

Awake – What does it mean?

The premise for all the forthcoming articles is that there is a difference between being “awake” and “not.” I think we need to be clear about what this means. We all know there is a difference between being asleep and awake, or do we? When we are sleeping we can have conscious dreams in which we are fully aware, even though we are in a “sleep state.” Medicine has discovered that individuals can be in a coma and yet know what is being said in the room. Studies on “Near Death Experiences” reveal that an individual can be “brain dead” in surgery for as long as forty-five minutes and return to “life” with no brain damage, and in fact, be very aware during that time of “death” of another state of existence that is highly charged with love, light, and the presence of Higher Beings. Advanced yogis can stop their heart rate for extended periods with no physical damage. St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:31, “I die daily.” The yogic interpretation of this statement is that he learned how to stop his heart by advanced meditation techniques like Kriya Yoga.

I am suggesting here that our concept of awake and sleep is not as easy to define as one might think. So how do we begin to understand being “awake?” First, we must understand that there are different states of consciousness that go beyond the brain. Remember, we can be clinically “dead” with no brain activity, and yet be fully aware and conscious. This state of awareness is not limited by, nor defined by the body. To be fully awake at a “conscious level” appears to mean a level of perception that exists beyond our definition of physicality. To make matters even more complex, time and space are no longer limiting factors for “awaken consciousness.”

If you believe in the Bible’s accounts of Jesus and the resurrection, then He reappeared from another dimension and another time frame. If you read the Autobiography of a Yogi by Paramahansa Yogananda you will discover additional accounts of other “Higher Beings” like Mahavatar Babji who have been manifesting for one thousand years and periodically seen by devotees on this physical plane. Yogananda himself gives a very moving and vivid account of his guru Sri Yukteswar materializing in physical form a few months after his

“death” to reveal the secrets of life and death. This account can be found in Chapter 43 of his book.

So for our purposes, being “awake” has a much more profound meaning than just getting up in the morning after a night’s rest, drinking a cup of coffee, and getting started with your day’s activities. Awakening Consciousness is a profound journey to move beyond the limitations of body identification with the more limited definition of self that is defined by one’s thoughts, feelings, emotions, and physicality. It is realizing a more expanded state of self beyond the limited “ego” to a higher sense of self or the soul.

In my book, *Sacred Healing: Integrating Spirituality with Psychotherapy*,” I attempt to define what we mean by the term ego.

“The word *ego* is subject to great confusion and is used widely and loosely in both psychological and spiritual circles. For clarity's sake, two sets of characters will represent two different meanings of this word herein. The letters *psy* follows the term *ego* when it’s meaning is within the psychological realm. The letters *sp* follows the term *ego* when it is used in its spiritual sense.

In the psychological context, the ego (*psy*) performs a very positive function for the self. The ego (*psy*) is a hypothetical construct for those functions of thinking, perceiving, organizing, and integrating. It is psychologically important to have a strong ego (*psy*) in order to function well in daily life. Those with a weak ego (*psy*) structure have difficulty with their own emotional life. They feel overwhelmed by their feelings; they are confused about their inner experience; and they have difficulty accurately perceiving outer reality without projecting their own unconscious material.

A strong ego (*psy*) allows one to confront the difficulties of life with confidence and have the strength and flexibility to be open to other people's thoughts and feelings without feeling threatened or overwhelmed. A strong ego (*psy*), in this context, allows one to be intimate and to merge psychologically with another person without the need to create conflict and anger as a way of defining one's sense of self. Knowing what one

feels and thinks is a great asset. Knowing how to communicate that information to another person is a great gift in any relationship. A strong ego (*psy*) results from integrating all parts of the psyche, the light and the dark, the masculine and the feminine, and the various aspects of the personality, such as the child, adult, and parent. A strong ego (*psy*) allows one to let go and explore new territory when one's consciousness begins to expand. If one has a very solid and well-integrated sense of self at a psychological level, then one can more easily allow for an inner shift of self-perception that includes a greater sense of one's own being.

