

5 Perception

We construct our view of the world and what we think is real through our senses. How do we broaden perceptual habits?

Starting right where you are, notice what you're noticing. Do you habitually look, listen, move, smell, taste, or touch to meet the world? Observe your perceptual preferences.

Begin a body scan. Sit comfortably, or lie on your back in constructive rest, eyes-closed:

- Bring your awareness to the top of your head.

- Notice any sensation happening on this part of your body. You might feel tingling, an itch, or a pain. Observe any sensation on this area non-judgmentally.

- Bring your awareness to your face and scalp. You might sense the touch of air on your skin, heat or cold, a muscle twitching. The invitation is to feel what is really happening at this moment, without reacting.

- Move your awareness to your neck. Notice any sensation—tingling, the touch of cloth on skin, or your hair as it brushes your body. If you feel nothing, just wait. Sensation is happening all the time whether you are aware of it or not.

- Move your mind's eye to your back body. There might be pressure or pain, heat or coolness, compression of joints. If your mind wanders, just bring it back to this part of your body, valuing sensation.

- Continue to the front surface of your body, the right arm, the left arm, the pelvis, the right hip and thigh, the right lower leg and foot, the left hip and thigh, the left lower leg and foot.

- Bring your awareness to the soles of your feet.

- Return to the top of your head and scan down the core of your body.

- Notice sensations in the soft tissues of your mouth and tongue, lungs, heart, digestive tract, and reproductive organs.

- Return awareness to your breath.

- Notice any impulses for movement. Let yourself follow these impulses. Move while being moved. Rather than doing exercise or patterned movement, listen to your body. What feels good is right.

- Pause and return to a seated alignment. Slowly open your eyes in this dialogue with light

that we call seeing. Can you remain aware of sensation as you include vision?

Changing Lenses

-Sit somewhere you can imagine an expansive view, with your eyes open:

-Visualize that you are facing an ocean. It's a warm day with bright sunshine and a light sea breeze. People are strolling by, children and dogs are playing, and birds are passing overhead. Build this scene for yourself: what are the colors, smells, textures, and details of this place?

Now, imagine a pair of sunglasses and put them on by lifting your hands to your face:

1. Focus your attention on the water, air and land of this place. This is the geological lens, connecting you back to billions of years of earth's history. If you are a surfer, a mountain climber, or a geologist, this lens might feel familiar. (Lower your arms to refresh.)

2. Try a second pair of glasses (lifting your hands to your face): What's happening to the plants and animals of this scene. This is the biological lens, connecting you back millions of years. Often we recognize the truth of our emotional lives in the lives of animals. If you are a dog-lover, gardener, or biologist, you might be drawn to this lens.

3. Put on the third pair of glasses: Notice people; this is the cultural lens, connecting you back thousands of years—since the origin of humans. If you are interested in gender dynamics, politics, religion, history, architecture, and clothing choices of the people you see—and the artists and writers who have preceded you in this place, you might view the world through this lens. (Now lower your arms, and “glasses” to refresh.)

4. Try on the fourth pair of glasses: Connect to your relatives; this is the familial lens, linking you back hundreds of years and continuing to the present day. You may have grandparents who walked here; parents whose ashes were spread at sea, picnics and boat trips on nearby islands. Some of us view the world from the lens of family. (Lower your arms and “glasses” to refresh.)

5. And, finally, experience the last pair of glasses - your personal lens. Now you are engaging decades of history, your life span. This view includes your education and training, beliefs and values, and the individual life experiences and memories that shape your perception of place: a first kiss by the dock, performance on the beach, or fight with a friend. Place is emotional, whether you are consciously aware of it or not. (Lower your arms, and “glasses,” and refresh.)

The problem with any lens (in binoculars, for example) is if it gets stuck, fixated on one view of the world, with no other possibilities. Then all the rest of the perspectives are blurry or impossible to perceive.

The invitation is to look at various scenes during your day and scan through the lenses to be more inclusive. No two people perceive the same thing at the same moment. Changing lenses opens possibilities for communication and exchange.

-Dance your own dance, with awareness of sensory perception. Does changing lenses as you move broaden perceptual range?

Sensation is the language of the body, informing all our actions and interactions. It's how we make "sense" of the world.