

Dewdrops on Stinging Nettles



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Outside Practices

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“Truth is a pathless land.”
- J. Krishnamurti

Gazing

In the *Gazing* practices you move through the world in such a way as you don't project yourself out into the world. Instead see what is in your visual field as shining *into* you. The practice of gazing is being fully open to where attention has been placed. Abide in the subject of attention without labeling, discriminating or commenting upon it. If such language arises, let it naturally pour away. Just simply be open to what is in your field of view. Allow this openness to persist for a sustained duration. Time itself will flow away. As attention releases, awareness opens up. Allow this to naturally occur. Very gently, seamlessly gazing, this widens from dwelling upon our field of view into an open awareness.

We can gaze internally placing our attention on breath and expanding out to our whole bodies until it opens to awareness. We can gaze externally at what is in our field of view until it gently ebbs into open awareness. This practice of gazing follows from *focus*; diffused attention opening up focus into awareness. It is essential to be able to seamlessly shift from focus into gazing.

Gazing externally is fundamentally a natural practice oriented toward *Empty Awareness*. While we walk, we walk from our bodies, in awareness. Over time we find we don't need to think about where we are going or what we are doing. The constant narration falls silent and we are just a presence moving within our surroundings which are simply a collection of presence, a singular expression of absence.

When we stop and let things go and open up our senses, seeing and hearing and feeling, we are practicing maintaining that functioning without the filtering of our conditioned responses. We are training ourselves to remain in *Openness*. *Empty Gazing* practices are practicing seeing the world as it truly is, being fully open to *what is* and in this our true selves.

Being Outside

When out of doors we are naturally in our bodies, by being aware of our bodies, centering ourselves in the abdomen, rooting ourselves in the earth, breathing naturally, we can truly inhabit them. As we move amidst the natural environment with all of its continual change we can become increasingly aware of silence. Behind every sound, behind the incessant activity is a deep silence. At twilight, when birds come to rest and people are generally not out and about, you can feel a hushed stillness, that points to a yet deeper silence. Paying attention to these conditions facilitates seeing past the self.

When we are seated outside, or where we can see the outdoors, this is not an opportunity to ‘watch’ or to attach to

additional stimulus. Gazing at what is in our field of view is not different from gazing at the floor in front of us. We engage in outdoor sitting in order to facilitate Empty Awareness.

Sit as you normally would, eyes mostly closed, gaze downward. Let the increased sounds of the outdoors flow through you. Let go of the environment and relax into awareness, cultivating the Still Pool. When thoughts have subsided open your eyes, fully utilizing your peripheral vision. There should be no distinction between them open and closed. The Still Pool, deeply clear, undisturbed by thought, sensations and feelings, brightly mirroring all that shines in.

Alternatively you can sit with eyes open but not focused on anything. In this manner you are using the complexity of the environment to move past the self. Things can appear as a blur, or almost like

static. If you are able to sit somewhere where in your immediate, direct view is something complex like a stand of trees, or a mass of shrubs. Simply relax your whole body, especially the eyes, keeping them open. If a bird or insect flies by, let it enter and exit your field of view without naming it, commenting upon it or dwelling upon it. If a thought arises notice this and let it fall away without pursuing it, commenting upon it or dwelling upon it.

In this way our field of view, the very landscape, feeds into the cultivation of Empty Awareness.

Sky Gazing

Lie down outside in the grass or on some surface and gaze up into the sky. A solid grey mass is its own form of absence as is the transparent depths of a clear blue sky. Scattered clouds amidst the deep blue sky are rife with fractal edges, endless dimensions, layered complexities and gaps revealing absence. Gazing with eyes wide, with our peripheral vision, into whatever form the sky takes our minds settle, opening into awareness. Take it all in at once. Wandering thoughts are subsumed into the vastness, the depths of the sky. This is the sky as the Still Pool.