This leads to the other meaning of ego (*sp*). From a spiritual perspective, ego (*sp*) is the aspect of self that experiences a separation from God. Ego-consciousness (*sp*) believes that "I" am in total control of "my" life, that "I" am the total creator of "my" existence. The inherent limitation of this notion is that it does not allow for the full, expansive understanding and experience of God-consciousness. This limited ego-identity (*sp*) creates a contracted and reduced field of awareness. For example, when a disciple asks his/her *guru* for cosmic consciousness, the *guru* may reply, "If I were to give it to you now, it would kill you. It would be like placing a million watts of electricity through a one-hundred-watt light bulb." This ego-obstacle (*sp*) occurs as long as consciousness is identified with the limited aspects of the self, which does not allow for the flow of higher vibrational energy.

Ego (*sp*) consciousness restricts the amount of higher energy that is able to flow through us. Every level of consciousness is like a sheath of energy that vibrates at different levels. If we identify only with a particular level of Being, we limit how much energy can flow through us. The physical experience of receiving an influx of Divine energy that is larger than we are able to handle can be painful or emotionally damaging. The process of transformation, however, through spiritual practices and disciplines, allows for a gradual change of consciousness as well as a strengthening and conditioning of the physical body, so that the entire Self or Being can conduct and resonate at higher energetic frequencies. Physical cells actually need to be purified in order to receive these higher vibrations.

Many years ago, I participated in a retreat for children with Joan Halifax, Edith

Sullwold, and Sun Bear, in Ojai, California. Half of the children present had terminal illnesses. On the first evening, I awoke around two o'clock in the morning, feeling a great pulsing of energy around me. My tent was located in the center of all these young participants. I opened to their energetic presence and realized that I was actually feeling the process of life and the development of the personal self that was emerging within these children. I realized then that one cannot transcend the ego (sp) until one has enough ego (psy) to transcend it. I realized that spiritual life develops and evolves in its own organic way, with its own developmental timing so to speak, and this process was literally breathing all around me.

This little story illustrates the relationship between the two forms of ego, for many individuals are not ready and able to carry out the profound and difficult work of spiritual development. They do not yet have the inner strength and personal integration that is required of one who is devoted to spiritual unfolding and of anyone who seeks to assist in the healing process on these levels. In fact, such an aspirant finds eventually that his/her ego (sp) must be burned, sacrificed, in the fire of purification. The little ego (sp) gradually dissolves as the greater Higher Self or soul awareness becomes revealed. Therefore, spiritual life is truly for the strong at heart and the dedicated, for only the courageous survive the supreme tests that are given to purify the heart, foster growth, and awaken the consciousness to the reality of cosmic forces.

In the process of spiritual growth or sacred healing, one does not actually "get rid of the ego." Rather, through spiritual practice we shift the identification of the self beyond the ego (sp) to the Soul. This is a process of transformation in which we transcend our attachment to and identity with the little ego (sp). Deep states of meditation provide the experiences in which one actually perceives, through subtle and intuitive levels of perception, the distinction between ego-consciousness and soul-consciousness. The ego (sp) tends to claim personal responsibility for an experience, since it is totally identified with thought, physicality, and emotion. On the other hand, the soul perceives itself as being a channel or instrument of the Divine, through which experience flows. To the soul, knowledge, information, wisdom, healing, and action are experienced as coming from something greater: the Infinite. Ultimately, all these

aspects of the Self are merely energies or levels of consciousness. The shift from ego-consciousness to soul-consciousness actually produces a change in vibration. Yogic meditation practices facilitate this change in consciousness because they provide a relatively precise means of quieting the mind, withdrawing the life-force energy, and shifting the identification of consciousness away from the outer senses of perception to the deep, inner reality of soul awareness.

Many years ago I had a very interesting experience in meditation, in which I was given the perception of my ego (sp) as an energy sheath. I thought that perhaps I could pry that energy body away from me and then be free of my ego (sp). I imagined that I had a crowbar and began to pry at this energy body. Immediately I felt a great pain in my physical body and realized that the ego (sp) could not just be scrapped. Thereafter, I developed a much greater appreciation and acceptance for the process of transformation of energy as a major aspect of spiritual transformation.”

I hope this brief discussion of the term “ego” helps to clarify our purpose. A higher level of consciousness in which we are “awake” accesses powerful subtle vibrations that will change our perception of reality, our relationship to our physicality, our relationships with others, our sense of identity, and our ability to influence our lives. The information in this educational community will give you greater understanding about the techniques to awaken and help you become more conscious in every aspect of your life. In future articles, we will discuss in more detail how to achieve higher states of awareness and how they impact every aspect of your life.

Please email me with questions and I will post new articles in response.

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