**Ruslan Zhukovets**

**The Keys to Self-Awareness**

**Preface to the Second Edition**

I wrote this book, *The Keys to Self-Awareness,* in 2010. My goal at the time was to provide the readers with a simple and straightforward algorithm for working with attention, by which anyone could develop the internality of *presence* and awareness. To avoid straying from this goal, I wrote the text as simply and clearly as possible by focusing on how to develop an awareness of the physical body, emotions, and mind. On the one hand, this approach made things technically easier for me; on the other, this approach was missing a number of clarifications relevant to understanding the role of awareness in the mystic Work. I wrote the instruction that has no room for subtle meanings or lengthy explanations of the interconnections between certain subjects. For example, I didn’t mention any other functions of the etheric body, except for that responsible for emotional reactions, making it more difficult for the readers to get a good understanding of the role of the etheric body in human life. Also, I never mentioned the mental body, yet I wrote quite a lot about it later on.

As *The Keys to Self-Awareness* fell out of tune with my later books, something had to be done. I had neither the time nor the desire to write a new book on the topic of awareness; besides, I didn’t believe *Keys* had completely lost its relevance. Editing the original version would require writing it anew, because the rhythm and energy of the text written five years earlier would be broken and the text would no longer have the effect that was originally intended.

After weighing the pros and cons and realizing the need for a few clarifications, I decided to proceed with the writing of comments on my own text. Considering how far I had come since then in laying out the Truth, this approach appears to be logical enough. On the one side, the original text remains intact and conveys the message embedded in it at the beginning. On the other side, the text is now supported by new comments that add to the knowledge from the earlier book. This is the task I assigned to myself and completed by adding comments to the text where they will hopefully give the readers the intended broader picture and deeper understanding of the subject.

“The master of it anticipates things that are difficult while they are easy, and does things that would become great while they are small. All difficult things in the world are sure to arise from a previous state in which they were easy, and all great things from one in which they were small.” *Tao Te Ching*

“To understand means to simplify.” *Arkady and Boris Strugatsky*

1.

One way or another, each spiritual seeker has the goal to change his being and deliver on his potential, which is present in each human being. Through this search, a seeker must transcend his animal nature and discover the part within him that has its roots and source in the Divine. This part of a human being has been given different names in different traditions, with “soul” being one of them. I call this supreme part of human nature “consciousness.”

For the sake of simplicity, we will consider human beings as having the following levels of existence: the first and lowest level being the physical body, the second level being emotions, and the third level being the mind. The fourth supreme level in this system is consciousness. The upper levels subdue the lower ones. Thus, the physical body is rigidly subordinated to the emotions, whereas the emotions are subordinated to the mind and its desires. Consciousness remains separate in this chain of command, as humans in a normal state of mind do not sense its manifestations.

Each of us is more or less familiar with his or her own body, emotions, and mind and their respective functions. The role and function of consciousness as a separate power embedded in human beings are a different story. Experience shows that most people understand consciousness and awareness as the ability to intentionally and effortlessly think about a topic and, at the same time, retain a clear perception of the world around them. That is, a person’s feelings and state of mind are calm and balanced, he easily maintains focus, and his perception stays clear of any emotional blurring. In other words, by saying “I am conscious,” people mean that they can focus and clearly perceive their surroundings. The state of clear consciousness is understood as the ability to exert complete self-control, while the opposite would be psychosis or an affective state. For example, if one can say when asked what day it is today, then that person is obviously aware of what is going on. Following this logic, consciousness is a derivative of the mind, and the mind’s activity is a result of electrochemical processes in the human brain.

**Comment.** The question always arises as to how the brain’s functions relate to the mind. It is a well-known fact that a partial excision of the brain’s frontal lobe results in a compromised thinking ability and damages the mind. Based on this evidence, it is easy to come to the conclusion that the mind is nothing but the product of the brain’s functions. But this is not as simple as it may seem. The human brain acts as a control center over all systems in the physical body, responding to external stimuli through nascent excitatory and inhibitory signaling. However, these responses are secondary effects, that is, they do not emerge in the brain *per se*. They appear in the mind, and the brain, as the organ linking the physical body to the body of the mind, responds to the processes occurring in the mind. Excitation in various brain regions is a reflection of reactions happening in the mind, and there is no other explanation. The nervous system is affected in a similar way when emotions are generated in the ethereal body. A person filled with anger develops increased blood pressure, reddening of the face, etc. But anger always comes first, with all of the somatic symptoms arising later. The same can be said about the mind and brain: The mind reacts first and the associated changes in the brain develop next. Thus, if there is any damage to the brain, it can no longer properly function as a conductor, and the interconnection between the brain and the mind becomes impaired. The body of the mind remains intact, but the communication from it to the brain is disrupted. The physical body is the final destination for impulses and energies coming from the body of the mind and the ethereal (emotional) body. Essentially, the physical body is a vehicle for their manifestation in the physical world. All that we accomplish by damaging the physical body is breaking a delicate interplay between the three bodies, but this hardly proves the statement that humans are nothing more than muscles, bones, brains, and other parts visible to the eyes.

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Based on all the above, the mind turns out to be the ultimate level for a person in a normal state of being. It thinks of itself as both the pillar of consciousness and the pinnacle of creation. Created therein is the so-called ego or a personality by means of which humans differentiate themselves from others and shape their “identities.” This explains the confusion around the terminology and understanding of things happening in a person versus things happening with a person: Everyone equates the mind with consciousness. For the same reason, many of those who practice meditation believe that a meditative state is achieved once the mind is calmed down and try to bring it to silence. It never occurs to them that by doing so, they are merely trying to establish some sort of control over their minds.

The nature of consciousness is entirely different from that of the body, mind, and emotions. The nature of consciousness is the eternal Light, the Divine radiance. One can call it the Divine spark or a soul; no matter what name it is given, there is no effect on its eternal essence. The Lord our God, while creating the world from Himself, has granted Consciousness to every living creature. Inanimate nature is not void of a bit of His Consciousness, but there it is concealed even deeper.

Thus, each of us bears an element of Divine consciousness, which, although tiny compared to the Whole, is by far sufficient for us to live in this world. The kind of our consciousness is tantamount to the kind of God’s Consciousness; for us, however, this fact is not obvious because it is disguised by manifestations of our lower-level bodies. With regards to the mind, emotions, and physical body, consciousness has the power similar to the one God has over His creation. However, humans are deprived of this power, because the mind is placed at the center of their being.

Nature programs humans to continue their development up to the age of approximately 21. During this period, the physical body, emotions, and mind are formed and undergo maturation. Once this process is completed, development pauses; and we take this as a natural order of things. The laws of nature, which are, in fact, a static manifestation of His Will, assume that the inbuilt mechanical program brings us up to a certain point, following which we can sustain ourselves and procreate. Once this point is reached, the program stops. Further development requires our consistent, ongoing efforts. Through these efforts, we *must* transcend the developmental level preset for us by the laws of nature.

2.

It is quite easy to check whether our consciousness exists outside our minds or not. Start by looking at your palm. As you bring your palm closer to your eyes, your palm blocks your field of view. Move your palm back a bit and you will see your whole hand. If you hold your palm over your eyes, you cannot see anything. In other words, in order for someone to see an object, they have to create some distance between themselves and the object—this is a requirement.

Now, let’s all close our eyes. Can we observe our body from within? Yes, we can. Although the observation of the body from the inside is not the same as observing it from the outside, it is still possible to do so. This attests to the presence of a certain clearance or distance between the body and the center from where we observe the body. We can also observe our motions and thoughts in a similar manner. As far as is possible, the source of our vision is situated outside the mind, emotions, and body; otherwise, no observations would be possible.

3.

The moment we observe our mind, we *become aware* of our thoughts. The immediate mental content becomes clearer, and we can now discern thoughts that have been there all the time yet remained outside the scope of our attention.

Attention is a function of consciousness just as muscle contractions are a function of muscles and thinking is a function of the mind.

Have you ever watched a cat watching a pigeon? Strained to the limit, the cat’s attention is fully focused on the bird. At the same time, the cat lacks any of the attributes of the human mind, as does the pigeon, yet both have consciousness.

Attention is a channel for the energy of consciousness. This energy follows attention wherever it goes. The power of the energy of attention is enormous.

I believe everyone is aware of the power of human attention. Everyone is also familiar with the sensation of being stared at, which is felt like a light physical pressure. This sensation results from the energy of the external attention directed at us, and so we can feel it quite literally. There are well-known cases when a person used the power of his gaze to induce a hypnotic trance in another person. Many legends talk of warriors who brought their enemies to a standstill just by gazing directly at them. These miracles would not be possible without the power of the energy of attention, or more precisely, the energy of consciousness.

Attention directed outwardly is normally tied to our five basic senses. When we attend to what we see, hear, smell, taste, or touch, our attention helps us collect experiences and information, which are processed by the mind. In a normal state, a person perceives all incoming impressions refracted through the prism of their mind. The mind verbalizes the experience instantly which evokes a sequence of associative responses that affect the emotions and physical body alike. For example, at the sight of fresh water, a thirsty person feels relief (because of the chance to satisfy the desire) and joy, and then swallows saliva uncontrollably.

The bottom line is that our consciousness interacts with internal and external objects via directing attention toward them. The moment they enter the field of our attention, these objects become exposed to the full power of the energy of consciousness. It is also through the channel of attention that our consciousness can be identified with any object perceived.

4.

If we had no consciousness, this Divine Spark of God within us, then we would not have existed at all. Our three lower bodies (the physical body, emotions, and mind) would have been devoid of their main engine, the primary source of energy, that is the only link between us and the Source of Everything. Consciousness is the essential element for life to exist, whereas the three lower bodies are merely its instruments. Consciousness, in turn, is also an instrument—the instrument of Creation—through which matter can be spiritualized.

In the act of Creation, the Lord imbued animate nature with His Consciousness, and He did the same with inanimate matter to some extent. It’s through the Consciousness which is dispersed into matter that God’s Will is being channeled and everything in the world stays interconnected. Any decent mystic will testify that, under certain states of mind, the material world opens up in front of his astounded eyes suddenly as the sheer radiance of the Divine Consciousness.

5.

Imagine a glass of water with a spoon of salt in it. Once dissolved, the salt seems to disappear, it becomes invisible, and the water turns salty. The properties of salt are blended with the properties of water, with the chemical identity of both substances still retained. By analogy, our consciousness dissolves in, or becomes identified with, our lower bodies. When the water evaporates, the spoonful of salt remains intact at the bottom of the glass, and its properties remain unchanged. A similar process happens to consciousness when someone passes away. However, refining the consciousness back to its initial state can be performed without the destruction of the physical and other lower bodies. To accomplish this task, one should develop *awareness*. Awareness is cultivated gradually as a person learns to manage his attention by keeping a portion of it on observing the mind, emotions, and physical body. Such observations, on the one hand, gradually change the lower bodies by eliminating health conditions and disorders and bringing their interactions into harmony. At the same time, such observations initiate the process of non-identifying the consciousness from the said bodies. This process promotes the crystallization of consciousness into a separate center.

**Comment.** I have borrowed the term “crystallization” from G. I. Gurdjieff, yet as of now, I don’t consider it as accurately describing consciousness. It is not crystallization that happens with consciousness; instead, consciousness becomes more and more present in one’s inner space as one’s channel of attention gets wider. The word “crystallization” denotes that “getting stronger” or “solidifying” is more relevant for willpower rather than individual Consciousness. Light is light—whether it is hidden or revealed. The more it is present in one’s inner space, the more self-aware one becomes.

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Once consciousness is fully crystallized and its non-identification is complete, then it becomes possible for its qualities and capabilities to manifest themselves in all their genuine beauty and power. When this happens to a person, his level of being is perceived by others as something incredibly amazing and interpreted in various, but not always reasonable, ways. This happens because it is difficult to see and understand how divine the nature of the consciousness that we are granted is.

6.

Consciousness is closely connected with the mind, emotions, and physical body, which, in turn, are tightly interconnected to each other. In its normal state, human consciousness constantly identifies itself with any of these three bodies. The identification of consciousness with an object happens when attention directed at this object gets *absorbed* into it. When this happens, consciousness sort of *becomes* the object with which it identifies itself. If the object is fear, consciousness merges with that fear. If the object is a desire, consciousness becomes identical to that desire. Merged with fear, consciousness vests its power in fear, which makes that fear insurmountable. Here is one of the main phenomena of human life: people, ignorant of their own nature, never realize that it is them who are the source of the power which feeds their own negative emotions, obsessive thoughts, and destructive desires.

