

Staying Awake

Always observing the mind takes attention and attention takes interest. Our attention is directly proportional to the level of interest we have.

We may think that our interest in other things is the reason for breaks and gaps in attention, but it is not so. There are no other things; the ten thousand things¹ are not different things really but ten thousand differences we see in the same one thing.

A shopper in a jewelry store sees many different things; bracelets, rings and more, but the jeweler sees only gold or to be even more accurate—only profit. He talks about what you are interested in, knowing full well that they are all the same thing.

Total awareness is to see all things just as they are in the moment along with the rise and fall of every thought and feeling without any separation of outer and inner—as it is the same awareness that is *aware of both in itself*.

We have thought of things as intrinsically different and disconnected from us for too long, but this division or separation cannot be real. How is it that one can meet someone they have never known before and suddenly start feeling related or get related? do they become 'our own' when they were not our own earlier? If difference and disconnection can be abolished completely, it must be a psychological operation both ways.

How is it that when someone we *feel* related to feels pain, we feel some of it too? If it is compassion, why do we not feel the same with someone we do not *feel* related to? How is it that if we break up with this person that we do not *feel* their pain anymore?

Associations and disassociations are *operations of and in the mind* and the seeds of much havoc. We feel a certain way about someone or something and what we experience when that person or thing comes is what we felt about him or it. We experience our own feelings in all and at all times, our experience is but our own expression returning back to the conscious level.

If we are at all concerned about our experiences, and we should be, we must be very concerned about all expression and never break awareness, as that opens the door wide for habit or

¹ 'The Ten Thousand Things' from Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching

conditioning to act, to express. There has to be clear perception of the great danger of conditioning's interference.

Life is not a problem—nor are conditions, people and things. Our conditioned reactions disregard *things as they are* and substitute things *as we feel they are* and hence, we react to our own feelings and not things as they are. If one was attentive, one would discover a beautiful way of living that is completely free of struggle—conditions being just as they may be.

Not getting tangled up with conditioning

Observation increases observation and clarity brings clarity. You have to see that all these waves of the mind rise and fall naturally unless we get tangled with them. Do not identify with them. We identify with them because they arise in us and we get confused, thinking we must be thinking them but we are not. They are only old thought patterns charged up with energy (feelings) and running on their old charge. They will exhaust themselves naturally if you are persistent in *non-selective observation* which retrains the mind to be wholly attentive only to what actually is just here and right now.

The mind's incessant return to conditioning is not because of a defect of the mind but a result of our own fondness for (attachment to) memory which is the content of conditioning. I am not suggesting revulsion as the antidote or cure—that is utter foolishness. But I am suggesting taking keen interest in what actually is just now, right here and from moment to moment for two important reasons: the present is the reality, and facing reality *automatically turns one away* from conditioning.

There is no need to struggle with any habit. Why struggle with what you are trying to let go of when you can instead just face the new and direct energies there? The inner reluctance to let go of what we know is not good is because 'the knowing' is only on the surface level, but we maintain fondness for it at the depth of our being. The tip of the iceberg can never move the base.

Bringing about change

If you are aware of the rise and fall of thought, how can you *be* these thoughts? The rise and fall of thoughts in you is just like the rise and fall of waves in the ocean. Imagine yourself as the ocean forgetting you are ocean and mistaking yourself for a wave—much suffering results.

It is not possible to suppress thought any more than suppressing waves in the ocean. Thoughts rise and fall in the mind *naturally*—let them. You do not interfere with the rise and fall of breathing or the heartbeat—why interfere with thought? When you leave thoughts alone, thoughts leave you alone as well. Thoughts are the movement of energy in consciousness.

Direct that energy to reality, or what is real . . . what is actually in front of you from moment to moment without holding on.

Keep thought from holding on

We can never be without activity for even one moment. Even if you are just sitting under a tree, you are doing something—simply sitting. Why should the attention be elsewhere? You have chosen to simply sit—why can't your mind join the activity so you can sit fully and enjoyably too? You may discover that when you are fully in the moment, you are joyful too and then, the mind will not want to be other than in the present.

The mind has to see that being ahead of the moment is a disaster, not efficiency. Being fully in the moment is not wanting something that is not, and the absence of wanting is the absence of anguish and happiness surges.

Staying alert is staying awake and staying alive as well. Alive is that which exists, that which actually is. When the attention drifts to memory, which is thought, it is not on what actually exists or what is and one is then only biologically alive.

