

THE WORLD PLATFORM



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Awareness and Spiritual Growth

Awareness

From a biological perspective, awareness evolved as a survival mechanism. Every second, our senses receive an enormous amount of information from both our environment and our own body. Because the brain cannot consciously process everything at once, it continuously filters, organizes and prioritizes incoming information.

In the fields of philosophy and psychology, awareness is **the knowledge or perception of something**. As such, it is the ability to perceive, understand and respond both generally to our surroundings and specifically to individual stimuli, whether it is a physical sensation or an idea.

How Awareness works

 Specialized **sensory systems** constantly **send signals to our brain** that originate from vision, hearing, touch, smell, taste, balance and internal bodily signals such as heartbeat, breathing and hunger.

 **Attention** acts like a spotlight. Although millions of bits of information reach the brain every second, only a small fraction enters conscious awareness. Networks in the brain continually decide what deserves priority based on

factors such as novelty, emotion, personal goals and potential danger.



Different regions of the brain process different aspects of this experience. Our visual cortex processes what we see, our auditory cortex processes sounds, while a region called the insula monitors internal bodily sensations. Our amygdala rapidly evaluates emotional significance, our hippocampus relates new experiences to memory and our prefrontal cortex helps us interpret experiences, regulate emotions and make conscious decisions. Awareness emerges from the integration of these different processes into a coherent experience.

Without awareness, we simply react to life.

Self-awareness

Humans possess an additional ability called **metacognition**, the capacity to become aware of our own thoughts and feelings.

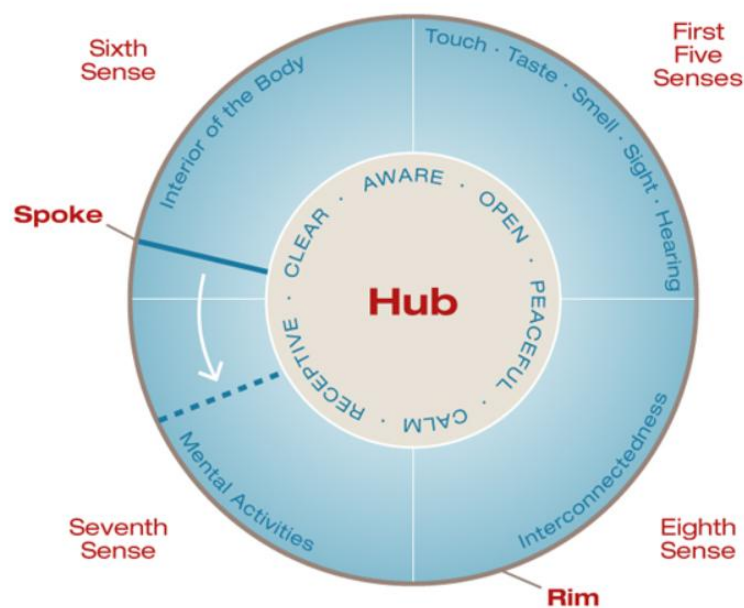
Instead of simply thinking 'I'm angry', we can recognize 'I'm noticing that I'm feeling angry'. This creates a small but important space between the experience and our response and that space allows us to choose a conscious response rather than to react automatically.

From a neuroscientific perspective, awareness emerges from the integration of many brain processes into a coherent experience. In contemplative traditions, however, awareness is often described as the constant background in which experiences

arise. While these perspectives differ in how they explain awareness, both recognize their central role in shaping how we experience life.

Understanding awareness conceptually is one thing; learning to cultivate it in daily life is another. **The Wheel of Awareness**, developed by psychiatrist Dr. Dan Siegel, offers a practical way to explore these ideas through direct experience.

The Wheel of Awareness



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Source

<https://drdansiegel.com/wheel-of-awareness/>

The Wheel of Awareness is a mindfulness practice that helps integrate different aspects of our inner and outer experience. By strengthening awareness, it promotes emotional balance, clarity and well-being.

Dan Siegel expands our traditional 5 senses into 8 domains of awareness. Each represents a different category of experience that we can bring into conscious attention.

The First 5 Senses: The Outside World

These are the senses we are all familiar with:

1. **Sight** – what we see.
2. **Hearing** – the sounds around us.
3. **Smell** – scents in our environment.
4. **Taste** – the flavors we experience.
5. **Touch** – physical contact, temperature and texture.

These senses provide **information** about the world **outside our body**.

The 6th Sense: The Interior of the Body

The 6th sense refers to interoception, our awareness of what is happening inside the body.

Examples include noticing our heartbeat, our breathing, muscle tension, butterflies in our stomach, hunger or thirst, warmth or cold and pain or comfort.

This sense is essential for **emotional awareness** because emotions are closely linked to bodily sensations.

The 7th Sense: Mental Activities

This refers to everything happening **within the mind**.

It includes thoughts, emotions, memories, beliefs, images, expectations, judgments and intentions.

Rather than becoming absorbed in these experiences, the Wheel of Awareness encourages us simply to **observe** them as they arise and pass.

The 8th Sense: Interconnectedness

This is the most distinctive aspect of Siegel's model.

The 8th sense is our awareness of being connected with something larger than ourselves.

