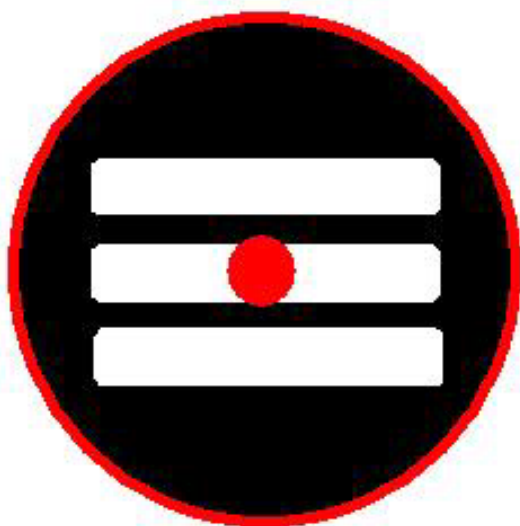


AWARENESS AND ILLNESS



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AWARENESS AND ILLNESS

Subjectively, illness of any sort does not begin with some external or internal cause – some object such as a virus or cancerous cell. Nor does it even necessarily begin with some well-defined experiential symptom such as a localised pain. Instead it begins with an ill-defined *awareness* of ‘not feeling ourselves’. It is this awareness of ‘not feeling ourselves’ that is accompanied by worries and experienced as a sense of ‘disease’. And whilst it is common knowledge that illness can ‘change’ people, what medicine ignores is that the very essence of illness has to do with *identity* - every symptom being subjectively experienced both as an altered *state of consciousness* and as an altered *sense of self*. If ignored, the ill-defined awareness of ‘not feeling ourselves’ can grow and take the form of a more localised well-defined symptom. ‘Scientific’ medicine then seeks objective causes and cures for such symptoms. Yet it implicitly retains a subjective element. This is not just because it relies partly on patients’ subjective accounts of their symptoms but also because ‘cure’ – indeed ‘health’ as such - is understood not just as an absence, or successful elimination or amelioration of symptoms but also as a restored sense of *identity* - ‘feeling ourselves’ again.

The entire medical understanding of illness and the entire relationship of patient and physician rests on an unspoken

agreement to seek something *other than self* (whether an organic cause, traumatic event, or a diagnostically labelled 'disorder') to explain the patient's sense of dis-ease, their awareness of *not feeling themselves*. The basic principle of medicine – 'The Medical Principle' - is based not on *fact* but on (a) the dogmatic *belief* that illness has no intrinsic meaning for the individual and (b) the military *metaphor* of 'fighting' its causes rather than seeking its meaning. In contrast The Awareness Principle offers an approach to illness, which begins where it actually begins – the sense of 'dis-ease', which accompanies the awareness of 'not feeling ourselves'. Yet instead of denying meaning to this inwardly felt dis-ease - merely labelling it as a medical disease or disorder and seeking causes for it in something *other than self* - The Practice of Awareness encourages the patient to fully affirm the awareness of *not feeling themselves* as soon as it emerges, and to both *understand* and *transform* it into a quite different awareness – the awareness of *feeling another self*. This can both prevent the ill-defined dis-ease of not feeling oneself from developing into well-defined disease symptoms, or alternatively allow those very symptoms to be experienced in a different way – not simply as an altered mental or physical state but as an altered state of consciousness and with it an altered bodily *sense of self*.

By fully affirming this altered sense of self, we let the essential dis-ease of *not feeling ourselves* achieve its true and most

meaningful purpose - that of allowing us to *feel another self* - one we hitherto feared to be aware of or to recognise as part of our *self as a whole* - our 'soul'. And by letting another self express itself in our thoughts and emotions and finding ways to *body* it in our overall demeanour or 'body language', we remove the need to *repress* or medicalise our bodily sense of that self. For then that self will no longer feel forced to *express* itself through bodily symptoms or through behaviours regarded as forms of 'mental' disorder.

