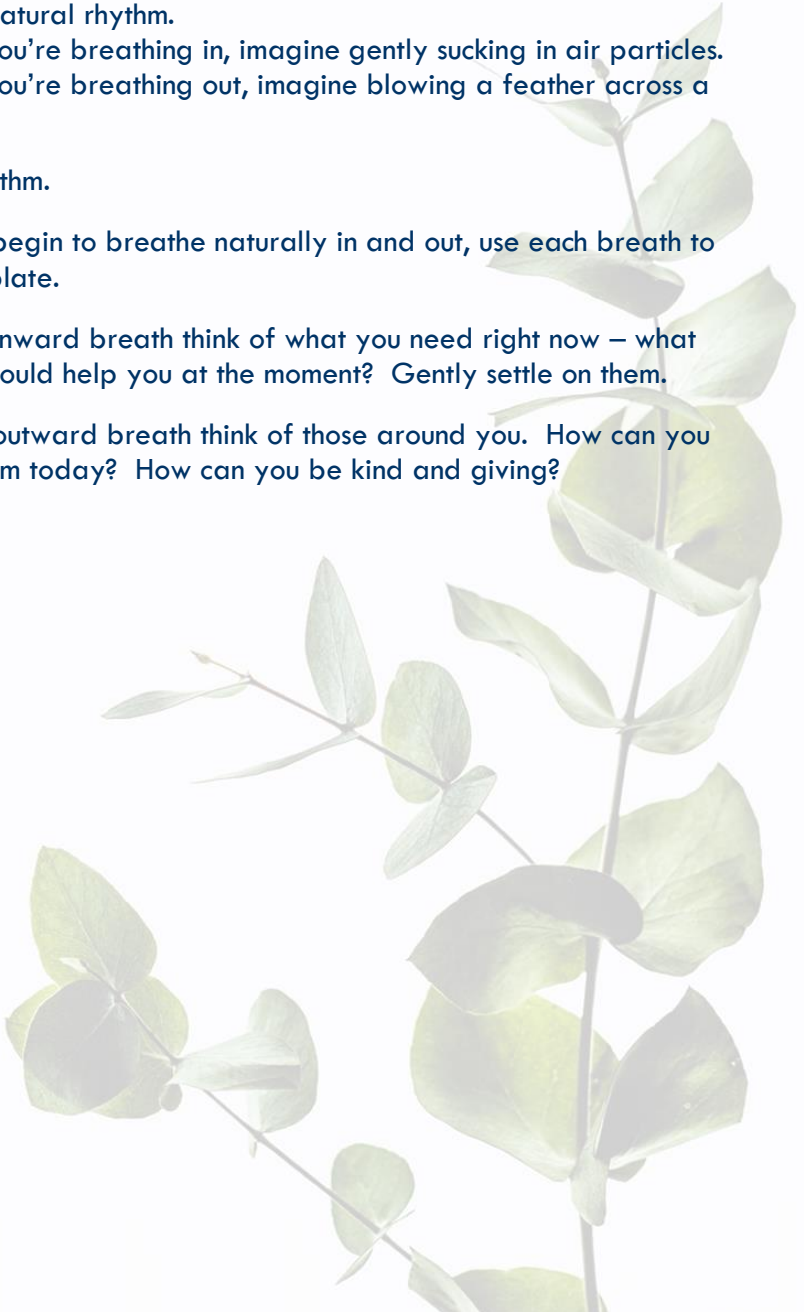
When you're breathing out, imagine blowing a feather across a table.

Find rhythm.

As you begin to breathe naturally in and out, use each breath to contemplate.

On the inward breath think of what you need right now – what things would help you at the moment? Gently settle on them.

On the outward breath think of those around you. How can you help them today? How can you be kind and giving?



