

AWARENESS: THE MYSTERY OF BEING

Mindfulness and Attention

*'In the end you reach a state of non-grasping,
of joyful non-attachment, of inner ease and
freedom, indescribable, yet wonderfully real.'*

There's an old Zen story: a student said to Master Ichu, "Please write for me something of great wisdom." Master Ichu picked up his brush and wrote one word: "Attention." The student said, "Is that all?" The Master wrote, "Attention. Attention." The student became irritable. "That doesn't seem profound or subtle to me." In response, Master Ichu wrote simply, "Attention. Attention. Attention." In frustration, the student demanded, "What does this word *attention* mean?" Master Ichu replied, "Attention means attention."

For *attention*, we could substitute the word *awareness*. Attention or awareness is the secret of life, and the heart of spiritual practice. (1)

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Awareness – and this is more than mere attentiveness – is everything. A lack of awareness is responsible for so much of the violence and suffering in the world today. For it is the mind that feels itself separated from life and nature, the mind dominated by an omnipresent "I," which lashes out to destroy and kill in order to satisfy its desire for more and more – at whatever cost. This unaware mind breeds insensitivity to people and things, for it doesn't see or appreciate the value of things as they truly are, only seeing them as objects to be used in satiating its own desires. The deeply aware person sees the indivisibility of existence, the rich complexity and interrelatedness of all life. Out of this awareness grows a deep respect for the absolute value of all things, each thing. From this respect for the worth of every single object, animate as well as inanimate, comes the desire to see things used properly, and not to be heedless, wasteful or destructive. (2)

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Do not undervalue attention. It means interest and also love. To know, to do, to discover, or to create you must give your heart to it – which means attention. All the blessings flow from it.

Q: You advise us to concentrate on 'I am.' Is this too a form of attention?

A: What else? Give your undivided attention to the most important in your life – yourself. Of your personal universe you are the center – without knowing the center what else can you know? (3)

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The exercise of pure attention implies the complete elimination of all elements from the past, thus allowing the authentic purity of the present to be completely grasped. We must forget everything and wait, yet wait for nothing. This entails a state of complete receptivity which seizes and is open to the complete, eternal and perfect newness of each moment. (4)

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I want to see directly, for myself, what goes on throughout this mind and body, and not live under the constant influence of what others tell me is the right or the wrong thing to do. I see clearly that unless there is open awareness this instant, mind and body function mechanically, habitually, according to ingrained patterns and influences.

I realize that I cannot possibly respond wholly and appropriately to people and ever-changing situations if there is inattention. Without careful attention, ancient or newly formed patterns of behaviour react immediately and compulsively, and create conflict.

I see that when there is the urge to find out what is going on this instant – not just thinking or speculating about it, but looking and listening *directly*, quietly – the energy to attend is there. It needs no special effort or preparation to bring it about. Questioning and insight generate energy! Unnecessary habitual baggage drops when it is uncovered and clearly seen. There is real joy in discovery.

It is also noticeable that when I use willpower to stay attentive I somehow lose it. Straining to get something or to preserve something for myself immediately changes the effortless openness of an attentive mind into the entanglement of duality. Self-centered concern and openness of awareness don't go together. (5)

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Awareness is our true self; it's what we are. So we don't have to try to develop awareness; we simply need to notice how we block awareness, with our thoughts, our fantasies, our opinions, and our judgments. We're either in awareness, which is our natural state, or we're doing something else.

When we become open awareness, our ability to do necessary thinking gets sharper, and our whole sensory input becomes brighter, clearer. The world looks brighter, sounds are sharper, and there's a richness of sensory input, which is just our natural state if we are not blocking out experience with our tense, worrying minds. (6)

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When you sit quiet and watch yourself, all kinds of things may come to the surface. Do nothing about them, don't react to them; as they have come so they will go, by themselves. All that matters is mindfulness, total awareness of oneself or rather, of one's mind.

Q: By 'oneself' do you mean the daily self?

A: Yes, the person, which alone is objectively observable. The observer is beyond observation. What is observable is not the real self. (7)

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It takes a long time to come to unfurnished attention, an attention which is completely open without expectation and memory. The mind is a complicated jig-saw puzzle. There are many little pieces with which you build up your landscape. When you see how the mind functions in repetition you will lose interest in building the picture yet again!

Every situation has its own puzzle which is much more entrancing than the same old one you live in. Observe. Be alert, and you will see more than you know. (8)

The True Nature of the Self

'You are the infinite focused in a body. Now you see the body only. Try earnestly and you will come to see the infinite only.'

What we ordinarily think of as the self has many aspects. There is the thinking self, the emotional self, and the functional self which does things. These together comprise our describable self.

