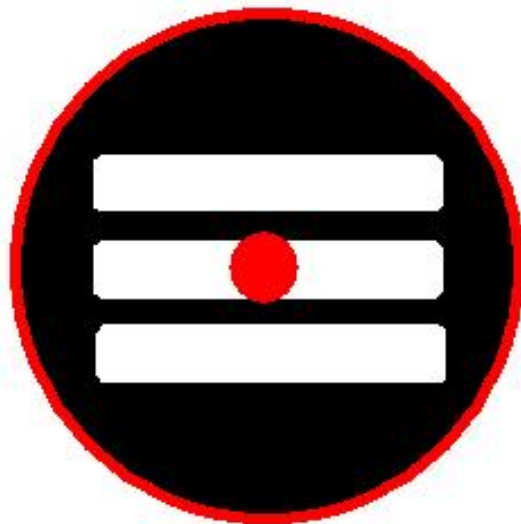


# TAKING TIME TO BE AWARE



**Peter Wilberg**

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**“In robbing us of time, today’s culture also robs us of dignity. But dignity has no great value in a culture devoted to progress, power and productivity. Since time is money in modern culture, few of us can afford dignity.”**

Alexander Lowen

Today’s world faces a grave economic, ecological, cultural crisis – indeed a global civilisational crisis. The word ‘crisis’ means a ‘turning point’ in time. Humanity has reached a turning point in time, a turning point which requires us to establish a whole new relation to time, a whole new way of being in time, a whole new awareness of time. The nature of that turning point in time, of that new relation to time, that new way of being in time, is simple but profound. Quite simply: it is *taking time to be aware*. Only in this way can human beings find a way of *being-in-time* that is not simply dominated by ‘busy-ness’ - by *doing* - and aimed only at *having*. The new relation to time that human beings so desperately need at this time of crisis then, is one in which they give themselves time, not just to produce or consume, work or play, but to *be aware*. For to truly ‘be’ is to *be aware*. Just as to truly ‘meditate’ is simply to *take time to be aware*.

Without granting ourselves time to be aware we impoverish ourselves. For to be aware means to be aware of *all there is* to be aware of - all there is to sense and feel, experience and explore, enjoy and delight in, process and ponder, recollect and anticipate, delve into and draw insight from in the present moment.

Without granting ourselves time to be aware of all that there is to be aware of in the moment, we become overburdened, fatigued, stressed out, depressed or dis-eased by all that we have been too rushed to give ourselves time to be aware of. We reduce awareness itself to the next thing to do or say, act on or react to. We reduce being to *doing*. In doing so, we reduce our lives to a series of actions strung out along a two-dimensional timeline. We reduce the moment to a mere point on a timeline, and time itself to a *seemingly* empty

space between one moment point and another – one which we have become addicted to filling with *doing*, whether in the form of speaking or acting, working or engaging in ‘leisure activities’. Even ‘meditation’ becomes something to be *done* – for example through the form of the type of bodily stretching engaged in under the name of ‘yoga’ that substitutes for a meditative stretching and increased mobility of *awareness*.

*Doing* dominates over *being aware* because all the business powers of this world conspire to keep us *busy* at all costs, not least by forcing us to *sell our lacking awareness* - human beings are destroying each other and the earth. *time* to employers whose only interest is in exploiting it to the greatest extent possible and making it ever more ‘productive’. The old Protestant work ethic with its famous adage - “the Devil makes work for idle hands” - is so instilled in us that *idleness* itself has to be induced by falling sick or aided by the use of drugs, and any idle time we have has to be used to *do* something - if only to take drugs or indulge in activities which either require no awareness or in which we lose all awareness. In this way ‘the Devil’ does indeed *make* work for idle hands, ensuring even if they are not working they are still *doing*, still not allowing themselves time to just be - to *be aware*.

Yet only by taking *time* to be aware can each of us open up a broader *space* of awareness - one which, like the clear and empty space surrounding things, allows us to meditate, place in perspective and come to new insights regarding whatever questions, concerns or feelings are currently addressing us. Only out of such a *broader*, more spacious and expansive awareness *field* can human beings also come to *deeper*, more thoughtful decisions and find better practical solutions to both personal and world problems. And only out of this broadened and deepened awareness can we also relate to other human beings in a more meditative and aware way – thus bringing about a *healing transformation in human relations*.

