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Expand Peripheral Vision

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY *

In the midst of your busy day, stop.
Sit quietly with your eyes open.
Look at any object before you.
Now take an in-breath and expand your vision
To include what is immediately to the left and to the right of
that object.
With the out-breath, relax and settle into yourself.
Take another in-breath and expand your vision even more
To include everything that's before you, in an arc of about
ninety degrees.
Breathe out and settle further into yourself.
Take another in-breath and include your entire field of vision.
Your attention is equally distributed between what is
in front of you
And all of your peripheral vision.
Expand it even more to include things not just to the left and
the right,
But even things over your shoulders.
Expand beyond what your eyes can see.
With the out-breath, relax completely into being that which
sees all.
Remain like this, breathing softly, for several minutes.
Feel the mystery of your own essence.

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Attention can take many states. It can be focused, alert, and single-pointed. Often we need to be like that, like a cat watching a mouse or a bird, ready to pounce. If you drive in traffic, juggle a busy schedule, perhaps while raising children or just working in today's commercial world, you are probably constantly attending to beeping machines, deadlines, and needs from a variety of directions, which sometimes seem impossible to fulfill at the same time. You need to stay focused to get it all done, and there's no time to space out.

This is our habitual state, ready for action, muscles and sinews taut, anticipating the need to make a move. When your attention is focused in this way, you become more defined, a human-doing instrument more than a human-being presence.

Attention can also be more diffused, spread equally over the range of our sensory perception. Then, everything can relax—body, thoughts, and feelings—and we become more of a presence. Now you can feel the forest rather than just busily counting the trees as you hurry through them on your way toward the future.

Because our habits of focus are so familiar, we may think that a more diffused state of consciousness is out of reach. We ascribe it to other people, a teacher, the author of a spiritual book, or even a historical figure, but never to ourselves. We may also project more expansive consciousness into our own future, saying to ourselves, “When I am enlightened, then it will all be different.”

But there is no need to make this choice. You can shift to a more expansive view at any time, for a few minutes, and then return to the habits of daily life. Try using this practice often throughout the day.