

# Focused Attention and Open Awareness Guided Meditation (9)

In this guided practice, we'll be exploring both focused attention and open awareness to help you shift out of the beta brain wave state and into the other brain wave states like theta and gamma that are conducive to creativity, innovation, and flow. We'll start by doing a practice to develop focused attention and then move on to do a practice exploring open awareness.

To help train the mind to develop focused attention, we're going to choose the breath as your focus. This is a way of practicing paying attention to one thing, noticing when the mind has wandered and then bringing it back again. However, it's important to know that outside of this meditation the focus of attention will be the issue that you're wanting to find a creative solution to, and then whenever you become aware that the mind has wandered, bring your attention back to focusing on the issue at hand.

Let's begin the guided practice. You can start by finding a comfortable position. You can do this practice sitting, standing, or lying down, and the eyes can be either closed or open. Soft gaze and the attention is turned inward. Then as you're ready, taking a few slow, smooth, deep breaths in and out through the nose if you can. Slow, smooth, deep inhale. Slow, smooth, deep exhale. Do a couple of more of these at your own pace. As you do, know that this is helping to balance your sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, and that supports a quality of relaxed but alert attention that will be supportive for your practice.

Okay. Now allow the breath to return to its natural rhythm, not controlling the breath in any way. Simply feel the breath coming in and going out. Now, take a moment and notice where you feel the breath the most clearly the most easily. Maybe that's the belly, the chest, or the sensation of the breath inside the nostrils. Then allow that to become the focus for your attention. Whenever you notice that the mind is somewhere other than the breath, simply bring your attention back to the experience of the breath coming in and going out. I'll give you a few moments now to practice this on your own.

See what it's like to pay attention to one full cycle of breath from the very beginning of the in breath all the way through to the end of the out breath. Stay with the breath one breath at a time, one moment at a time. With the focused attention practice, whenever you become aware

that the mind has wandered, allow the attention to refocus on the breath. If the attention wanders nine times, you bring it back 10.

Okay, very good. Now let's shift from the focused attention practice to exploring open awareness. In open awareness you're learning how to open to and embrace more of reality in your awareness. To start, imagine that you're lying on your back on a warm summer's day gazing up at a blue sky. You notice beautiful white clouds slowly passing through the sky. You also notice birds and airplanes passing by. Now shift your attention from focusing on the objects in the sky, the clouds, the birds, and the airplanes to opening your awareness to the vast spaciousness of the blue sky beyond. You become aware of the backdrop of the sky as far as it goes in all directions. Notice how the sky isn't bothered by any of the objects that are floating through it. How easily, effortlessly the sky holds it all. Now let that scene go from your imagination, and let's explore open awareness within your own experience.

To start, bring your attention to any sensations you feel arising in your body. You might take a moment and scan your attention through your body starting with the sensations in your feet, moving up your legs, your torso, your arms and hands, and neck and head. Notice if there are any areas of warmth or coolness, tingling or buzzing, aching or pain, tension or numbness. Now shift your attention to noticing any thoughts or images that might be arising. Shift your attention and notice sounds. What sounds do you hear?

So now, just like when you shifted your attention from focusing on the objects in the sky like the clouds and birds and airplanes, to opening your awareness to the spaciousness of the blue sky beyond, see if you can now allow your attention to shift from focusing on the objects in your experience, like sensations, thoughts, images or sounds, to opening to the spacious awareness that holds it all and easily allows all of the objects that arise to come and go. It could be a sound, then a thought, and then a body sensation. Allow the awareness to remain open like a big sky unbothered by any of the objects passing through it. Breathe and soften, watching it all come and go.

It's in this place of open, spacious awareness that insight, innovation and creativity can arise. If at any point you find yourself getting distracted, allow the attention to refocus on the breath for a few breaths, and then again open your awareness to become the big sky that holds it all and allows all of the objects, the sensations, thoughts, images, sounds, to come and go. I'll give you a minute to explore this further on your own.

Okay, very good. The next time that you're wanting to be more creative, see what it's like to first focus your attention on that which you're wanting to find a creative solution to and then shift gears into open awareness, making the space for something new and fresh to arise. Sometimes an inside, creative solution will arise that is the answer to the issue or question at hand, and that will be the end of the process. It's wonderful when that happens. Other times, often with more challenging or complex issues, you can go back and forth between these two modes of focused attention and open awareness as much as needed.

That brings us to the end of this guided meditation. Take a moment to appreciate yourself for doing this practice. May you experience greater creativity, innovation, and flow through the art and science of mindful living.