All *time-wasting* indecision, mismanagement, misgovernment and mistreatment of others stem from the self-defeating rush of busy-ness that characterises our global business culture. This is a culture of enforced economic conscription of *all* (‘employment’) which ends up rendering the unique awareness, potentials and creativity of *each* more or less wholly *unemployed*. The value our global capitalist culture places on activity, speed and busy-ness denies the time needed for meditative and aware decision-

making - but in this way also slows down or entirely blocks *truly aware, thoughtful and effective action*. Behind this culture is a deep-seated *fear* of awareness, not least awareness of all the ways in which -

The resulting global crisis and turning point in time that we now face tells us that it is high time for humanity to become more aware, high time for a cultural revolution in awareness - one based not just on 'slowing down' but on cultivating a whole new way of aware experiencing and action, living and relating, thinking and feeling. This in turn requires new forms of *education in awareness* in all areas of life and knowledge - and not just education in facts or skills. Above all it requires a new understanding of awareness as something essentially distinct from mere consciousness 'of' things. There is all that we experience, all that occurs or goes on in ourselves and the world. And there is *the awareness* of all that occurs or goes on - *the awareness* of all we experience. That awareness - awareness 'as such' or 'pure awareness' - is what alone can free human beings from bondage to anything they are conscious or aware *of*.

Awareness *as such* is a not a product of the brain, bounded by our bodies, or the mere private property of individuals or groups. Instead it has an essentially unbounded and universal character. It is the 'trans-personal' dimension of consciousness. As such, it transcends *identity* - as it also transcends all group *identifications* - social and economic, ethnic, cultural and religious. For awareness itself is the essence of the divine - one and indivisible. That is why anyone who cultivates awareness works not only for their own well-being but for that of the world - a world whose ills all result from a lack of awareness, and thus can never be healed through the politics or psychology of *identity*.

Identification with limiting ways of experiencing ourselves, other people and the world is embedded in our very use of language. Thus instead of *being aware* of having a certain feeling such as anger or sadness, we say "I *am* angry" or "I *am* sad". Instead of being aware of *having* a particular thought or feeling about some thing or person - for example the thought that 'John is a bastard' - we so *identify* with the feelings expressed in that thought that we take it as a 'fact' that 'John *is* a bastard'. As a result of this identification with a limited way of experiencing something or someone, our thoughts and feelings cease to be a true and authentic expression of all there is to be aware of in relation to that thing or person - and make it impossible for us to experience them in

different ways. Identified with the ‘text’ of our thoughts and feelings, we close our awareness to the whole experiential *context* in which they arise. Restricting awareness of the larger context of our experiencing – not being aware of how much *more* there is to be experienced in and through any thing or person – we also restrict the lived ‘text’ of our own lives and relationships. If the contextual *space* of our awareness is not fully occupied by that text – if we are not wholly *preoccupied* with it – we feel empty and need to fill it with action or emotional drama (whether in ourselves or through television, film and vicarious soap operas).

Herein lies the vicious circle in which individuals and relationships become bound up. For all those things which we have given ourselves no time-space to become aware in the *moment* cumulatively mount up in *time* – causing us stress, fatigue or dis-ease, bringing us to a point where we must put a damper on or repress them, or impelling us to impulsively act on them or ‘act them out’ in an unaware and emotionally reactive and dramatic way. Not living *meditatively* - not granting ourselves time even to be fully aware of how we experience ourselves, we end up with a world in which neither real life people nor fictional characters *have any time for one another*. Instead their lives are reduced to a series of emotional dramas - interspersed by and compensating for periods of uneventful or impoverished experiencing. They have no time for themselves or each other because they give themselves no time to *be aware*. Time itself is measured out purely in *quantities*, and so-called ‘quality time’ is seen as something to be ‘created’ only at certain times, rather than as our *birthright* as beings – as a boundless time-space of awareness that can be opened up at any time, within each and every moment of our lives.

‘Being aware’ means not just attending to the awareness of our thoughts, but also to all the immediate bodily dimensions of our experiencing – to our felt bodily sense of all that is present or going on within and around us. It also means attending to the spaces, inner and outer, within which we experience both ourselves and others, both thoughts and things. For those spaces we can become more aware of are not empty. By attending to the awareness of them we come to the experience of space itself, inner and outer, as something singular - as a singular field or time-space of awareness itself.

**“Space and time...themselves arise from time-space,  
which is more primordial than they themselves...”**

**“Modern man must first and above all find his way back  
into the full breadth of the space proper to his essence.”**

Martin Heidegger

Being aware also means learning to feel that we dwelling within awareness in the same way that we abide and dwell in the boundlessness of space. Whenever we stop *sensing space*, both within and around us, we contract the space of awareness in which we dwell. Whenever we lose our awareness in thoughts, feelings and everyday activities, rather than attending to *the awareness* of all that we experience around and within us, and whenever we allow our attention to just flit from one thought or action, one narrow *focus of awareness* to another, we lose sense of that larger and more spacious time-space or *field of awareness* in which alone we can truly dwell or ‘be’.

So-called ‘meta-cognitive awareness’ – transcending both intellectual and experiential cognition - is no mere catchword or medium of ‘therapy’ for those driven to despair or madness by a mad world. For awareness is not only, in principle, *the* most primordial mode of cognition. It is also the restoration of dignity to all of us in our search to find a sane and healthy way of ‘being-in-time’ and ‘being-in-the-world’ - through *taking time to be aware* – and coming to rest in and *be* that very *awareness*.