#2 : THE PLAYLIST

What you need : something to play music on

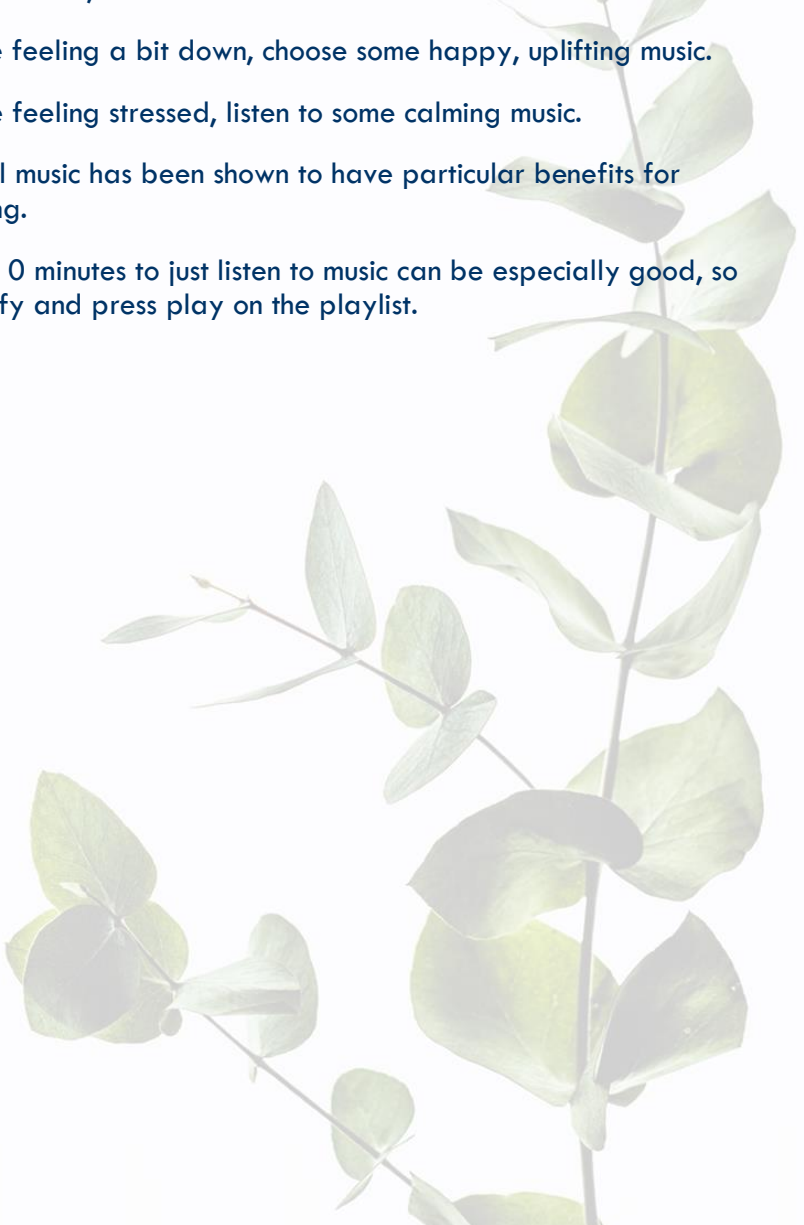
When our brains are overactive and stressed, the stress hormone cortisol is released. Listening to music has been proven to lower blood pressure, heart rate and levels of the stress hormone cortisol.

If you're feeling a bit down, choose some happy, uplifting music.

If you're feeling stressed, listen to some calming music.

Classical music has been shown to have particular benefits for wellbeing.

Taking 10 minutes to just listen to music can be especially good, so get comfy and press play on the playlist.



#3 : SURROUNDINGS

This meditation can be done anywhere and involves embracing yourself in your surroundings.

Wherever you are, be aware of your body and how it connects to where you are. This could be your feet on the ground. Your bottom on a seat. Your back against a tree. Be aware of your body as it connects.

How does it feel?

Be aware of your head, neck, spine, legs, feet. Are you holding any stress or pressure? Be aware of it and, if you can, relax it. Breathe deeply and allow calm to settle.

