

Forgiveness

A Mindfulness-Based Role-Playing Experience
about Guilt and Redemption

For One Game Master and Any Number of Players

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Introduction

*The mirror in smithereens
was struck by the burden
on my back*

Me, Sisyphus

*I commit myself
to redemption –
the fall from grace*

This “game” may be somewhat different from those you have played before. More precisely perhaps, it could be described as an experience. It involves no contact with other players, no overt interaction with the game master and the character you play is yourself. Recover from your shock in your own time and do read on.

The game is designed for one game master and any number of players. The game master acts as the organizer of the event and also as the narrator in the game. The game takes about 1–2 hours to play. It is played on a partly cloudy day outside lying on the ground, looking at the passing clouds.

The Game Master’s Guide

This game is simultaneously very straightforward and complex. It is easy, because it is simple and cheap to organise and the game can be directly recited from the paper. What makes the game complicated is the art of mindfulness, to which this game introduces the player and perhaps the game master as well. In any case, this sections gives you all the tools you need to run the game. A player’s guide is found at the very end.

About Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a meditation practise that has its roots in eastern religions. Recently, it has been found efficient in treating stress and some mental disorders such as anxiety and depression. The effectiveness of mindfulness is based on the fact that it weakens ruthless and judgmental thoughts about oneself, which, if persisting, cause and uphold psychological discomfort.

In short, mindfulness means conscious, curious, non-judgmental observation of one’s mind or surroundings. During a mindfulness exercise we deliberately turn our attention toward our inner experience and observe it, whatever it may be. Instead of automatically and unconsciously judging our observed thoughts or emotions, we consciously accept them with self-compassion. We do not try to change or cling to the thoughts, emotions or sensations, we only experience them. A train metaphor can be used to clarify this: mindfulness practise means observing one’s thoughts as one would watch scenery from a moving train. You cannot rest your eyes at one spot for long.

Mindfulness practise often revolves around breathing and mental imagery. The most simple – but certainly not easiest – exercise is to sit comfortably, close your eyes and bring your whole attention to your breath. Each time your mind wanders, you gently refocus on your breathing. You can try this now if you want. Sit up straight, put a timer up for 3 minutes so you know when to stop, close your eyes and repeatedly guide your attention to your breathing.

You may notice that this is a hard task. Our minds are constantly crowded with thoughts, worries, images and ideas. These thoughts are often critical and judgemental, especially if you have a tendency to rumination, anxiety or worrying. At times, we become “one” with our inner experience and think that it is an exact representation of the reality around us, and we are unable to distinguish what

we think is reality from what the reality actually is. Mindfulness is a tool to make this distinction and relieve the stress our rushing minds cause us. For example, just because we think “I am incompetent” does not mean that it is so – it just means such a thought occurred!

During a mindfulness exercise, breathing is used as an anchor for awareness: when one’s mind begins to wander (which happens to every one of us), we gently refocus our attention back to our breathing. Stress is on the word gently. If you find yourself blaming yourself for not “doing it right”, this statement can just be observed as a thought like any other. Again, only because we think something, does not mean it is so.

Many people find mindfulness and breathing exercises soothing and relaxing, some may even fall asleep. This may be especially problematic if you hold the game when people are tired, such as during the night (see below). You should caution people to notice the feeling of tiredness but try to resist it to stay awake. Some people may still fall asleep. Take it as a compliment.

This brief explanation has been but a scratch to the refined art of mindfulness. You can find more information from the library or the Internet. If you have, as most of us have, ever experienced anxiety or episodes of depression, you may find the self-help books mentioned below useful. If not, they still contain plenty of information about mental health and easily approachable instructions for mindfulness practise. The first book even has a CD included.

Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal and Jon Kabat-Zinn (2007). *The Mindful Way Through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness*

Susan Orsillo and Lizabeth Roemer (2011). *The Mindful Way Through Anxiety: Break Free from Chronic Worry and Reclaim your Life*

