



Fully Alive Introduction to Awareness 1

From the moment we're born, most of us learn that we need to do something, and we need to do it right away in order to not lose our grip on reality. And so, the way that takes shape is that when we're born, awareness is wide-open and forever free. It doesn't really have a sense of being born, let alone conceived, and there's no sense of being 'somebody.' When an infant is born, an infant is just spontaneous wide-open awareness with no selective mechanisms for choosing any point of view and honing in on that point of view.

So, another way to describe that would be to say that points of view include thoughts, emotions, sensations and other experiences. We learn from other people from the moment we're born that we are identified by our thoughts, emotions, sensations and other experience. And all the while, the wide-open awareness that we're born as never changes. So, the entire identity that is created that we are taught that we are, is simply an appearance within wide-open awareness. It's never made into an individual identity or thing. It always remains wide-open awareness.

By the process of our early caregivers saying, "Hello, Candice," we come to be looking around for this "Candice" that everyone's referring to! And finally at some point, we get that that must have something to do with us. It's very interesting. I watched this process in my own children and grandchildren: the process of self-identification, the identification with an individual identity. And while there's nothing

www.greatfreedom.org

wrong with that and everything is beautiful exactly as it is, if we don't really know the actual fundamental nature of our identity, then we're kind of chasing our tail throughout life.

Now, here we are, and we have all these self-described identifications: our thoughts, emotions, sensations and experiences, including the experience of being whoever we are. And what to do with that; what to do about it? Well, first of all, we need to understand it completely. We need to understand what it is. If we only understand that we are an identity that is comprised of thoughts, emotions, sensations and other experiences, then we never understand that those have a fundamental nature. So, we only know one of their aspects. We know their appearance, we know their dictionary definition, or we know how they're defined by a variety of fields of human inquiry.

When we learn about ourselves in such a way, then really most of us only learn to indulge our thoughts, sensations, emotions and experiences or to avoid them. We may learn a smattering of replacing negative states with positive states, but for most of us, we never even learn that. We never even learn that it is possible to cultivate positive states rather than negative states, that it's possible to cultivate a sense of happiness. We never even get to that level of trying to replace our negative states and cultivate positive states. But even the cultivation of positive states, the replacing of negative states with positive states, is still very limiting and very restricting in terms of who we are as human beings.

You might say that to avoid or deny our points of view or to replace our points of view destines us to a devitalized existence. In one way or another we're neutralizing our fundamental nature and our knowledge of that by indulging all our thoughts, emotions, sensations and experiences, thinking that they're going to lead somewhere, to some kind of well-being. Or by avoiding the negative ones or maybe we even avoid some of the positive ones, or by replacing points of view with other points of view, we're doomed to a devitalized existence where we're never truly able to love, because we're always looking for the incarnation of love in something. We're looking for the incarnation of love in some kind of point of view, and we'll never find it there. The only place that we'll ever find well-being, love, happiness, peace of mind, everything that we're looking for, is in awareness.

Everyone is aware. There isn't anyone anywhere who can say, "I am not aware." And even if someone said, "I'm not aware," they would be admitting their awareness by virtue of having said, "I am unaware." Whether we say we're aware or not aware, whether we recognize awareness or we don't recognize awareness, anything that we say is the self-sound of awareness, and anything that appears is the self-appearance of awareness. This is what is fundamental; we need to know that everything that appears has these two aspects. It has this wondrous appearance of whatever it is—vivid, naturally perfect in its own right. And so you see, no matter what appears, it isn't independent in its own right. It's always naturally perfect in its own right, never independent in its own right, even though it appears to be.

To continually seek for well-being, love, happiness, peace of mind, contentment, whatever it is that we feel driven to possess, to continue to look for that in something that isn't anything is futile, is completely futile. It's like saying, "Oh I want love. I'm going to grab it out of the air," or "Oh, I want peace of mind. I'm going to grab it out of the air." All of these non-independent appearances don't have any kind of independent vitality or potency that can deliver the goods. All that can deliver the goods in terms of our well-being is awareness; that's all that can deliver the goods. It delivers the all-good.

If we get to know ourselves as awareness by the power of short moments of awareness repeated many times until it becomes automatic, then we're able to have a balanced view of everything. As all of these thoughts, emotions, sensations and other experiences appear, we don't have to indulge them, nor do we have to sanitize them in anyway. Whatever they are, they are.

When we don't sanitize our thoughts, emotions, sensations and other experiences as they appear, we come out of being numb to the true nature of our human existence. We're no longer numb and we're so accustomed to being numb that we don't even know we're numb! We don't even know we're devitalized. And so, as we start to come out of that numbness, everything can seem very real—very, very real—and there may even be a sense of nostalgia for what we were experiencing before.

The numbness is deadening, and so it's a way of not really feeling, not really understanding, not really being expressive of what we are. It's a way of never entering into full love-heart relating with anyone or anything. Maybe we gradually open up, and then we might retreat back a little bit and say, "Oh, this is a little too scary for me. I think I'll return to my numbness for a while and just kind of wallow around in all my thoughts, emotions, sensations, and other experiences. I'd rather hold onto my conceptual identity of everything that has gotten me to this point, even though it's never given me well-being."

