

Chapter 1 : SEEING AND LISTENING

To read ALL of these practical instructions FIRST is unnecessary. Any sensible person would want to know : why on earth should i bother learning about this? My advice is to please read at least the first few paragraphs, to get the hang of what i'm talking about. When you start to get impatient and want to know where it's all leading, then move on to Chapter 2.

SEEING

I'd been thinking about how, over the course of thousands of years, the need for focussed visual attention has always increased. From craftsmen to reading and writing, television and now miniature phones. And the only alternative seems to be, to close the eyes, when sleeping or meditating.

Then, around 10 years ago, i asked myself : How else can i use my eyes - what else can i do with them apart from focussing or closing them? And i thought maybe i could use my peripheral sight like some birds (ducks, blackbirds, blue tits and pigeons), or horses and deer.

At first i wondered how animals used their peripheral sight, because as soon as i tried to look at something on the peripherie, my focus always went to that point, (or to anything else moving or bright). So i focussed on something straight infront, and then directed my attention to a point on the peripherie, at about 30° up on one side. I quickly realised i could see points at 30° on both sides simultaneously, still physically focussing on a boring focal point infront, and the experience was interesting enough to want to repeat.

Slowly, over the next few weeks, i chose different angles, checking out all the points of the compass. Then one day i realised: i didn't need the central focal point straight ahead and if i looked at a blank space, i could see the whole oval shape of my field of vision with multiple things moving inside it. (I was outside, obviously things indoors don't move that much.) And so, broadband seeing was born.

I don't think it's necessary to follow my long preparation method, but i still use this idea to intensify the sensation.

We sometimes spontaneously experience a short moment of broadband seeing, looking into the distance with a landscape or seascape - and a panorama is best for this exercise.

An ideal alternative, is to lie down in the centre of a clearing in the woods, look at a clear sky, and see the leaves on the trees moving all around the peripheries.

'Looking with two eyes', is an idea which may help you get into the feeling quickly. Put your hands up between your eyes, so you block the central area. You will get an impression of how it is to see with eyes on both sides of your face. Then take your hands away and just imagine you have two separate eyes on the sides of your face. Then forget you've got two eyes and just look.

Look at everything you can see and see everything you're looking at. Wait until it all merges into the oval shape of your field of vision, then look at the whole picture - if anything moves you will notice it, but don't look at it, keep looking at the whole picture.

My experience is that instead of looking at the world like a T.V. screen, it feels as though i'm right up inside the T.V.. The normal feeling of subject looking at object is considerably different, it's a 'being with' what i'm seeing, instead of looking at it.

It seems to help if there is a monotonous wall or a ceiling straight in front, anything which has no focal point. If your eyes wander, then look at a neutral and motionless focal point. Outwardly it will appear as if you're staring. (I can do it with glasses on, but it's not easy, i think it's better to take them off and do it half-blind, and i haven't yet been able to experiment with anyone who wears contact lenses.)

It's important to get the hang of broadband seeing before going too far with this essay, otherwise you will only intellectually understand some of the things i'm saying.

To see everything you've just got to stop thinking, and just look. And the easiest way stop thinking, is to listen. So i recommend starting with the following listening exercise, it is far easier, and essentially practices the same thing.

LISTENING

For most of evolution, life was a lot quieter than it is today. It's been a few thousand years since the first blacksmith started hammering; - but recently, with motors, amplifiers, drills, bombs and beat music, we have suddenly become a very loud species. And i think we have all become a little deaf.

Listening has an immediacy which the other senses don't have, and this is because sounds are sometimes very sudden and over in a split second, smells and sights usually last at least a few seconds. Listening requires and stimulates nowness like no other sense.

Sounds are either quick, or else they have a timeline, usually a start and an end, and always a collection of repetitive riffs as with bird song, waves and rivers.

There's quite a difference between listening to nothing; - listening to something specific, like music or bird song; - and broadband listening.

I remember camping by a deserted country road, at night listening to single cars winding off into the distance, with the feeling that it was stretching my hearing abilities for five miles and more, and then, the complete silence ... Maybe if that sort of experience could be guaranteed i would suggest focussing on it.

But the only way to be ready and open for those experiences when they happen, is with broadband seeing and listening. And, if the inner openness is available, this is an inspiration in itself.

Listen to everything, as helpless and vulnerable as babies are before they learn to filter out the boring everyday sounds, even before they learn that they have ears.

It helps us civilised adults to regain this openness, by actively listening, searching for sounds, listening out. Not only aware of all we hear, but also listening out for any really quiet sounds - always ready for any sudden surprise. It depends on the time of day and where you live, listening out for distant dogs and children is often a good idea, at night listening out for owls and car doors.