Deepening this practice is a function of time. Laying down looking into the sky for an hour or longer opens ourselves up completely. The endless narrative is

subsumed in the deep sky. As we lie there we can use the complexity of the clouds to diminish this chatter, we can bring all our attention to those small gaps of absence momentarily cutting off all thought. But primarily it is a continuous settling into the sky itself, to where there is no separation. Open yourself to the entirety of the sky, our gaze, our peripheral vision and beyond that. Open yourself to all of the sounds until they are a continuous symphony whose wash of sound is beyond any single element. Stay in the body, feeling the surface upon which you lie, feeling your weight, feeling the earth. Be aware of all of these sensations, all of these sounds, all of these sights. Gaze with the entire body.

All that remains is empty awareness, no knowing whether eyes are open or closed, between earth and sky,

Tree Gazing

The *entangled complexity* of the branches of trees, stands of trees, networks of leaves can open us to awareness. When we encounter a tree with bare skeletal branches stark against the sky, or with a matrix of leaves and negative space we stop and spend time gazing at them. Scan the branches, gazing into the negative space, let patterns go, let yourself settled into just taking in a broad swath of the complex scene. Branches fray into fractal invisibility against blue or grey skies, pulling our gaze past ourselves. The network of negative space between leaves or branches, pulls us into absence away from our narratives.

This process requires time, especially as one first begins this practice. When you

stop to gaze into a tree it is not a matter of a glance upward and then moving on. Let your gaze caress the branches, seamlessly transitioning to a wide gaze utilizing your peripheral vision taking in the entire canopy, lingering on negative space. When engaged in this practice while *Walking*, stop frequently and spend time with each tree. As time passes you will find your thoughts less scattered and the narrative more distant, less urgent.

Over the course of dedicated periods of time, on a walk, or sitting and gazing into the entangled webwork of branches, leaves, grasses, shrubs or anything that creates complex fractal and negative spaces, one cultivates *Empty Awareness*. With practice one can spend most of this time just gazing, ones mind a Still Pool, reflecting what it encounters. Not casting ones self into the world, but seamless with it, illuminated by it.

Mountain Gazing

There is no place for the self to find purchase amongst the mountains. The physicality of going deep into mountains roots us in our bodies, pushing us past our small concerns. Life and Death have an immediacy that can be missed in the village. Surrounded by peaks our selves are reduced. Amidst towering indifference we can let our selves completely go. Sitting amongst peaks the artificiality of time as a construct resolves itself.

Sit amongst mountains and gaze at the range before you dispensing of all names, labels, commentary or distinctions. The inner dialog naturally grows silent. Simply be still and allow the landscape to shine inward. Using your peripheral vision take in the full extent of the the visible range.

Notice any tension and place ones awareness there allowing it to ease. Let eyes relax and unfocus or mostly close. Be with the mountains; there is no distinction between inside and outside, sitter and mountain.

Gaze out toward a sawtooth ridge-line forgetting yourself in the infinite detail of the fractal edge, experience yourself from the mountains perspective. Eyes open, snapped into focus there is no distinction.

Gazing into the Distance

When we gaze across an open space—a pond, the ocean, a field, a lake, tundra, ice sheets —into the distance our perspective shifts. The sense of self naturally recedes. When gazing into this wide immensity, utilizing our peripheral vision, this becomes ever more apparent.

Gaze long at the horizon, or at the sawtooth of a distant mountain range or the fractal edge of a far away tree line. Roam your eyes across these features as the sense of isolated, separateness diminishes. Then open up to the totality of the vast landscape in your gaze. Listening to sounds from far away enhances this sense of vast openness. Allow this complexity, this immensity to pervade

your being. As with all of the gazing practice this requires time.

When the sense of self is at a low ebb, invert your gaze, so that your perspective is that of the distant landscape shining into you. Instead of your separate body standing on the shore, or sitting overlooking a valley gazing outward, it is the mountains, trees, ocean gazing at you. Perception is identity and thus there is no distinction between gazing outwards and the outwards gazing inward.