And so you know we might hop from one foot to another foot for a while, and all the while, when we start to gain confidence in awareness, we think, "Oh, this is great. Maybe I won't have to hop from one foot to another after a while. Maybe soon both of my feet will be off the ground." However, it isn't that way at all. We skip the road of happy destiny. As we skip along, our feet are always on the ground, and our skipping and playfulness increases, and we're able to just be as we are, no matter what that entails.

Now, in a certain sense, we're saying goodbye to what we've always been, but at the same time we're learning that it never had an independent existence, it never was delivering the goods for us anyway. So while we're saying goodbye, and we might feel sentimental and a little bit nostalgic about our new state of affairs, nevertheless, we're delighted. We're extremely happy, and we don't really want to go back. And so, it might be a little bittersweet in a way.

And perhaps we're not a person who has felt deeply. Perhaps our feelings have been dormant due to avoiding them or neutralizing them. Some people are just emotionally effusive. They're always very in touch with their emotional states—in what's going on—and are very much identified with that. Now, for me, I've always been fully alive with all my emotions! I've always known what they are. I could name them, and I was never emotionally dormant or dead. But for other people, there is a sense of feelings being dormant, just dormant, indifferent, neutral, passive. Just because that's what has been learned, it doesn't mean anything. So, by the power of being introduced to awareness, we gradually begin to see that there's a full range of appearances, a very full range of appearances, but that none of these appearances, whatever they are, have an independent nature.

Now that doesn't mean that we're shutting down and going into some kind of little intellectualized corner of saying, "Nothing has an independent nature; nothing can bother me at all." It isn't like that. It's the simultaneous appearance and dissolution of whatever it is. It could be incredible grief, or it could be the most amazing love you've ever experienced in your entire life. But whatever it is, it is whatever it is. There's no need to shy away from unspeakable grief; there's no need to shy away from incredible love. It is what it is. It is whatever it is, and that's just what is.

And so, for the aspect of us being here and being together as we are, when we don't sanitize all of our experiences any longer, then we're more and more capable of loving, and we certainly are not numb. We're fully alive. We're fully human and fully alive with everything that entails. Well, here we are, loving and living together, and that is just the way it is. And in that, there are all kinds of appearances.

From the balanced view of awareness, whatever these appearances are, we're able to be with them as they are. We're able to make wise decisions; we're able to live joyfully; we're able to move forward in life in a way that will be beneficial to everyone, because we're no longer driven by our own obsessive self-interests related to how we experience phenomena. We don't look to those phenomena for well-being. Awareness is the source of well-being. It isn't located in phenomena.

Awareness is open to everything. Awareness plays freely in a sublime way that is totally inconceivable when we're numb and dumb. When we're numb and dumb to the nature of reality, we cannot play. When we start to be able to play, it might be a little scary at first, because awareness is without limitation. There is no restriction anywhere, and awareness is entirely responsive—the full force of responsiveness. Whatever presents itself in awareness, there's an automatic response, and heavens knows that can take many, many forms—all fun, all playful, all free, all sublime.

If we can't recognize that there are sublime beings, we won't be able to see that *we're* a sublime being. If we see someone who is totally aware, and then we think, "Oh that's for me. There's something in that that really wakes me up in a sense." Then you see, we see somebody else and we think, "Oh, I can be just like them"—just the same way

we got numb and dumb: by being around other people who were avoiding points of view, or replacing points of view, or radically indulging points of view, whatever it might be.

There are all kinds of ways to become familiar with awareness, and some of those involve playing out all kinds of experiences, whatever they might be. Great Freedom isn't like that; it doesn't require you to play out any experiences. All you do is show up, and in that way make yourself available to be totally certain in awareness. In Great Freedom there's full support for that. There's full support for that. If people don't want to avail themselves, that's fine, it doesn't matter. There are all kinds of ways of becoming aware. I must say though that Great Freedom is a very easy way to become familiar with awareness, and it's also a lot of fun.

We all embrace life in different ways. Some of us are naturally very quiet and kind of loners and eccentric, and others of us are very conforming. We just are whatever we are. Now, I've been both at once, actually—very conforming as well as wild and eccentric, very social and a loner, all at once. So you see, whatever we have as our appearances, they don't really need to be solidified into any particular lifestyle. They just are whatever they are. They're a complete play of spontaneity.

Even though we may not have known anything other than indulging our points of view or avoiding, denying or replacing them, now it's time for something new, perhaps. Now it's time to really be introduced to your nature, your true nature, what you really are—to really allow yourself to love and enjoy, to allow yourself to play, to play freely and to see the joy in sharing that and to have that joy of sharing come totally alive. Once we really get who we are, it's just natural to want to share it; it's just such a tremendous relief and source of well-being that it's very natural to share the joy.