There is, however, another aspect of ourselves that we slowly get in touch with as we spiritually mature: *the observing self*. All the describable parts of what we call ourselves are limited. They are also linear; they come and go within a framework of time. But the observing self cannot be put in that category, no matter how hard we try. That which observes cannot be found and cannot be described. If we look for it there is nothing there. Since there is nothing we can know about it, we can almost say it is another dimension. (9)

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Seeing is not thinking. Seeing is seeing – attending, listening without knowing.

If there is no clear awareness of how this human mind-and-body functions from moment to moment, division and conflict continue and multiply. Having an image of oneself and of what one should do or should not do creates duality and has nothing to do with undivided attention to what is actually taking place.

Attention comes from nowhere. It has no cause. It belongs to no one. When it functions effortlessly, there is no duality. Without attention, one lives in words, images, and memories of oneself and others, constantly in the grip of fear, anger, ambition, confusion. (10)

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What is self-realization if not the immediate, moment-to-moment insight into the process of the human mind? Can fear and wanting be instantly seen and directly understood – not just the present feeling of it, but seeing the root-cause and the inevitable consequences that follow? Not thinking or speculating about it, but a penetrating awareness that dispels what is seen? This seeing, this undivided openness, has nothing to do with any experience. There is no experiencer in it – no recipient of anything. It is something entirely new and unknowable. (11)

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Q: How can I come to greater alertness?

A: It is a question of being interested when you look at and listen to things. When you begin looking and listening you'll start discovering and you will enjoy the discoveries. You will see that every situation, every moment in life, is a fathomless sack. But you make it a sack with a bottom and put things in it. The moment you see that each situation is bottomless, much richer, much more alive than anything you have accumulated in your memory, then you spontaneously become more interested in life. (12)

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Q: But what can I do here and now?

A: You can be aware of your being – here and now.

Q: That is all?

A: That is all. There is nothing more to it.

Q: All my waking and dreaming I am conscious of myself. It does not help me much.

A: You were aware of thinking, feeling, doing. You were not aware of your *being*.

Q: What is the new factor you want me to bring in?

A: The attitude of pure witnessing, of watching the events without taking part in them. (13)

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You can see your body wake up in the morning like the rising sun. It wakes up in your awareness. Feel the exact moment when you step back into identification with the old body. What you call your body is not your real body at all. It is

fixation in your brain. So see how you take yourself for what you are not, how you reduce yourself to a pattern. As soon as you see it clearly there is some distancing from it and you are out of the process of gluing yourself to an idea. In this distance-feeling, this being out of the process, there is the fore-feeling of your autonomy, your freedom, beingness.

It is true that you may understand intellectually at first. But when the mind understands, you are open to a new dimension of living. It is an exploration, a discovery. So don't adopt any new religion or philosophy. All the peace, love and joy you are looking for is in you. Come to know your nearest surroundings. Don't look for it elsewhere. (14)

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Whatever changes is not your Self; this body is continuously changing. It was not there, it appeared and it will disappear. It is not you. Find out what you are.

The important thing is the consciousness. You must give your full attention to the consciousness itself. That is the process of meditation; then all the secrets will be revealed to you by the consciousness.

Watching yourself, that itself is mediation. To keep only consciousness, without mixing it with anything, that is knowledge without words, that you ARE. Thoughts will be there, but they will be weaker and weaker, so only the feeling of "I Amness" will remain: just consciousness, without any activity. Watching your activities is on a lower level, like watching anger, etc., that is identification with the body-mind. (15)

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You live, you feel, you think. By giving attention to your living, feeling and thinking, you free yourself from them and go beyond them. Your personality dissolves and only the witness remains. Then you go beyond the witness. Do not ask how it happens. Just search within yourself.

Q: What makes the difference between the person and the witness?

A: Both are modes of consciousness. In one you desire and fear, in the other you are unaffected by pleasure and pain and are not ruffled by events. You let them come and go. (16)

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I do not speak about the body-mind and what goes on in the world. I talk only about your true nature and your true nature is the sense of presence you have, this consciousness. If you are not conscious, then there is no world for you. There is nothing there. The world exists for you only when you are conscious, so it is about this consciousness, this sense of presence, that I talk.

