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Developing Awareness in Meditation

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Awareness vs. Attention

Attention is like a spotlight—it zeroes in on specific objects or sensations.

Awareness is more like ambient light—it includes the broader field of experience.

Both are important. Attention helps stabilize the mind, while awareness lets us notice what else is happening—body sensations, emotions, thoughts—without getting lost in them.

In meditation, we often start with focused attention (like on the breath) but aim to expand into awareness, staying grounded while opening to more of our lived experience.

Guided Breath Awareness Sequence

We'll practice this sequence during meditation today. You can also use it anytime on your own.

Step-by-Step Breath Awareness

1. **Find the Breath at the Nostrils**

Start by noticing where you feel the breath most clearly under the nostrils. Could be the coolness of the inhale or the warmth of the exhale. Just feel it without needing to control it.

2. **Narrow the Focus**

After about **10–20 seconds**, gently tighten your focus to an area about the size of a **pencil eraser** just under the nostrils. Let attention rest there. Notice any subtle sensations—the texture of breath, tingling, movement.

3. **Loosen the Focus**

After about **10–20 seconds**, let the focus widen back to the whole area under the nostrils. Notice any change in how the experience feels. Does it soften? Does the mind relax or shift?

4. **Full-Body Breathing**

After about **10–20 seconds**, expand awareness to the **whole body breathing**. Feel the breath moving through the body like a wave—chest, belly, shoulders, back. Include the sense of being embodied—noticing posture, contact with the chair or cushion.

5. **Return to the Nostrils**

After about **10–20 seconds**, gently come back to the breath at the nostrils. Notice how shifting attention changes the quality of experience.

What to Notice

- **Changes in Experience**

Pay attention to how shifting focus changes what you notice. Is the breath different when attention is tight vs. when awareness is broad? Does the body feel different when you're focused narrowly or open widely?

- **Pleasurable Sensations**

Sometimes there's a sense of ease, calm, or even subtle joy. When this happens, **let the corners of your mouth curl slightly into a gentle smile**. Not a forced grin—just enough to acknowledge the pleasure without clinging to it.

- **No Storytelling**

When you notice something pleasant (or unpleasant), **don't make a story about it**. Just feel it. Experience it directly as sensation.

Why This Matters

Practicing this kind of **awareness training** can:

- Help you become more sensitive to your inner world
- Reduce reactivity by noticing experiences early—before they snowball
- Increase the ability to enjoy simple pleasures without grasping or clinging
- Make meditation feel more alive and less mechanical

Closing Reflection

We'll discuss after the meditation:

- What did you notice when shifting between attention and awareness?
- Did you experience any moments of calm, ease, or joy?
- How might this practice help you in daily life—not just on the cushion?