Thus, human consciousness nourishes human’s lower bodies with its energy similar to how God’s Consciousness supports the existence of all the worlds.

*Identification* underpins unconsciousness, and the mind’s governance is filled with various “rosy” ideas resulting in the suppression of emotions, desires, and the physical body. The stronger this identification is in a person, the more he is *absent*, because he is not present inside or within himself. What is present inside is either a desire, an idea, or an emotion that his consciousness has identified itself with at the moment. It is this desire, idea, or emotion that becomes one’s instant representative and, in fact, constitutes that person at a given moment.

Further, the mind in its attempt to call the shots pushes so many desires and emotions deeper into the subconscious that its unconscious part eventually expands to unprecedented proportions. As a result, in time, the unconscious starts to put a lot of pressure on the so-called conscious. However, this conscious is simply a part of the mind, emotions, or physical body where one’s attention is present at the moment and with which one’s consciousness is currently identified.

When something is suppressed, its manifestation is prohibited and, therefore, one’s attention never goes that way. The mind turns a blind eye to anything suppressed; it doesn’t want to see, feel, or know anything about it. Since consciousness strongly identifies itself with the mind, attention naturally follows the mind on to whatever it is directed at. This is the reason consciousness fails to spot the areas of suppressed desires and emotions. As such, unless a person makes the effort to bring their attention to these areas, they remain under the rule of impenetrable darkness.

7.

Emotional responses, as we know, are faster than physical responses, and that the mind is faster than the emotions. To put it in another way, the vibrational frequency of emotions is lower compared to that of the mind. This is why the mind is so good at inhibiting forbidden emotions and desires in a split second. This happens so fast that it usually goes unnoticed, leaving one incapable of deciphering the reason for a blood pressure spike or depression symptoms that hit shortly thereafter. Limited by mental conditioning and restrictions imposed thereon, the mind fails to see the aftereffects of its actions in regards to itself. Consciousness is the only one that can see. But attention follows fluctuations and leaps of the mind much like chicks follow a hen, and there is no one out there to see how the mind executes its built-in programs that conflict with the natural processes and physiology in humans and pave the way for all kinds of disorders, ailments, and sufferings.

The human ignorance that mystics refer to is partially due to people trying to fix things by tricking their physical bodies rather than figuring out what’s going on with their minds—because the mind is the actual cause of their constant sufferings.

8.

Consciousness is still much faster than emotions and the mind put together. It gets identified with this or that, moving from one object to another at an incredible speed. I assume its speed is faster than the speed of light.

The human eye cannot see a bullet in flight, because a bullet travels at a velocity significantly exceeding the speed of humans’ visual perception capabilities. Since a bullet is so fast in its flight, it can’t be seen even at the moment it strikes. For a similar reason, the mind remains under the impression that there is no such thing as consciousness and none has ever existed.

9.

Obviously, a person in his normal state barely has any control over the energy of his attention. Despite the fact that, during school education, students are prompted to focus their attention on the subject being studied, the effect quite often comes out as the opposite of what was intended. Rather than getting the hang of how to be in control of their attention, children often develop the habit of persistent reluctance toward studying and resist making any efforts by themselves. Sometimes it seems to me that many of the present-day young adults have developed an aversion to reading books just because they have spent so many years in school.

Normally, human attention is ruled by desires and fears as well as the stimuli that incessantly fire through the body in the form of sensations or brief thoughts in the mind, and so forth. People have limited control over this process (and are governed by desires or fears in any case), yet they remain under the illusion that they are in control and take an active role in the attention-shifting process.

Here is a simple experiment to demonstrate that we are not in control of our attention. Let’s close our eyes and try to observe our breath. We can follow how the air touches our nostrils when inhaling, fills our chests, and goes out when exhaling. Our full attention should stay focused on breathing and not get distracted. The task is to stick with the observation of breath and not let ourselves get carried away with the flowing of thoughts. Unless a person has a prior experience in practicing this exercise, I believe he will last less than a minute and forget about his decision to observe the inhale-exhale process. This experiment perfectly illustrates how things stand with our capacity for attention control and ability to manage our inner world.

10.

We are unable to steadily hold our attention off its beaten track— this is a fact. Mechanicalness of our psycho-emotional reactions and constant identification of our consciousness with them leaves us no chance to influence our reactions at least partially. In fact, inside us, there is nothing representative of our identities that we present to others; rather there is a repertoire of psycho-physiological response patterns that the mind utilizes to respond to external situations and internal stimuli—all of which happens at lightning speed. It is the outcome of these reactions that we present to others as “ourselves” by saying, “I am in a good mood today,” or “I am nervous,” or “Maybe it’s time to change something in my life.”

Our ego is just the tip of an iceberg, the final scene of the process unfolding in the unconscious part of our beings. The mind uses ego as a tool for the rationalization of contradictions between the mind’s conditioning and desires and brings some unity between them. The purpose of our personalities is to consolidate and secure the consequences of the coexistence of conflicting desires in our minds. Each time one of those desires takes the lead in influencing a person’s mental state and actions, his ego tries to rationalize to itself and others what is going on. In order for the explanation to look credible and convincing, quite often the ego deceives itself and the others. As soon as a new desire takes over and a person’s behavior changes accordingly, his ego puts together another “logical” explanation equally different from what happened in practice, something like, “Well, that’s life.”

In other words, the false-self shaped by the mind is not the one who makes real decisions, and it is not the source or cause of our actions. It merely tries to maintain an ostensible consistency in our actions, but only so much. Any success with that? Think of your acquaintances and you will acknowledge that they act weird quite often—to put it mildly. They don’t see it that way, though, as they always have a “reasonable” justification for their actions. And yes, in their eyes, your life looks just as odd.

11.

In order to change the situation above, all you have to do is to *begin to want* to change it. Taking into account the place where we are starting from, desire is the only thing that can give us a chance to begin moving towards the transformation of our existence. Each of us, at least once in a lifetime, has felt the urge to break free from the emotions and desires that bring us everlasting sufferings. If it’s just a onetime occurrence, such as an aspiration, it is of little help because it has insufficient power. If, on the other hand, it comes and goes and grows stronger in between, we may start seeing a glimpse of hope for improving our plight. The stronger the desire you have to change your life, the more effort and energy you can devote to this task. That is the law, and there is no way around it. The first challenge one faces on this path is to understand what flesh to put on this desire. There are a lot of spiritual practices out there promising all sorts of solutions for personal problems. How to make the right choice? And once the choice is made, how do you know whether it serves the purpose and leads you toward the desired goal, or is it just a waste of time?

Tough questions and, at the beginning, there are usually no quick answers. Keeping in mind the circumstances when one starts their journey, it is easy to pick the wrong answer at the very beginning, during the goal setting; namely, the ultimate state of being to aim for. More information on mistakes of the sort and possible consequences can be found in the series of my articles entitled, “*The Dark Side of the Search*.”

Another challenge comes from the fact that it is not always clear how to choose an exercise that better suits your current needs. Where to begin? Should you follow ancient scriptures, or purify your body, or silence your mind, and how exactly are these actions supposed to be performed? Contemporary spiritual coaches at times provide such absurd instructions that a sapient person has hard time following them.

As the first challenge was discussed elsewhere, let’s turn to practices and exercises.

12.

Any exercise assigned to one on the path to self-mastery pursues one single goal—mastering one’s attention. Retrieving attention from the yoke of desires is not an easy, yet it is still a feasible task.

In essence, all exercises can be classified into active and passive. In regards to awareness, passive exercises are fundamental. They are designed to detach consciousness from identification with the body, mind, and emotions, therefore these do not play an active role in passive practices. Instead, the main efforts are made on observing and witnessing.

Just as an observation is an integral part of the observer, witnessing is the manifestation of the witness. Consciousness becomes a witness of the internal processes through uninvolved perceiving.

The subject for observation can be breathing, emotions, tensions in the body, and so forth. In fact, the subject of our observations does not make a big difference. The main point is for us to be able to, first, not let our attention merge with the subject of observation, and, second, keep our attention on the subject without wandering for as long as possible.

The key point here is to get a grip on holding your attention *steadily* and the steering it according to instructions of a technique assigned. The very effort to hold attention helps one to create a gap in attentions’ habitual mechanistic flow along with desires and emotions. This is a step toward freeing our attention and an opportunity to master it fully.

The most well-known passive techniques are Vipassana, Zazen, and listening. There are other techniques, for instance, awareness of different body parts, that G. I. Gurdjieff recommended to his students.

The state of awareness is passive as well, because in this state, we witness external and internal events without getting identified with them and yet we maintain the ability to perform concurrently in the outer world.

At the core of all passive techniques lies the principle of using attention as a pure function of consciousness with no active involvement of the body, emotions, and the mind during the process.

It may seem that exercises on focusing attention, such as gazing intently at one point or at a candle’s flame, are passive, but this is not the case. In these practices, the physical body serves as a vehicle for attention, meaning one has to make an effort to not blink, not look away, and to sit still. Similarly, recitation of mantras, koan practices, and the well-known Neo-Advaita constant self-inquiry (“Who am I?”) are all active techniques, where the mind and body are instrumental in performing these practices.

A deep prayer is an expression of our gratitude and awe and equally affects all three lower bodies. Dynamic meditations, which are the practice of expressing emotions, and visualization practices are all examples of active practices. These practices are always aimed at and used to accomplish certain tasks in the seeker’s being. They are similar to crutches that help a convalescing person to walk. Quite a few of active techniques are designed to resolve certain problems that seekers face on their way along the Path, and thus they are of applied significance. Those seekers who fail to realize that and attempt to build their entire work practices around such techniques will never make any progress.

Most of the existing religious traditions and paths use a combination of active and passive techniques. Active techniques create an opportunity to overcome existing obstacles and clear up our inner space for a deeper plunge into passive techniques. In other words, the intentional releasing of anger that was not expressed in a timely matter and causes continuous internal pressure makes us a bit more relaxed which allows us to go deeper inward and discover things hidden previously by our anger.

Active techniques prepare the groundwork to make it easier for our consciousness to break free of identification with things and become crystallized. Passive techniques *per se* represent the process of breaking free from identification and redirecting our attention to the process of awareness of the body, emotions, and the mind. Active techniques help resolve issues in the lower bodies, while passive techniques bring them into harmony. These two types of practices complement each other and, when practiced correctly, lead seekers to their primary goal.

13.

All types of exercises have only one goal and that is to change one’s level of being. Such a change is meant to be achieved not by gaining better control over humans’ inferior nature but by the activation and manifestation of the supreme Divine nature inherent in a person. In the terminology that I use, the state when one’s supreme nature is hidden is referred to as unconsciousness, whereas the state in which one’s supreme nature is revealed is referred to as awareness.

So long as a person’s consciousness is identified with their lower bodies, they remain unconscious; the stronger the identification, the deeper the unconsciousness.

In practice, the situation is as follows. As a child, one internalizes a set of ideas and notions about life that shape one’s individual conditioning. Based on this conditioning, personal desires are defined and formed. One’s primary emotional patterns are established during the same period and stay unchanged throughout life.

Starting from a certain point in life, a person’s whole existence becomes a sequence of routine actions and psycho-emotional clichés that swap instantaneously and do not require that person’s *conscious* participation in the process. When a person identifies himself with a desire, he lets it take over. Then when fear raises its head, it turns into their master at once.

An unconscious person *is absent* in his actions, though his ego tries to hide this fact by any means. An unconscious person is always somewhat inappropriate in his responses to life’s situations, because when he is identified with any of his inner states, he fails to properly perceive the situation around him. Due to the overly zealous activity of his mind, this person lives in a half-asleep state. For example, he is walking down a street. Memories of a recent conversation, TV show, etc. pop up in his mind, or perhaps he is making plans for the evening. In either case, the thinking processes one voluntarily merges with evoke images similar to those in our dreams. Walking, meanwhile, happens automatically. Almost everything is done the similar way—automatically—and the mind keeps daydreaming.

