

The Game of Rings: an Open Awareness Analogy

Would you like to play a game?

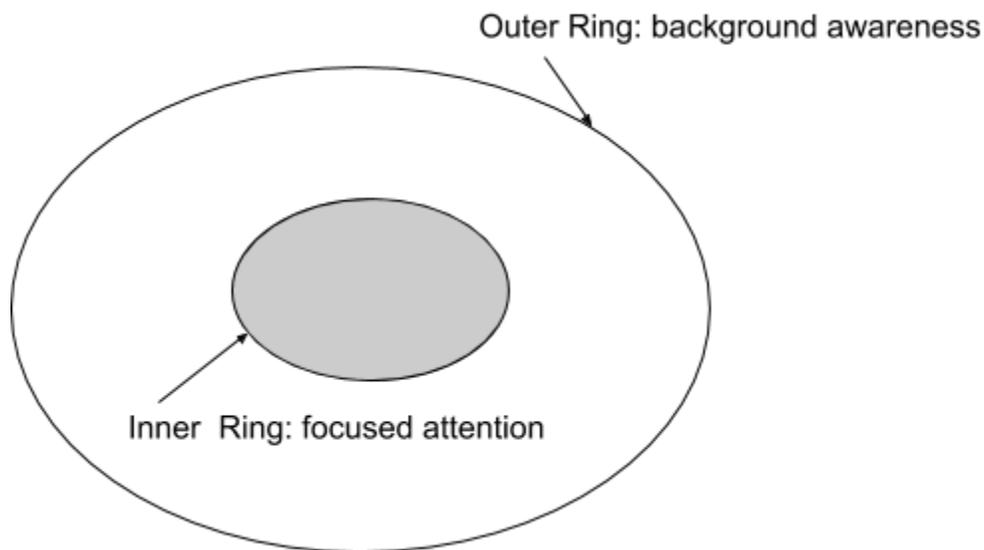
The game doesn't really have an objective. If there is a point, it's to have the experience of playing it. Some might even say the game plays you.

Like any game, the more you practise and the more insightful your approach, the more proficient you become. As a bonus, the skills you learn in this game are useful for any area of your life.

Imagine your awareness as two concentric rings, one within the other.

The outer ring is the part of your awareness that is spread over a wider area. Let's call it **diffuse background awareness**.

The inner smaller ring is more concentrated, focussed, more pinpoint. Let's call it **narrow focused attention**.



To play this game you need to understand the playing field.

Everything you can ever be aware of is spread out over the field of awareness. Within this field are all the objects, people, thoughts, sensations, entities, beings, memories, emotions - everything and anything you could possibly imagine. And of course, in between all this stuff is open space. This field is the **content of awareness**.

Note from the game master: There are no rules, but it helps to understand the tools of the game, which are the two rings.

The two types of awareness, the two rings, have different ways of being aware. It's like having two types of instruments or equipment with which to play the game.

The diffuse background awareness, because it needs to deal with a whole lot of material over a wide area at once, is adapted to **gather and merge content**. It doesn't deal as much in detail or analysis. It's more passive, and requires less energy.

Focussed attention, the inner ring, can **concentrate on a smaller area**, on one thing at a time. It's better at analysis, and tends to separate smaller pieces of information from the background in order to examine them. It has a more active, searching character, and uses more energy.

Enough theory - how do we play?

The game starts with an **intent**, a conscious decision to play.

The main skill is to keep observing, to keep watching whatever plays out, with curiosity and without judgment. This is **mindfulness**.

Sounds simple, doesn't it?

We let the two rings do what they do naturally. And we use our **imagination** to **observe** them at play. Technically, we **observe the way we observe** or we become **aware of the awareness**.

Note from the game master: Don't get discouraged.

It often happens that while we play we're distracted. That's fine. When that happens, smile (it's just a game!) and just remember to start again, resuming where you left off or anywhere else in the middle. The trick is to notice when you drift. The point is not to do this perfectly, but just to do it.

Imagine the soft outer ring of unfocused background awareness **expanding**. It stretches and grows both outward and inward.

Can you imagine the outer ring extend outward into the area around you?

Be imaginative, be creative, **visualize** this in whatever way or ways that work for you.

As the ring moves it gobbles up everything out there into it. Everything it swallows becomes part of its inside. You observe what's in the ring by what arrives through your **senses**: what you hear, see and sense within it.

You can be aware of being aware of more and more as the ring expands. Can you let it expand to the **space** immediately around you? Further? Filling up the room? Don't stop there, this is a game, go further, we aren't limited by time and space or "reality".

*Note from the game master: You'll notice that this type of knowing, this background awareness, has its own special way of knowing. The more content filters into the ring, the less you can focus on each individual element, until you have no choice but to just **let go and experience the content more directly**, without thinking about it. Just notice what you notice.*

And while you're at it, imagine the outer ring **expanding inward as well as outward**, into the space inside you. So now you can note how you are observing all the inner body senses too, like touch, discomfort, warmth, balance, the sensation of the breathing or whatever else makes itself known. Even your thoughts and your emotions and mental pictures.

Note from the game master: This is where that game gets freaky. Anything and everything goes (and comes). Who really knows all the mystical stuff that may be in here or out there?

Still having fun?

Now it's time for the inner ring of attention.

Here's the magic: you can keep experiencing that outer ring and, **at the same time**, the inner ring of focused attention. Notice how you can keep being aware of what's within the space of the outer ring, and at the same time **focus on something within that space**.

Choose one thing. For example, the sensation of the breath amongst all the other sensations out there, or bring out a single sound amongst all the other sounds. You can **choose** any object of your focus. You get to choose what the inner ring focuses on within that larger outer ring. And then, if you want, choose the next thing or stay on that one thing. The "thing" can be anything, from an object, to a sensation, to a thought, an emotion, anything that you can imagine.

Note from the game master: Observe the focused nature of this inner ring of attention. How is it different from the outer ring? You can zone in that inner ring all the way in and out again, can't you? And move it around too. How does the outer ring complement the inner ring and vice versa?

Important: the inner ring only gets to play with what's already in the outer ring.

When the outer ring is wide (perspective and overview), and the inner ring is free to move around freely within the outer ring (not fixated or restricted and not in "tunnel vision") - this is **Open Awareness**.

Final word from the game master: Experiment, have fun. Play with the rings. There's no right way or wrong way. The more you play the better you get at this. Investigate how you can

*allow the rings to expand and contract, together, on their own, in one way, or another.
Anything goes!*

Go play.

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