We do not 'have' a body. We body 'our-selves'. Our bodies are but the embodiment of the particular way in which we are bodying ourselves - and the particular selves we are bodying. Being aware of an emotion or any aspect of our self-experience and *bodying* it in our demeanour is not the same as 'somatising' it through physical symptoms or giving it free reign to emotionally determine our *behaviour*. Someone who cannot allow themselves to *frown* with anger, adopt an aggressive bearing or give an angry or aggressive *look* to someone - thus silently *embodying* that anger through their demeanour - is more likely to *enact* their anger in their behaviour, expressing it in harsh or hurtful words or deeds. Thus someone who cannot allow themselves to be fully *aware* of their anger and feel it in their bodies - to *be* angry - is more likely to 'get' angry. It is only because we are not taught, like good actors, to first of all *inwardly* feel the selves that find expression in the different 'parts' they act out -

without in anyway *judging* them - that we ourselves may feel forced to act those parts in real life, or feel a strong *fear* of doing so. The reason that the actor Anthony Hopkins could so effectively play the gruesome figure of Hannibal Lecter – without becoming or acting like him in real life - is *not* because he distanced himself as a person from the part he played but because he deliberately sought, found and felt the self within him that could fully identify with Hannibal.

People fear to fully feel any 'other selves' that they judge as 'bad' or 'dangerous' in some way – for example mad, violent, sadistic, weak or suicidal selves. The fear is that if they allowed themselves to be more aware of these selves and feel them more fully, they would *become* mad, violent, sadistic, weak, suicidal etc. In reality it is those who fear to feel such selves within themselves who are more likely to end up impulsively 'acting out' these selves in their behaviour. Thus a self that feels violent only actually acts in a violent way through the body if its violence is not fully felt in a bodily way. Actual bodily violence results from a *fear* of violent feelings, and is essentially a last-ditch attempt to *evacuate* violent feelings *from* one's body rather than fully feeling them with and within one's body. Bodily *enactment* of feared emotions, impulses, states and selves replaces a fuller awareness of those emotions, impulses, states and selves. That is a great paradox, for were we to allow ourselves

greater awareness, that very awareness would *free* us from those aspects of our bodily self-experience that we fear.

For paradoxically, *awareness* of our bodies is not itself anything bodily but is a bodiless or body-free awareness. Similarly the awareness of our minds is not itself anything 'mental' but is a mind-free awareness. The same basic precept of The Awareness Principle applies to all aspects of our self-experience – including our thoughts, feelings, fears, sensations, impulses, illnesses and sickness symptoms. Just as *the awareness* of a thought is not itself a thought, and is something essentially thought-free, so also is the awareness of an emotion, sensation, urge or impulse something essentially free of emotions, sensations, urges or impulses. There is nothing sick or ill about the *awareness* of a symptom or the awareness of feeling ill. Similarly, the awareness of a fear is not itself something fearful but is essentially a 'neutral' or fear-free awareness. And just as the awareness of our bodies is nothing bodily, so is the awareness of a particular self not something that binds us to that self – or to any self.

It is only because we do not allow ourselves to be more aware of other selves and the bodily states that express them that we can *neither* free ourselves from them – recognising that the very awareness of them is distinct and free from them - *nor* fully affirm and body these selves as valid ways of feeling ourselves. The suffering associated with illness arises

because, instead of affirming the selves we feel when we are ill, however 'foreign' they may feel to our usual sense of self, we feel 'possessed' or plagued by them - whether in the form of somatic illness or uncontrolled emotions, thoughts, inner voices or behaviours. At the same time we see the cause of such symptoms as something essentially *other than self* - whether another person, a 'malign spirit' or a 'foreign body' such as a virus, toxin or cancerous cell. Not feeling ourselves, we blame our illness on this 'other'. In this way we deprive ourselves of the opportunity to become aware of another self within us, and to both face and overcome our fears of it through that very awareness.