Another problem of an unconscious person is that he *projects* his dreams onto reality. For example, say that one is afraid of aggression and violence. In addition to making one feel insecure and weak, such fear creates a setting where every well-built man begins *to look* dangerous to him. Due to this fear, an unconscious person perceives all physically strong men as a threat. Since fear weakens us, almost anyone will seem stronger than us. This is a pure projection of the mind. When one’s inner reality becomes identified with fear, this creates an illusory outer reality in which the person now has to live. As we constantly project our inner reality affected by identification outwards, each of us travels through life in our own illusory world.

Desires and fears create the strongest projections. For this reason, one and the same person may come across as a liar, a demi-god, or just a random Jewish person[[1]](#footnote-1) to different people. One and the same event is recognized as a hand of Fate, a needless tragedy, or manifestation of magical powers to different people. But the nature of a projection is the nature of a dream, and the dream emerges in the form of a mental product created by imagination and memory and, therefore, it does not have a reality of its own.

Since desires and fears are tightly linked to ideas that inhabit our minds, it sometimes happens that entire nations adopt an idea common to all and begin to share dreams—for example, dreams about the superiority of their race over all others.

These are the consequences of self-identification and the resulting unconsciousness. In our happy times of the unprecedented technologies, people have plenty of opportunities to identify with external objects.

I heard recently a humble dervish asked his Sheikh: “Please tell me, how spiritually uplifted is my state when I watch the TV? I feel clearly that my ego disappears, and I myself appear to dissolve too while watching.” The Sheikh graciously responded that such a state could not be considered spiritual, because when the dervish is back from this state, nothing is changed in his being. I would add that this situation perfectly illustrates the state of self-identification with the environment. With the ongoing spread of television, computers, and 3D technologies, the identification of self with external objects will only become deeper, and so will human unconsciousness.

Thus, release from identification is the basis of awareness. Actions of a conscious person are always marked by the *presence* of his consciousness which is not attached to anything and can see the processes in the lower bodies. Due to non-identification, the perception of this person is not distorted or conditioned by his mind, and he is free from projections of the mind and will cease daydreaming.

14.

There are seekers who have come to the conclusion that the mind has to be discarded because it interferes with the perception of objective reality and causes problems. Some teachers take a stance against the mind by calling it the Devil’s tool and curse the mind endlessly for its activities. This somewhat lopsided discourse cultivates a feeling among followers that the primary goal of spiritual self-improvement is to “halt” and discard the mind.

Osho, as a Buddhist in disguise, spoke about the state of no-mind all the time. What is no-mind? Just about the same as a no-chair or a no-table. A negative statement like this one leaves the mind with no clue to follow and is completely Buddhist in spirit. One can bounce from it toward only one conclusion: discard the mind.

I have met seekers who chose to focus their attempts on accomplishing the complicated and unrewarding task described above. They had a really hard time trying to do it. After all, they were trying to bring their minds to a stop by means of those very minds! The idea and desire to achieve such a halt find refuge in a seeker’s mind, spinning it into a frenzy of activity for its implementation. The majority of such seekers, mind you, have only a vague idea of what to expect should they reach their goal. It appears to them that the main point is to get rid of the mind, after which things will get sorted out somehow by themselves.

I happened to see people in the final stage of schizophrenia. This stage is characterized by the compete disintegration of personality, lack of desires, and a ruined mind. The point is that these patients did not reach enlightenment. They stayed in a vegetative state and might have starved to death if they were not forced to eat.

It is impossible to silence the mind by means of the mind, because the very desire to silence the mind will maintain its activity. Instead, attempts to achieve “inner silence” or to “stop the internal monologue” can impair one’s mental health. Brief periods of mind’s self-control will cycle with the states of inner chaos that resemble insanity.

More often than not, misinterpreted knowledge, or knowledge that came at a bad time, does more harm than good. To make a stop during a walk, we do not have to cut our legs off. It is sufficient to just have their power supply put on hold. If we adjust the alignment of forces in our essence in a such way that the mind is no longer dominant among the lower bodies, and consciousness becomes crystallized as a separate center, then the mind’s activity will gradually change. We don’t have to feel the same emotion all the time, do we? Equally, if we are in a state of complete non-identification, there is no need for us to think all the time.

15.

The self-denial present in people with an inferiority complex (almost in everyone to a varying degree), among other things, finds its way onto a path of spiritual searching. Here, you can find self-flagellation, mortification of the flesh as a source of sin, castration, ritual suicide, and similar rituals throughout the history of religions. Attempts to forcibly halt the mental activity belong to “spiritual” acts of a similar kind. The denial of oneself or one’s body or mind has never led one to God. Instead, it has created impressive examples not to follow.

Yet, self-denial thrives here and now, resurrected again and again in different forms in the teachings of freshly minted “masters.”

All you need to do is to look into yourself and your mind to discover ideas and desires within yourself that create the feeling of being defective and non-conformal to the world. This is impossible without developing the skill of non-identification. So long as one stays identified with the idea that they are an incorrigible freak, they are left with nothing to do but self-destruction, no matter in what manner, which is even better if that destruction is “spiritual.” It is always more pleasant to be crippled in the name of a great purpose rather than simply being unable to accept yourself the way you are.

16.

Where should one begin when seeking to develop awareness? It would seem that the easiest way is to start with self-observation, but experience suggests such starting is very difficult. One who is not proficient at managing their attention will have hard time learning how to divide it into two parts and keep one part directed onto oneself. Considering that this practice is to be performed in parallel with common daily activities, it becomes clear why self-observation is practically impossible without any preliminary preparatory work. A person physically falls short of the energy needed for attention to stay with several concurrent processes at the same time. He typically loses awareness and habitually slips into identification with one of his actions or states.

Such a situation is unavoidable at the beginning and just speaks one more time to the fact that we are not in control of the energy of our attention. Therefore, it is better to start with the preparatory training on getting control of that energy. Any exercises on developing attention will be helpful. Any passive techniques will work. Among active techniques, those that train one’s attention to focus on external or internal objects (trataka, mantra, repetition of prayers, etc.) are the best. Many movement meditations, for instance, Osho dynamic mediation, work with the energies of the body, emotions, and mind and therefore are not very suitable for the attention control training. Perhaps that is the reason why many practitioners of Osho’s dynamic meditation cannot boast a congruous growth of their awareness.

Suppose you decided to begin with observing your breath (Vipassana, a classic Buddhist technique). You sit in a chair or on the floor and direct your attention on the air coming in and out of your chest. You can observe the air flow touching the tips of your nostrils or the sensations in your chest, whichever you prefer. The main effort in this exercise is to observe breathing without getting distracted and identified with a stream of thoughts that flow through the mind. As you can guess, at first, it will be difficult. The habit to identify with thoughts is so strong that you will hardly notice how quickly you forget about the observation and begin to think about other things. As soon as you recall the purpose of your sitting here, you bring yourself back to the observation. Do not let your mind go into self-condemnation or producing thoughts like, “I am going to fail.” Water dropping constantly wears away stone, and any effort bears its own fruit.

In regards to the preparatory work for growing awareness, the benefit of passive techniques is obvious—they utilize the same principles as the practice of awareness, except that all attention is directed toward observation and not distracted by other actions. This practice helps to develop the skill of witnessing, or viewing. If one is successfully able to stay aware of one’s breath sufficiently long, this becomes a step toward developing constant awareness of the body and all of inner processes.

To see the progress, one must be performed exercises *daily*, regardless of the type. Practicing irregularly boosts the ego but is of little help in increasing self-awareness. The mechanicalness of human responses is so strong that probing self-awareness two to three times a week will be insufficient to overcome it.

17.

The subjects of sacrifice and self-sacrifice are raised in many religions. The meaning of sacrifice is rather trivial: a person of faith must give away part of his assets to get the desired blessing or the favor of God. This is, so to speak, the exact meaning. The symbolic meaning of sacrifice for the seeker states that you can’t get anything for free on the Path of Truth. For instance, in order to find bliss, you have to give away your sufferings, some of which are very dear to you.

Some mystics make a deliberate sacrifice at the price known to them only, in order to gain new opportunities in their Work. There are also mystics who sacrifice themselves to God in their entirety. This sacrifice gives them something that can neither be explained nor understood by those who have never done the same.

18.

No one should hope that as one’s awareness increases one will continue living the same way. The first thing a person will have to sacrifice at the altar of the desire to change himself is his leisure time. He will have to organize his life in a way that will allow certain time for daily meditation sessions and exercises. If unsuccessful, perhaps it is too early for him to start this work or he might not need it at all.

A frivolous attitude for the work on yourself produces equivalent results. Lack of attention to details results in no results. Practicing an exercise for 20 minutes daily is better than doing one hour and a half of exercise twice a week. Those who want to awake and become aware need to understand that this work takes continuous effort.

Some teachers recommend to meditate at the same time of the day, wear special clothes, listen to certain music, or use aromas. The rationale behind this is that the mind will get used to the schedule and the clothes and related attributes will create the right mood to calm the mind. Then all of this will help one reach a more profound meditation state.

This approach might be of use for certain types of people, but I see two negative aspects here. First, once the mind finally adapts to a specific time and setting, the person may become somnolent over the course of meditation and succumb to a trance state. When returning from the trance, the person may feel refreshed and rested. But this path no longer leads to awakening. The second aspect is related to the fact that a seeker who wishes to acquire awareness will have to practice it in the course of their ordinary life where there is no advantage of concessions or favorable conditions available to him.

For this reason, my firm opinion is that the key element in working on yourself is *determination*. It is determination that enables a seeker to use every opportunity possible to carve out time for the practices. It is also the determination that eventually leads one to developing one’s own independent *will*.

19.

Many researchers believe that a person in a normal state has free will. They believe that this is a gift of the Lord owing to which humans may choose to commit endless sins or, the opposite, rise over into holiness. However, upon a closer view, it turns out that this so-called free will is not so free and independent. In fact, all of its manifestations are desire-dependent in one way or another.

The first manifestation of the “will,” a positive one, is the pursuit of a desire dominant at the moment. For example, a person wishes to get rich. This desire takes one a long time to fulfill. Over a period of time, the person will stay persistent, determined, and demonstrate the wonders of hard work and diligence. Behind the scenes, the person will experience bouts of anger and occasional depressive episodes. If he nails it, then his biographer will write a story about a man of exceptional willpower. But we have to understand that pursuing a desire is not a manifestation of the will, although the person’s external activity creates an illusion of having one. If another desire becomes dominant at some moment, the person’s behavior will undergo a miraculous change, and his ego will invent a logical explanation for that immediately.

The second manifestation of “will,” a negative one, is stacked against desires. It is highly valued in totalitarian societies, because an individual suppresses personal desires for the sake of supreme goals set up by their leaders. As a matter of fact, the principal part of child-rearing in any society is to teach children to control their desires. The one who mastered this skill better than others is considered a strong-willed individual, while those who did not are rendered as spineless.

The more a person is conditioned by the ideas of duty towards their society, homeland, and family, the deeper they suppress their desires. The person will be seen as righteous and strong-willed but sad, because such manifestation of will is always accompanied by deep sadness.

As long as the mind is in control of a person’s actions, it can’t be otherwise. All acts of “free will” are guided either by desires or by opposing conditioning coupled with fear. Rationalized by the ego, these interactions and oppositions create the impression that humans have free will.

When consciousness begins to separate into an independent center, the process of non-identification with external and internal objects brings to life a new force: the will that is unfettered by momentary desires, not associated with them in any way, and doesn’t need their presence in order to manifest itself. It develops as a result of efforts on non-identification, and the closer one gets to actualization of their true Self, the stronger becomes his will and the ability to act outside of his desires. The more power, which is the true willpower, a person has, the more chances he has to give up their will to God and accept His Will as his own.

**Comment.** It should be added here that outside of desires, a person has needs and necessities. However, the needs of a person with a high level of self-awareness are different from those normally present in common life. For example, such a person no longer needs to get lots of new experiences in the outside world, because is replaced with internal fulfillment which produces experiences of its own. The need for knowing and experiencing God may emerge and grow stronger. Further, it comes not in the form of a desire but as the deepest need that requires filling.

As for a strong will, it is manifested in the ability to endure discomforts and act with totality. The higher the level of awareness, the less the internal splitting created by doubts and self-identification with desires and energies conflicting with each other. As such, one can invest all of his energy into action that adds power and effectiveness. A conscious person won’t take on a decision he is not going to follow. He is wholesome and his actions are of equal quality.

20.

