



## A Mental Vacation Exercise

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Would it not be nice to take a mental vacation, a break? Close your eyes and let's journey there. Sit comfortably or recline.

Again, wouldn't it be lovely to take a mental vacation? A mental break? To cross a bridge into somewhere different. To go somewhere in your mind, into your experience, to somewhere special. A place that feels like a vacation. A place where you may have

been or only imagine being. A place of your choosing. A forest, mountains, the beach, a resort or spa. Anywhere that would feel like getting away on a mental vacation.

And now just be there in that place. And look around inside that place. Notice everything you see there, whatever you may see. Buildings. Sand. Water. Trees. The sky. The clouds. The sun. Are you inside or outside? If it's indoors, are there paintings on the wall? Perhaps there is comfortable furniture or someplace you may be sitting or lying down. Perhaps some very comfortable sofa or easy chair or bed.

Or if it's in the sand, lying back on the sand and allowing it to support you. And how you move so that the sand moves under you to give you total support. Just notice everything that you see.

And notice everything that you hear. The sounds of water perhaps or people talking or children playing. Birds. Trees in the wind. Music. Whatever you hear, whatever sounds may come to you.

Are there aromas in this place? Something that appeals to your sense of smell. The ocean. Flowers. Just notice all the colors. All the sights, all the sounds.

What are you touching? Are you touching the sand? Water? A cushion? Just what might you be touching? Just notice that. Notice the sights, the sounds, the aromas, whatever you're touching. And just enjoy all that. Just noticing and connecting with all that.

Look about this place where you are and find something that could be a souvenir of this place. A smooth stone, a flower, a picture. So, just find something in your image and your experience that when you think about it, it would be like a souvenir of this place. It would evoke and elicit from within you all of the wonders the enjoyment of this vacation place.

Now touch it or look at it and notice how it fills you with the same feelings of this vacation, this break. Touch or look at it again and notice the feelings building up in you, the vacation feelings, the emotional break from the ordinary. Just sit with those feelings for a minute. There's no need to name them. Just experience those feelings.

As you reflect upon this experience, what does it enable you to say about yourself? What would you say about yourself? That's as the person who is experiencing this emotional vacation Touch your souvenir one more time and deepen the feelings of being on a vacation.

Now, take a few moments to just to enjoy that. And now begin to come all the way back from that place to this place wherever you may be. Perhaps you're in a room in this time., in this moment. When the sound of the bell disappears, open your eyes and just sit for a moment reflecting on your experience.

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My clients have always immensely enjoyed this guided imagery which adapted from one used by Yvonne Dolan in a workshop I attended years ago. It's not technically mindfulness – it's not about the present moment here and now. It seems to be about imagination. But in a way it's not. That's because it is eliciting everything from within your real feelings and memories.

The idea of the souvenir is sometimes called *Anchoring*. That means conditioning a stimulus to an experience so it is, in essence, anchored in the nervous system. So, go ahead and listen to the recoding of this exercise and practice "firing" that anchor souvenir image.

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*Shorehaven Behavioral Health is a major mental health clinic and training center with therapy offices in Brown Deer, Greenfield, and Mt. Pleasant, and also offering telehealth throughout Wisconsin. We specialize in challenging cases and rapid access to services. In addition to depression, anxiety, behavioral problems, and most other psychological problems, we work extensively with children & families and with substance use problems. Our DBT program has three groups – for younger adolescents, older adolescents, and adults – and has openings. We also accept referrals for substance abuse care from clinicians who are not comfortable with that population. Call 414-540-2170.*

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