

The Walk of Awareness

We can and should practice “being aware of” (as opposed to “thinking about”) in our daily lives as well as in formal meditation. After all, that’s where we want awareness to work its healing effects and to infuse every moment with the energy, love and intelligence of the universe. Awareness packs this power.

“There’s a great space in which this moment takes place,” the spiritual teacher Adyashanti offers. This space is awareness itself, consciousness, the noticing capacity.

My own advice for noticing this space and then inhabiting it—as it and being it—is simply to notice the noticing that is already happening and right there you will find the portal to that great space.

“Its so simple and direct that our complicated minds get very confused,” says the Buddhist teacher, Ajahn Sumedho. He says students often strongly object when he teaches that the stillness of awareness is always present, easy to notice, and available as a peaceful harbor from storms and distress. They tell him they've never experienced a still mind and to the contrary, always experience noisy and busy minds.

But right there, Sumedho tells his students to notice “there's an awareness” of the busy mind. If we turn our attention to that very awareness, we'll notice that it is, itself, perfectly silent and still.

“Even if you think you’ve never had a still point or you’re a confused, messed-up character that really can’t meditate, trust in the *awareness* of those perceptions,” Sumedho says.

So try this: go outside and take a short refreshing walk of awareness.

On this walk, commit yourself to noticing everything that happens in your awareness.

That is, on this walk you firmly commit to taking a walk not “out in nature,” nor “in your neighborhood” or “around the block,” but instead to taking a walk *in your awareness*.

Remember, this is the walk of real life. It’s not separate from life. When you take a walk of awareness, it’s actually your real life, you are taking a real walk, in the whole reality of your experience right now.

A walk like this is an excellent way to build confidence that it is actually possible to take every step, and to undertake every small task and duty of our daily lives, while drawing on the always-available energy, clarity, compassion and wisdom of the universe. Because, again, awareness packs this power.

If our practice is limited to sitting with our eyes closed on a cushion, it can be more difficult to build up that confidence. Because we don't spend most of our lives folded up on a cushion, or sitting with our eyes closed on a chair, watching breath after breath.

But by taking a walk down the street with your eyes open, taking step after mindful step, looking deeply into your experience, that's close enough to real life that if you get a taste of how continuous awareness works in this way, it can be far more readily transferable to daily life.

When people first get the instructions for taking a walk of awareness, they'll often say something like, "But if I'm paying attention only to consciousness, I might not notice where I'm going and walk right in front of a car!"

But where do you think your whole life is happening, including the cars on the street, if not in your own consciousness? Where else is everything and anything happening in your life? Only in your awareness.

When you pay attention to your awareness, what's happening is that you are noticing the wholeness of your experience. You aren't focusing on one thing after another in a conscious, grasping way, by seeking to extract pleasure from "pleasant experiences," beauty from "beautiful experience" and meaning from "meaningful experience." Instead, you're keeping an eye on everything that's happening in a relaxed and interested way.

In this way of relating to reality, you relate to your whole experience by simply knowing. You let all experience come to you, instead of pushing your consciousness out through your eyes to grasp sights, your ears to grasp sounds, your mind to grasp meaning, and so on. In this way of being, you simply are waiting and noticing, with great joyful interest, watching everything that appears at your sense doors. You watch all experience, both that which you normally think of as "inner" and as "outer," appear in the same way in your consciousness. You are just watching appearances and disappearances and it is a most magnificent, informative and always surprising show.

In this way of knowing our present experience, we don't know everything that's happening in extreme detail all at the same time. The human mind doesn't work that way. What happens, instead, is that one object after another comes forward in consciousness to be known in quite clear detail, leaving everything else for the moment in the background, with the whole background known in a relaxed and general way.

It's quite like the way that vision works. Right now, notice that the only thing that you see in sharp definition with your eyes is what you are focusing on at the moment. Everything else is seen in a relaxed and general way, peripherally, as color and movement, out of focus and not in clear detail. Then when we shift focus, a new specific object becomes clear and the previous one takes its place in the background.

That's how aware consciousness works as well. One after another object is known clearly, with the rest in the soft background, being known in a general way. When

we are aware of awareness working, we see how one thing after another quite naturally is presented into the foreground of consciousness to be known; where we may inspect it with interest for a while; and after a while it naturally will subside to the background while another object comes forward. This is how the natural flow of noticing works and we can learn how to flow or "surf" with it.

So, on this walk, if you see a tree you make a point to remember immediately that "this tree is appearing in my consciousness." In the same way, all sights, sounds, textures, emotions and thoughts will immediately be remembered and understood as objects arising in awareness, in consciousness, and nowhere else.

You'll recognize that the sight of the tree is an appearance of the form and colors of a "tree" in consciousness. If you go to the tree and stroke its trunk, you will notice that the tree then appears in your consciousness as the sensations of the bark's textures; and likewise, whatever thoughts arise as you stroke the tree's bark or look at the tree, will be recognized as thoughts arising in consciousness.

As you continue on your walk, notice how a "breeze" appears as sensations on your cheek; and recognize that those sensations appear in one and only one place: consciousness. Likewise the "grass" appears as the sight of the grass in consciousness; and the sensations of your feet, step after step, appear and disappear with each step in consciousness; and then when you have a drink of water at the end of the walk you notice that "water" appears in your consciousness as the tastes, textures and sensations of "water."

Above all, notice that everything you are experiencing is happening as pure experience.

Then, reflect and investigate in your own direct experience: what weight does pure experience have? Does it have any weight at all or isn't it, essentially, weightless? What density does pure experience have? Does it have a density or is it, as a pure experience, truly known as empty? What are the boundaries of pure experience? Can any boundaries be found? Where is the boundary to the sensation of the texture of the tree bark?

Ask yourself, and search in your direct experience for the answer, what is the actual substance of pure experience except one thing: knowing. In all of your experiences on your walk of awareness, when do you ever experience anything except the knowing of those experiences? Does experience have any other element to it, that pure knowing? On your walk of awareness, which is the walk of life, see if you can get to a place where you recognize that everything that you experience boils down to just this: knowing. Just pure noticing.

See if you can get to a place where the seemingly solid tree you see in front of you, is recognized as nothing in reality but a knowing. Likewise when you approach a tree and touch the bark, see if you can get to a place where you realize that the texture of the bark is nothing, in your experience, but a knowing. In this way, one experience by one

experience, the realization dawns that our whole life is a very pure and beautiful knowing whose individual known-objects come and go, but whose knowing of itself never ends, but continues in one fluid flow.

These knowings include of course not only the physical objects you see “out there” in the world, but as well the many objects “in here” in the form of sensations, emotions and thoughts. At this point you may come to very simply and naturally recognize there is no real and actual “out there” and “in here,” because it dawns that everything you experience is known by, and known within, only your own consciousness.

Within this great space-like consciousness, everything happens all at the same time, and all in the same place, without limit, without border and without end.

It's like a flower that is constantly blossoming out of itself, taking the infinite forms of your miraculous life.

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