As G. I. Gurdjieff used to say “Patience is the mother of will.” Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that someone who lacks patience could develop willpower. Impatience is rooted in desires and is also caused by the mind’s urge to complete a pending task and relieve inner tension. Tension can be associated with an unsettled situation or an unfulfilled desire, and the mind rushes to resolve it. Therefore, in common life, patience is exhibited out of necessity. We have to endure physical pain and discomfort when we are sick. We have to “grin and bear it” when we need to bring our negative emotions under control. Patience is indispensable when faced with a dangling desire that cannot be fulfilled immediately.

Accordingly, in ordinary life, patience goes hand in hand with unconscious misery. This is the state when we have no choice but to endure the unpleasant experience. If it was within our power to eliminate pain, anger, sadness, or desires, we would do so immediately. However, we are helpless to change anything and resort to either conventional or non-conventional painkillers, bearing it until they begin to work. Our misery is unconscious because we are unaware of its source, fail to see the origin of this or that emotion, and are thus unable to change the situation. So, we put up with it, become irritable, and wallow in self-pity because we do not want to tolerate the frustration. Practicing self-mastery develops a different type of patience. Sports professionals and individuals who make a serious effort to change their quality of being are familiar with it. This type of patience is different, in the sense that a person committed to a certain practice continues with it and endures its associated discomfort through *their own will*. For example, while practicing observing one’s breath, one faces the situation in which one’s mind, deprived of any meaningful activity, begins to wander first and then race. At first, this creates maximum noise and anxiety. One has a choice either to persist in observing the inhale-exhale process or to give in to the mind and abandon the practice. If they don’t want to capitulate at the very first obstacle, they carry on sitting with and enduring the turmoil their mind created. This is their deliberate choice; this is *conscious suffering* that can be put to an end at any moment. Yet, they continue with it and soon see that their mind, deprived of the habitual fueling energy of attention, gradually cools. This is the moment when the person assumes control and ceases to be a victim of circumstances.

As the seeker continues to exert effort, his patience grows stronger, and consistent with it grows his freestanding will. With continuous efforts in self-awareness, the seeker develops the *willingness* to endure discomfort, as working against self-identification alleviates the pressure of desires that was previously overwhelming.

**Comment**. When not identified with a desire, we feel its energy as vibrant, but now there is a distance between the desire and the one looking at it. Now we have a choice previously unavailable to us: Either to remain conscious of the desire without repressing it, but at the same time making no attempts to fulfill it, or to go ahead and allow it to happen, staying aware all of the way through the process of any internal reactions that we may have. Thus, we will be able to get to the root and see what causes the desire, although it may take more than one attempt before we do. Once we become aware of our desires, we can break free of some of them for good. Being with, and observing the desires while making no attempt to fulfill them works well for those desires that have idealistic grounds and are far from reality. The practice of conscious fulfillment of desires is one of the main practices for coping with desires.

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Impatience, as a side effect of desires, generates anxiety and haste. If a person is open to endure whatever comes his way, he relaxes and becomes calm. Patience that was opted for consciously, brings one a special type of inner peace and serenity. This internal peace is the fruit of acceptance, the willingness to accept whatever happens. Such acceptance makes one very strong and, in inner work, invincible.

It is patience alone that prevents a seeker’s emotional and mental reactions from causing him to revert to an unconscious state. It also gives him a chance to delve into deeper layers of his being. Patience also helps one progress toward the Truth. Finally, in the absence of patience, it would be impossible even to pass through the first part of the Path.

21.

Practices that are used to cultivate patience and willpower are not limited only to passive ones; in general, any practice can be helpful. The precise consistent effort to overcome one’s automatic reactions brings about the desired result. However, to proceed to the next level, i.e., to work on self-awareness directly, a solid experience with passive techniques is a prerequisite. The absence of this preliminary training puts a seeker at risk of walking straight into a trap.

There is a characteristic example of many followers of Osho Rajneesh—the mystic whose teaching is popular today—demonstrating a poor model for others. They read Osho’s books and perform various dynamic meditations and exercises that Osho developed in plenty for his disciples. In his books, Osho wrote a great deal about awareness and everything he stated is correct, but the form of the message conveyed leaves the reader under the impression that awareness is an effortless state to achieve—if only you attempt it. This is where the aforementioned trap lies. If the seeker has failed to develop the skill of self-observation, he will confuse witnessing with *thinking*. The follower believes instead that his proper knowledge of Osho’s discourse and regurgitation of his sayings attest to his high level of self-awareness. The truth is, he has no knowledge of himself—only of what Osho said about awareness.

Thinking about observation and practicing observation are such very different things that it is even difficult to explain it. Still, I will try.

Witnessing is a process that occurs in real-time, here and now, in contrast to thinking, which is always retrospective. The one who is witnessing is observing things happening at the moment impartially, while the mind reflects on events that have happened already to make sense of them. Let us say that a person found himself in a situation that he has been afraid to face his entire life, and thus, always anticipated that it would occur again one day. When this finally happened, it triggered a fear reaction. If in a state of awareness, the person will observe fear emerging, with associated thoughts and cold flashes flowing through the body. He *is present* in whatever is happening and acts according to the way he sees the situation. Even if the mechanical response prevails over awareness, he is the witness thereof.

If a person behaves unconsciously, the moment that fear manifests, he *loses himself* and reacts automatically. Further, from force of habit, he also represses fear. Later, when thinking back, he admits, “Yeah, I was scared; it’s all because of my childhood trauma which...” A person will think of himself as exceptionally self-aware and truly intelligent. The first is a false belief, while the second is true. Becoming aware of an emotion or desire brings one to the gradual transformation of one’s being, while thinking about emotions and desires creates an illusion of self-knowledge.

**Comment**. Further, retrospective pondering on a past event allows one to reassess and form an opinion about the issue, i.e., to craft an interpretation in favor of one’s conditioning and ignore or soften your reactions that don’t fit the picture. Rationalizing and compensation strategies nearly inevitably accompany the process of reasoning, which differs fundamentally from the process of witnessing, where the occurrences are observed in real time as the mind remains neutral and uninvolved.

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I have met individuals whose “awareness” never left their cognitive framework, but in contrast, whose unconsciousness was present at all levels of their being. That was the outcome of thinking about self-observation, as the mind can never understand itself, never anything superior to itself.

Thinking about awareness is so common that it may be the principal reason for the lack of progress made by seekers who have failed to grasp the difference between the mind at work versus the observation of the mind at work.

**Comment**. In cases where a seeker is afraid to lose self-control or is afraid of his own emotional reactions, it’s easier for him to substitute self-talk and memories for impartial observation. Such people infer that because they can recall the situation clearly, they were in effect present at that moment in the past. However, as the moment has passed, the mind has redacted the memories, and its evaluation of the situation is now lopsided. The mind supports the desire to think of oneself as self-aware, and then presents its behavior and autopilot reactions as full of awareness and rationalizes them by citing spiritual teachings. Self-deception is the main reason why individuals who believe they are highly self-aware, in actuality, are not. The habit of lying to oneself, which a seeker has trouble relinquishing in favor of candidness, as well as the desire to become a spiritual person, most often produce seekers of this kind.

22.

Consciousness sees. Mind analyses, evaluates, and judges. Sooner or later, the mind tends to believe that seeing is one of its functions. This creates an additional illusion that locks you away in the realm of your mind permanently, as wherever you look, you see nothing but the mind. It appears to be impossible to perceive the world and yourself differently, unaffected by its interference. It appears that the thinking process is an indispensable part of human existence. It appears that watching will never supersede thinking.

Constrained by the boundaries of language and the duality that accompany them, the mind has no faculty to achieve a comprehensive worldview. In contrast, consciousness has this ability, and the knowledge it gains in the process of watching is always more impartial and thorough. Direct seeing that is free from the mind’s interference is a distinct level of perception that is unavailable to those who have not mastered the art of witnessing and non-identification. This explains why intelligent people too often find themselves in situations where they act like complete fools.

**Comment**. One can say that consciousness sees, but it would be more accurate to say that it perceives one’s surroundings, and through that seeing it gains knowledge about them, including people and personal life situations. This is referred to as direct perception: it is not tinted with thoughts, mind projections, or conditioning. You don’t even need to observe details or subtle nuances; otherwise, something as simple as walking down the street will send you into overload attributable to excessive information influx—grasping the essence of the matter is sufficient; there is no need even to shape it into words. Further, there is no need even to hold onto this essence, or try to remember or record it in your mind. You are present in the moment, know everything you need to know about it, and make no judgments, speculations, evaluations, or attempts to scrutinize it. This is unmediated perception. When there is a need to describe the things that you see, you allow your mind to communicate this nonverbal knowledge. If you are looking for more precise details, you either restrict your attention to the person whose inner state you need to understand, or use a contemplation technique—if you wish to understand the subtleties of a given personal situation. Direct perception is inherent to animals as well, although of course, they lack the capability to gather elaborate and precise knowledge in the way that humans do.

23.

Suppose a seeker has acquired a certain proficiency in the practice of witnessing and is prepared to move on to practicing self-awareness in daily life. As mentioned earlier, the main challenge at this stage is to learn to *divide* our attention in two. One part of your attention supports whatever action you are engaged in at the moment, while the other supports the process of observing your actions.

**Comment**. To rephrase, one aspect of our attention is spent on the activity at hand, on being present with it; the other stays within and is spent in a continuing effort to observe reactions that emerge in the meantime, including physical sensations, thoughts flashing through the mind, associations and feelings, that is, everything one experiences in the course of performing the activity. This is what is meant by the observation of the doer.

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Once a person begins to work with his attention, the energy of consciousness that has been used thus far entirely to feed the lower bodies, begins to become more available to him, and the capacity of his free attention increases noticeably. As one identifies less with emotions and thoughts, the volume of one’s free attention grows to eventually accommodate all internal content: physical sensations and impulses; emotional spikes, the flow of thoughts and associations… All of this assemblage could well be covered by one’s attention simultaneously. Moreover, growing sensitivity and awareness will allow one to sense things that are imperceptible to those who are “asleep”.

When learning a new skill or an art, a rule of thumb is to begin with the basics. Do not try to force your awareness to span across all processes happening in the three lower bodies at once because you are bound to fail. Taking the mind and its fine moves as a starting point for observation in the practice of self-awareness is not a good idea either, because our self-identification with the mind is the deepest and it is too easy to become confused between observation and thinking about observation. That is why the best way to begin to practice self-awareness is by being *present* with your physical body during any activity in which you are engaged at the moment.

Nearly anything can become a target for practicing awareness: walking; dishwashing; manual work, etc. The goal is to maintain attention in a divided mode, allotting an ample part of it to execute the activity properly while the other part of one’s attention spans *all of the sensations* emerging at the moment. A routine, ordinary activity is the best choice to practice observation.

Let’s take dishwashing as an example. While performing this simple chore, you may be conscious of the tactile sensations as your hands make contact with the dishes, hot water, and suds. You may smell the detergent’s fragrance. You may also sense the contraction of your arm muscles and how strong or weak it is. As we usually stand while doing dishes, you may exercise awareness of the muscle tension in your legs and back, as well as gravity’s effects on your body. By tension here, I mean tonic motor activity of postural muscles rather than muscle stiffness. Further, going deeper into awareness allows you additionally to exercise awareness of your breathing rhythm and heartbeat.

All of these sensations are there all of the time but we are blind to them because our attention is absorbed by thoughts and other things. The moment you become engaged in awareness of your sensations, the quality of incoming experiences changes and you now stay with *what* *is*, with what is happening with you in the moment, and cease to live habitually in the clouds.

Brought into the field of our attention, the sensations give us a chance to realize our physical bodies’ true state. Very often people invest excessive physical effort in basic body movements, which can cause them to overexert muscles when otherwise they would be relaxed naturally. Once a person becomes aware of their state, they have an opportunity to do something about it, for example, to incorporate relevant active practices or to discontinue inefficient movement patterns. Once successful, they find that their stamina has increased, as the energy wasted previously can now be put to good use, for instance, to expand their field of attention.

**Comment**. I would like to add here that high muscle tone occurs for a good reason—it has its roots in the mind’s tension. Even if tension is caused by repressing emotions, the mind is still involved because it is responsible for their control. It will take more than practicing emotional expression—you will need to recognize your ideas that lead to overcontrol and repression and eliminate them—again, through awareness.

24.