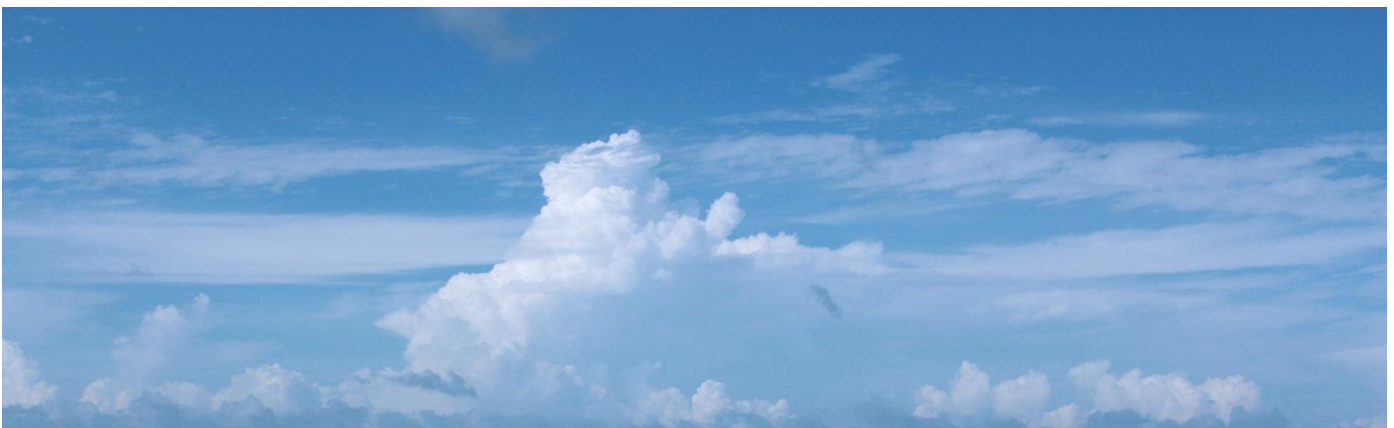
The Theme of the Game is Guilt

Often, the emotion of guilt results from a choice that wasn’t in accordance with our values and our expectations towards ourselves. Guilt can be an overwhelmingly strong and aversive emotion and it is easy to start to avoid thinking about the things that cause it. Facing what lies in our past can feel even more difficult than living with self-resentment and guilt: the knowledge that we made a decision, but it was the wrong one.

This game is about facing your guilt and finding forgiveness towards yourself. The fact that we all have made mistakes makes us human and we should admit this. Whatever it is you hold against yourself: you can learn from it and avoid making the same mistake again. Whatever you have done, there is always another chance.

This is a Spiritually Humanistic “Game”

For some people this game may appear Christian – and religions stir up strong feelings in many people, including myself. Admittedly, this game draws from Christian myths, but this is strictly not a religious game. However, it is deeply and definitely spiritual in nature and it is intended for people of all religions and ideologies.



Additionally, this is a game that toys with the concept of game: should this game be called a game at all? In their renowned book *Rules of the Game* Salen and Zimmerman define a game as a “system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome.” I leave it up to the reader to decide whether this is a game, an experience, a relaxation exercise or an imaginary journey. In a mindful stance: “Whatever it is, it is”.

The Players Lie on Their Backs

During the game the players should lie at least somewhat comfortably on their backs: a blanket or sleeping pad comes in handy here. The game master should bring some for the players to use, in case someone has forgotten theirs home.

Have the players lie on their backs and watch the sky. The place should be chosen so that the players see as little horizon as possible – they should only see the sky. Nearby high buildings or trees may break the illusion the game strives to create.

Clouds are a Metaphor

We usually pay little attention to the clouds. Yet, there are a huge variety of clouds from low-hanging, heavy, ominous clouds to light and hazy smog high in the atmosphere. There can be several layers of clouds, and each of them can move at a different pace. The movement can be fast or tediously slow. The time of the day and the season affect the colour of the sky. The clouds can be highly transparent or painted in a vast range of colours from the intense orange of the sunset, to the light emerald of the dawn or the intense azure of the day.

Besides forgiveness, this game is about the appreciation of clouds and the sky. They are also a metaphor for the mind: our mood, our emotional state is the sky that paints the clouds travelling on it. Naturally, the clouds represent the thoughts, feelings and sensations we experience.

The sky and the clouds should also 1) reinforce and facilitate the state of mindfulness; 2) strengthen the illusion created by the suggestions recited by the game master and 3) provide a feeling of smallness in the universe.

If you wish to read more about appreciation of clouds, you should check out *The Cloudspotter's Guide* (2007) by Gavin Edmund Pretor-Pinney.

Alternatively, play the Game at Night

For a more intensive adventure, hold the game at night. Preferably, the sky should not be completely filled with clouds; rather it should be partly cloudy or the sky should be clear. The game should be run at the countryside where there are no disturbing lights at the horizon and the sky feels deep and imposing. This emphasizes the infinity of space above the players. Keep in mind that the lights from the cities have a huge range. Also the nights can get cold: blankets and sleeping bags make the game more comfortable and hot drinks are appreciated afterwards.

You can hold the game as it is or you can alter it to a science fiction setting. Perhaps the players are Martians crashing with their spacecraft, or resurrected moon-people or extraterrestrials arriving to study the planet of a foreign race of aliens. Do not hesitate to draw ideas and influences from your favourite movies and series. Watching them can also serve as a warm up exercise.



