

NATURAL AWARENESS EXERCISES *The Little Book of Being: Practices and Guidance for Uncovering Your Natural Awareness (Diana Winston, 2010, Sounds True)*

FOCUSED AWARENESS PRACTICE

"Once you are settled in a comfortable posture, notice your full body seated. Take a breath or two to help encourage relaxation. You can close your eyes, unless for some reason that doesn't feel comfortable to you. Gently turn your attention to the sensations of breathing in your body. You may feel your abdomen rising and falling, your chest expanding and contracting, or the air moving through your nose. Try this for a minute or so. Then let go of attending to your breath and turn your attention to the sounds around you that are coming and going. Listen to them as if you were listening to your favorite music. Try not to get caught in a story or reaction about the sounds. Just listen. For a meditation anchor, choose to focus either on your breath moving in one of the physical areas I mentioned or on the sounds around you. Whichever you choose, try to notice breath after breath or sound after sound. When you notice that your attention has wandered, you can say a soft word in your mind, like thinking or wandering, and gently redirect your attention back to your breath or the listening. Keep returning to your anchor whenever you notice your mind has wandered. Try to sustain this practice for a short period of time. Conclude the meditation when you are ready and feel the impact of meditating on your body and mind."

FLEXIBLE AWARENESS PRACTICE

"Begin your meditation in a comfortable posture. Close your eyes, if you wish, and take a few breaths to help you settle. Then try a few minutes of focused awareness practice. Connect with your anchor: feel your breathing or listen to sounds. When thoughts take you away from your anchor, notice you have wandered and then return again to your anchor. Try this for a few minutes. Now that your mind is more concentrated, you can notice when your attention strays from your anchor. But instead of bringing it back right away, keep your attention on whatever is grabbing it—the achy back, the blaring siren, the funny thought. Sense, feel, notice, or listen to whatever has pulled your attention away from your anchor. When the new object no longer holds your attention, return your attention to your anchor. Then stay with your anchor until something else pulls your attention away. Fully notice, sense, or feel the new object until your attention moves back to your anchor or to another new object. Keep practicing in this manner for as long as you feel drawn to. When you are ready to stop, notice the impact of the meditation and open your eyes".

FULLY FLEXIBLE AWARENESS PRACTICE

"Get in a comfortable posture. Close your eyes, if you wish, and begin with some focused awareness to help calm your mind. Focus on your breathing, and when your attention wanders off, bring it back to your breathing. Or if sound is your anchor, you can listen to the sounds around you. Although you are attending to your anchor, it is likely that other things are happening in the background—meaning they are occurring, but you are not focusing on them. Now let the background become foreground. Notice whatever grabs your attention: you hear a sound, and you just listen to it; you notice a strong sensation in your body, and you feel it; a memory arises, and you notice the image or thought; another sensation comes, and you feel it; and so on. You can choose where to place your attention, or let the objects choose you, bringing attention to whatever is most obvious in any given moment. You may start to feel a little lost without your anchor, so if you feel unsure about what to notice, go back to your anchor at any point. After a while try letting go of your anchor again and tuning in to whatever objects arise in your mind, from moment to moment. Practice for as long as you feel drawn to. Whenever you are ready to stop, notice the effect of the practice on your body and mind, and when you are ready, open your eyes or conclude the meditation.

FLEXIBLE AWARENESS OF MENTAL ACTIVITY PRACTICE

"Settle into a comfortable physical position. Close your eyes, if you wish. Using your breathing or listening to sounds, spend a few minutes using focused awareness practice to stabilize your mind. When you are ready, let go of your breath and any other physical or external object of focus, and turn your attention to your mind. See if you can notice thought after thought after thought. Give them labels, if it is helpful, such as planning, remembering, worrying, fantasizing, judging. What happens when you notice a thought? Does it disappear? Can you think the thought with awareness? Do you notice a thought at the beginning, middle, or end of the thought? Have fun with the exploration. If you start to feel overwhelmed or lost, take a break by bringing awareness to a physical aspect of your meditation: your bodily sensations or your breath. Or return to your anchor. Notice the physical sensations for a little while until you can return your attention to the mental activity. If you are enjoying this practice, stay with it as long as you are drawn to. If it feels challenging, do it for just a few minutes at a time. Once you stop, notice the effect on your body and mind and then conclude the meditation."