Once this sense of presence comes, how you act and what you do in the world I don't deal with. This sense of presence, this consciousness, is it not prior to anything else? Even thinking about anything for which you have to use your mind, if you are not conscious, can any thought come? Therefore, this sense of

presence, this consciousness, is it not the primary thing without which nothing else can happen? Nothing – no thoughts, no concepts, can arise by themselves. No activity can arise if the sense of presence is not there. The sense of presence does not need any activity of the mind to know that you are present. You do not have to ask yourself, “Am I present, am I conscious?” There is that intuitive sense of presence, you know that you are present. Because one identifies oneself with one’s body, one thinks one is born and is going to die. What is born is the general sense of presence, as such. The sense of presence which has come spontaneously will leave spontaneously. There is no individual except through identification with the body. The sense of time, of duration, or the event happening in time, all that can come about only if there is consciousness. (17)

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When you have had your first few glimpses of the timeless state of consciousness, you begin to move back and forth between the dimensions of time and presence. First you become aware of just how rarely your attention is truly in the Now. But to *know* that you are *not* present is a great success: that knowing is presence – even if initially it only lasts for a couple of seconds of clock time before it is lost again. Then, with increasing frequency, you *choose* to have the focus of your consciousness in the present moment rather than in the past or future, and whenever you realize that you had lost the Now, you are able to stay in it not just for a couple of seconds, but for longer periods as perceived from the external perspective of clock time. So before you are firmly established in the state of presence, which is to say before you are fully conscious, you shift back and forth for a while between consciousness and unconsciousness, between the state of presence and the state of mind-identification. You lose the Now, and you return to it, again and again. Eventually, presence becomes your predominant state. (18)

The Timeless Reality

‘Who are you? The answer is not in words. The nearest you can say in words is: I am what makes perception possible, the life beyond the experiencer and his or her experience.’

Be satisfied with watching the flow of your life; if your watching is deep and steady, ever turned towards the source, it will gradually move upstream till suddenly it becomes the source. Put your awareness to work, not your mind. The mind is not the instrument for this task. The timeless can be reached only by the timeless. Your body and your mind are both subject to time; only awareness is timeless, ever in the now. In awareness you are facing facts and reality is fond of facts. (19)

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Q: Isn't observing a dualistic practice? Because when we are observing, something is observing something else.

A: But in fact it's not dualistic. The observer is empty. Instead of a separate observer, we should say there is just *observing*. There is no one that hears, there is just hearing. There is no one that sees, there is just seeing. But we don't quite grasp that. If we practice hard enough, however, we learn that not only is the observer empty, but that which is observed is also empty. At this point the observer (or witness) collapses. This is the final stage of practice; we don't need to worry about it. Why does the observer finally collapse? When nothing sees nothing, what do we have? Just the wonder of life. There is no one who is separated from anything. There is just living itself: hearing, touching, seeing, smelling, thinking. That is the state of love or compassion: not "It is I," but "It is Thou." (20)

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The observer is a function of awareness that only arises when we have an object come up in our experience of the phenomenal world. If there's no object coming up (for example, in deep sleep), the observer is not there. The observer finally dies when we are *just* awareness and no longer need the observer.

We can never find the observer, no matter how long we look for it. Still, though we can never locate it, it is obvious that we can observe. We could say that the observer is a different dimension of mind but not an aspect of the little mind, which is on the ordinary linear level. Who we are is awareness. Nobody has ever observed awareness; yet that's who we are – a "formless field of benefaction." (21)

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The witness is always present, is always presence. It is that which is not identified with change, with circumstances, and therefore "observes" them. Whenever you take note of a change, you do so from the position of the present. It is a present thought. It is this continual presentness throughout life that we call the witness. One cannot say it was born because birth and death are ideas, second-hand knowledge, something you've been told about. To know the witness, therefore, means to experience presentness in all change. Naming presence "the witness" is only a pedagogical device to show you that you are not the image you have of yourself, and to accent the subject, not the object, in your perceptions. In the end even the witness dissolves in that presence from which it springs. (22)

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Instead of searching for what you do not have, find out what is it that you have never lost. That which is there before the beginning and after the ending of everything; that to which there is no birth, nor death. That immovable state, which is not affected by the birth and death of a body or a mind, that state you must perceive. (23)

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You must realize first of all that you are the proof of everything, including yourself. None can prove your existence, because his existence must be confirmed by you first. Your being and knowing you owe nobody. Remember, you are entirely on your own. You do not come from somewhere, you do not go anywhere. You are timeless being and awareness. (24)

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Presence, which is the source of all experience, is beyond the experiencer / experienced duality. When the accent is on being aware, and not on thought nor on perception, we gradually become deeply relaxed, both on the neuro-muscular level and on the mental plane.

If we disinterestedly observe the arising and disappearing of all the states we experience, we soon come to realize that each state, each perception, each thought, is reabsorbed into an unspoken knowing, knowing as being. This, the continuum, the only reality, is there before activity commences. Let yourself sink deep within this stillness each time it makes itself felt.

