

Vast Mind: 3 Ways to Open Beyond the Self-Concern of Our Small Mind

Most of the time, we are caught up in what can be called “small mind”: the small world of self-concern, of wanting to get what we want and avoid what we don’t want.

This is the cause of our suffering — always running to distraction, procrastinating, caught up in worries and fears, worried about what people think of us, what we’re missing, what someone did to offend us, and so on.

It’s a small world we get trapped in, this worrying about ourselves all the time. And it leads to stress, anger, hurt, worry, fear, anxiety and distraction.

The antidote is Vast Mind — growing bigger than the small mind we have habitually become stuck in.

What is Vast Mind? It’s opening to something bigger than our self-concern, opening to the freshness of the moment.

Let’s imagine that there’s someone whose family member has said something insulting to them. They immediately get caught up in small mind, thinking about how they don’t deserve to be treated this way, that they’re a good person and that this person is always being inconsiderate. They are worried about themselves, and their world is very small and constricted.

What if instead, this person dropped their self-concern, and opened their awareness to something wider than themselves? They experienced the moment as pure experience, and suddenly everything is open and vast. They relax into this openness. They might notice that this other person, whom they love, is suffering in some way. They send this person compassion, and feel love for the person and this moment.

That’s the difference between small, constricted mind that’s full of suffering, and vast mind that’s open, fresh, unbounded, and full of love.

You don’t have to take my word for it. Here are three practices for growing from small mind to vast mind.

Practice 1: Ego-Dropping Meditation

A great place to start is by sitting in meditation and opening your awareness and dropping the boundaries between you and everything else. Here’s a meditation I’ve created for practicing this.

The idea is that we practice dropping into a relaxed, open awareness, and then start to relax any boundaries we have between ourselves and all that surrounds us. We drop the construct we've created that we call ourselves, and then there's just sensation, just pure experience.

It's a returning to wholeness. It's a wonderful practice.

Practice 2: Radical Not-Knowing

Most of the time, we act as if we know exactly how things are. We don't pay too much attention to this moment, because it's boring to pay attention to the breath, body sensations, the sensations of everything around us, because we already know all about that!

But in fact, every moment is completely fresh, completely open, full of new possibilities to explore.

When we get stuck in small mind, we are in a narrow, constricted view of the world. And it's a hardened view — I know what I want and I just want to get it. I know what I don't like and I want to avoid it. It's the hardened view of fundamentalism.

The practice of radical not-knowing is to *act as if you've never experienced this before*. Everything is completely new to you, with no preconceptions or labels.

You look around at everything as if you've never seen anything like this. It's fresh, wondrous, breathtaking. There are no names for anything, just the pure experience.

Try walking around like that for a few minutes, and see what it's like. Be open and curious.

What happens is that we become much more open to the vastness of experience. There is no, "I want this" or "I don't want that." It's just, "This is the experience I'm having right now."

This is pure boundless awareness, and it is vast.

Practice 3: Opening to Devotion to Others

When I notice that I've gotten caught up in my small mind, I try to think of people other than myself.

This person is being inconsiderate because they're suffering.

The people who I love are more important than my discomfort.

The love I have for my family is so much bigger than my small wants.

Opening myself up to the love I have for others gets me past my small mind, and into an openness. What would it be like to be completely devoted to other people? It's a fresh experience, boundless and vast.