

COMMON DREAMS

BRISBANE

SEPTEMBER 2016

CONFERENCE PAPER



Jan Lawton

ELECTIVE-PRESENTATION

*To Whom It May Concern: Prayer Beyond
Theism*

Ian Lawton

To Whom It May Concern; Prayer Beyond Theism

This workshop is about nothing less than a realization of oneness. You are already whole, but after a lifetime of building layers of protection, and after many years of being told you are unworthy, your memory is hazy. This is a reminder that so many of the things you seek outside of yourself actually reside within. Letting go of the baggage of our religious past and finding the freedom “to be” takes enormous self-awareness.

Awareness brings peace of mind, and adds quality and depth to life. It improves your intuitive decision making skills, and decreases your anxiety. Awareness also transforms habits that may or may not be serving you.

Prayer beyond theism is a practice in self-awareness. We have so many voices inside our heads all wanting to be heard. The challenge is in knowing how to handle them; listening to them all without letting any of them run the show.

Don't Believe Everything You Think

Watch your thoughts. They have a mind of their own, and don't always tell the truth. Sometimes they become words without warning. Once words (or actions) they become part of your destiny. So tend to your thoughts with care. The only way you can align your thoughts with your hopes and values is through awareness. Thoughts are to awareness, as the sunflower is to the sun. One shines, the other follows.

Awareness reminds you that you HAVE thoughts and feelings, but they don't define you. There is an inner witness to these thoughts and feelings, and realizing this distinction is transformative. As you align your inner awareness with your thoughts,

words and actions, you manifest your highest aspirations in the world.

Big Mind is a voice dialogue exercise combining the best of western psychology and Zen meditation. We learn to engage with both dualistic and non-dualistic voices. Dualistic voices are changeable, often fleeting aspects such as joy and sorrow, anger, control and fear. They are all seeking some completion or wholeness from the outside. The non-dualistic voices are pure acceptance with nothing to seek or prove. The ultimate is Big Mind/Big Heart.

I mean “big” in the Sanskrit sense of the word “maha” which is also translated “great”. It indicates something spacious, beyond size. We tend to think that sky or space is the biggest thing. But a Zen teacher once said,

This whole universe covers my body, yet my mind can cover the whole universe.

When you “think” of the whole universe, you have drenched your mind in it. Your mind is spacious enough to include whatever you can conceive of. This includes things that are much larger than logic; like love, forgiveness and generosity.

Tapping into Big Mind/ Big Heart is about accessing grace for yourself and others; God within by any name. Open the communication lines with Big Mind/Big Heart and you have instant access to so much wisdom and compassion that praying TO God fades into insignificance in comparison.

In the workshop we practice this form of self-awareness in a way that you can do any time, either on your own or in groups. We start by dialoguing with the louder voices (usually the dualistic voices) hearing their wisdom but also exploring their

shadows. We move towards an experience of Big Mind/Big Heart, resting in silent contemplation of the infinite within.

We often discover our truest selves and most authentic voices through trial and error, and this usually involves a great deal of pain. The Big Mind/Big Heart exercise creates a safe place to practice this self-discovery. It shines a light on the inner bully voices such as fear and judgment, nurtures a healthy expression of all facets of being human and ultimately reveals even just a glimpse of the Self that holds it all together with love and acceptance.

Awareness goes by many names; inner wisdom, stillness, serenity, God within, Big Mind....and YOUR name. You have the presence of mind to have thoughts and emotions without being had by them, to work with them rather than against them, and to get them working for a greater good.

Big Mind/Big Heart holds all possibilities without attaching to any of them.

Here are just some of the practical implications of Big Mind/Big Heart awareness:

Awareness and Growth (Everything That Happens Outside Has An Inside Back Story)

Carl Jung said, "Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding about ourselves." We see things on the outside according to the way we see things on the inside. We get impatient with others because we are impatient with ourselves. The old break-up excuse is basically true, "It's not you, it's me!"

This realization can only come with the most brutally honest self-awareness. Like a private detective, sleuth out what's really going on. Shine a light of awareness on every irritation, fear, fury and frustration and you will find something unresolved

within. This is awareness's hardest work, but it's worth the effort, because the growth that comes with it is ginormous.

Awareness is to personal growth as the Hubble Telescope is to space exploration. We zoom in and see the spaciousness of our inner life. We go deeper in order to see clearer what's right in front of us. Awareness is seeing life from a depth of 30,000 feet, where vision and purpose are born.

Awareness and Action (Awareness is the first step to change)

"Awareness is the greatest agent for change."
Eckhart Tolle

There are two fish swimming together. They meet another fish heading the other way, who nods at them and says "Morning, boys. How's the water?" The two fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and says, "What on earth is water?"

Most of the time we are like the fish. We are swimming in a sea of possibility, but it's too close for us to see it for what it is. Awareness brings us closer to the realization that everything we need we already have.

Without awareness, we flounder and drift through life. With awareness, we gain clarity and direction. Awareness is the first step to change because it's the wakeup call that there's a problem. Change without awareness leads you to aim for the wrong targets, fight the wrong battles, attack the wrong enemy and make rash and inauthentic decisions. Action and passion are exciting. But to act passionately, out of a deep awareness of why certain causes give you goose bumps and why change is essential, is true mastery. With self-awareness, you learn to see your own part in the problem, where you can make a difference and why you want to be involved. With self-awareness, you

learn to see the possibilities and pitfalls of swimming in the ocean of life.

