

# THE NATURE OF AWARENESS

by Lynn Marie Lumiere

Awareness of Being cannot be described in words or understood by the mind. Words can only point to that which is essentially true. It is often pointed to by describing its qualities such as silence, stillness, peace, love, joy, compassion, innocence, clarity, and many more. We call it Awareness, Being, Consciousness, Presence, Emptiness, Essence, True Nature, Truth, and so on. I am choosing to simply call it Awareness, but these terms and others can be used interchangeably as well.

We can know Awareness only by consciously being it. Awareness cannot be seen like the objects that appear in it, because you are it. Awareness is what is always present. We are always aware. We are aware, even if we are not aware of being aware. It is impossible not to be aware. Even when we are sleeping and dreaming, Awareness is still here. It is ever-present because it is our True Nature.

Because it ever-present, Awareness is easily overlooked. It is also overlooked because it is not a thing or an experience like everything else. Our habit is to get so absorbed in the movie of our life that we take it to be real and don't notice the screen it is being played on. There is a Ground of Awake-Being both within and behind all experience. Yet, the identification with the complex conditioned mind's projections is so strong that we miss the simplicity of what is most obvious.

I once heard a spiritual story about a man who had a visitor in his home that he suspected was a thief. The man wanted to hide his treasure in a place where the thief could never find it. So, he hid it right under the thief's pillow. As soon as the thief had a chance, he searched the house for the treasure, but found nothing. The man was wise; he knew that the most obvious place would be the last place the thief would look. This is our human condition. There is a vast "treasure" that is closer than our own breath, but it is overlooked. The treasure is Awareness. Awareness is the Source of everything we seek: peace, happiness and love. Yet, out of ignorance and confusion, it is common to look everywhere else for peace and happiness without finding it.

Awareness is not a state and therefore cannot be produced or created. It is the Source from within which all other states arise and fall. Awareness doesn't react to what is happening in our life. It doesn't care if the body is experiencing pleasure or pain. It is the mind that labels experience "good" or "bad", "pleasure" or "pain." Awareness graciously accepts all of life. It's all the same to Awareness, just sensation. It is the thinking mind that creates problems out of our experience and circumstances.

Awareness does not have problems. It doesn't need things to be different than they are. From the perspective of Awareness, everything is perfectly okay exactly as it is. Awareness is totally unaffected by all experience that occurs within it. It is like a movie screen in that it is not affected by the stories being played on it. No matter how violent, dramatic or beautiful the images, the screen remains unaffected.

Awareness is untouched by phenomena because phenomena are an expression of itself. Conscious Awareness is all there is. All divisions and separation are imaginary, like lines drawn in sand. They are created by the concepts of the mind. A common analogy is that Consciousness is like the ocean and all of manifestation is like waves. The mind can label the waves “wave” and see them as separate, but it is still all the ocean. In Reality, there is not two--you and Awareness. The formless Awareness and all of its manifestations are the same. Your body, thoughts, feelings, sensations and personality are all expressions of Awareness.

As we gaze toward that which is aware, we find nothing whatsoever. It is empty, like space. Yet, there is a knowing quality—there is a knowing of Awareness as empty. We know that there is no thing here. This empty, open, knowingness is pervasive and unobstructed: it has no form, color, sound, texture, smell or taste—no qualities whatsoever. In fact, it is because it is qualitiless that it is unobstructed. Everything that appears arises within this empty, open, cognizance. Yet, as we allow our attention to rest as empty Awareness, its qualitiless nature brings forth qualities such as contentment, ease, peace, compassion, love, kindness and wisdom.

Just as Awareness is empty, it is also full. The nature of Reality is paradoxical. Awareness is both empty space and full of all that is—all of life in its countless variations. Awareness is all-inclusive. Nothing is outside of it. And it doesn't miss a thing. Awareness notices every thought, feeling, sound, sensation and dream we have. Every single movement of the body and mind, no matter how subtle, is noted in Awareness. And, Awareness is only in this present moment. Awareness is the Now and the Now is Awareness.

Recognizing Awareness involves seeing what is already always present, here and now. There is no one way for this to occur. It can happen spontaneously in a moment of seeing great beauty, feeling love, in the gap between thoughts, or in any moment when the mind is temporarily suspended and you see what remains. It can happen in the course of spiritual practice. In meditation, the mind is quieted and focused, which can allow for a seeing of what is always here. Meditation can also help us develop the capacity to witness our inner experience without getting caught up in it or suppressing it. When Awareness is sustained in this way—allowing thoughts, feelings and sensations to come and go without interference—it begins to dissolve the self-structure the mind has built. As this structure dissolves, the Awareness that was always here as the ground comes into the foreground to and can be recognized.

For a rare few, Awareness is recognized and never lost sight of again. But for the vast majority, full awakening is a process over time of undoing the deep habit of identification with the ego-mind and coming to rest as Awareness moment to moment in our daily lives. Recognizing who you are takes no time and no effort. It's amazing how simple and available it is! Yet, the mind with which we are identified is complex and focused away from its Source. The complexity of the “thought world” in which we live in obscures the simplicity and presence of what is most obvious.

We simply need to return to the present moment and discover what is always here no matter what is occurring. Whether we are calm or agitated, sleeping or active, happy or sad, there is something within and behind experience that pervades it all. Once that it recognized, we embark on a process of giving attention to that and consciously resting as that. Life can then be consciously lived from Awareness rather than from the mind.

Without conscious recognition of Awareness, the mind cannot find rest or lasting peace. It is forever grasping and wanting or avoiding, and will continue to do so until it comes back home to its Source. Already free of suffering, Awareness waits silently to be discovered and rested in. Once discovered, Awareness reveals a vast treasure—a deep peace and sense of innate well-being—a bubbling spring of all the wisdom, healing and love we need or could ever want. It is where rest is found for our suffering mind.

Yet, the majority of human beings do not even know such respite is so readily available. It is like we have been walking around in a nightmare, not realizing it is only a dream. This has been the tragic joke of our human existence. The good news is that we are living in a time where more and more people are awakening to Awareness of Being, discovering the freedom it offers and sharing their discovery with others.