Gazing out toward distant rain clouds offers a similar evaporation of the diminished self. Gaze out at these clouds with their streaked, grey fingers of rain connecting earth to sky and fray into the clouds perspective. Not only do you hover over a vast area but you seamless connect to the landscape via countless drops of rain.

Entirely open to the totality of *what is*.

Gazing in Motion

Gazing at myriad objects in motion defies our singular casting of attention and opens us up to complexity. Sunlight dancing on the surface of water, flocks of birds, swarms of insects, falling snow, dust frolicking in a ray of light, all of these can bring us to awareness.

If out *Walking*, move through space letting sights and sounds pass through you uncommented upon. At an opportune locale pause and gaze out into the distance. Gaze across a pond with your entire vision letting the play of ripples, flickering sunlight, gnats roiling in the air, trees swaying in the wind, or whatever is there simply be in your gaze. Avoid directing attention toward any singular object. If a bird, or insect, flies across your

field of view simply let it. These transitory events come into view, persist for a time and then pass outside of our view.

As our minds begin to reflect the view shining in and the narrative is at a low ebb remain with the awareness of the transitory passage of a bird. It is impossible to hold in your mind, simply be aware of them as they pass beyond your field of view. Following the birds, without looking at them shift to their viewpoint. Open your awareness to the paths and views of multiple birds as they fly by. Opening yourself up to them and you move with them, as them, hopping from branch to branch, wheeling above the ocean, darting across the sky. None of this is beyond awareness.

Gazing into Water

Water in all its multiplicity of forms reveals the ever changing nature of all of things and by gazing deeply into it we open to this essential truth. Water can be a mirror, a literal manifestation of the Still Pool. When we gaze into it in this form the myriad reflections, the clarity of the water the depths below, the ground beneath all intermingle beyond our sensory capacity, beyond graspability. An insect striding across the surface breaks up this layer, distorts the reflections and leaves us with little to hold onto. Wind just stirring the water generates endless abstractions subverting the mind of representation, the mind that divides, categorizes and names. As the wind grows stronger still ripples, little waves weave endless patterns that

confound categorization, leaving the discriminating mind with little to work with. Sunlight bouncing off of waves, dances endlessly, unpredictably, chaotically eluding our desire for regularity, pattern and stasis.

In all these forms and endless others water provides one of the richest and adaptable subjects for gazing. It can reflect the clouds and negative space for sky gazing, but stirring it around, abstracting it allowing us to slip past our habits. Trees reflected in the water, layered with each other, are fragmented by movement are rendered beyond our grasp by a single drop falling into the water. When gazing into waters reflective prosperities we take it in as a whole—the layers, the sky, the reflective subjects. We simply allow disturbances in the water to bring home the contingent nature of all

things. We let the reflections shine into us and we are as a mirror to them.

We can sit and gaze across water watching the ripples weave endless patterns. These patterns are beyond our kin. We gaze with relaxed eyes, utilizing the full breadth of our vision. The patterns simply come in and we can not conceptually categorize them. They are beyond words, beyond understanding.

When there are ripples in the water and sunlight shining on them it is broken into spots seeming to dance across the water like a natural display of static. Truly random it defies our minds attempts at prediction, at forcing the display into a pattern. Completely beyond our control this makes for one of the most powerful subjects for gazing as there is literally nothing to hold on to. As the waves shift, the sun moves in the sky, the wind changes the dancing light becomes more

or less active, more or less distributed across our view. Again we want to take in the whole scene: the patterns of the water, the patterns of the light, any reflections just let the entirety of this overwhelming sensory experience shine in.

We gaze across a lake at the trees on the far side and the reflections softly distorting them. We gaze across the ocean with its endless waves and the blurry line of the horizon. We watch waves roll in leaving intricate patterns of foam, tracing incomprehensible symbols in the sand.

