



Lesson #10 — Vagal Stretching and Conscious Olfaction

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Welcome back. It's great to have you here.

Hopefully, you enjoyed yesterday's homework. If you will recall we had three steps, the first step was to practice the vagal stretching to go into a bodily awareness, a whole bodily awareness. After that we shifted into awareness of the total visual field, keeping the eyes relaxed but open and that creates an association between the conscious alpha brainwave state and awareness of the visual field so now were connecting, enabling the ability to remain in a conscious alpha state with our eyes open. Of course, much more practice is necessary for the brain to really adapt through neuroplasticity to become quite adept at it, but we've begun that process. And then the final step of the homework was to shift back into beta and then see if we could get into a conscious alpha brainwave state with just use of the total visual field absent vagal stretching.

Today we are going to take it a step forward by adding another sense to our repertoire. So, we have bodily awareness. We have the total visual field. The next sense is olfaction, or the sense of smell. We're going to use vagal stretching again but this time we're going to do it with our eyes open. We might start with our eyes closed and at some point during the vagal stretching I'll ask you to open your eyes to see if you can't continue the vagal stretching and bodily awareness in a conscious alpha state with your eyes open. All right, and then we will work with the sense of smell.

Let's begin our vagal stretching. Go ahead and close your eyes and let the body take on whatever form of stretching it wants to. Be sure to get the entire body, if you are in a chair, don't forget the legs, and also don't forget the face...and open the eyes. You can keep them soft even if you're just kind of squinting and you are just seeing a bit of the visual field in any case, let's start with our eyes at least a little bit open. And then open them a little bit more. And once you are done, sit centered, calm and relaxed, comfortably and become aware of your breathing.

Notice the travel of the breath as it enters the nasal passage. You might notice the coolness of the air as it reaches the top of the nose and then travels down into the lungs back up and out into the world. Keep the eyes open. Feel the breath, relax. Notice how the breath moves the body. The whole body is subtly moved by the breath, but you may not feel it in your lower legs. It's happening and over time you will become aware of that fact that it travels throughout the entire body. Early on you probably just feel it in the upper body and maybe the abdomen, but in any case, be aware of it to the extent that you can be. And now let's intend to become aware of the sense of smell. But the key here is not how much you smell, or which things you smell, the key here is that you intend to smell.

The other key is that your intention is to take in all scents simultaneously, become very sensitive to them without identifying them, labeling them like 'sweet' or in this case the air outside smells like cookies because we have a pollen in the air. We don't want our mind playing the game of identification. So, we are just going to bring it all in, the entire cacophony of smells without dividing them up into individual smells. You see the mind has a habit of labeling things. And so, we are going to just practice not feeding that habit for a time. Labeling things is not wrong, but we don't want it to be a habit. We want to be able to be mentally clear. Spend some time with the sense of smell, if you smell nothing, have no concern whatsoever, it is just the intention that matters. And with this practice, your sense of smell will become much more sensitive over time.

If there is something you feel averse to or a smell that you feel quite attracted to, for now, set aside the bias just take it all in. Soften the reactions to pleasant and unpleasant for this time. That said, if there's an unhealthy smell, if the air is quite stagnant, you might open a window to improve the air quality. That's important for health. Be sure to relax. (Pause)

Alright, now let's shift back into beta. Think of your to-do's, say in your mind some curse words if you want to, that definitely doesn't blend well with a healthy, clear nervous system so it tends to pull us into beta. I have not found an exception to that. I can't say something

mean or cruel without creating a beta brainwave state. Same with deceit, so of course the hidden teaching here is that you might not want to be lying and saying things that are malicious in your daily life because it's not healthy for the nervous system. But in any case, you could use those as a means to get back into beta strategically. I generally recommend you do some mathematical equations, you may think of your to-do list, that sort of thing to get you back in. You might move vigorously, slap your face, that sort of thing, back into beta. And now that we are back into beta, we are going to see if we can't shift into alpha again, but just using the sense of smell. And this time we are going to close our eyes, so we are just going to be working with the sense of smell, relax the body, no vagal stretching, take in some deep breaths and smell. Intend to smell, become very sensitive to the quality of the air, the travel as the air comes in and exhales, the temperature of the air, any scents that it carries. Enjoy. (Pause)

Go ahead and open the eyes, maintaining awareness of the breath and the sense of smell. Now the question is: What if we had a cold, congested, our breathing was somehow perturbed or blocked nasally, we would have to breathe through the mouth. That's okay. In such a case you can't work with the sense of smell, you can just work with the feeling of the breath itself. Work with the way the breath moves the body. Feel its temperature, that sort of thing. Eyes open, continuing for another minute or two. (Pause)

I'm going to test your meditation. Your job here is to continue with the sense of smell and allow my words to be in the background. I'm going to discuss a little bit about the nature of the sense of smell and how it relates to the brain. At the top of your nose, there is just a mucus membrane that separates the sensors that receive the sense of smell from your brain. Essentially what is receiving the sense of smell is neurons that are a part of your brain and there is a mucus membrane where molecules connect to and dissolve into that then touch these neurons as receptors that then transfer that information directly to your brain. So, the sense of smell is the sense that is most closely connected to your brain. It's the direct connect to the external environment, and it connects to the oldest parts of your brain which stimulate deep memories and emotions. So, you might have recollections of times when you smelled something that brought up memories from your young childhood and feelings of nostalgia and all that. That is because your brain's first deepest connection to the physical world is through the sense of smell. Again, as you are listening, keep the information in the background, don't hyper focus on it, remain aware of the sense of smell. As I'm describing this process here in part it's to challenge your awareness. To see if you can remain aware of the sense of smell and the breathing process primary. I highly recommend you practice the sense of smell outside where you are going to be much more recipient to the various molecules of the world. So that you can challenge and go deeper

into this process. How are you feeling now? Is the body relaxed? Is it enjoying the breathing process? Are you feeling the undulation? Are you detecting various scents? How about the temperature and air quality? Are you detecting these things? If not, these are just goals to work toward.

Now as far as homework goes, we are going to do the very same exercise we did yesterday. We'll do vagal stretching, seeing if we can do it with our eyes open and go into awareness of the breathing and the sense of smell. Again, be careful not to spend energy identifying certain scents. The brain will probably do that out of habit, but just soften the tendency if that is the case. See if you can't really enjoy the breathing process, make it feel quite good, and after a few minutes of that, go ahead and stop, shift back into beta by using some vigorous activity, slap your face around, a little bit (laughing), think of your to-do list, that sort of thing. Once you feel focused in beta, your energy is a little bit up and, you know, the usual daily mindset, then see if you can shift back into a conscious alpha brainwave state just purely by feeling the breathing process. Being aware of the breathing process and appreciating the sense of smell and spend several minutes that way. Do it with your eyes open at least half the time. You might start with your eyes closed and then open your eyes at the second half. As you practice this more and more, you might do it more and more with your eyes open earlier and earlier into the process.

And with that, I hope you enjoy your practice, and I will see you next lesson.