The Awareness Principle allows us to affirm our most elementary experience of illness as an awareness - an *awareness* of feeling our own bodies or minds as having become something 'foreign' to us, no longer fitting our previous sense of identity or self. The Medical Principle blames illness on 'foreign bodies'. Yet this is just the same as blaming the ills of society on *foreigners* - rather than seeing them as a new and healthy element of the social body, whose values can help make it more balanced and 'whole'. If we seek the causes of illness in 'foreign bodies', and seek to chemically or surgically root them out or 'eliminate' them we are acting like xenophobes or little Hitlers. Worse still, we are actively *encouraging* that which feels foreign to us - either within our own soul or within society - to take the

malignant form of either illness or social ills. The Nazi state was a Medical State - one in which The Medical Principle was applied to all social problems, all of which were seen by Hitler as 'diseases' of the social 'body' or 'Volk', and blamed on racially foreign, impure or genetically unfit bodies - in particular Jews, Gypsies and the mentally or physically 'handicapped'. The 'Final Solution' to social ills was seen as a medical one - the clinical *annihilation* of all people and ideas seen as detrimental to the health of the social body. Yet like German rocket scientists, German Nazi physicians, eugenicists, psychiatrists and pharmaceutical companies played a key role in the development of *today's* 'genetic' medicine and pharmaceutical drug therapies. Nazi social 'health fascism' is reflected today in the growth of state-imposed health regulations and treatment 'regimes'. Those who seek alternative forms of healing in 'complementary' medicine on the other hand, do not realise that these are as much based on The Medical Principle and a 'Medical Model' of illness as orthodox medicine. Which is why not only vegetarianism or vehement anti-smoking campaigns, but also the promotion of exercise, herbal and homoeopathic remedies were as much a part of Nazi ideology as they are a part of today's health fads and 'health fascism'. The only *truly* alternative medicine is one whose basic principle - The Awareness Principle - challenges The Medical Principle and 'The Medical Model' of illness as such.

HEALING THROUGH AWARENESS 1

1. If you are feeling unwell do not think to yourself that 'you' are feeling unwell, or that 'you' are experiencing this or that physical-mental state or symptom.
2. Do not even ask *why* you are feeling the way you are, but *who* - *which you* - is feeling that way.
3. Be aware not just of what or how 'you' are feeling but how and who it makes *you* feel - the sense of self that it induces.
4. Be aware of your state of being not simply as a mental or physical state but as a distinct self or 'self-state' – a distinct *you*.
5. Remind yourself also that your current mental and physical state is but one of many 'self-states' among others, one self or *you* among many others.
6. Now identify with that self which is distinct from each and every *you* – for it is nothing but the very *awareness* of any and every self-state that can be experienced.
7. Feel this self - the *awareness self* - as a spacious field or pure centre of awareness that is absolutely *distinct* both from your current self-state or *you* and from all such self-states.
8. Choose to allow *the you* that your current state of being is bringing to the fore to *express* itself *more* fully - both in your bodily language and in your thoughts and emotions.
9. Do not try to heal or change the self or *you* that is expressing itself through your current state or symptoms but let it gradually *change* you - allowing it to alter the way you feel your self as a whole - your whole self or 'soul'.
10. Do not become 'a patient' but *be patient*. For by letting your mental-physical states and symptoms *change you* – which means feeling and expressing the *other selves* that they express – those selves will gradually no longer need to express *themselves* through states or symptoms of 'illness'.

ILLNESS INSTEAD OF AWARENESS

A personal secretary finds herself stuck in a job with a bullying and abusive boss. Fearing to express her feelings of irritation, anger and embarrassed humiliation 'face to face' and 'face up to' her boss, feeling vulnerable in the face of the unpredictable rage this might unleash in her boss, and afraid with good reason that it might be 'rash' to risk her job by doing so, she keeps 'a straight face' in the face of all the bullying. Over time her feelings come to the surface in her body itself - in the form of an 'irritating' and 'angry' red skin rash. Lacking a way to face her boss, let alone 'whack him one' - even though she is itching to do so - the rash appears on her face, arms and hands. Plagued by itching, she scratches and irritates her own skin until it blisters and bleeds - an activity that provides, unaware to herself, some satisfaction in releasing her 'bad blood' towards her boss. But her feelings of embarrassment and shame about not being able to face up to her boss become displaced by shame and embarrassment about the rash itself. So she goes to her doctor. Not even thinking that asking her questions about her *life world* might have any diagnostic significance, the doctor is therefore completely blind to the metaphorical *meaning* of her 'angry rash'. Applying The Medical Principle, the doctor's sole interest is in diagnosing the rash as some form of skin disorder, the 'cause' of which must for him be some impersonal 'thing' - even though there is in this case no 'thing' to explain it such as a liver disorder. Nevertheless he prescribes a cortisone cream to 'treat' and 'cure' her problem. The problem is that she then becomes dependent on the cream, which far from helping her to become tougher and more 'thick-skinned' emotionally, has the side-effect of thinning her actual skin surface itself, making it more vulnerable to embarrassing sores and bleeding. Eventually she feels forced to take more sick leave and then to leave the job altogether and seek another boss.

