

**Practice #5: Awaken Your Spiritual Vision: See Clearly and Recognize the Sacred in All Things**

*Chapters 22, 23, 24, 25, 26*

**OVERVIEW**

**[5] Awaken your spiritual vision: See clearly and recognize the sacred in all things**

**Keywords:** Vision, Seeing, the Sacred

When you're able to be calm and concentrate, it's time to acquire a new way of viewing and understanding the world -- This is the way by which you can see that the "Sacred" is what holds the whole world together. The Sacred (aka, the Spirit, the Greater Power, the Numinous, God, etc.) is actually the core and ground of everything; it also encompasses all things.

**Sample Exercises:** Eat mindfully; Become a good listener; See teachers everywhere; Recognize the Sacred in nature

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**1. The Healing Power of Awareness (Chapter 22)**

Summary:

Everything we experience comes to us molded by our minds. Yet our untamed minds have minds of their own: What we perceive is selected by our desires, colored by our emotions, and fragmented by our wandering attention.

Key Points in Chapter 22

**1.1 The Cost of Unconsciousness (175)**

- Usually we bring far less than full awareness to our experience, to reality
- The costs include absentmindedness, alienation, automaticity (i.e., running on "automatic pilot" without being mindful), and illusions/delusions that we have.
  - Absentmindedness: Even when we are physically present we are not always 'there'. We are often so mindless that we are quite unaware of the present moment, of what is really happening in the here and now.
  - Self-Alienation: We are strangers to ourselves: we do not know our own minds, our inner depths, or who and what we really are. Consequently, we identify with

the external and superficial aspects of ourselves. This is true especially with regard to our body: We become over-conscious and over-anxious about our external without paying attention to who we really are within.

- Automaticity: we are conditioned to live 'semi-consciously', move through things mechanically, to run on "auto-pilot" without being fully present in the here and now.
- Life in Illusion: the net effect of these distortions is that we live in an impaired state of consciousness. We are living in an illusory world (just like Neo before he took the red pill in *The Matrix*)

## 1.2 The Benefits of Living Mindfully (178)

- Concentration allows us to direct attention to whatever experiences we wish, while mindfulness allows us to explore them sensitively.
- To live mindfully is to bring greater awareness to each activity, to be more present in each moment.
  - Interpersonal sensitivity: Mindfulness makes us more present with each person we meet, more aware of the other person's feelings and the many messages conveyed by subtle body movements and vocal tones.
  - Refining the senses: We do not necessarily need to give up sensory pleasures, but we do need to give up our attachment to them. We also need to refine the senses by honoring each experience and bringing to it a careful, gentle, and penetrating awareness or mindfulness.
  - Knowing one's mind: Making the unconscious conscious is the essence of deep psychotherapy. Meditative awareness can penetrate far below the levels reached by psychotherapy. Awareness meditations, which allow attention to move from one object to another and which explore all experiences with care and precision.
  - Freedom from Automaticity: "deautomatization", the possibility of breaking automatic habits by bringing awareness to them. Each moment of mindfulness weakens the chains of conditioning and brings us closer to liberation.
  - Healing Power of Awareness: Many of the unhealthy and self-destructive things we do spring from automatic, unconscious responses.

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## 2. Exercises in Awareness (Chapter 23)

Summary:

Specific exercises to heighten one's awareness and mindfulness

Key Points in Chapter 23

### 2.1 Exercise 1: Eat Mindfully, Enjoy the Food (184)

- Pay attention to what you are eating by allowing it to be a sensory experience
- Eat slowly and attentively (think of taste, texture, swallowing, etc.)

- Note the satisfaction that comes from eating (or whatever feeling comes from the eating experience)

#### 2.2 Exercise 2: Mindful Music (186)

- Choose a soothing piece of music to actively listen to (consider the notes, rhythm, emotions, etc.)

#### 2.3 Exercise 3: Become a Good Listener (187)

- Careful listening focuses attention, refines awareness, and increases empathy for the person as well as ourselves

#### 2.4 Exercise 4: Find Beauty in This Moment (188)

- Find something beautiful each day and recognize how its aesthetic affects you

#### 2.5 Exercise 5: Heighten Awareness of Your Body (188)

- Achieve a middle way in which we honor but not worship the body
- Intimate mind-body connection: body awareness can help heal somatic traumas
- Yogas and meditation can increase body awareness (e.g., Buddhist “sweeping meditation”: One “sweeps” [scans] the body from head to toe)

#### 2.6 Exercise 6: Mindfulness Meditation (190)

- Mindfulness meditation emphasizes clear awareness (exploring mental and physical experiences)
- Begins with focusing on breath, then shifting awareness to physical feelings and thoughts, allowing them to pass by while studying them carefully (*Bre-Fee-T*)

#### 2.7 Exercise 7: Mindful Speech (194)

- Applying mindfulness to your speech, analyzing your intentions and motivations behind what you are saying to others.