Awareness and Compassion (Awareness is the heart of love)

A young girl is badgering her father who is trying to read the paper. He becomes so exasperated that, in a fit of desperation, he tears a picture of a map of the world out of the paper, cuts it up in pieces and sets the girl the challenge of putting it back together again. Much to his surprise she comes back to him quickly with the map all in place. The father asks her how she put it together so quickly. At this point the girl turns the paper over and shows that the other side has a picture of a man on it. **“I put the man together,”** she said, **“and the world came out all right.”**

The work of awareness is to put yourself back together. When you do that, you inevitably come to realize that there is no separation between you and all other living beings. This is the heart of compassion. Thomas Merton said,

“The whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all these living beings, which are all part of one another, and all involved in one another.”

Be the change! The more you put yourself right, the more the world will come out right. This is the inner work of change. We need outer actions too. But it begins with the inner work.

Awareness and Intuition (Awareness Taps Genius)

Emerson said, “What lies behind you and what lies in front of you pales in comparison to what lies inside of you.”

This is amazing, and liberating. What lies behind you is given meaning (healed, forgiven, transformed, built on) by what lies inside of you

(awareness). What lies in front of you is shaped (pre-sensed, imagined, planned) by what lies inside of you (awareness). Either way, your life manifests from the inside out.

This sort of inside out knowledge is the source of genius. The world’s greatest ever hockey player, Wayne Gretsky, once said, “I skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it has been or where it is.” How did he know? Like a great chess player, he amazingly saw 3 or 4 moves ahead to what was emerging in his field of awareness. This sort of knowledge is non rational. It’s not irrational. I’m sure there are some patterns and signs he could describe. But it’s more than rational, because he “saw” the situation as a whole and knew what to do and where to go from the inside out. He had intuitive awareness of the whole situation.

Awareness brings you to the cusp of your own genius, and leads you to be all you can be.

Awareness and Inner Peace (Build Your Still Power)

Inner peace is often realized in mystery and surprise. It isn't always predictable. It doesn't depend on circumstance. You can't find it or locate it. It's more than physical. Maybe a better question is, "Who is it that's noticing the experience? Where is the awareness of inner peace?"

When circumstances, or thoughts and confusing emotions, are threatening to derail you, awareness brings you back to your inner still power. You remember that you don’t have to chase thoughts, you don’t have to pander to emotions and you don’t have to attach your identity to circumstances. Awareness is an amazing tool to return to inner peace, and take the paralysis out of challenges.

One winter day, a man discovered a thick layer of frost on his window. He started painstakingly scraping it off.

"What are you doing?" inquired a curious neighbour.

"Removing the frost from my window," answered the man, "so I can see outside."

His friend suggested, "Light a fire in your home -- the frost will disappear by itself!" ~ **Pesach and Chana Burston**

Awareness and Identity (Who is the One Who Wonders Who You Are)

Who are you? It's a strange question to answer. Usually we think of something we do, something we did, or a way we like to be seen. Alan Watts said, "Trying to define yourself is like trying to bite your own teeth."

In your truest moments, you don't need to define yourself. Beyond the roles and labels and names, which are often ancient beliefs from the past, or expectations from society or the ego clawing for some fixed sense of importance, you know that you are more than any of the things you do, say or think. You are always evolving and growing, and open to experiencing each moment. You can't so much talk ABOUT yourself, you can only BE yourself. This is the crucial distinction between a belief (or an idea) and an experience. A belief is an idea that so easily takes us out of the present moment because it's talking about an experience. An experience of awareness is always IN the moment.

Life is about experiencing yourself in relationship to all else, beyond the labels and judgments.

Awareness Asks Why

Awareness is powerful. Awareness helps you to see both the strengths and weaknesses in yourself and in systems. Awareness reminds you of what makes you happy, what makes your blood boil and what

gets you out of bed in the morning. Awareness enables you to see the dysfunction in a system, the inequalities and injustices both small and large. In terms of change, wisdom is knowing what to do next, awareness is knowing why it's important, skill is knowing how to do it, and integrity is following through and actually doing it.

Why is a powerful question. Why creates a frame for all your whats, whens, wheres, whos and hows. Think about the power of why.

If your why is clear, you WILL find a way. ALWAYS

If your why excites you, you WILL find a how. ALWAYS

If your why is clear AND excites you, you will solve any what, trust every when, meet all the right whos, find all the right wheres, and overcome any challenging how.

And if you feel like you've been clear about your WHYS, and the whats and wherefores have not gone your way, this itself is likely taking you to a deeper WHY.

Kids understand this well- why, but why, but why, but why..... Kids understand something that we easily forget as adults. The power of why.

Why can be used for good or ill. When its used for good, its directed forward. When its used for ill, its directed backwards. An insatiable why that is directed backwards wants answers to questions that only lead to suffering- like why me? Why then? Why did he do that to me? These whys lead to anxiety. A persistent why that is directed forwards seeks answers to questions that open up new questions- like why do I feel this? Why am I feeling this NOW? Why is this important? And why do I care? These whys lead to clarity which gives you peace of mind.

The power of whys is that they make you wise with awareness. They take you close to the essence of WHO you are, maybe even to the source of life itself. (read on for more about the power of awareness)

Practicing Awareness (Diving Deeper Into An Experience of Awareness)

When you touch base with awareness, the part of you that sees everything as it arises without judging it, naming it or putting it in a box, you are pulling back the layers to allow greater peace. All it requires is a shift in your mindset. Instead of seeking inner peace, notice the moments that hit the spot. Feel them deeply and notice that there is part of you that notices. This is the essence of who you are, and it has nothing to prove or fear. Inner peace hits the spot when you let your peaceful awareness wash over you.

The Big Mind/Big Heart exercise is a deep dive into self-awareness. Practices help you to return to the wisdom that you have a body, but you are not your body, you have thoughts, but you are not your thoughts. You can't search for awareness. It just is. So stop striving, and let it be.

Pamela Theresa Loertscher said, "Know thyself and all will be revealed."