AWARENESS INSTEAD OF ILLNESS

A personal secretary, faced with having to work with a bullying and abusive boss for the first time in her career, doesn't 'feel herself' at work in the way she was used to doing. She allows herself to be fully aware of her emotions of anger, vulnerability, shame and humiliation - and yet is wary of rashly letting them out in an emotional outburst that might risk her job. On a day-to-day basis she reminds herself that the awareness of an emotion, however intense is not itself an emotion or impulse but something emotion- and impulse-free. This makes her feel less vulnerable to her boss's bullying and less impelled to react emotionally to it in a rash way. Instead she sees the bullying abusiveness for what it is - as the indirect expression of a deep insecure and vulnerable self in her boss. Nevertheless, she stays with her awareness of her own emotions, allowing herself to fully affirm and feel them in her body. As a result they condense into a bodily sense of a completely different self within her, a self that feels inwardly strong enough to face up to her boss - or to anyone - and challenge them in a calm, non-reactive but nevertheless firm and resolute way. By simply letting herself feel this other self in a bodily way and give it expression through her body language and tone of voice she feels ever less vulnerable, and instead becomes even more aware of the vulnerability that lies behind her boss's bullying. Sensing this new self and awareness in her, her boss finds it strangely more difficult to be as bullying towards her as before. Now it is her boss who is uncomfortably aware of feeling another self, a less powerful and more vulnerable self. Afraid of this self, her boss reacts by actively intensifying the abusive bullying, only to find it met by a calm, resolute and firmly toned response from the secretary. Yet her boss now feels so secretly ashamed of bullying the secretary that she is not fired. She does not develop a rash, feels ready to face up to bullying, and as a result does not feel vulnerable, shamed or humiliated.

ILLNESS AS AWARENESS

Every feeling, symptom, mental or physical state, together with our overall sense of self or 'self-state' is not just something we are aware *of*. Its meaning lies in the fact that *it is itself an awareness* of something. Thus a head or neck ache, though we aware *of* it as a bodily tension itself *embodies an awareness* of something beyond it – for example an awareness of real personal tensions in our lives, relationships or place of work.

Just as a person whose family has been made homeless or wiped out in a war has *good reasons* for feeling 'depressed', so do all feelings - including feeling 'depressed', 'anxious', 'angry' or 'ill' - have good reasons. They are not just programmed or mechanical physiological reactions to or 'effects' of external or internal 'causes'. Simply to label feelings as 'positive' or 'negative', to describe ourselves as 'well' or 'unwell', or to call the way we feel as 'good' or 'bad', is to deny the inherent *meaning* of all feelings - as an awareness of something beyond themselves. Symptoms of illness, like dream symbols, are a form of *condensed* awareness. Their *inherently* positive value and meaning lies in helping us to become more *directly* aware of what it is that they themselves *are* a condensed or embodied awareness of. Thus digestive problems are a condensed embodied awareness of an aspect of our lives or lived experience of the world we find difficult to 'stomach' or 'digest'.