When one gives each moment, each action, his fullest attention, the dismantling of conditioning begins with disregarding preferences—which want to give more here, less there and would rather be elsewhere. Our loves are the chains that bind us—naught else.

These may be useful

Do one thing at one time: This will keep the mind in the present without preference. Keeping the mind in the present moment automatically keeps it from strolling down memory. If you struggle with keeping the mind in the present, know that you have fondness for what you are trying to let go of and are struggling unnecessarily with your own self.

Make each action your best work: Do every action as if it were a masterpiece and your life will be a series of masterpieces. Naturally, this will take your fullest attention and energy and this rewires the mind to be wholly in the present—you don't have to struggle with it. Eating, getting some exercise, reading or any activity—each activity is an opportunity to gather or scatter the rays of the mind.

Be fully aware of everything, all the time: Be continually aware of the outer and inner or every thought and feeling—without getting tangled in either. See each situation for what it is instead of "I've been down this road before", "I've done this before" or, "I know this well". It does not matter how many times you see the sunset, it is always new, and you continue to evolve so it is ever fresh. Can you treat each situation, including each rise and fall of thought and feeling

afresh too? It does not matter how many times either have presented themselves, that they appear just now is a brand new, fresh appearance.

Take interest in each moment: Let each moment have your fullest attention—why should the attention be elsewhere? Taking an active interest will rivet attention to the present. If interest wanes, it is because you are interested in something else and the mind goes there naturally. If this distraction continues—reexamine your sincerity.

If awareness slips: Remind yourself what you *are* doing, not supposed to be doing—take a deep breath and take an active interest in the task again. Anything you are supposed to do will not gather lasting interest. You are doing this now, and in doing it best, you will train the mind to be in the present fully—the task will also be done far better.

If interest slips: It is easier for interest to slip if the task is all about our own interests, as one may feel, "This is good enough for me" or, "I will improve on it later". But if you that feel every act is a gift of service unto others, you will try to do your best. Even while raking the fallen leaves in the garden, it can be seen as loving service to the garden. This attitude will not only keep interest but will aid in thinning the ego by impersonalizing action.

Why this emphasis on awareness?

Life is training for meditation and meditation is training for life. When you give yourself completely to the present, from moment to moment with zeal, attention will rewire the mind to be in the present without wandering. This is very important when you begin meditation, as the distracted mind is unsuitable for meditation.

Thoughts rise and fall because that is what they do, and this is not distraction. But *our* being distracted is a problem and it stems mainly from lack of interest. Attention wanders if there is no interest; and without attention, trying to meditate is a waste of time.

Being fully aware of the outer and inner, doing each action the best you can without any preference, letting each action complete physically and psychologically at one stroke—and letting the attention be on the path as it unfolds—will all help rewire or renew the mind.

Now when you sit to meditate, the renewed mind will not wander, as the understanding of 'interest equals attention' will have been practiced all day. You will be able to meditate without any struggle at all, as there will not be anything to struggle with.

In this struggle-less meditation, you discover how to continue amidst the rise and fall of thoughts and feelings from the deeper reaches of the mind that have more energy—and this will help you experience life in a totally new way without getting trapped in old prejudices and feelings.

A life of yoga is a life lived expertly, and a life lived expertly is a life in meditation. Meditation plunges one into the deeper recesses of the mind and it is here one learns how to live expertly. Life and meditation feed on each other, are essential to each other, and deepen each other.

Awareness and meditation upfront

I recommend training in awareness and meditation *upfront* and not as a later step that you should come to. Without staying awake or being keenly aware, meditation is not possible. Without meditation, all actions have no value beyond the physical act, and they may give you some expertise in performance at best.

The Katha Upanishad unfolds its teachings with this mighty instruction: "Arise, having arisen, stay alert. Then exert vigorously, and when you come upon difficulties that you cannot surmount, seek guidance from those who have".

Without the meditative mind or awareness, the yoga element is absent from any and every practice and life. If one does not cultivate awareness upfront: the scattered mind will do hatha yoga and it will be gymnastics at best; the scattered mind will pray and it will lack heart; the scattered mind will study and it will be an intellectual pastime; and then—this scattered mind will attempt to meditate and will struggle and hallucinate.

Yoga is the discovery of the *existing oneness* as the reality and we have to embed this principle into every blessed action. Taking interest keeps us at one within and this oneness within becomes one with the action. In this oneness, the little self or ego weakens and starts to wither. Not tackling this upfront, will be to confront a much stronger force later on, and this is not the wisest way.

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