How to Narrate the Game

The game master should read the game text at their own pace using a calm, steady voice. Do not recite the titles. You should rehearse reading the game aloud before the game.

Even if the game text is fixed, you can flavour it with your own spices. Practise the right pace and stressing. Remember to leave long enough breaks between the sentences and especially between paragraphs. Do not rush the text when not needed. At other moments, you can drive the game forward with speed.

Preparations before the Game

- Read the game materials thoroughly.
- Practise narrating the game text aloud.
- Choose a quiet, peaceful game location.
- Look at the weather forecast or pick a day at random and play if the weather permits.
- Invite the players and give them sufficient information about the game.
- Give the players the information sheets (found at the last page) beforehand, or you can also give them the materials when they arrive. Ask the players to bring a sleeping pad, blanket or a mattress to lay on.
- Double check weather before the game. Make sure there are clouds in the sky.
- Bring with your game materials, pens and some sleeping pads.

When the players arrive

- Welcome the players. Tell them about the schedule.
- Instruct the players about the game mechanics and the theme of the game, forgiveness.
- Give the players the game material (found at the end), if they haven't received it yet.
- Answer any questions the players have.
- Remind the players that it is ok to show one's feelings during the game and that they can stop the game at any time, but they should avoid disturbing others.
- Ask the players to lie down and begin reciting the game.

After the Game

- Tell the players that the game has ended.
- Have the players fill out the debriefing form by themselves.
- Ask the players to gather around for debriefing. Encourage them to show, describe and discuss their feelings and thoughts about the game.
- Ask each of them, in turn, "How was the game for you?"
- Bring the players back to the present day. Ask everyone to gather in a circle and state their name, their occupation and additional facts about their self.
- If the players want further debriefing, they should pair up randomly to discuss the experience for fifteen minutes.
- The author would greatly appreciate feedback: lauri.m.lukka@gmail.com.



The Game

Settling down

Take a moment to make yourself comfortable. This is a moment for you to relax and let go of your worries. You can close your eyes. You find yourself more calm and peaceful. This is a time just for you.

Take a deep breath. Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth. Rest your hand on your stomach and feel the way you breathe. Breathe long and steady, all the way down, so you feel your stomach move. You can feel your breathing completely. In your nose, in your neck, chest, stomach. You are your breathing. And your breathing is the waves that wash the shore. They colour the sand, extend and retreat. Over and over again. Feel how your breathing travels all the way from your nose, through your neck into your lungs and back out. Like waves on a shoreline. Deep and steady.

You feel calm and peaceful. You feel the warm and calming sun on your eyelids and your body. You feel pleasant flickers of light. The light caresses you and keeps you safe and sound. Your body is light, almost weightless. You are as soft as a feather blown by the cooling breeze you feel on your skin from time to time. Your breathing is slow and steady. Your breathing is the soft wind blowing through the treetops, carrying the scent of spring, summer and fall. Your breathing supports the wings of birds, bears the words whispered.

The Road

You only now became aware that you are on a journey. A journey inwards, toward yourself. Actually, you have been on this journey for a very long time, but now you become acutely aware of it. You feel your inner path within you. You know it is there.

Looking inside, you find yourself on your inner road or path. How is it? Is it asphalt, mud, rocks or something else? - - You turn to the direction you came from, and see how the road has changed over its course, or maybe it hasn't. - - Looking at its surroundings, what do you sense? Mountains, lakes, buildings or something else indeed? - - Turn around, look at where the path leads you. You see the fork in the road. Standing in the crossroads, you feel your breathing becoming lighter and deeper. Your breathing is unforced and easy.

Awakening

You have focused so much on your breathing that you may have not noticed how the surroundings around you have changed. The sounds are coming from farther away. Most of the sounds are coming somewhere from beneath you. They grow farther every breath. Far away, far away.

Slowly and carefully, open your eyes. You see the clouds and the sky behind them. Your eyes feel unaccustomed to the light, like you were waking from slumber. Allow them to adjust, unforced. Each cloud you see, you have never seen before. They are unique. They are as individual as you are. You feel attracted to them. You feel the relation. You follow them with your eyes, unforced. Your breath is smooth and comforting. You are together.

You appreciate the attraction of the clouds. You feel safe at home. You perceive the changes in the clouds, the eternal movement of the tracks in the sky. You feel at home. Let your eyes follow the clouds as they go, do not cling to them. You feel at home. You find yourself smiling. You feel at home. Your breathing is even and steady.