There is a technique that can be a great help in practicing body awareness: A practitioner pays attention to the sensations in a bodily part while his body remains passive. One of the exercises Gurdjieff recommended to his followers was to become aware of all of the sensations in three fingers of the right hand. I want to say straightforwardly that I, too, recommend beginning with simple tasks. In principle, you can choose to work with any part of your body in this practice; it is simply that Gurdjieff’s approach was based upon the rationale that fingers, as tools used frequently, have enhanced tactile sensitivity that makes it easier to perform the exercise.

You can begin by practicing awareness of one arm and once you can do that, take it to the next level: As you become connected fully with all of the sensations in your right arm, bring your attention to the left arm and try to achieve the same result. The entire exercise is as follows: Focus your awareness on the physical sensations in your right arm (for five to ten minutes), then move to your left arm and observe the sensations for the same amount of time, then go down to the left leg, then the right one. Then, place your attention on the sensations in your trunk and head. Finally, try to expand your awareness throughout your entire body.

The primary difficulty encountered during this exercise (aside from “falling asleep”) is to not confuse awareness with concentration. The mind is trained to concentrate and can start focusing on sensations in a limb during observation, that creating pressure in the area. This can lead to sensations of heaviness and discomfort in that body part. Concentration emerges because of a strong desire to achieve the goal. Concentration is an incorrect approach to use and won’t help you reach your goal because it narrows your attention, which is the opposite of awareness.

**Comment**. When we concentrate, the attention channel narrows and the pressure of the energy of our consciousness directed at the body part increases. Doing so evokes various secondary sensations, such as heaviness, tingling, etc. This is not body awareness; this is charging the body with a large dose of the energy of consciousness, which generates sensations that were not there originally. The practice of body awareness implies that we simply bring attention to a body part to get a better sensation of it and observe whatever is there. This is the difference between concentration and awareness and a strong desire to practice the latter often steers one into engaging in concentration rather than awareness.

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The correct approach is to try to *open up* to all of the sensations in the body part observed that can be experienced at the moment. Let’s put it another way: You want to the body part to which you subject thorough awareness become exposed to your attention and allow the sensations elicited to occupy it entirely. There is yet another way to rephrase it: Once we begin to feel sensations in the body part, we need to enter and become submerged in them, so that they can manifest themselves and be realized fully.

With respect to experiences and sensations, not everything can be expressed in words. Using different words to explain the same inner action can make it clearer to some people. Sometimes, just one reworded sentence becomes a key to the insight and breakthrough in understanding for someone who has already studied numerous books on the subject.

25.

Everyone knows the saying that water dropping constantly wears away the stone. However, if we try to track the process in real time, the changes will not be noticeable immediately. What we see is water drops breaking on the stone one by one. Brief observation would suggest the converse, that water is less powerful than stone. However, if water continues to drip, it will win over the rock’s hardness eventually. A similar thing happens when we expend effort to become aware. In the beginning, we have very little energy free for attention, are distracted easily, fall asleep, and forget about our goal. We are struggling to hold our attention free from identification and to remain open to body sensations, which make this work appear to be too difficult to do. This conclusion is an illusion and arouses skepticism that all of our efforts will turn to dust like water drops hitting the rock of unconsciousness helplessly. For a long time, nothing seems to be happening; however, the process plays on behind the scenes, concealed from us by our strong emotional and mental reactions. Sooner or later, a moment inevitably comes when the results of our efforts become so obvious that they can no longer be ignored.

**Comment**. Awareness increases in steps—every practitioner knows this. You carry on your efforts and they may appear to be totally fruitless for quite some time, because after balancing in awareness for a certain period, you unavoidably fall and forget. This can go on for weeks and months, but with persistent aspiration and consistent efforts, the results will come, and one day you realize suddenly that a certain degree of presence has been established in you and losing it is no longer possible, not even during occasional “unconscious setbacks”. Staying at this level of presence in oneself can take some time, but eventually another change occurs, and you notice unexpectedly that your self-awareness has increased even more and you are now able to see and sense things of a more subtle quality in yourself. This step-wise progress continues until your awareness and presence in yourself become complete at last.

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With respect to body awareness, first you see enhancement in the body’s sensitivity and in the later stage, you achieve the complete and permanent presence of attention in your body. This occurs abruptly, as if someone turned on the light in a dark room, and everything in it comes into view. Vague shapes and blurry silhouettes are revealed now as objects accessible for perception. From that moment on, body awareness becomes constant and effortless, representing a new level of one’s being. Once reached, this state cannot be lost. It can only grow deeper in concert with the increase in awareness.

26.

There is one essential limiting factor in the practice of self-awareness: the amount of energy at one’s disposal to practice witnessing. We can supply only as much free energy for an intended purpose as we have in our possession.

The energy that comes from food, breathing, and new experiences is spent partly on autoregulatory body functions (heartbeat, digestion, etc.), while the excess is used at our discretion. We spend the latter carelessly, like children. It leaks off through unconscious tension in the body, outbursts of negative and positive emotions, and generation of desires followed shortly by worries about them. Thus, each of the lower bodies requires energy to function. Further, when we are not preoccupied by life’s problems and don’t have many issues to cope with, we invest all of the free energy we have into avid pleasure seeking.

Having pleasure entails spending energy, but this process is not unambiguously bad, as pro-austerity advocates argue. Drinking alcoholic beverages, dancing till you drop, having sex, identifying with movie characters, getting together with friends, playing soccer, going to a restaurant... All of these activities give us new impressions—albeit not always the ones we need—in exchange for our energy. We need fresh impressions as much as we need fresh bread, but the mind, equipped with its habits’ power, reduces our pursuit of pleasure to a mechanical and useless action. As a result, the impressions that we obtain turn stale and cease to satiate us. Things that once were enjoyable become something similar to wistfulness, yet the mind goes on trying to reproduce the original experience and pushes us down the well-worn path again and again.

Hence, all of the energy not yet consumed by worries and fixing critical life problems is flushed down the channel that feeds our customary pleasures.

Cultivating self-awareness requires making efforts to redirect our energy flow. If we are interested in expanding the field of our awareness to include the physical body, emotions, and the mind, the best time to start is the morning hours right after we wake up, when our energy is still vibrant and abundant.

If you are up for the challenge, as soon as you roll out of bed, observe the things you are doing, together with any mental and emotional events that arise in the meantime. Whether you are washing your face, brushing your teeth, or having breakfast—your routine is escorted by a stream of thoughts and feelings, such as ‘That’s fun’, ‘I don’t like it’, or ‘I don’t care’. Your task is not to “fall asleep”, i.e., not to identify with your thoughts and sensations and forget about the observation. This task will be a real challenge if you have no prior experience with passive practices. Still, even if you do, remaining in awareness is no easy thing. Any stimulus from outside can distract you, so that you revert to daydreaming and lose awareness.

Either way, as soon as you begin to run short on energy, you will become distracted and fall into identification. You will spend the rest of your day as you always do—by being absent in the actions and decisions that you make. The energy will flow into familiar channels of unconscious suffering and pleasure-seeking, and then tomorrow, you can start all over again.

27.

The aforementioned “downs” in awareness are unavoidable, so there is no need to become upset about it. On the other hand, if you experience no “downs” at all as you begin practicing, then you are most likely thinking rather than witnessing.

There are two aspects to saving inner energy. One is associated with self-discipline, the willful decision to forgo chasing certain desires to save extra energy to practice witnessing. The advantage of this approach is that the mind is already familiar with it—control is in its nature! The mind will take over eagerly and begin repressing any desires, including those most innocent. The disadvantage of this approach naturally derives from the advantage. Repression of desires creates tension in all three lower bodies; in addition, sooner or later, the desires will win and throw one into very deep unconsciousness.

Another way to conserve your energy is to discontinue activities that you perform mechanically, from habit, or to meet others’ expectations. For example, one of the most difficult moments early in practicing awareness is to continue self-observation during a conversation. Once you begin talking, your attention becomes focused completely on making sense of the other person’s words and determining your responses. Even a brief observation of yourself through the course of the conversation will attest that communication requires energy and is a time-consuming activity. A great deal of your energy spent during talking is wasted on unconscious chatting. It will do you no harm to drop off such communication and meanwhile take the opportunity to observe that the mind enjoys jabbering.

I think that everyone, if they take the time to look into their lives carefully, will be able to identify everyday tendencies that became mechanical habits that offer nothing to either the mind or the heart. Breaking them off would be equally alright. Renouncing them is a temporary measure that allows for the time necessary to strengthen the skill of witnessing. Once the habit of being aware has a good foundation, you will be free to resume everything that you put on hold—should you wish to do so, of course, for some unexplainable reasons.

28.

If a practitioner performs observing correctly, they begin to see. They look into their bodies and see bodily tensions and the causes thereof. They watch their emotions and become aware of what has provoked them; this reveals to them the way the mind works and the way ideas that program the mind form the grounds for bringing desires to life.

I have heard of a spiritual coach who claimed that the expression “look inward” was incorrect and made no sense. He stated that he had tried to do that, but had seen and found nothing but darkness. Then he suggested that everyone close their eyes and try to look inward. As might be expected, shortly after, he offered the audience the opportunity to buy his genuine method for swift enlightenment and spiritual cleansing.

His mistake came from trying to look inside himself with his physical eyes. Naturally, he was unable to see a great deal with his eyes closed. This is a common mistake among beginning seekers.

Efforts in observation, witnessing, and self-remembrance develop inner or *spiritual* vision. It forms as a product of awareness—direct perception by consciousness of everything that falls within the field of our attention in a given moment. Advanced spiritual vision creates a framework for seeing: A state in which one can perceive the Divine Will clearly and follow It according to their seeing.

**Comment**. Directed outwardly, unmediated perception is referred to otherwise as spiritual vision if directed inwardly. Some authors refer to both skills as spiritual vision, but this may cause confusion. Spiritual vision advances together with the mind non-identification and through practices of contemplation, and allows one to see everything that happens within them clearly. Another function of spiritual vision is the ability to perceive incoming impulses of the Will of God and insights of various forms of truth and Truth itself. As the door to God is hidden within us, spiritual vision is invaluable for interaction with Him.

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Further, while looking fearlessly at the visible world and everything revealed in it with their physical eyes, a seeker perceives with his spiritual vision things that cannot be seen physically. In this case, even if he closes his eyes, his spiritual vision remains as sharp and penetrates deep into the core of things.

29.

The mind can imitate spiritual vision easily. A strong unfulfilled desire seeks alternative ways to be balanced out, so if one has a desire for the world to be different, one’s mind will use imagination eagerly to fill the perception gap. Things likely won’t devolve into hallucinations; rather, the mind will produce various images and pictures as soon as you “look” inside or outside of yourself with your eyes closed. Quite a few seekers and psychics live in this sort of self-deception. In fact, they live in an imaginary world. This is a trap, one of many along the Path. The only way to prevent being caught in it is to continue to hold on to the basics, continue to witness, and resist the temptation to look in various directions with your eyes closed. The growing experience in practicing witnessing will help us distinguish between the phenomenon of true spiritual vision and mental projections.

The mind is artful and desires are powerful. For that reason, most techniques’ descriptions are scant on details; otherwise, a seeker exposed to the knowledge of what to expect will be likely to deceive himself. For the same reason, many aspects of the Truth are revealed to a student only when he is ready to understand them correctly.

As I write these lines, I realize that an elaborate explanation of certain topics here may be potentially harmful because of the human mind’s aforementioned specifics. Yet, I choose to continue my work in the hope that there are individuals who will benefit from reading this text, make sense of, and apply the knowledge that is presented to them correctly, and avoid the mental traps successfully.

30.

Jesus used to say that it is no use looking for the Kingdom of God in the outer world because it is within us. Following this guidance, seekers try to go inward into the depth of their being, but encounter challenges naturally.

Practicing body awareness is not easy, holding emotions in awareness is even less simple, and being aware of the mind’s movements is truly difficult. I have encountered people who were struggling to identify the emotion they were experiencing at the moment numerous times. A deeply seated habit to repress and turn away from one’s own emotions is the reason why people don’t know themselves, such that they can go on swearing that they feel love while they are consumed by anger, or state that they feel nothing but peace and indifference while their masseters are tense and jaws clenched.

Denying one’s own feelings to preserve an ideal image of self is a very common habit. Denial of one’s own inner reality manifests itself as the *unwillingness to see* negative emotions and as a result, leads them to develop a selective blindness. The seeker arrives at the point where he finds himself unable to be aware or witness anything that involves his emotions.