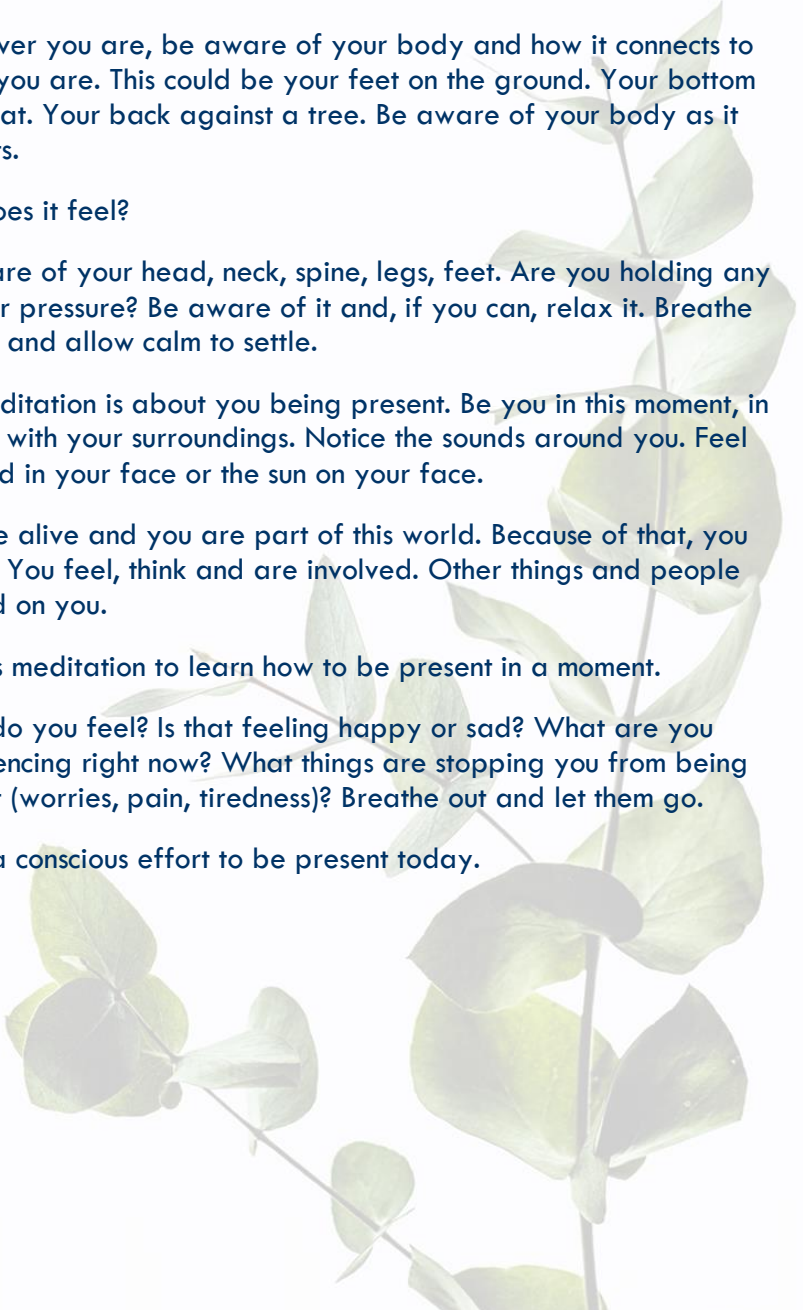
This meditation is about you being present. Be you in this moment, in contact with your surroundings. Notice the sounds around you. Feel the wind in your face or the sun on your face.

You are alive and you are part of this world. Because of that, you matter. You feel, think and are involved. Other things and people depend on you.

Use this meditation to learn how to be present in a moment.

What do you feel? Is that feeling happy or sad? What are you experiencing right now? What things are stopping you from being present (worries, pain, tiredness)? Breathe out and let them go.

Make a conscious effort to be present today.



#4 : KNOWING ME

You will need : An A4 sheet of paper, a pen

The Chinese Philosopher Lao Tzu once said: “He who knows others is clever, but he who knows himself is enlightened”

What do you know about yourself?

How can this knowledge help you?

Draw out a copy of our template below on to an A4 sheet and to jot down some of the things that you know about yourself.

Consider how you can use this knowledge to make decisions about investing more into the things that are most ‘you’

Consider how you can use this knowledge to make decisions about how to look after yourself when you feel drained.