Even though illness is often or mainly experienced through *localised* bodily symptoms (including 'mental' states such as a sense of confusion localised in our heads), every such symptom is also and always accompanied by a state of consciousness or 'mood' that pervades *our entire body* and in this way also affects our entire *bodily sense of self*. This bodily sense of self or 'self-state' is itself an undifferentiated *awareness* of what may be many different aspects of our overall *life world* that are difficult or uncomfortable, distressing or disturbing for us - thus giving rise to a general sense of 'dis-ease'. That is why, in order to find meaning in the overall bodily sense of 'unwellness' or 'dis-ease' that accompanies a specific illness, it is necessary first to experience it *as a self-state* - to be aware of how it imparts an overall colour, mood and texture to our bodily sense of self, one which in turn colours our experience of our whole *life world*. To pass from an experience of illness as 'not feeling ourselves' to one of 'feeling another self' - a distinct self or 'self-state' - means experiencing this distinct bodily sense of self. The 'other self' we experience through illness however is, by definition, *an experienced self* - a self we are aware *of*. Our self as a whole or 'soul' on the other hand, is not essentially any *experienced* self, symptom, state of consciousness or 'self-state', but rather the very *awareness* of experiencing it. To avoid becoming unconsciously identified with the self-states and symptoms of dis-ease, it is necessary to identify with that 'whole self' which is nothing *but* this awareness - the *experiencing self* rather than any *experienced self*. Only within the

awareness that *is* this self – our ‘awareness self’ - can we in turn feel and affirm every particular feeling and self we experience or are aware *of*. We are as much aware of our *self as a whole* – our soul - as we are aware of our *body as a whole*. Yet the ‘body’ of our whole self or soul - our *awareness self* - is not just our physical body but *our entire life world*. For it is an awareness that embraces everything and ‘every-body’ in our world, from our immediate present reality and relationships to our past and future - and ultimately the entire universe.

The *second* step in healing ourselves through awareness is therefore to experience each and every localised bodily sensation or symptom, no matter how subtle, *as an awareness* of some specific aspect of our larger body - of our life world. Thus by giving more awareness to a localised muscular tension we can experience it *as an awareness* of a specific tension in our life world. Through a meditational process of giving awareness to each and every *localised* bodily feeling or sensation of dis-ease - no matter how subtle, and by making sure we attend to each and every *region* of our body in the process - we can come to experience each of these feelings and sensations *as an awareness* of some aspect of our larger body or life world. Through this process we are literally putting ourselves together - ‘re-mem-bering’ and making whole that larger body that is our life world *as a whole*. And by simply *granting* awareness to each region of our bodies and each sensation or

feeling of dis-ease or discomfort we experience within it, our overall sense of dis-ease and overall 'self-state' will automatically begin to alter. For we will feel ever-more pervaded, lightened and healed by that very self which is the *awareness* we grant – both to our overall self-state *and* to the specific, localised feelings and sensations it unites – that 'whole self' which *is* nothing but the pure, healing light of *awareness as such*, one which pervades the entire universe and every body in it.

HEALING THROUGH AWARENESS 2

1. Give yourself time to attend to your immediate bodily sense of any discomfort, tension or emotional feeling - however intense or delicate and subtle - that you are aware of. Be more aware of where and how you feel it in your body.
2. Staying aware of any such localised sensation or feeling of dis-ease, remind yourself that it is itself an awareness of some aspect of your life world and relationships that is a source of unease or 'dis-ease'.
3. Wait until a spontaneous awareness arises of what specific aspect of your life-world it is that the sensation or feeling of dis-ease embodies.
4. Grant awareness to one localised sensation or feeling of dis-ease or discomfort after another, staying with it long enough until it too recalls you to some specific aspect of your life world, present, past or future.
5. Take time to follow this process through - making sure you attend to every region of your body *in* the process – until your *overall* sense of dis-ease lifts and your overall sense of your self and body alters - feeling lightened and pervaded by the very awareness you are granting it.

ILLNESS AS A LANGUAGE OF AWARENESS

When we speak of someone 'losing heart', feeling 'disheartened' or 'heart-broken' we are not just using the language of a biological 'organ' – in this case the heart - as a metaphor for a psychological state of 'dis-ease'. It is the other way round. Heart disease is itself *a living biological metaphor* of psychic states of dis-ease such as feeling 'heart-broken', 'heartless' or 'cold-hearted'. Similarly, respiratory disorders such as asthma arise from feeling 'stifled' or 'having no room to breathe', and digestive disorders from aspects of our lives we do not feel able to 'stomach' or 'digest' in our awareness. The 'body language' used in phrases such as 'hard to stomach' in other words, are not 'mere' mental metaphors. Instead they point in a quite literal way to incapacities or states of dis-ease belonging to our subjectively felt body or *psychical body* – and how these in turn can find metaphorical expression in organic diseases and dysfunctions of our *physical body*.