To avoid such a potential impasse, you must realize the fact that no one but you supports a ban on being aware of negative emotions. At some point in your childhood, you accepted this ban as guidance your parents and teachers enforced. Ever since, it has been a part of your self-control mechanism and fosters an illusion that ego is in charge of your inner state of affairs. This is not the case, and your self-control collapses occasionally and wreaks havoc within you.

This ban is preposterous, yet you created it, and hence you can overturn it. Inner chaos has caused the ban on expressing emotions and the need to exert constant control. In contrast, becoming aware of emotions allows one to resolve existing problems without creating new ones.

Together, the ban and control have become part of your conditioning, part of your being, and it will take effort to change the status quo. You will have to *accept* yourself and *let* yourself be the way you are, and no longer compare your demeanor with the guidelines of ideal behavior that were drilled into your head. Change doesn’t happen overnight, as I stated earlier. The most important thing here is to permit yourself to express your emotions and stop being afraid of their manifestations.

Actually, your emotional energy is just waiting for a chance to exert itself. If you agree to welcome emotional manifestations, they will not be long in coming. What will come to the surface will be just the tip of the iceberg, as too much has been repressed over the years, but that’s another matter. Even so, this will provide you with material for observation and an opportunity to work on the repressed emotions that contaminate your psychological state constantly. Once you have seen your anger, you should initiate the process of letting it out using specialized techniques, and you may also want to investigate its cause, that is, the underlying desire. Fear can be observed by allowing its hidden source and veiled manifestations to step into the light of your consciousness.

Practicing observation diligently helps one learn to discern even the most subtle movements of any emotion. At the beginning, it is obviously easier to begin working on rough, apparently visible, emotional states. However, it is not uncommon for a person to fail to detect and remain blind to their predominant and frequently recurring emotion. One can feel nervous, yet fail to perceive one’s anxiety, or be scared and still unable to recognize one’s fear. When you take the first steps in practicing witnessing while in a mental state as described above, you see everything but the main problem. This is the hidden cunningness of self-identification at work: The more one identifies with something, the more difficult it is to see and become aware of the fact.

Under such circumstances, it helps to enlist an external witness’s assistance—one who will help the person identify his emotional issue. As they say, standers-by see more than gamesters. Having the Master as a witness is the best but, from my experience, few seekers can find one. Technically, anyone who practices awareness can serve as a mirror for a seeker, but to qualify, the person has to be good at being able to distinguish between the things that he really sees and his own mind’s projections. Thus, feedback from those who do not practice self-observation can be fallacious, as far too often, it speaks more about the projections of their minds than about the subject of observation.

An outside witness’s assistance can be highly valuable for a seeker. They help guide a seeker to what he should be directing his attention, and if the seeker has sufficient trust and perseverance, he begins to realize that the information that has been shared with him is real and he has simply been unable to see it all along. Then, the seeker’s opportunity to change his situation finally arrives.

31.

After a seeker has learned to identify and understand his emotions, observe them, and exercise awareness of them, he will encounter the problem of *repression*. He will find himself in a situation in which he can see his emotion, say, anger, but is unable to identify its root cause. Regardless of how much he struggles to become aware of the cause, he continues to run into an invisible internal wall. This is indicative of one of two things: either, as befits, a repressed desire that is prohibited from manifesting itself triggered his anger, or the accumulated repressed anger is boiling over because it can no longer be kept under control and there is no space left available within into which to force it. All three lower bodies are overstrained, and the excess energy is vented at the slightest opportunity—hence, for example, occasional anger outbursts over trivial matters. If a seeker is ignorant of this mechanism, it is likely that he will struggle to trace the roots of an emotion that he sees is emerging in himself.

Because emotional expression is the opposite of emotional repression, appropriate active practices should be performed to alleviate inner tension that has accumulated because of constant emotional control. For example, if one feels sad, simply cry. Having said that, I used to know folks who would shed tears for any reason, yet their inner state showed no signs of change; quite the opposite—they could not prevent themselves from crying. A similar tendency may be seen with anger, anxiety, and fear. The bottom line is this: Unconscious venting is likely to create an unhealthy emotional-behavioral pattern in which feelings go round in circles, like circus ponies, pushing a person back into sadness or anger over and over again. Emotion gains control and commands a person, who then becomes sadness incarnate, the unconscious channel for the energy of sadness. In contrast, when a person practices expressing his emotions diligently, in turn, he becomes in charge, as there is a gap between him and his feelings and he is not identified with them completely. He becomes a conscious channel relaying emotional energy and releases himself from it. Such an approach helps break the behavioral pattern rather than develop one.

When performed correctly, expression practices relieve tension from all three lower bodies. The internal space becomes cleared, which offers one a chance to achieve a break-through in self-awareness and open doors to *within oneself*.

The primary difficulty one faces when trying to adopt the practice of expressing emotions is the inability to overcome their internal confines. The mind remains vigilant and disapproves of any actions that fall outside one’s operant conditioning. Such self-criticism blocks the free flow of one’s energy. A person keeps pushing and trying, but is still unable to make his anger flow freely, which would give him the opportunity to dispose finally of the burden of unexpressed anger. The only way to overcome such internal resistance is to exercise perseverance and genuine dedication to make the expression practice work. It may take a week, sometimes a month of practicing daily, to see progress. Regardless, I have never seen it take more than a month for a seeker to break through his inner resistance. As always, it requires patience and commitment.

32.

The next obvious question that arises once the expression of repressed emotions becomes manageable is how can you stop bottling up emotions and learn to express them directly and in the moment?

To cease repressing, one needs to learn to detect an emotion or desire the moment it emerges. You need only one thing—to *be present* in whatever is happening, i.e., to be aware. Awareness is the key to breaking the habit of quelling any motions within the emotional body or the body of the mind. Unless you eliminate this habit, your transformation and non-identification become just another unattainable dream.

The simplest starting point for learning to see the emotional repression mechanism is your physical body. If you are already good at observing your body’s states, then you will have no problems identifying the moments when you repress manifestations of your energies. Any emotion seeks to express itself through the body: Anger manifests itself through yelling and fighting, and sadness through groaning and crying, while fear and anxiety cause us to curl up physically. Emotional control is impossible without the physical body’s involvement, just as data transfer is impossible in the absence of a suitable storage medium, i.e., paper to print hard copies, or USB and computer hard drives to store digital data. To a certain extent, the physical body serves as a storage medium for emotions. Thus, by observing your body, you can see its responses each time you take control of your desires and feelings. For example, as you practice awareness of your breathing, sooner or later you will notice that at certain moments it becomes shallower than normal. The reason is that for emotions to be held in, they have to be deprived of energy, weakened. This effect is achieved with shallow breathing, as reduced intake of oxygen or, if you will, prana, which secures the control process. When you begin to become aware of a change in the depth of your breathing, you will be able to see an emotion that is being repressed at the moment. Once you see it, you will have an opportunity to change your reaction.

It is not rare to encounter people with shallow or almost no breathing. Such a breathing pattern is indicative of the constant control of feelings and the self. As constant tension and abnormal breathing are harmful to the health, they eventually become ill, and mundane neuroses can be the least of their problems.

As emotions try to express themselves by means of the body, their control is predominantly routed through the muscular system. You can see them contracting involuntarily as they prevent the emotional energy from manifestation. Therefore, an individual who has a relatively high awareness of his body is able to catch the moments of involuntary muscle tension and trace it to the root cause of the repressed emotion. If one manages to perceive such tension the moment it runs through the body, one has the option to relax one’s muscles voluntarily and thus terminate the process.

Fear is repressed in the lower abdomen and partly in the legs, anxiety in the upper abdomen area, sadness in the chest muscles, and anger in the shoulders, arms, neck, and jaw muscles. This is a schematic, but still accurate, overview of the control zones in the body. I don’t believe it is worth going into the details of muscle control for each emotion. If you are interested to learn more, I welcome you to explore the subject independently.

The power and benefit of awareness lie in the fact that it allows one to come to know oneself, not based upon what others have said, but by studying the processes in all of the layers of a human being firsthand. Further, as a ray of sunlight hitting a glass of freshly served beer makes a permanent change to its flavor, so too a person never remains the same if, for once, he sees his internal reactions’ mechanical nature. Some people I used to talk with would say: I became aware of my anger and got to see my repressed fear and the cause of repression... Everything they said sounded about right, as if they were reading a book, yet some time later it became clear that it made no difference to the quality of their being—their unconscious anger continued to pour out and their fear still limited their choice of actions. It also became clear that the “revelations” were localized in their minds, nurtured by imagination, and unrelated to seeing. Sometimes people are so artful in lying to themselves that any evidence of inconsistency between their state of being and personal statements is plainly worthless: They always find a way to justify themselves.

33.

Speaking broadly, one of the principal outcomes of self-awareness is the change in one’s being. Impartial observation strips off the veil of illusions about oneself, and reveals inner reality and unresolved problems.

If one wants to go within oneself, one must be prepared to face some unpleasant revelations. The illusions the mind creates are powerful and breaking free of them hurts. Ego makes every effort to hide inner contradictions and sugarcoat itself, and is bruised each time the truth about the actual state of events is revealed and destroys the foundation on which it tries to base itself. That explains why people who are exhausted with unconscious suffering and desperate not for bliss, but simply inner peace, find it difficult to believe that conscious suffering can be of any benefit.

A desire to escape suffering transforms a person into a slave: He becomes a lifelong hostage to fear and equally dependent on all types of psychological defense and emotional anesthesia mechanisms. Therefore, if people are trying to avoid pain, they will not be able to cultivate self-awareness, because the very desire to escape suffering pressures them into retreating into unconsciousness and self-distraction. They don’t want to wake up; they want to fall into yet a deeper sleep.

The same principle works for those who feel that they are inferior and attempt to hide this feeling from others or even try to conceal it with ostensible attractiveness. Self-inferiority is imaginary and is developed in childhood as a response to invalidation instilled by “kind” caregivers, yet the very attempts to compensate make this feeling very real. After investing so much time and effort in compensating and making oneself attractive, it is difficult to turn away from the task of a lifetime and embark on eliminating self-illusions. The fact that a person’s illusions are maladaptive (belief in deficiency and inadequacy of self) does not make the process any easier; he is afraid to face inner reality and is hesitant to discover it.

This doesn’t imply necessarily that individuals with the problems outlined above are totally incapable of advancing to higher levels of awareness. Rather, the initial stage of managing attention will probably take a bit longer than normal. Moreover, of course, successful progress necessitates recognizing and accepting the problem in the first place. Therefore, everyone reading these lines is encouraged to look at themselves sincerely and try to find the answers to the following questions:

1. How bad is your fear of pain (physical, emotional, etc.)?

2. How badly do you want to prove to the world that you are smart, brave, charismatic, basically, that you are not a jerk?

Fear should be addressed by observing it using the passive observation technique, which, in addition, helps cultivate patience and willpower. A chronic sense of worthlessness and inferiority calls for preliminary compensation, embracing some degree of self-realization in career, sports, or hobbies. When a person achieves a certain inner balance, he is ready to undertake consistent efforts to achieve self-awareness—not just dream about it. Unfortunately, experience shows that when feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness are sufficiently severe, achieving at least partial self-realization and accomplishments in life is imperative. This will give one self-confidence, which is important in working on oneself. Those who dismiss this factor and attempt to practice self-awareness regardless become trapped in the error of comparing themselves with the enlightened, the saints, and allied companions in the search quest, if any. Comparing yourself to others leaves you feeling frustrated, disappointed, and sorry for yourself; moreover, a drive to inflate our self-esteem causes us to lie to ourselves and others increasingly, and causes ostentatious and inappropriate behavior.

34.

Now, if you are proficient in awareness of and ability to sense the body, you will have no difficulty identifying the moments when you begin to repress your emotions and desires. As you remain vigilant, you will soon be able to determine which muscles are engaged in controlling anger, anxiety, sadness, and fear. Techniques of emotional expression will help you dispose of these energies, and the next logical step after you accomplish this work would be your release from everything that has been repressed as a whole.

It is important to realize that all of the variety of neurovegetative symptoms are attributable to chronic stress, which in turn is attributable to repression. The repercussions include hyperkinetic disorders, various forms of spasms (blood vessels, ducts, intestine, etc.), and miscellaneous neurosis symptoms. As the underpinning repression mechanisms fade, the vegetative symptoms improve and disappear as well.