Knowing Me

I am...	I am not...
I like...	I dislike...

THE WELLBEING TRIANGLE : OTHERS

There are now more ways than ever for me to connect with others. I can count at least nine different ways my smartphone alone allows me to make connections with people. However, a recent survey done by the British Red Cross and the Co-operative group found that 1 in 5 people in the UK are always or often lonely. (British Red Cross and Co-Op, 2016). What is it about our

world that is so connected, yet so disconnected? And does it matter?

Well firstly, yes it does matter! The same report from the British Red Cross and the Co-Op, identified that loneliness can be as damaging for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and that loneliness can increase the likelihood of mortality by 26%. In babies, the love, care and attention given by a caregiver is shown to increase the growth of synapses in the brain and there is an increasing body of evidence to show that babies and young children who lack warmth and affection are significantly more likely to have learning and developmental impairments.

Connection with others is important for us, and not only because it decreases our chances of an early grave, but because it allows us to thrive. It's a basic human need.

The challenge is that connection with others isn't straight forward. Connection with others is one of our core basic human needs and so when we seek it out, the stakes are high. Every attempt at connecting has the potential to fail as well as succeed which means we need a certain amount of confidence to seek it out.

One of the ways we can decrease the risk is by only investing in connections with a minimal amount of emotional energy/time/effort. This 'play it safe' approach means we never stand to lose too much. But this doesn't really create the kind of enriching connections we need. Real connection happens when we invest that bit more, that bit more often. It happens when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable with others, honest about our triumphs and our failures, honest about our hopes and our dreams, honest about what we want and need. The stakes here are bigger, the potential to be hurt greater, but so are the potential rewards and benefits.

Many of our modern methods of communication create opportunities for us to connect with minimal investment; looking at someone's social media feed rather than meeting up face to face, sending a message rather than making the call, declaring our strong opinions in an email rather than engaging in respectful dialogue and debate.

Connecting with others is important for our wellbeing and something that needs our investment if we are to live well, fully and deeply. It will take risk, but the risks will pay off in the end.

#5 : CONNECTION WITH OTHERS

We need each other.

Sadly, though we often don't have time to connect with those we care about because the pace of life is so fast.

Think of three family members or friends you really value. List their names.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Plan time to see each of them. Start with a text message saying hi and suggesting a Zoom call or some time on the phone. Then make the opportunity to catch up.

#6 : THE MAYDAY CALL

Stress is often just tangled thoughts. We all need help untangling our thoughts from time to time. Things that feel very big in our heads, often feel smaller once shared and talked over.

If you're feeling overwhelmed, one of the single most effective things you can do is reach out.

Call someone who you know and let them know what you're experiencing. It may help you untangle your thoughts. If what's in your head feels too risky to share, call one of the advice lines below. They are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

There's always someone who can stop you from sinking.

Samaritans 116 123

#7 : PEACE GIVER

Peace is something we can enjoy in our own lives but it is also a gift we can give to others.

Famous wandering friar, Francis of Assisi used to offer peace each time he walked into another person's home. This wasn't just a prayer as many commented he lived out peace in the way he worked and talked.

Think about being a peace giver to others.

Think about neighbours and friends – what is troubling them right now and what would give them peace?

- If you can provide an answer to their problem, think about giving time to do that.
- If you can reassure them, give them a call.
- If you can connect them with someone who can help do that.
- If the best you can do is be a comfort and be someone they can cry or grieve with, give them that time.

The funny thing is, as you give peace to others, you often receive it yourself.

Mind says giving to others is one of its Five Ways to Wellbeing. Being kind to someone else is also being kind to you.

#8 : INTERDEPENDENCE

Connection to others isn't just a matter of being with your friends. We also gain enormously by connecting authentically with those outside of our normal sphere or friends or colleagues.

Why not try these three ideas this week, which echo the concept of our interdependence with each other.

