

The Intimacy of Everything

When we know ourselves as awareness, the mind, the body and the world appear in me.

This is very intimate. It's an intimate knowing.

This intimate meditation—noticing the mind, the body and the world appear in me—sums up our six weeks of meditation practice, in one meditation of love.

In this meditation, we define "love" as the intimacy of awareness, knowing all that we know as our own being, our true nature. It is the direct experience of everything that we know as "me."

Awareness is intimate because everything happens within it: the sensations of the body, the thoughts of the mind and the perceptions of the world. This intimacy is our own true nature as awareness. Our meditations give us practice in understanding ourselves in this way, not conceptually through the activity thought, but through direct experience in each moment.

When we know reality as intimate in this way, we naturally become careful and tender with everything in our experience, because everything is "me"—the new "me" of awareness.

The body, the mind and the world aren't different from each other, separated from one another. They are intimate with each other. But even to say they are "intimate" with each other is not quite right, because in awareness we recognize everything that we experience as one. All arising in awareness, made out of awareness, and disappearing back into awareness. This is all that we ever actually experience; as opposed to what our thoughts say we experience; which is division.

We experienced life as the intimacy of everything once before in our lives, when we were babies and didn't know the body, the mind and the world as separate things. It was all one experience.

That is still our only actual experience. It is only our thoughts, that we subsequently developed as we grew up and were educated and socialized, that tell us we are separate from other people, from the world, and indeed from our own selves, especially when we are stressed and overwhelmed.

As adults we sometimes catch glimpses of the one reality in moments of transcendent understanding, such as when we are out in nature. Or, at times when we love another person, as when a mother knows that she and her child are not two beings but one in their true essence.

Sometimes this knowledge just falls upon us as if by accident and we stand still and silent, stunned by the wondrousness of the moment. These moments usually pass quickly and are forgotten.

In meditation, we learn how to understand such moments as the profound glimpses into reality that they truly are. We learn how to value them and not to forget or discard them. We're not squeezing them to get a feeling, we are exploring them as a completely free and open knowing.

Especially, in meditation we learn in a disciplined way how to create more of these moments, so that we may investigate them with caring interest and to absorb their lessons so that we finally understand that their nature is our own true nature. In this way, we learn how to experience life as our true selves as awareness. Not just in fleeting glimpses, but continuously in daily life.

When we deeply absorb these glimpses of reality—these "insights" into "the way things are" as the Buddhists say—then we put ourselves in sync with reality, and we learn how to stay there. Once we stay deeply in sync with reality, that's the natural and spontaneous end of stress.

We mustn't read these words to acquire information and conceptual understanding, but instead as pointers to our actual experience. Freedom comes in truly knowing our experience.

Let's give it a try:

When I stand as awareness, my body appears in me in the form of physical sensations.

Use the thumb-and-forefinger test to check this: touch your thumb to your forefinger and notice the fleeting sensation that is created. Where, very precisely, does that sensation occur? Where exactly does it arise, exist for a brief moment, and then disappear? In your awareness, your consciousness. It's the same of course for all physical sensations that we notice—the sensations of breathing, the tingling at the bottoms of our feet, the warmth of the face, the twitches and tensions we feel here and there throughout the body. They all appear within "me" as awareness.

When I abide in awareness, my mind appears in me in the form of my thoughts.

When we notice our thoughts, where do they arise and disappear? In our awareness and nowhere else. Over the past six weeks, we have watched our thoughts both in sitting meditation and also while simply sharing what thoughts arose in our minds as we sat in the meditation hall and talked. We saw thoughts streak across our awareness like shooting stars in the night sky; and sometimes we saw them as like cows standing in a field (following the Buddha's advice); and sometimes we experienced thoughts them as bursts of energy that pushed us in one of two directions,

either towards speech and actions that created more stress, or that created more peace. Whatever form we have noticed our thoughts, they have always appeared right here, in "me" as awareness.

When I know myself as awareness, the world appears in me in the form of my perceptions—sights, sounds, tastes, touch and smells.

When I open my eyes, the world appears in me as awareness in the form of visual forms. When I open my ears, the world appears in me as awareness in the form of sounds. When I notice what I am tasting, touching or smelling, I know the world in the form of these forms. My five senses seem to tell me that the world is "out there." And yet, when I abide as awareness, noticing my experience with caring interest (which is to say when I'm meditating), it's obvious that the world that I receive through my senses isn't happening "out there" but is instead right "here," in "me" as awareness.

Our commitment as meditators is to be aware of our experience, not to think about it. So please try your best to leave thoughts to one side as you very simply experience life as the wide open space of awareness instead of through the narrow, flattening, abstracting lens of thought. Awareness is how you experienced life when you were an infant and everything—your body, your mind and all the objects of the world—was all one fantastically captivating blossoming of pure experience.

When I say "leave thoughts to one side," that exaggerates just a bit for effect.

Of course we want to use our thoughts for positive purposes. We want our positive thoughts to help us conduct the kind and caring investigation that awareness naturally pursues. And we want to use positive thoughts to discriminate between our intentions to speak and act in ways that are healthy on the hand, and unhealthy on the other—so we can choose to act on the former, and to let the latter dissolve.

It's just that if you give thoughts an inch, they take a mile—so you have to be careful. We always need to keep our eye on our thoughts because, in general, they aren't trustworthy. We have far more untruthful and potentially harmful thoughts than positive and healthy ones. We need to stay on our toes. But every once in a while, a positive and healthy thought arises, and of course we want to pay attention to that thought and let it guide us—because that thought is wise and it came from love. The Buddha called such positive thoughts "a voice from another world."

The main thing is to make sure that awareness remains in charge. To not let thoughts—especially not harsh, divisive and trivial thoughts—take charge of your life ever again. Even the positive thoughts, remember, they arise in you as awareness. So even with those positive thoughts, you as awareness stay in charge. Because you witness all thoughts, and then you make the choice whether to follow their demands and suggestions for what we should think, say and do.

When we hold our ground as awareness, knowing ourselves as awareness in every

moment and not identifying with thoughts, then we have freedom. We have the freedom to watch everything that arises in awareness—mind, body and world—enjoying and learning but never clinging. In not clinging we learn to know ourselves as the very qualities of patience, kindness, compassion, love and wisdom.

We become the people we want to be.

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