The Medical Principle seeks 'organic' causes for illness in dysfunctions of our *biological organs*, and sees even psychical states and disorders as the result of such organic dysfunctions. As a result, medicine is blind to the deeper meaning and truth of the bodily 'metaphors' we use to describe psychical feelings and states – which are a way of recognising that the physical body and its biological organs are themselves a *living metaphorical language* of

the soul or psyche – of awareness. In contrast to The Medical Principle, The Awareness Principle recognises all physical body organs and their functions as biological embodiments of our psychic body and psychological capacities. The human psychological body or ‘soul body’ is our awareness body - that body with which we breathe, stomach, digest, absorb and let circulate and give physical expression to our *awareness* of all we experience.

Biological organs such as lungs, stomach and heart and their corresponding *physiological functions* are localised biological expressions of these *psychical capacities*, which are essentially *capacities of awareness*. It is the absence or dysfunction of these *capacities of awareness* – for example our capacity to breathe, digest, metabolise, absorb, let circulate and give expression to awareness in muscular activity – that finds metaphorical expression in ‘organic’, biological dysfunctions, not the other way round. It is these psychic capacities of awareness that find living biological expression in our physical body organs and organic ‘functions’ such as respiration, digestion and circulation, just as it is psychic incapacities that find expression in organic, biological dysfunctions or disorders. In other words, it is not illness that *incapacitates* us. Instead it is failure to fully or properly exercise our *psychical capacities* – awareness - that results in incapacitating illness.

Our *biology* has its basis in our *biography*, and in that larger *body of awareness* that is our *life world* as a whole. For it is always within the specific contexts of our life world that we experience 'dis-ease', just as it is *capacities of awareness* that allow us to relate to and respond to our life world in a healthy way - *with* awareness.

Illness can and has been understood in many ways: in a purely objective and biomedical way, as a mechanical neuro-physiological 'effect' of psychical stress or trauma, as a relation to our life world and other people in it, as a form of silent bodily *communication* or even protest, as blocked action or communication, and/or as a metaphorical *language* through which we give silent bodily *expression* to any *subjectively* felt 'dis-ease'. Understanding illness as a metaphorical *language of awareness* embraces all other understandings of it. More importantly it provides us with an understanding of illness that affirms its innate *meaningfulness* in the life of the individual – as an expression and embodiment of their lived experience of themselves and of their life world as a whole, as an expression and embodiment of the degree of awareness they bring to their experience, and as an expression and embodiment too, of the specific capacities or 'organs' of awareness that they do or do not exercise in relating and responding to their experienced self and world – for it is these specific capacities that offer new keys to diagnosing illness as a 'language of awareness'.

HEALING THE WORLD THROUGH AWARENESS

All the ills of this world, from war to want, stem from lack or want of pure awareness, its reduction to 'consciousness' of this or that and its replacement by limited 'wants' for this or that. Awareness gives way to willing and wanting. Yet without the power, light, air, water and soil of awareness, no healthy world can grow and flourish, and the growing material needs and wants of its populations will remain forever unmet - except for the few and at the expense of the many. That is why anyone who cultivates pure awareness works not only for their own well-being but for that of the world as a whole. Pure awareness is one and indivisible. The same pure awareness that allows individuals to encompass all aspects of themselves and their life world without falling into the bondage of identification with them – this same awareness also automatically works to loosen the bonds that hold others in the grip of unaware identification with limited aspects of themselves and of their life world. The light, air, water and soil of pure awareness is the divine medium within and out of which all things grow. Whilst it does not judge or discriminate between ornamental plants, proliferating weeds or poisonous berries and mushrooms, it alone is what nourishes the *healthy* growth and healing *metamorphosis* of all things, and of all human beings, 'good' or 'bad'. It is the sole antidote to the poisons and perversities that still corrupt the mass psyche, social cultures and politics of humankind.