

# **Practicing Awareness: Paying Attention Like a Monk**

## **Focused Attention**

The ability to focus and concentrate can give people significant benefits. While I am not the most detail-oriented person, paying attention helped me do better. Focusing is not perfect. It tends to see specific components or pieces and not necessarily the big picture.

## **The Power of Awareness**

It is easy to function without really being fully aware. Our bodies develop memories of their own and we follow the patterns of our habits. We may be able to go to a familiar place without really paying attention to each turn. Expected patterns of behavior wrap themselves around us, welcoming us. The monks who inspire me use the power of habits to remind themselves to be aware.

## **Developing Awareness**

It is not that the monks I know are more cosmic or more spiritual. They take practical steps to develop awareness and pay attention beneath the surface.

The community in which they live and work encourages them to remember. Despite their own distractions, members of monastic communities organize their lives to foster awareness.

For one thing, their days flow from time spent with others to time spent alone. They build time for reflection and for praying into their schedules.

## **Everyday Awareness**

There are people who take regular walks to give themselves time to remember. Some people find specific visual cues, including art, to help them practice awareness. I even know people who choose to listen to specific music.

Many people find practicing stillness, even for short periods of time, helps them get beneath the surface. It is helpful for some to practice taking deep breaths and listen to their own breathing. Some find a specific place, even

sitting in a particular chair, helps them practice awareness. Others are encouraged by setting the same time every day, like the monks, is important.

## **Overcoming Obstacles**

Challenges are part of practicing awareness. People experience obstacles and challenges whenever they practice.

For some our expectations of what will happen become obstacles to awareness. Other people are concerned about the return they will receive on their investment. They would like a guarantee that the time they spend will gain awareness for them. We do not earn awareness by practicing, though it helps us discover new ways of paying attention. Some people have a fear of practicing awareness. There are those who are afraid to fail and those who are afraid to succeed.

The only way to find out for sure what will happen is to try practicing, perhaps with some help.

How will you begin practicing awareness in a new way this week?

Where will you pay unfocused attention today?