In all cases we open ourselves up to the weave of the water, the endless complexity, the constant change. Our minds unable to separate and grasp this, have to just let it go. We let the small self recede into the waves, lost in the bottomless reflections, fade away like the momentary twinkle of the setting sun on unsettled water. Only *what is* remains.

Listening

We gaze not just with our eyes but with our whole body. In the same way that we take in visual stimulus in an all-at-once, defused way, we listen to the totality of sounds.

We become still, open to our surroundings, our eyes fully relaxed whether closed or slightly open. We let the sounds come in naturally, not straining to hear, not focusing on a particular sound. The totality of the sounds forming a singular soundscape, increasingly just a wash of sound.

When a sound draws our attention to it, we don't name it, comment upon it, tell a story about it or dwell upon it. We simply note that moment of focus and return to an open, expansive listening.

Undifferentiated sounds can lead us to a place of increasing openness, too expansive for our minds to grasp. The complexity of the sound-field is too much for our minds to take in its totality.

Rain falling on water, wind in the trees, the roar of ocean waves, the soft hiss of falling snow, these bring us to that diffused awareness.

But do not depend on any specific sounds as the wash of sounds is always present, you simply relax your listening and take it all in. The symphony of birds, insects, cars, planes, rustling grasses, falling leaves all the myriad sounds taken all-at-once until all of the senses merge. Then increasingly the silence becomes ever more present.

When gazing with the eyes we reach a place where we open further by listening. When *walking* as you stop and gaze at various subjects we open ourself in a

deeper way by opening to the sound field. When engaging in listening directly we reach a place where the visual field comes in. Indeed we open up to all of our sensory experience: the wind on our skin, the taste of the air, where those thoughts come from. Being truly open is to the entirety of our experience, what underlies experience.

Walking

Walk with full awareness of the body, *from* the body. Facilitate this if necessary by placing attention on the abdomen, being aware of the rise and fall of breath. Walk from the abdomen, simply letting sights and sounds flow through. Periodically stop, direct your gaze to your breath and exhale. Pause for a moment, letting go. Direct your gaze to the sky, a tree, distant things such as mountain ranges, tree-lines, buildings. Resume walking after a moment and try to maintain just a bodily sense of awareness, walking from the abdomen. Shift awareness to the abdomen as thoughts arise, but then open it up to your whole body and beyond. All sensations, sights, sounds, feelings, smells come in without

placing our direct gaze upon them. Do not name them, comment upon them, distinguish them.

When gazing at things, look for complexity with contrast, something beyond what attention can contain. The contrast can be essential as an undifferentiated mass doesn't allow for flow from the singular to seamless. Thin branches, like a tangle of veins contrasted with a piercing blue sky is a concrete example. We can only take it in all at once, but it isn't just a wash of color. At all times avoid naming what arises in our gaze or providing a commentary to the unfolding of experience. Avoid criticizing yourself. If you find yourself slipping into a narrative simply note this and return to walking, directing attention to the abdomen.

As you work with this practice, and do remember that all of these practice

require time, you will find yourself increasingly in just awareness, few thoughts bubbling up. Those thoughts that do arise simply pouring away. This leads to the purest form of walking where instead of projecting our self out into the world, the world shines in on us. This is the condition of walking without separation, without distinction of self and other, simply moving through the world without obstruction. Empty awareness,

We walk out in the woods, across fields, in mountains, on the beach, in landscape. As we walk our gaze takes in what comes, all the forms shining within. We walk in our bodies, from the abdomen, breathing naturally. We pause and gaze out in the distance. If birds fly across our gaze we hold them in our minds, no separation. If the tops of the trees sway, they sway in our minds. Sunlight dances on water, dragonflies dart through our

field of view. We let these all of these reflect in the deep still pool of our minds.

Stop, let out a breath and gaze out at anything, any layered complexity, negative space, distant fractal landscape thoughts pouring away until there is only empty awareness. Return to walking, remaining in that modality. As attention rises, direct it to your abdomen, feel your breath, the diaphragm sinking low. Simply walking in emptiness. Simply walking.



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