Repression is among the mind’s prerogative strategies, and the respective embedded behavior patterns are triggered automatically each time a recurring desire or emotion stimulates a person to act or express himself in a way that has been disapproved. These behavior patterns inhibit expression of emotion or action and precipitate a wave-like response that begins in the mind, cascades down, and ends in the physical body. The control of desires and emotions is executed through their repression in the unconscious parts of the mind and emotional body, respectively, and is embodied in the form of muscle tension and imbalance in the autonomic nervous system, the latter of which serves as a liaison between the physical and emotional bodies.

Repression is a mainstay of unconsciousness, and therefore, if a seeker wishes to progress to the highest level of self-awareness, he cannot avoid addressing his repressed energies. Although social norms that regulate the behavior of the members of society have been present since the beginning, humans’ beingness has been skewed heavily toward the mind over the past century. The need for universal education together with the advances in science and technology have been contributing factors. The number of physically labor-intensive jobs has shrunk, while the call for intellectually challenging work has increased. People are exposed continuously to information overload from news media and manipulative advertising. The behavioral norms become more restrictive as they follow progressively sophisticated social structures and lifestyles. In the past, the family set most behavior guidelines, which revolved primarily around rearing their children consistent with religion, morals, and traditions, but today, they also account for policies and regulations in the workplace, rules of the road, etc. Therefore, repression in our time has become an unavoidable part of human life on which we have to work, whether we like it or not.

The irony of the situation is that the moral codes and rules are created for unconscious people with the goal to establish limits on the expression of their animal instincts. However, at the same time, adhering to these rules quite often makes unconsciousness grow deeper because it exacerbates repression. A conscious person would not engage in stealing, not because it is against the law and is prosecuted, but because he is void of the desire to steal items. This is the only difference, but it is fundamental because it is the difference in one’s levels of being.

35.

Thus, through observation of the body and emotions, each seeker realizes eventually the need to become aware of his mind, its content, and the laws that govern the way it operates. Ideas are the source of fuel for the mind, while desires are the mind’s products.

It is important to understand that desires are associated closely with human needs and necessities. “Desire is a need gone mad,” Osho used to say, and he was absolutely right. Here is an example: Hunger is a physical need that requires fulfillment. Yet, if you feel like drinking a cup of sweet tea paired with a pickle, that would be a desire to experience pleasure from contrasting taste sensations. The need to fulfill sexual needs manifests itself through certain desires, and the more these desires are repressed, the more sophisticated and twisted they become. The need for self-realization can yield a desire to create art, or become enlightened, or climb the career ladder, or elicit a feeling that you would love to start a family. The basic set of ideas the mind acquires determine the shape of an individual desire. Hence, a need creates the foundation for a desire, which is then formed based upon conditioning and its settings. Therefore, the same need can produce diametrical desires in different individuals. For instance, the need to feel secure can produce a desire to be around people—as they will surely help and protect you if something happens—or a desire to stay away from them—because they are unpredictable, dangerous, and know not what they do.

To have the opportunity to see your repressed desires, you have to find them first. Desires don’t sit around within the field of our attention the entire time; rather, they show up occasionally when propitious milieu are created to fulfill them. Not all desires become repressed as an outcome of moral constraints or conditioning; some simply cannot be gratified at a particular time and are forced into the unconscious. It is impossible to obtain a view of all of the desires at once because there are many and because they have been repressed during different periods in life. Usually, the work resembles the process of peeling an onion: Once you become aware of, and work thoroughly through the desires and emotions that constitute one “layer” of the unconscious, you have an opportunity to go deeper inward and discover the next “layer” of energies repressed at an earlier time. The work with the unconscious is indeed very much like peeling an onion: When all of the layers are peeled away, all that is left in your hands is emptiness.

36.

Some contemporary “spiritual” teachers offer strategies to collaborate with the unconscious, lured by its immense power and the profound effect it has on human life. I can’t argue with that—the power of repressed desires, fear, etc., is enormous and quite clearly affects people’s behavior and their emotional and mental state. Specifically, these teachers recommend using self-affirmations, which the subconscious is supposed to take as guidance and the person is expected to begin to grow spiritually effortlessly and at a rapid pace. Other teachers credit the subconscious with a magic power that can affect human life directly and encourage their followers to tune it properly by means of visualization and other techniques that alter the entire personal “reality” thereby. These are all varieties of self-hypnosis that serve to make human sleep more comfortable and create an illusion of control over things that are beyond our reach. A desire to collaborate with the unconscious comes from being helpless to do anything about it, and this powerlessness is a consequence of the fact that a person lacks the skill of witnessing. In true spiritual work, the light of consciousness is shone on the dark of unconsciousness, and as one’s capacity for awareness improves gradually, the unconscious becomes smaller and the conscious grows larger, until only the conscious remains.

I cannot help but comment here briefly on the masters who recommend that their followers adopt visualization practices for meditation purposes. For example: “Imagine pure white energy filling and saturating your body; your body is starting to grow”, and so on. Active exercises of this kind can be beneficial to enhance certain functions of the mental body, yet these are essentially guided dreams. Of course, such exercises leave you feeling refreshed, as if you have had a good sleep; you may even feel a certain enthusiasm or inspiration. However, it has nothing to do with spirituality or awareness, because a dream is a dream, and whether the dream is inspiring or frightening is inconsequential from the perspective of consciousness.

37.

When discussing repressed desires, it is impossible to avoid the topic of sexual desire. The matter is a stumbling block to many seekers: Some feel afraid to socialize with the opposite gender and adopt a bygone recommendation to repress their desire; others follow current sexual liberation tendencies and end in sects where promiscuity is a basic practice. Given how much people care about sex, seekers who have begun to work on themselves often have twice as many concerns about this matter.

I have mentioned previously that one should approach ancient scriptures with caution and consider the author’s origin and target audience. Often, monks wrote such texts as a way to justify their vows of sexual abstinence, and hence, highlighted statements about the harm that derives from sexual activity. I appreciate the point: Indeed, sex and romantic relationships consume much of our energy, which otherwise could potentially be used in spiritual practices. Still, over the last several hundred years of enforced sexual repression, including the “platonic” Soviet times, sex has nearly become completely skewed in the mind. According to one perspective, the majority of modern people have never plunged into the depths that a true orgasm creates that allows them to explode and relieve themselves of their pent-up energies.

Any blockages in the body interfere with the natural flow of energy—that is an obvious fact. The blockages associated with any repressed energies inhibit delicate body sensitivity, while restrictive sexual attitudes contaminate one’s sexual life with the denial of sex and self. This makes one veer to another extreme: I am sexually active (which is prohibited allegedly); alas, I am a sinner. As I am bad anyway, why don’t I live it up and become dissolute. This is akin to taking a long break from alcohol, then having one drink and saying, “I took a shot, broke my sobriety, it’s hopeless”—and getting truly plastered.

A seeker will face the need to work on his sexual repression throughout all of his three lower bodies. At the level of the physical body, the practice of awareness needs to be applied during both foreplay and intercourse. In the beginning, the desire and arousal will cause him to revert to unconsciousness, but the better he becomes at body awareness in everyday life, the better he will be able to maintain witnessing during sex. This witnessing will help him identify areas of tension in the body that are associated with repressed sexual energy and change the movement pattern that was formed under the constraints thereof. In this way, he will be able to become more natural, spontaneous—more alive, if you will—during sex.

With respect to emotions, one should work with the fear that shrouds the entire subject of sex. Women are afraid of men’s potential aggressiveness and men are afraid of women’s power; both patterns are established in childhood and leave an imprint for the rest of one’s life. The perception of sex as something preposterous, animalistic, and dirty is passed on unconsciously from generation to generation and is part of social conditioning. Sex is alluring and frightening all at the same time. Hence, we have repressed sexual desire and its satellites—anger and sadness. It’s no wonder that most expletives that people use to express their frustration on any pretext have a sexual theme. Therefore, a seeker is bound to observe anger and sadness that accompany repressed sexual desire.

Next comes the mind. First, one must trace one’s negative attitude toward sex and restrictive ideas about having sex. Then, one should work with repressed sexual desires that have accumulated since puberty. If you manage to cease deprecating your desires, it will make it easier for them to manifest themselves, and thus, you will have an opportunity to change your internal situation. Observation changes everything, and sexual desire is no exception. The rules for working with this desire are the same as for the other desires: some are fulfilled, some become irrelevant. Obviously, this is a schematic representation, as this work is usually performed concurrently at each of the three bodies’ levels, which is a more natural and correct thing to do. The lesson is that so long as one denies and represses one’s sexuality, one remains psychologically immature and aggressive. This is an undisputed fact.

38.

Let’s return to desires. It is possible to try and back-track desires after anger, sadness, and fear emerge, but this may be difficult to do if a desire is buried too deeply. When activated, such a desire goes against the default conditioning and associated taboos. This creates tension and sometimes free-floating anxiety that overshadow the underlying fear of shattering the taboo. Tension results from control, i.e., holding back the desire. Combined with anxiety and a taboo, it prevents one from becoming aware of the desire.

Hence, in the beginning, our options for unearthing hidden desires are limited to indirect methods. Let’s take daydreaming, for example. Fantasizing is a means to make up for one or more unfulfilled desires, and if you study your reveries, you will be able to see the desires hidden behind them. The next step is to realize whether the fulfillment of your desire is feasible and if so, what internal or external factors stand in the way. The following step should be easier to accomplish: You either fulfill your desire or, if you realize completely through awareness that it is unattainable, you let it drop and accept the existing state of affairs.

There is one more simple technique to help you learn more about your desires. It is a two-step exercise. The first is to imagine you have one million dollars at your disposal and you have to spend them all. Write out a list of anything that comes to mind and do not let your mind jump in with its silly common sense and deprecation attempts. Allow yourself to “buy” whatever you want. Try not to ignore small wants, as they are as significant as large ones. Do not increase the amount of money at will. Stick to the budget given in the task. Make sure to do this exercise quickly; don’t mull it over. The first things that will spring to mind are your unfulfilled desires. Any after-thoughts from several hours later are attributable to your mind at play as it searches for the optimal solutions.

The second step follows immediately after. Imagine you are a powerful wizard. Think of how you would use the power you have. Again, you want to think fast, to give an advantage to your*true* *desires* over the whims of mind. Put them down on paper for the record to work on them later.

Next, analyze the notes you’ve taken. The list of desires captured in the first step belongs to the material world; the ones in the second step may include both materialistic and idealistic desires (for example, a desire to fly like a bird in the sky). The point here is to understand and verbalize your desires as well as the needs they represent. The needs that express themselves via desires can be quite diverse; for example, the need for new experiences, comfort, safety and security, freedom, food, etc. Moving forward, you can work systematically on each desire using our standard approach, i.e., fulfill whatever can possibly be fulfilled and discard the rest, always remaining in awareness…

39.

To break down the repression mechanism that is activated automatically, it is necessary to have an established level of presence in oneself, i.e., a certain level of awareness. Performing work of this sort is impossible unless you become a permanent witness of everything that is going on within and around you. The only way to make the mechanism of emotion repression stop functioning is to begin to express your emotions. We know that humans can act both reasonably and unreasonably. The general understanding is that reasonable and appropriate behavior is representative of the ability to execute self-control, while inappropriate behavior is interpreted as a lack of self-control. However, from the perspective of awareness, to be reasonable in any situation means to be self-aware, while being unreasonable disproportionate in response to an event/person is characteristic of an unconscious person. Thus, awareness is a must before one begins to practice expressing emotions, as the fear of losing self-control is an element of the repression mechanism. Awareness is required to prevent you from identifying with this fear and at the same time, to allow yourself to express, say, anger. Losing self-control often leads a person to engage in yelling, anger outbursts, and outrageous statements. A person will become calmer after a little while and feel embarrassed, realizing that he was acting unreasonably. However, the expression of anger becomes messy because the outburst is engendered not only by the immediate anger response, but by the total degree of amassed anger, and therefore, the entire situation tends to look absurd. That is what an unconscious person’s behavior looks like.

A person who possesses awareness communicates his displeasure in a manner that is respectful and comprehensible to the other party. The aware person does not identify with his emotions and remains the master of any given situation. This level of skill in self-expression is developed gradually, as a seeker slowly, but surely, *learns* to convey his feelings openly rather than responding with angry silence. He will need to be utterly sincere, but I have covered that already in my previous book.

