

REGARDING SPACE—OUTER AND INNER

Here are two practice techniques you may find useful. The best way to apply the first one is during a chosen day as a menu item as you go about daily life. Remembering to practice it even just a few times in a day can be useful. The second one is best used during actual sitting meditation.

Outer Space: This technique has you consciously turning your attention to space as an object of awareness. You can divide the technique into a number of specific steps:

First, look at the space between any two objects in your field of vision. For example, if there are two trees in front of you, look at the space in between, exactly along the plane made by the two trees. In other words, focus your eyes along that spatial plane. Then you can shift your vision and attention to the space between two other objects. Do this three times, i.e., with three sets of two objects.

Now, pick a single object and look at the space immediately around the object. Again, do this with three different objects in your field of vision.

Finally, look “into” a single object (car, tree), sensing the space inside it.

Making this small shift of conscious attention to space instead of to physical objects themselves, which of course you’ll also continue to be aware of, breaks up the normal pattern of seeing the world and begins to allow for a certain sense of “spaciousness” and presence to show up. “Things” lose some of their sense of solidity, while, paradoxically, becoming more vivid.

As a final step, notice the space between your own hands, then the space around them, then the space inside your own body (head, chest, belly, limbs).

Advanced technique (“advanced” only in that it might take more practice): While doing the above also maintain awareness of the breath coming and going into and out of the center of the chest (heart center).

Inner Space: Here, too we, focus on space, but in this case specifically on the “space” or gap between the words of our thoughts. In sitting meditation, this is best applied when you find yourself caught by thinking (i.e. obsessing, repetitive gerbil thinking, monkey mind, obsessive planning, fantasizing, strong negative emotions, or revisiting the past). First, take a single short thought out of all the thoughts you’re having and say it back to yourself just as you would in thought labeling. Secondly, say the thought to yourself again, only this time consciously slow it way down, repeating the sentence with distinct pauses of a few seconds in between each word. Actually focus your attention on the “space” or gap between each word as you slowly repeat the sentence, e.g.:

“It’s just not fair.”

You may note how the space or gap gets “filled” with the present moment, i.e., sounds, breathing, body sensations, etc. And how the thought itself takes on a quality of insubstantiality the more the sense of space brings you back to just this moment.

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