This may include experiencing empathy with another person, a sense of belonging, connection with nature, compassion, community and humanity as a whole.

Some people also experience this as a spiritual connection or **a sense of unity with life itself**. Siegel intentionally leaves this open to personal interpretation, allowing people to understand interconnectedness in psychological, social or spiritual terms.

The Core Principles

The Wheel of Awareness is a visual and practical metaphor for consciousness. It consists of a **hub**, representing awareness itself and a **rim**, which contains all the points of experience, including thoughts, emotions, sensations and relationships. A **spoke of attention** connects the hub to the rim, allowing people to focus on specific aspects of their experience while remaining grounded in awareness. The Wheel helps us observe our experiences more clearly, creating greater integration between our thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations and relationships.

The practice involves moving our attention around the rim, observing different experiences with curiosity rather than judgment, while remaining anchored in the hub of awareness. We can then turn our attention back to the hub itself, recognizing that awareness remains constant even as our experiences change. This shift often cultivates greater calm, compassion and a deeper sense of connection with ourselves and others.

How the Wheel works

The spoke of attention can move freely around the rim.

At one moment, we may focus on a sound (hearing), then on tension in our shoulders (interior of the body), then on an anxious thought (mental activities) and finally on a feeling of connection with another person (interconnectedness).

Throughout this process, we remain anchored in the hub, the stable place of awareness from which all these experiences can be observed.

A practical example:

Receiving Critical Feedback

Imagine your Manager says: "I think your report needs a lot more work".

Rim: What we experience

Immediately, we notice our stomach tightens, our heartbeat quickens and our face begins to flush. Thoughts arise such as 'I failed', 'I'm not good enough' or 'Why is he always criticizing me?'. We are embarrassed, frustrated and afraid. We feel the urge to defend ourselves, become quiet or leave the room. Most of us become caught up in these reactions.

Hub: Awareness

Using the Wheel of Awareness, we pause instead of reacting immediately. We notice what is happening without trying to change it: 'My heart is racing', 'I'm feeling anxious', 'I'm having the thought that I'm not good enough'. Notice the subtle difference. Instead of being overwhelmed by the experience, we observe it.

Back to the Rím

From that place of awareness, we can now choose a more thoughtful, conscious response, such as: "Thank you for the feedback. Could you show me which parts need improvement?".

Nothing external has changed; only our relationship to the experience has.

Rather than eliminating difficult thoughts and emotions, it allows us to observe them without becoming controlled by them. As we become less identified with our thoughts and emotions and more grounded in awareness itself, we create the conditions for deeper spiritual growth.

Using Awareness for Spiritual Growth

Every time we choose awareness over automatic reaction, we strengthen our capacity for conscious living. Over time, these small moments accumulate, supporting a gradual process of personal and spiritual development.

The **4 stages** of Spiritual Growth:

1. **To Us** - Life Happens to Me

This is where we feel that life is happening to us. Experience feels external and often unpredictable. We strongly identify with circumstances and emotions and often ask "why?", driven by a **victim mindset**.

2. **By us** - I Shape My Life

We start shaping our life with a growing sense of responsibility and control. We recognize that our thoughts, choices and actions matter. There is a strong focus on goals, identity and self-development. We become conscious of personal power and use discipline and intentional action. Our **Ego** organizes and builds.

3. **Through us** - Life Flows through Me

Now life flows through us. We use less force and experience more alignment. Increased trust, intuition and openness allow creativity, insight and meaning to emerge more naturally. This is the stage of **Flow states**, reduced Ego control and a sense of being guided.

4. **As us** - I Am One with Life

In this stage there is no separation. The boundary between the self and life dissolves. Identity shifts from 'individual' to 'awareness' and we experience a deep sense of unity and interconnectedness. This is called **non-dual awareness** and it is accompanied by a profound peace and clarity, natural compassion and presence. This is **One Consciousness**.

How do We move from One Stage to the Next?



From Stage 1 (To us) to Stage 2 (By us): this is the transition from reaction to responsibility. We need to **become aware** that our choices influence outcomes, so we need to **take ownership**. This includes identifying patterns, taking intentional actions and building self-regulation.



From Stage 2 (By us) to Stage 3 (Through us): this is the transition from control to **alignment**. It is often the hardest one, because it implies letting go and trusting. If we succeed in doing so, we begin to see that not everything can (or should) be forced and that effort alone does not create meaning or flow. We allow things to emerge by engaging in activities that **create Flow** such as being creative, connecting with nature, practicing deep focus (mindfulness) and listening to our intuition.



From Stage 3 (Through us) to Stage 4 (As us): this is the transition from alignment to unity. It is not something we *do* in the traditional sense. We create deep awareness and our identity dissolves (e.g. through meditation). Our awareness is constant and as a result everything else around us moves naturally. There is no more separation between us and the world around us. We experience **total unity**.

Key Takeaway

Awareness is the foundation of spiritual growth. By learning to observe our thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations and relationships without becoming identified with them, we create the freedom to choose our responses consciously. Each moment of awareness strengthens our ability to move from reacting to life, to shaping it, flowing with it and ultimately experiencing our interconnectedness with all life.



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