

WASHING A DISH EXERCISE

Choose a relatively quiet moment to select a dish and place it in an empty sink. Just look at the dish for a moment and become aware of the colour, shape, and texture of the dish. You may become aware that other thoughts come into your mind while performing this exercise. This is inevitably going to happen because numerous thoughts come and go in our head all day, every day. Simply notice them, notice the tendency to fight them, and let them be. Gently bring yourself back to the task of focusing on the physical aspects of the dish.

Now, pick up the dish and allow comfortably warm water to pass over it. Notice the sensations of the water, its temperature, and the feel of the dish as the water passes over it. Once again, you are likely to notice a variety of thoughts unrelated to this task. If so, please notice without judging them as good or bad, right or wrong, but simply an activity in your mind that comes and goes like waves intermittently hitting a shore. The specific thoughts you are having do not matter, just your ability to notice and focus on the feelings and sensations that the water and the dish create. Allow yourself to feel the sensations in more and more detail. In this way, you continually strengthen your concentration.

Now, wash the dish with whatever mild detergent you normally use and become aware of the additional sensations of smell and touch that emerge from this activity. As you continue to mindfully wash this dish, notice any external sounds and any internal thoughts as though they are simply words or symbols on a ticker tape and gently bring your attention back to the task of washing the dish. Having a variety of thoughts is normal; be patient with yourself. The fact of the matter is the mind will always tend to wander. Remain in the moment with washing the dish and you will increasingly enhance your attention.

After about 5 minutes, wipe off the dish, stop the water, sit down and note — physically or digitally — the experience you just had. Include all thoughts, reactions, and actions that you took during this exercise.

(Adapted from Gardner & Moore, 2007)