Anxiety

Close your eyes again slowly. Your attention turns inadvertently to your body, and you find an uncomfortable sensation within you. The object seems blurry, formless and shapeless. Braving

yourself not to turn away you scrutinize it more carefully. Turning your inner eye towards it is distressing. The spot is sore. Uneasy to touch.

You scan the object curiously, and see it becoming more and more clear. You analyze what you find: the object's location - - its size - - its shape, colour and tone - - and finally you realize, it has a name. Stating it silently in your mind, you wonder how long it has been there. Your breathing becomes shallower and somewhat faster.

Falling

All too sudden you become aware of the vertigo. You find yourself falling, spiralling downwards in endless circles. You feel the breath of the air moving faster around you, you hear the wind breeze by. You are falling downward, ever downward. The only thing that supports you is the wind, you are falling and falling. Home in the clouds seems farther and farther away. Your breathing is short and rapid. Is there no return?

You understand you have made a mistake, you feel regret. More emotions surface: grief, anxiety, anger, fear. You are remembering the unresolved situation. You are craving the forgiveness you have not dared ask for. Your breathing is short. You fall ever downward.

You recall the time when you did not live up to your own standards. You took the easy way, you broke your word, you let your loved ones down. Seeing the spot clearly you go back in time. Remember how it started. You sense the presence of other people, were they there. You remember how the events started - - what happened - - how you said what you said - - did what you did - - how others reacted - - how you tried to forget it - - Your breathing begs and mourns. Ever downward. You open your eyes to the light.

Forgiving

As you become more aware of the present, you find yourself still falling. The clouds above seem menacing and more distant. You feel the vertigo and nausea in your stomach. You are spiralling downward, sensing there is not much time left before you reach the ground. Reminiscing: were you thrown down or did you jump yourself? Turning your awareness toward your emotions you become acutely conscious of your feelings. Your breathing is spontaneous and true. Sensing all the anger, fear, hate, anxiety - - love, hope, happiness and trust. If you had the opportunity whom would you address? What would like to say?

You find yourself still falling, weightless. Your home in the clouds is becoming ever more distant. You sense something on your back, a pair of wings. You understand your choice: to spread them to rise again with new-found vigour; or to walk among humans seeking for deliverance, forgiveness. You feel the ground growing nearer. Do you spread your wings to soar or make your descent? - - Your breathing is firm and deep. Resolute.

Finale

You turn your attention toward your breathing. You can choose to keep your eyes open or close them, your breathing becomes steadier and steadier. You breathe slow and deep. This part of the journey is soon coming to its end. Whatever choices you have made in your past, there is always strength to be found. New opportunities lie ahead once you have consolidated your past.

You can not change the choices you have made but you can learn to live with them. You can learn from them. Grow from them. Learn to live with yourself. Looking back at your life, you find that you have often made the best decisions you could at the time. Counting back from ten with your breath - - you find stability and peace in your life and awake with the knowledge of your value.

Forgiveness

A mindfulness-based role-playing experience

Introduction

This “game” may differ a whole lot from those you have played before. It does not involve any direct contact with other players or the narrator and the main character is you. Not a fictitious character, but an enhanced version of you.

This game is an inner journey to an unresolved situation in your past. The game is wholly narrated by the game master and by your thoughts. This game may provoke strong emotions and you are allowed to show them during the game. Also, you are allowed to end the experience at any time without any explanations.

The main game mechanic involves a guided meditative practise that many people find relaxing. If you find yourself drowsy or ready to fall asleep, try to resist the urge. Usually it passes with time.

Before the Game

Please think about a situation in which you made a decision you regretted afterwards. A situation in which you did not live up to your own or others’ expectations. A situation that remains unresolved to this day. You may or may not have found forgiveness from others, but most importantly, you have not found yourself to come to terms with this situation.

The situation can be any small interaction or a somewhat bigger issue – but it should not be a life-changing one. The issue should stir some emotions in you, but not so much that you cannot bear them.

If you have experienced psychiatric problems, or suffer from them now, or your life situation is very stressing, consider not participating in the game as the game master will be unable to provide sufficient debriefing. This game is meant as a tool for self-reflection, not psychotherapy.

Give a short description of the situation you have chosen for the game:

What do you think about yourself in this situation:

Debriefing

This section is filled in after the game. Reflect again the situation you chose before the game.

What do you think about yourself in the situation:

You may still have strong emotions and thoughts about the situation, but what do you know to be true about your behaviour:

What will you do in these kinds of situations in the future:

What have you learned from this experience:

I hope you enjoyed this experience. Do not hesitate to send feedback to the gamewright, lauri.m.lukka@gmail.com.