1. Take a moment today to go and say hello to a neighbour or work colleague you've never really got to know before. If you're feeling brave would you ask this person how you might help them, how you might care for them or what you might be able to do to make their life better.
2. Think about how you might cross a cultural boundary. In the 2011 census 12.7% or 7.9 million people stated they had been born outside the UK. If you live near or work with someone from a different nation or culture why don't you make them a cup of something and find out more about their story.
3. We love the idea of uncalled-for generosity. There is something compelling when people give of themselves without need for anything in return. Why don't you try this? Make a batch of biscuits and give them out to your neighbours. If you have a garden put some of your produce on the wall for people to take or share it with your neighbours. If you have a skill why not offer to make a gift of it.

THE WELLBEING TRIANGLE : OTHER

You know those three little stars that sit in a row that you sometimes see at night? You might know them as Orion's belt. They sit one thousand three hundred and sixty light years away from planet earth. With current space technology, it takes a space craft 18,000 years to travel each light year. That means that if you set off to Orion's belt today, you wouldn't arrive for another 13 million years!

That stuff blows my mind. It makes me realise that my 'own little world' isn't quite as big as I think it is. It draws my attention to the sheer enormity and complexity of the universe we're a part of. I might even say that it gives me 'an overwhelming feeling of reverence, admiration, fear, produced by that which is grand, sublime, extremely powerful'. That's how the dictionary defines 'awe'

Awe is apparently good. So good that it can actually boost our immune system so one set of American scientists have recently found². Other studies have shown that engaging in awe releases endorphins; the hormones that make us feel good.

Something else that has been proven to release endorphins is gratitude. Gratitude is both an act and an attitude, one that can be developed over time. Positive Psychology guru Shawn Achor did a study where he asked participants to record three good things at the end of each day and then journal about one of those things in more detail. He found that after just 21 days participants were more inclined to notice the positive things in their lives. He concluded that these people had literally rewired their brains to be, and feel more positive.

Both awe and gratitude are part of connects us with 'Other'. 'Other' is a strange term, but it's meant to indicate that which is more than our own human experience. Some people of faith would call this 'thing' God. Others might use terms like 'the divine' or simply 'the universe'. The simple thing for us here is that for our wellbeing it's important for us to look beyond ourselves and even beyond our fellow humans. Spending time connecting with that which is more than us, with a sense of gratitude is what we're trying to encourage here.

The final part of our wellbeing triangle invites us to feed our soul through this connection with 'Other'

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25603133>

#9 : BE SILENT

Silence is a tool we use a lot at Space to Breathe. It is simple and accessible. It has been researched and been found to have a number of wellbeing and health benefits.

Give this a try:

Find a comfortable place and sit in whatever way feels relaxed and still. Have your eyes closed or open depending on what feels most comfortable.

Be completely still and silent. Allow the sounds around you to be there but you do not have to do anything about them. When you get distracted refocus. Try and do this for a few minutes at least. Use the resources to help or find something to focus on

When you have finished, relax and slowly come back into the room

Four further ideas you might try:

1. When you feel yourself rushing stop for one moment and slow yourself.
2. In meetings when progress is hard or dialogue heated encourage everyone to be silent for at least one minute. Then ask if any new ideas have emerged.
3. Take up doodling. This is a perfect aid to silence and lets your mind wander to new places and new ideas.
4. Want a different perspective on an idea. Ponder it in silence for a few minutes and scribble ideas that arise. Let the silence allow you to see things differently.

#10 : TWILIGHT

Time needed : 10 minutes

You will need : sunglasses, a timer, a phone or a piece of paper and a pen

Find a flower, plant or tree and sit in front of it.

You are going to spend 10 minutes reflecting on it.

For the first 2 minutes, contemplate it in the natural light. Take in the colours, the detail, allow the beauty to strike you.

What do you see? What impact does the light have on it?