### 3. Seeing the Sacred in All Things (Chapter 24)

Summary:

Religious traditions basically consider *mindlessness to be a negative thing*, especially as it can make us blind to the sacred – in the world, others, and ourselves.

#### 3.1 The Blinding Power of Science (195)

- Science is so impactful in the Western world, it shapes our vision of reality and of the universe itself

- The result is that we look out on what philosophers call a "disenchanted world": a world seemingly stripped of "the magic" of meaning, significance, and spirit. (Recall how "enchanted" the world was when you were a child!)

### 3.2 A New Manner of Seeing (196)

- Spiritual vision has inspired sages throughout history and been called many names.
- The seven practices develop **spiritual vision: *the capacity to recognize the sacred in ourselves and in the world.***

### 3.3 The Sacred Within

- This potent awareness of 'the sacred' or 'sacred nature' penetrates far below the ego's restless turmoil to the sacred core of our being.
- A "sensible person" values the eye of the soul even more than the physical eye because it is the eye of the soul that allows us to recognize the sacred, the truly "awe-some" things in life.

### 3.4 The Sacred World (197)

- At first, this recognition of the sacred within ourselves and in the world breaks through only in moments.
- With practice, we learn to recognize 'the sacred' in persons, animals, things more often.
- At some point everything will more clearly fall into place.

### 3.5 Transformed Relationships (198)

- As the eye of the soul begins to recognize the sacred in all things, it also awakens to the sacred in all people
- This makes for dramatically different relationships.
  - More room for openness and love
- Perception is not a passive process but rather is an active cre-ation, and the state of the world we perceive reflects the state of mind within us.

## 4. Exercises in Sacred Seeing (Chapter 25)

Summary:

Specific exercises in developing sacred seeing.

### 4.1 Exercise 8: Open Yourself to the Sacred in Nature (201)

- Finding a place in nature that feels appealing (mountain, ocean, forest). Open yourself to your surroundings and appreciate the magnificence of the scenery
- You can integrate prayer, ritual, or mindfulness into this practice

### 4.2 Exercise 9: Recognize the Inner Light (202)

- Begin with focusing on breath, begin with insight meditation

- Visualize someone you love, experience the warm feelings you have for them. Then imagine light radiating from them until it is all-consuming
- Then visualize someone you don't like beside your friend; imagine the same thing happen to them. Imagine that light spreading to you, too.

#### 4.3 Exercise 10: Surrounded by "Saints" (203)

- Decide on a period of time (day, hour), and try to treat everyone you meet as a holy person (seeing them as Christ or Buddhas-in-disguise)

#### 4.4 Exercise 11: See Teachers Everywhere

- We can see all people as our teachers – learning the good from those that are good, and learning what not to do from those that fall short of the ideal or who are even bad
- Select a period of time (morning, day) and try to see each person you meet as a teacher bringing you an important lesson

### **5. The Higher Reaches of Vision (Chapter 26, 205)**

Summary:

Dedicated practice brings both a remarkable continuity and an extraordinary depth of awareness. Rare glimpses of the sacred blossom into recurrent recognitions and ultimately a continuous presence. The secret of success is to use more and more activities as opportunities for awakening so that spiritual practice grows from an occasional activity to being part of every activity.

#### 5.1 Ecstatic Vision and the Dark Night of the Soul (206)

- The loss you can feel after having a spiritual experience can be hard.
- After glimpsing a vision of the world that has brought unprecedented meaning and joy to life, after tasting the indescribable bliss of one's true nature, life bereft of these gifts can seem shallow and insipid.
- This is sometimes called "the dark night of the soul"

#### 5.2 Transforming Flashes of Illumination into Abiding Light

- For those who persist, initial glimpses gradually become a recurrent vision, peak experiences extend into plateau experiences, altered states of consciousness become (more firmly established) altered traits of consciousness, and flashes of illumination transform into abiding light.
- Desired states of mindfulness/awareness are easier to achieve

#### 5.3 Dream Yogas (207)

- Dreams are viewed as spiritually significant
- Taping into lucid dreams has great potential for spiritual development

- Lucid dreams have remarkable potential, the greatest of which is to continue one's spiritual practice throughout the night.
- You can witness your dreams-and you can remain aware during nondream sleep.
  - Practitioners are able to watch themselves fall asleep, dream, rest in dreamless pure awareness, and eventually awaken the next morning, all without losing consciousness.
- Researchers observed a group of very advanced TM meditators, all of whom claimed to be continuously aware 24 hours a day
  - When observed while they slept through the night, their brain waves showed a pattern never seen before: a combination of fast waking rhythms superimposed on the very slow rhythms of deep sleep, suggesting that these meditators remained alert and aware throughout the night.