Thus, self-expression *disrupts* the repression mechanism. Still, there are certain emotions, such as fear, which can be expressed only through immediate escape. In such cases, one should practice observing fear and anxiety to avoid repressing them. The skill in observation establishes a space between yourself and the emotion, guards against identification with it and allows you to hold fear within your attention, yet act as if it is not there. If not repressed, the energy of fear dissipates gradually and eventually the fear disappears; that is the beauty of working with emotions consciously rather than repressing them. As your fear disappears, you become *liberated from it*; it will no more precipitate in your unconsciousness, sending “friendly reminders” in the form of unwarranted anxiety spikes.

A space between Self, consciousness, and the lower bodies will expand as your awareness increases. This process is continuous, as is the process of overcoming the automatic habit of repressing emotions: It is a lengthy, gradual process to first substitute repression with expression and observation practices in part, and then progressively offset and eventually replace the repression mechanism altogether. In the end, awareness of your desires and conditioning will bring you to the point where there will be nothing left to repress.

40.

Sometimes expression practices require a seeker to engulf himself completely, both physically and emotionally, in the energies he is working with. This ensures that the energies are expressed in their totality and clears the way into the depths that conceal their sources. Observation and breaking from identification can yield the same result, although it takes longer.

For this reason, to execute certain techniques more accurately, a seeker should master the skill of *deliberate identification*. This task is not terribly difficult for those who have good control of their attention, but may present some challenge for those who routinely invest notable efforts in non-identification.

The procedure is quite simple: While performing the practice of expressing emotion, a seeker stops dividing his attention and directs it entirely at the energy he is working with at the moment, for example, anger. He should let his attention be consumed by anger and his consciousness be lost in it; he should become a channel that transmits nothing but the energy of anger. In essence, he must *become anger*. Once all of the energy is expelled, a seeker can safely return to his normal awareness mode. This practice can be applied when working with sexual energy or when giving all of yourself to prayer.

Some paths use methods intended exclusively for non-identification. Quite a few rely on both witnessing and conscious non-identification practices, whenever the latter are needed.

Overall, alternating conscious identification and non-identification is effective in improving and empowering attention management skills. In addition, such synergistic practice makes awareness deeper and conscious losing oneself in energy practices more profound.

41.

Awareness increases gradually and in a more discrete fashion; it may seem for quite a while that nothing changes, but a moment comes when you realize that the purview of your attention has expanded noticeably. The expansion of attention develops inconspicuously and is recognized as a quantum leap only after the fact—you realize suddenly that you can see much more and with a wider perspective than before. The way you feel or what happens around you does not affect this ability; it just is. It is a part of your transfigured being, independent and self-sufficient.

42.

In the early 1990s, I met a man who, without knowing it, became my teacher. His last name was Ogorodnik; he taught courses in alternative medicine that I attended. I was young, inexperienced, and had no idea of meditation. I am more than grateful to him for introducing me to my first spiritual technique. That was not the most important thing though. The primary thing he taught me was the way to broaden my horizons. He told me about people whose names I had never heard and encouraged me to read their books. He *raised the bar* for me by setting goals and defining objectives that took me several years to accomplish and even more years to comprehend everything he had told me. Nevertheless, his words helped me find my Path, and although a different person became my Master at a later time, the value of his words and the knowledge they conveyed cannot be overestimated. I hope that this book will, in turn, help some readers raise their own bar a bit higher and expand their horizons. If that happens, it will be my way to pay a debt of gratitude to the people who shared their experience and knowledge with me.

43.

In one of my previous books, I mentioned that the growth of awareness halts if an observer is no longer exposed to experiences that place him in unfamiliar situations. Such situations can be created deliberately by the Master or faced in the course of following God’s Will. They also happen to us naturally in everyday life. All things that happen to us in life are relevant material to work on oneself. Regardless of whether these experiences are good or bad—anything that is emotionally bruising, tugs at your heartstrings, or distresses you, presents an opportunity to practice awareness.

A common attitude among people is to wish only good things for themselves, i.e., a tranquil and steady lifestyle that does not take much to maintain and satisfy your needs. The longing for inner peace stems from the fact that things one has to do are not necessarily those that one wants to do. This desire is very human, yet deadly for a seeker, and arises merely in a weak moment or as a sign that the seeker’s quest is coming to an end. A serene, peaceful life stimulates no personal growth because it lacks challenge, and hence, one has no need to surmount difficulties.

Please know that facing hardships on the Path is a necessary and indispensable part of personal growth. Whether you like it or not, you become mature only through overcoming yourself and adverse life events.

As such, the rule of a true seeker is as follows: Whatever is happening with you and however much it hurts or is difficult—stay in awareness! Do not stop witnessing even for a minute, even when you feel you are about to collapse. There is nothing in this world that a witness is unable to withstand. Do not let your fear and self-pity dilute the energy of your attention. Regardless of what happens, stay present—this is the key to growth. It is extreme life circumstances that open access to things lurking deep inside that have not yet fallen into our sphere of awareness. Quiescent under normal circumstances, our fears are stirred up; previously undetectable desires are triggered. This is the perfect moment to practice awareness, an opportunity to break through into your being to depths you would never imagine possible. Practicing self-awareness when under stress requires a supreme effort, but the very situation steers you toward self-discovery. Never try to escape a difficult situation that has unfolded already, as it is detrimental in every sense of the word: Pretending that the problem does not exist will not help resolve it. Walk into it, accept it, and gain new experience. Experience is priceless, because it is the only lesson we learn in life.

44.

As is known, the Master’s role is to serve as a mirror to the student. In addition to other functions the Master serves commonly, there is this one—to show the student his current state. If the student is angry, he needs help to see his anger; if he is resistant, he is helped to become aware of the fact... This is an important and essential part of the Master’s work. However, for anyone who lives in awareness, his life becomes his Master. Each life situation, each person, damaged or not, becomes your teacher. They elicit emotional actions, reactions, and thoughts from us, and also provide food for self-observation. If you remain in awareness steadily, you can make use of nearly everything for your work: a conversation while you are waiting in line, walking alone—any random event will tell you something about yourself. Social interactions are a way to get to know yourself. It is like sitting by the river bank and observing objects washed ashore. Life is similar to the river: It brings up situations that can become either a step toward the summit of awareness or a ticket to the territory of fear and flight from our problems. In any life situation, there are equal options for one’s growth, downfall, or stagnation. Awareness is the key to transform your life into a quest, an adventure—into something that cannot be described in words.

45.

Once a person becomes able to divide his attention, and directs a major portion of it toward himself, his attention begins to shift inward. This makes sense: There is no outward place for it to grow. Sometimes one develops such a phenomenon as ‘super-hearing’, or altered visual perception (the so-called 3D vision, one that novice seekers often interpret as a special achievement) but these are of little significance and value. The moment comes when inputs from all sensory receptors become available for the seeker’s attention: He perceives consciously everything he sees and hears, is aware of any scents and tactile sensations, for example, the warmth-cold sensation—simultaneously. Simultaneous perception of all stimuli among the sense organs is an outcome of the expanded scope of attention and enhanced awareness. Once this state is achieved, you have reached the ceiling. I used to have a friend who practiced the hearing meditation. He developed an ability to detect a plane flying in the sky several minutes before people near him could hear or see it. Such a skill could be practical during air raids in a time of war. However, in ordinary life, it is more a bizarre trick that can work to impress a girl on the first date. The same is true for augmented visual ability, such as that to see auras and the like. Such abilities may be of use at times, yet come with such a strong temptation to brag about the newly acquired skills that they cause more harm and setback than improvement in spiritual growth. In all of the time that I have been working on myself, I have experienced more than one such breakthrough of perception, but now, looking back, I can’t say that it facilitated my progress along the Path in any radical way. So, don’t let yourself become exhilarated by gathering too much external information. It’s the things that happen inside you that matter most.

At first, your attention will be attracted by most “bulky” things: repressed anger or fear or bodily tensions that have become too pressing to be ignored further. Then, as you continue to make progress in your work, working through major tensions, among other things, your perception will grow more subtle. You will begin to discern more delicate emotions and deep-seated desires. As your awareness grows and non-identification improves, you will find that the ideas that underlie your conditioning are revealed.

Eliminating tensions and automatic mental and emotional reactions coupled with continuous inner witnessing create the environment in which a person enters within himself suddenly.

I must say that for quite some time, I myself regarded the precepts of the mystics—who emphasized that one needs to go within and that everything important is there—as a symbol, a beautiful figure of speech, or metaphor. It didn’t occur to me that the instruction was to be followed *verbatim*, by directing all of the power of my attention inside myself, basically within the body. This should not be confused with concentrated attention on, say, chakras: One has to be looking inside oneself explicitly. Imagine my surprise when, at a certain moment, the invisible inner barrier disappeared and I saw boundless spaces. The vision was so impressive that the beauty of the expanses in the outside world (seas, mountains, etc.) from that moment on ceased to look as impressive as before.

That discovery helped me come to know the Heart in the sense that mystics of all times relate to it, and become aware of the bonding with the Creator that is hidden in every human being.

46.

All efforts bear fruit eventually. Even if these fruits come in the form of negative experiences, they are no less valuable, for experience is one of the most valuable acquisitions possible in this world. Those who realize that they have been making efforts in the wrong way will be able to change their approach. Those who become aware that their efforts were insufficient can stop wasting their energy on trifles.

There is not a single person I have met who, despite their persistence in changing their being, has got nowhere. If they strived to change themselves sincerely, they did. If one wants to become conscious, this happens eventually.

Transformation of being is like a quantum leap. When an electron absorbs a quantum of energy, it transitions to a higher orbital. It is not present stably between the orbits, but slides along the energy scale from one stable state to the next within nanoseconds. Something similar happens with seekers’ consciousness. They have to direct their efforts to expand their field of attention continuously. One moment a seeker persists with self-awareness successfully, and the next moment he fails and “falls asleep”. It may take some time for the amount of energy that one has invested in self-development to increase. And then a leap occurs: The seeker realizes suddenly that the duration of “falling asleep” has become shorter and the quality of moment-to-moment awareness has become greater. This is a new stage of being and one experiences it as the consciousness of a different level. Later, other transitions occur, and the “falling asleep” occurrences disappear altogether.

Meanwhile, a seeker begins to sense an invariant core that has emerged within, holding and securing him, like an anchor, from complete identification with the lower bodies. As awareness grows and transformation of being continues, the sense of this core grows stronger. Eventually, a seeker arrives at a point where he feels *present* in all of his actions constantly.

The sense of presence is the effect of non-identification of consciousness and its crystallization into a separate center. The further a seeker progresses, the greater the presence. At the same time, the crystallization of consciousness in the absence of internal chaos, together with its non-identification with the mind, weaken the ego and make it thin.

Once consciousness is distilled completely and takes the place in a human being that has been reserved per the Creator’s design, all that was left of unconsciousness dissipates in its light, together with the ego. This is the moment when one can finalize one’s work on awareness and enjoy its fruits.

***Afterword***

I wrote this book for myself. I wrote it to the person I was eighteen years ago, struggling to understand and master the basics of meditation. What I was missing badly at the time was a detailed, step-by-step guide that covers the main issues encountered on the path to attain awareness. Obviously, this book does not provide answers to all of the questions a seeker may have. However, it offers the keys that can help those who are searching to find the answers. Life is a great mystery composed of numerous smaller mysteries. Those who have the keys can potentially unlock some of them.

Each person has potential that can be developed and realized fully. Everyone has this right, but not everyone takes advantage of it. The reason for this is that people largely haven’t had enough of their share of desires. Hopefully, those among them who have come to see the futility of chasing the mirage of happiness that they glimpse each time a coveted thing is obtained, will benefit from reading this book.

Everything you read in this book is true. However, having set myself the task to clarify the most important aspects of working on awareness, I had to narrow the content’s scope to present the material with the maximum clarity. In this respect, a reader may conclude that his personal efforts are the only thing that makes the difference on the path toward non-identification and awareness. That is not precisely true. Invariably, efforts are necessary and mandatory for a person who is cultivating the power of awareness. However, it would be a mistake not to mention God’s mercy, without which it is impossible to move forward. Still, reliance on God’s mercy versus personal inaction is not the same thing. One who understands this fact invests all of his effort in this work while praying constantly for the Lord’s help. “Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and you will find.”

I encourage all of the readers of this book to put the practice of awareness to the test and sincerely wish you success in changing the quality of your being.

1. TN: the author refers to Jesus Christ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)