

The  
Direct Way



Thirty Practices to Evoke Awakening

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Awakened awareness practices focus on dis-identifying with the conceptual mind, specifically the false self or ego that we imagine ourselves to be. To call the ego a “false self” is not to disparage it or even judge it. It is to name it as what it is: a psychological process with which we have become overly accustomed to identifying. The false self has no enduring quality—it is neither thing, noun, nor person. It is a process that we mistake for who we are.

I often call this false self the thought-created self or the psychological self. The false self grows and thrives in unconscious being. When we are asleep to Being, our attention becomes entranced by mind—the vast array of ideas, images, beliefs, habits, opinions, and judgments that we have been conditioned to identify as self. However, these are not self; they are conditioned psychological *processes* masquerading as who you are. Remember, you existed long before you had any thoughts and ideas to identify with. You did not suddenly pop into existence when you acquired an ego. At best, the ego is a functional tool to help you navigate through the world for a while, and at worst it is a nightmare appearing to be all too real. Either way the ego becomes a false self the moment we take it to be who and what we are. The great news is that we can, quite literally, wake up from the illusion of the false self and reclaim our essential identity.

We begin by acknowledging the always and already present presence of awareness. This is the awareness that is cognizant of reading these words and wondering what they mean. That awareness, as ordinary and common as it may seem, is the doorway to awakening to your true nature of Being. It is the very awareness that is so easy to dismiss, because it is always present and more essentially *you* than you could ever conceive or imagine. Take one simple inward step away from your thoughts and recognize what you are prior to the whole array of mental activity and self-image making. It's as easy as an exhale, as simple as a willingness to be amazed by your intangible presence.

Awakening to this aspect of Being happens when awareness spontaneously dis-identifies from the content *within* awareness and becomes conscious of itself *as* your self-nature. In other words, awareness is not something that you do, it is that which you essentially are. You can experience this for yourself if you begin by recognizing that everything you think and imagine you are is essentially mental content appearing *to* and *within* the intangible field of awareness. The content within awareness—including all the ideas, judgments, and images that make up the false self—comes and goes. Although much of this content persistently reoccurs, none of it is enduring, and none of it is who you are. The point is not to believe this, but to experience it as a living reality and the inherent freedom of the aware aspect of your essential Being.

Let's put this into practice.

- Begin by resting in whatever experience you are having right now. Don't try to change or figure out why you are having the experience you are having. Leave both your current experience as well as all your thoughts about it alone.
- Relax into awareness with the same feeling through which you relax your body into bed at night.
- Notice your thoughts as simply thoughts, your feelings as feelings, the sounds you hear as sounds, and the sights you see (if your eyes are open) as sights.
- Relax your awareness from focusing on the content of experience and ease into the open and silent space of awareness itself. Let's call this the *conscious context*.
- Notice that awareness is witnessing your thoughts and feelings and sights and sounds. Don't try to understand awareness; notice that your perceptions and experiences are already being witnessed by awareness, not by your idea of being someone who possesses awareness or who is trying to be the witness, but by awareness itself. You don't need to try to be aware because awareness is always and already present as the conscious context within which all experience happens.

- Notice that awareness is not something you can see, touch, or taste. Awareness sees but cannot be seen. Awareness hears but cannot be heard. Awareness observes all the mind's thoughts and images, but it is not a thought or image.
- Notice that all your thoughts, ideas, judgments, and images about yourself are arising within and being witnessed by the conscious context called awareness.

This practice helps us to realize that there is something (awareness) that is more fundamental about who and what you are than all your ideas about yourself. Your thoughts about yourself, experiences, and perceptions continually arise and change, come and go, but awareness remains. Don't try to grasp or understand awareness; notice that it is fundamental to you. Awareness is the conscious context within which the content of experience arises, changes, and passes away. You can never see awareness, but you are always looking *from* and *as* awareness. The key to awakening as the formless being of awareness is to let go of grasping at it with your mind and relax into the simple, quiet, and open intuitive sense of awareness itself.