Listening out is full of surprises. Listen in all directions, near and far away, high and low. I often imagine how early man might listen out for distant wild boar or herds of oxen or buffalo - and nearby tigers or snakes.

I know no better and simpler exercise than 'listening out' to directly stop thinking, or at least slow the thoughts down for a few seconds and enjoy a moment's inner peace. By empathising with the animal's acuity of listening, we can't think. If we start thinking, we stop listening, and in that moment an animal would be vulnerable.

(It's possible, but difficult to 'listen' with the windows shut, and some modern sounds aren't worth listening to: modern ear plugs are my advice ...).

Ready and waiting, passive but alert, as some animals are when dosing, we may recognise and name some things, and that's O.K., but then, (before the associations start the wheels of thought spinning) we just have to want to listen again ... why? ... For a hare or deer, it's survival, but we don't have that compelling motive. Maybe we need to recreate a touch of that primitive angst and urgency, and the compelling motive for us is : if we don't stop thinking for a few moments, we will go crazy. It is urgent that we get a bit of direct and simple peace of mind.

There's one other thing. When I feel open to hearing everything, the sensation is that I'm listening with the whole of my head. This subjective sensation may be my imagination but even if it is, it's a pleasant feeling. And I could easily believe that this is how it feels for many animals, birds for example (with no exterior ears), and babies, who learn to cover their ears with their hands between 6 and 12 months old.

SEEING (cont.)

There are all sorts of different degrees of broadband seeing; just as there are with listening, and everything else in life - love, hate and how hot the coffee is.

With listening, everyone seems to at least have an idea of how to try and do it ... with seeing most people have no idea ... even though they probably use it everyday when driving ... but it could never develop while driving, because you need to focus on where you are going.

A good idea to achieve a degree of success, is to go somewhere where lots is happening, sit outside where cars and people are moving - by the street or in a pedestrian zone, ..

Look upwards where nothing's moving, find a roof top chimney pot to focus on, but then don't concentrate on it - concentrate on the people, push-bikes and cars which are passing by in the bottom half of your field of vision. Notice when new objects come into your field of vision - follow them till they are out of sight.

Then look down at the pavement, or your knees, and 'massage' the upper half of your field of vision.

Another good idea is, sitting in a train, facing in the direction of travel, focus on something in front, and then watch the world going by on both sides. Anyone can do this, and once you've started, and if you enjoy it, then you can develop it.

WITH EYES CLOSED

An offshoot of 'seeing' must be mentioned : Normally, with closed eyes, we see little stars or vague shapes and lines or sometimes a kaleidoscope image. This is a result of our normal habitual focussed vision. When looking to the peripheries with the eyes closed, we can see light all around the perimeter, as though it shines through the forehead, temples, and cheeks. I think people often unknowingly use this as part of the relaxation in sunbathing.

It must be a sort of optical illusion, but we can easily imagine that animals with our type of eyes, who use their peripheral vision, would have had this experience through millions of years of doing. And that includes ducks and horses, and all animals who have their eyes on both sides of their heads. And so now, the question is : do you want to really stretch your empathy and imagination to feel how it might be for a duck or a horse to see light in and through their entire heads?

[Appendix A has additional ideas.](#)

THE BROADBAND METHOD

From the way we sense and the way we use our senses, we create the world we feel. This has often been said, but only rarely directly applied to our senses. It is nothing mystical, it's just rather strange: I'm suggesting a practical physiological method of using the senses to find a moments peace and harmony with the world.

Please spend a minute a day experimenting with the exercises in this Chapter. They are the practical basis for all that follows.

Combine broadband seeing and listening. This is the single, most basic and essential exercise. I usually start with seeing and then deepen it together with listening.

At first, it's important to do this for only a minute or so at a time. The attitude is important, the ability to switch it on.

We need only look at a pigeon or blackbird while eating and notice how quickly they can change between their focussed mode of seeing and their broadband mode, with their head popping up and down every second to eat and check for danger. They are so familiar with broadband seeing that the second the head is up, is enough to register if anything dangerous is moving.

There are lots of reasons for starting with just one minute a day. Partly because if doing this - even trying to do this - is enjoyable, then you will want to repeat it. Partly to create a feeling of urgency - it's got to be done now, and in a minutes time it'll be too late. And partly, to realise that you can turn it on without any preparation time. If you want or need preparation time, you will have 50 seconds to think about doing it.

Our non-selective or broadband abilities are a 'knack', a talent, a feeling. Concentration and will power are forms of focussing, starting off with an appropriate attitude seems important. If subsequently you want to do it hours long, that's up to you.

Your subconscious knows how it feels to use the senses like this. A minute a day which is interesting or enjoyable is the best way to give your subconscious the signal that it's time to remember.

If you want to make it a priority and do it a lot, then do it five times a day, one minute at a time ...