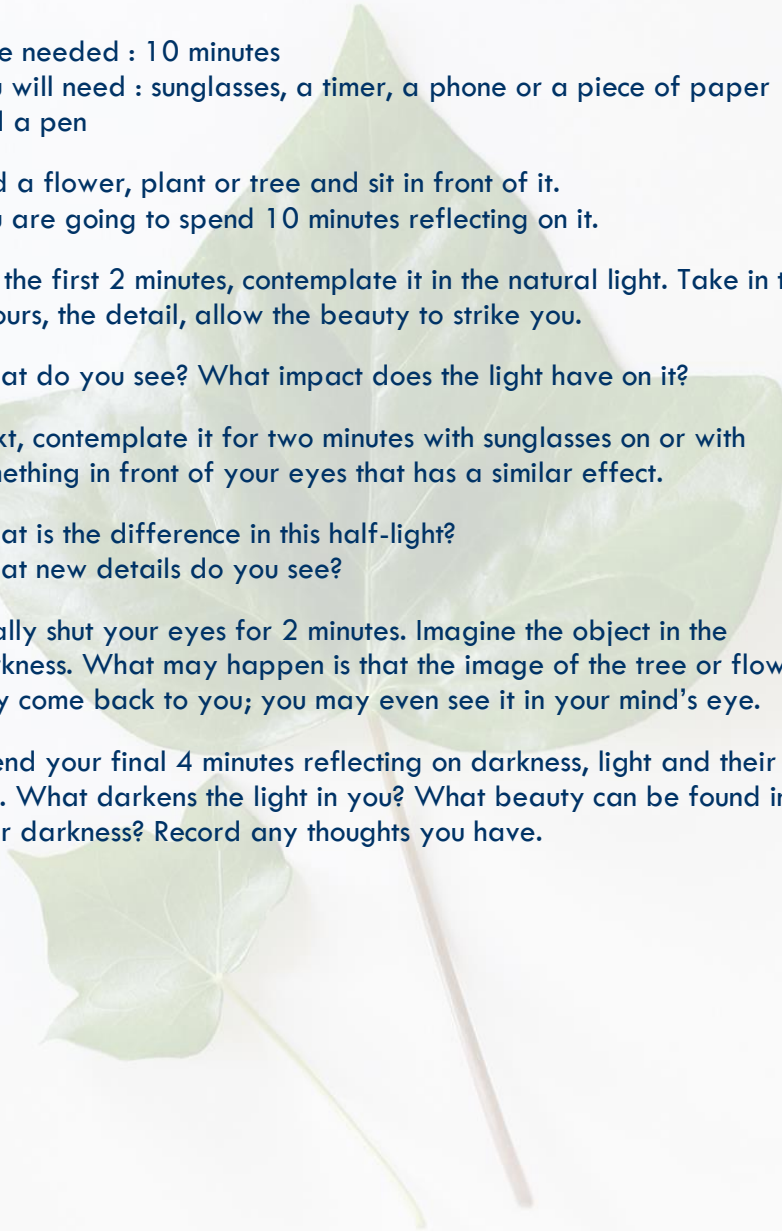
Next, contemplate it for two minutes with sunglasses on or with something in front of your eyes that has a similar effect.

What is the difference in this half-light?

What new details do you see?

Finally shut your eyes for 2 minutes. Imagine the object in the darkness. What may happen is that the image of the tree or flower may come back to you; you may even see it in your mind's eye.

Spend your final 4 minutes reflecting on darkness, light and their mix. What darkens the light in you? What beauty can be found in your darkness? Record any thoughts you have.



#11 : BALANCE

You will need : a pencil

Does your life feel in balance? How is the balance of work/life, family, free time vs busy, giving out and receiving?

Take a pencil and balance it on your finger for as long as you can. As you do this consider the sense of balance in your life.

Notice how it gets easier to balance the pencil as you learn how to do it.

What have you noticed/learnt in your life that can make this sense of balance easier?

Look at the ways the natural world balances, has rhythms and is connected. This could be in the growing of crops, the seasons or the way different animals and bugs need each other.

Go for a walk and see what you can observe about this sense of balance.

What do you learn from it?



#12 : SUNRISE

Arrange to wake up early enough one day to see the sunrise. Find out the time from the internet and then plan to be up just before the sun comes up.

Notice the way the dawning light changes the landscape. Take in the sounds and the beauty.

Allow yourself to be captivated by this global moment of beauty when a ball of light thousands of light years away from us, brings first light to our world.

How does this make you feel?