Let's begin with seven pointers and practices to evoke awareness into becoming conscious of itself and awakening from the identification with the false self.



# ONE

## Awareness Is the Conscious Context of Experience

The Direct Way is an exploration of the three aspects of Being—Awareness, Heart, and the Ground of Being—your Being and the Being of all beings. We begin by practicing awakened awareness—awakening *from* mind, from all thought and created and maintained identities, to the formless aspect of Being by acknowledging the always and already presence of awareness. Awakening to this aspect of Being happens when awareness spontaneously dis-identifies from the content *within* awareness and becomes conscious of itself, as our own self nature. In other words, awareness is not something that we do, it is that which we are.

As you rest in whatever experience you are having, don't try to change or figure out why you are having an experience as you have it; leave both your current experience as well as your thoughts alone. As you do, pay attention to your thoughts as simply thoughts, your feelings as feelings, the sounds you hear as sounds, and the sights you see (if your eyes are open) as sights.

As you do so, all your thoughts and sensations are being witnessed by awareness. Again, don't try to analyze

or understand awareness; instead, notice that awareness is witnessing all of your perceptions and experiences. Awareness is not something you can see, touch, or taste. Awareness sees but cannot be seen. Awareness hears but cannot be heard. All your thoughts, ideas, judgments, and images about yourself are arising within and being witnessed by awareness.

As you practice within the conscious context of experience, you will learn that there is something (awareness) that is more fundamental about who and what you are than any ideas about yourself. Awareness is the only thing that does not come and go even as your thoughts, experiences, and perceptions continually change.

## Practice One

- First, let your body relax.
- Allow your attention to transition from your thoughts and feelings to the sensation of your breath.
- Be with your breath for a moment.
- Notice you are already aware of this moment without any intention or effort.
- Notice that awareness is that which discerns each moment of experience.
- Bring attention to the fact that awareness is always and already functioning. Awareness is the witnessing conscious context within which the content of experience comes and goes.

- Notice the context of awareness. Acknowledge it without trying to grasp at or understand it. You don't need to make awareness more aware; it is always and already pristinely aware. It is the space within which thoughts and experiences appear.
- Notice that thoughts come and go, but awareness remains. Feelings come and go, but awareness remains. Sensations come and go, but awareness remains. Awareness is the conscious context in which all phenomena come and go. Even your idea of yourself, your passing memories, your self-judgments come and go within the conscious context of awareness.
- While being aware in this relaxed way, notice that your whole mentally constructed identity, your idea of yourself, is an ephemeral arising within the space of awareness. It's here one moment and then gone the next.
- Whatever you are beyond this ephemeral idea of yourself is always present.
- You are always here, but as something far more fundamental than your idea of yourself.

# TWO

## The Spacious and Empty Nature of Awareness

In the first practice we engaged awareness as the witnessing conscious context within which all content of experience comes and goes. Now, we will delve into the nature of witnessing awareness as spacious empty presence.

As we do this, we allow all thoughts, feelings, ideas, and mental images to be as they are. Don't try to change them or figure anything out. Let go of the calculating mind. Leave it to itself for a moment. When you do, you'll realize awareness is witnessing all your thoughts, feelings, and sensations. Be sure to take a moment to rest into this observation, into being the witness that is the same as witnessing awareness. When you do, awareness becomes effortlessly present. You don't need to create it, capture it, or make it happen. You simply need to notice and acknowledge it as you rest in that knowing of the spacious and empty nature or awareness.

## Practice Two

- Begin by resting as witnessing awareness. As you do, notice how your intuitive felt sense of awareness is spacious and open, clear and pristine—always and already.
- Experience awareness as a spacious and open sky within which thoughts and feelings come and go. Let yourself rest as this spacious and open sky-like nature of awareness as it clings to nothing and yet pushes anything away.
- Don't merely label the open sky-like nature of awareness with your mind—that's still an idea. Instead, sense and feel its openness in and around your body.
- Several times today, rest as this felt sense of open spacious awareness. Remember you are resting in your fundamental and formless nature of Being, which is naturally occurring effortlessly present awareness. This is always and already the case.