You cannot expect reality to appear, for it ever is. Events appear and disappear. Never forget the passing character of all experience, this is all you need to do and the door to grace will open before you. (25)

Presence and Being

*‘The witness is pure presence, pure awareness.
Witness is a ringing stillness, a living silence
out of which everything emerges.’*

Being is the eternal, ever-present One Life beyond the myriad forms of life that are subject to birth and death. However, Being is not only beyond but also deep within every form as its innermost invisible and indestructible essence. This means that it is accessible to you now as your own deepest self, your true nature. But don't seek to grasp it with your mind. Don't try to understand it. You can know it only when the mind is still. When you are present, when your attention is fully and intensely in the Now, Being can be felt, but it can never be understood mentally. To regain awareness of Being and to abide in that state of "feeling-realization" is enlightenment. (26)

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You are nothing perceivable, or imaginable. Yet, without you there can be neither perception nor imagination. You observe the heart feeling, the mind thinking, the body acting; the very act of perceiving shows that you are not what you perceive. Can there be perception, experience, without you? An experience must 'belong.' Somebody must come and declare it as his own. Without an

experiencer the experience is not real. It is the experiencer that imparts reality to experience.

Just as each flower has its own colour, but all colours are caused by the same light, so do many experiences appear in the undivided and indivisible awareness, each separate in memory, identical in essence. This essence is the root, the foundation, the timeless and spaceless 'possibility' of all experience. (27)

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Space consciousness means that in addition to being conscious of things – which always comes down to sense perceptions, thoughts, and emotions – there is an undercurrent of awareness. Awareness implies that you are not only conscious of things (objects), but you are also conscious of being conscious. If you can sense an alert inner stillness in the background while things happen in the foreground – that's it! This dimension is there in everyone, but most people are completely unaware of it. Sometimes I point to it by saying, "Can you feel your own Presence?" (28)

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Q: How does one get established in the higher state, the state of pure witnessing?

A: Consciousness does not shine by itself. It shines by a light beyond it. Having seen the dreamlike quality of consciousness, look for the light in which it appears, which gives it being. There is the content of consciousness as well as the awareness of it.

Q: I know and I know that I know.

A: Quite so, provided the second knowledge is unconditional and timeless. Forget the known, but remember that you are the knower. Don't be all the time immersed in your experiences. Remember that you are beyond the experiencer ever unborn and deathless. In remembering it, the quality of pure knowledge will emerge, the light of unconditioned awareness. (29)

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You know that you are sitting here. Be attentive to that knowledge only. Just be in your beingness. That knowledge "I Am" has created the entire universe. Hold on to that; nothing has to be done. Once you recognize that principle it becomes tranquil. Become one with that and all your needs will be satisfied.

At no stage forget that principle; whatever you are doing your attention should be there. When you are eating food, who is eating? Only that Beingness. Whatever you are doing is the beingness; pay attention to that beingness. (30)

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Q: What is the purpose in reminding oneself all the time that one is the watcher?

A: The mind must learn that beyond the moving mind there is the background of awareness, which does not change. The mind must come to know the true self and respect it and cease covering it up, like the moon which obscures the sun during solar eclipse. Just realize that nothing observable, or experientiable is you, or binds you. Take no notice of what is not yourself.

Q: To do what you tell me I must be ceaselessly aware.

A: To be aware is to be awake. Unaware means asleep. You are aware anyhow, you need not try to be. What you need is to be aware of being aware. Be aware deliberately and consciously, broaden and deepen the field of awareness. You are always conscious of the mind, but you are not aware of yourself as being conscious. (31)

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I repeat again and again, please listen; understand what it is because of which we feel alive, understand the nature of it, understand the taste of it, then the body identification will go. This Self love, this beingness, has come about with no effort on your part. What is its nature, its taste, what is it? That you must find out.

Fix your identity firmly in this beingness, do not give it limbs, shape or form, for once you give it form you have limited it. Understand this energy which is behind the entire manifestation of the universe.

You ask many questions, you look for the answers in books and words, not in intuitive experience. This is not knowledge. Knowledge springs from the consciousness without effort, of its own accord.

Various names have been given to this energy which is the source of all manifestation. People pray to these names and forms, they do not pray to that beingness, that substance, which these names represent. Pray to that beingness only.

As there is no separateness between two genuine friends, so you should develop such a deep friendship with that substance, as a friend seeking a friend. Be one with the knowledge "I Am", the source of sentience, the beingness itself. (32)

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You are what you are every moment of your life, but you are never conscious of it, except, maybe, at the point of awakening from sleep. All you need is to be aware of being, not as a verbal statement, but as an ever-present fact. The awareness that you *are* will open your eyes to what you are. It is all very simple. First of all, establish a constant contact with your self, be with yourself all the time. Into self-awareness all blessings flow. Begin as a center of observation, deliberate cognizance, and grow into a center of love in action. 'I am' is a tiny seed which will grow into a mighty tree – quite naturally, without a trace of effort. (33)

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