

# ~ *What Are the Three Types of Awareness* ~

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What is awareness? Many people ask me, what is the difference between mindfulness and awareness? And, what is awareness?

We discussed before what that difference is. Mindfulness is the *practice* of awareness. Awareness means all of consciousness — the fundamental quality of all consciousness is awareness.

Awareness itself is cognizing, the lucidity quality of the mind. Awareness is with us 24 hours a day. Mindfulness cannot be with us 24 hours a day, because if we maintain mindfulness and then forget, it disappears.

So what is awareness? Normally we have an example. Awareness is like a lamp, a candle lamp. The lamp has two qualities. One is that it is self-illuminating. When we have a flame, the lamp, we do not need a flashlight to see the lamp because the lamp illuminates itself. The second quality is what we call “other luminosity,” meaning the lamp can make things visible. In a dark room, if you light a lamp, you can read books and see things around you. That is “other luminosity.”

Right now, for all of us, the fundamental quality of our mind has this self-luminosity. Not only that, we can see things around us. We can see, hear, feel, and think. That is other luminosity.

For meditation, what is the benefit of awareness? Awareness is the key point. If we connect with awareness, we will get more long-term happiness and we will free what we call the “knot.” We bind ourselves. There is a lot of bondage, and all of this liberates itself. Sometimes a snake makes a knot by itself, but it also frees itself.

So how do we do that? Of course, we all have awareness. But not everybody gets this benefit. For the practice of awareness, the experience of awareness, there are three levels: what we call “normal

awareness,” “meditative awareness,” and “pure awareness” or “nonconceptual awareness.”

Normal awareness — everybody has it. You are not unconscious, so you have awareness. Awareness, mind, consciousness — these have the same meaning. And that awareness is illuminating itself. Self-luminosity, other luminosity, and everything is there. But the problem is we may not recognize it. When we do not recognize the nature of our awareness, what happens? We get lost in thought. We get lost in emotion.

Normally, what we call “awareness” is like the sky, and thoughts and emotions are like clouds. We only see the clouds — we do not see the sky itself.

So what do we need? We need the second level of awareness. The second is what we call “meditative awareness.” Meditative awareness recognizes the normal awareness and then maintains that recognition with an object. It might be breathing, or sound. It might be awareness of the body, awareness of sensation and feeling, awareness of the mind, awareness of phenomena . . . We can meditate anytime, anywhere, with anything.

Then slowly you can let go of the object, with what we call “open awareness meditation” or “objectless meditation.” Awareness with no need to hold on to any particular object, but being with itself, like self-luminosity. Being with that. These are all meditative awareness.

Then, if we get some flavor of that, some experience, the third level is what we call “going beyond.” Awareness goes beyond subject and object. Awareness beyond concept. Awareness beyond thought and emotion. That is pure awareness, or pristine awareness — like being with the sky itself.

For that, we need to first learn how to go beyond concept, how to go beyond the fixation of mind, the grasping mind. In my tradition, we have Joy of Living Levels 1, 2, and 3. Joy of Living Level 1 is connecting with and recognizing normal awareness, so it becomes meditative awareness. Then it connects with love and compassion [in Level 2]. Joy

of Living Level 3 is wisdom — going beyond concepts. But going beyond concepts does not mean getting rid of thought and emotion.

When we connect with the sky, we do not need to get rid of the clouds. Clouds are okay — we need clouds. But if we are not lost in the clouds, if we can be with the sky, then we can have clouds. Let the clouds come, let them go. If your sky is always blue with the sun shining, that may not be so nice — everything becomes dry. So we need thoughts. We need emotions.

Whether thought and emotion trap us or not depends on our relationship with our own thought and emotion. When we connect with the sky, thought and emotion kind of become friends. Let them come, let them go.

So we have these three layers of awareness. Actually, awareness is the same throughout. It depends on the recognition. Not recognizing it is normal awareness. Recognizing awareness is meditative awareness. Going beyond subject and object is pure awareness, or nonconceptual awareness. All together, we have these three practices. Thank you.