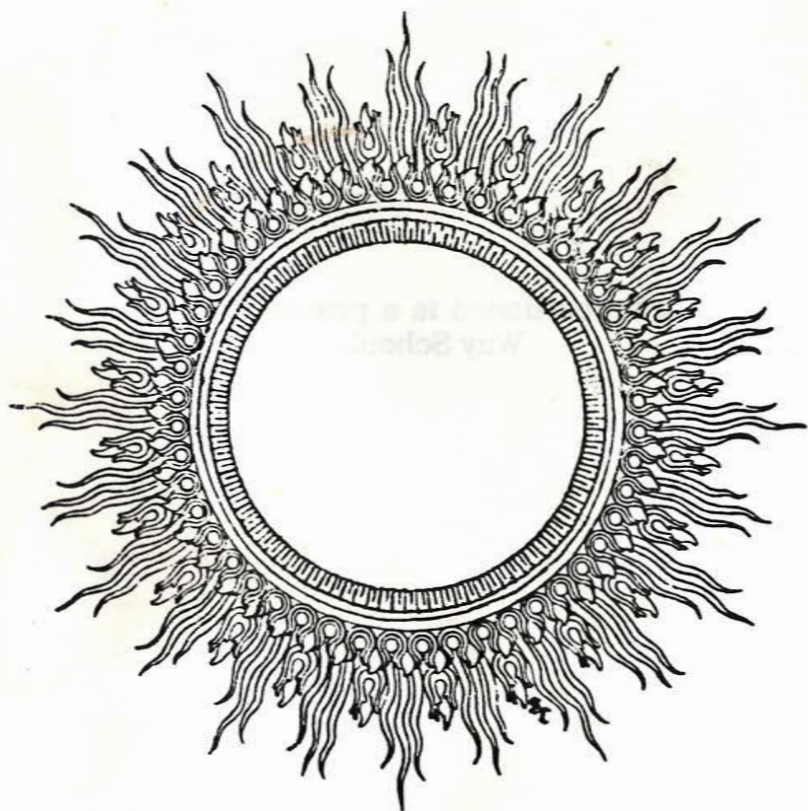


ATTENTION,
AWARENESS,
&
CONSCIOUSNESS



BEING PROPORTIONED

ATTENTION, AWARENESS, AND CONSCIOUSNESS

If you want to change yourself using this system, very soon after starting your work you must begin to study yourself using the ideas and categories as taught in this group. It is necessary to verify the ideas. Take them beyond the realm of words, because if you only talk and think about the ideas, you won't produce any changes in yourself. Approach your self-study scientifically if you want results. Experiment and observe. Avoid hasty conclusions.

This system claims that there are different degrees of consciousness possible for a person, and that people live only in the lowest of these degrees. If you want to verify this idea, practice self-observation. Try to see how your degree of consciousness changes through the day.

Studying your attention is the key to seeing how conscious you are moment by moment, that is, to seeing different degrees of consciousness in yourself. "Consciousness" is a vague notion, but attention is much more specific and easier to observe and study. The different degrees of consciousness we can experience are closely related to the qualities of attention that we have. For example, when you are asleep at night (a low degree of consciousness), there is no attention. Other degrees of consciousness are characterized by other kinds of attention.

Observe different qualities of attention in yourself, either in the present moment or in your memory. These different qualities of attention have different inner sensations or "tastes" by which you can come to recognize them.

From the point of view of changing yourself, there are three qualities of attention that are of particular interest: absent (or distracted), attracted, and controlled. Each of these qualities can be more or less deep or intense, but each one has a different "taste". Absent attention happens when you are unaware of what you are doing or what is happening around you.

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In attracted attention, you are aware of "something" (whether inside or outside of you) because it holds your attention. With controlled attention, you are aware of "something" because you are intentionally holding your attention on it. For example:

You walk into the kitchen to fix something to eat, and spend the first few minutes poking around in the fridge to see what's there. It takes a little while to discern what is appealing tonight. You select some ham, lettuce, carrots, and broccoli, and then get a potato from a cabinet. You start preparing the broccoli and potato for cooking, and as you wash and cut them, you find yourself mulling over something you heard at work that was a little unsettling; it causes you to imagine what might be happening at your job. Suddenly, you scrape your knuckles on the counter. You suck on the sorest one, then inspect it closely for bleeding while muttering "ow!" Then you shake it out. As you finish that, you look at the food you've been slicing, and think about what you need to do next to finish making dinner.....

In this tale, you can find samples of each kind of attention described above. The preparation of the vegetables leading up to the injured knuckles is perhaps the best example of absent attention. Lack of attention to the task at hand probably caused the incident. Scraping your knuckles snatched your attention away from the imagination about your job: this is an example of attracted attention. Later, when you studied what was needed to finish dinner, attention was purposely held on the task at hand. This is controlled attention.

Although the quality of your attention varied dramatically during this hypothetical kitchen drama, ordinarily you would still say that you were "conscious" during the whole thing. This system of ideas disagrees; it considers a third idea to be crucial in describing consciousness: awareness. Awareness links the qualities of attention to the idea of consciousness; a person's awareness explains the relation between kind of attention and degree of consciousness.

Think about the kitchen-task example from another point of view; although the quality of attention varied widely, the range of your awareness didn't change as much. During your time in the kitchen, the intensity of your awareness changed (especially when you hurt your knuckles), but the range or field of your awareness scarcely extended beyond one thing at a time. That is, first you looked at food, then you worked on food, then you imagined about work, then you hurt your hand, and so on.

This characterizes being in the lower degrees of consciousness: a person is aware of only one thing at a time. Of the myriad of possible subjects of attention in each moment, a person in our ordinary degree of consciousness is aware of only one. Other things either pass without notice or draw attention to themselves and away from the previous subject. In this way, the concern of each moment seems to be the whole world - moment after moment after moment.

This is the basis for our distinction between awareness and consciousness. A more conscious person is one who is aware of more than one thing at a time, often something inside and something outside simultaneously. Another way to describe a more conscious person is to say that such a person is simultaneously aware of the part, the whole, and the part's relation to the whole. Such expanded awareness characterizes higher degrees of consciousness.

By comparing this description of "consciousness" to our ordinary state of awareness, you might see a way to try to improve your state. How? By trying to be aware of more than one thing at a time. When you try to do this, you'll find that absent or attracted attention won't work - controlled attention is necessary. Not only that, but you'll find that attention is hard to control continuously, and gets harder to control the harder you try.

It is helpful to change your attention artificially. This artificial change starts with an exercise called

"divided attention". In this exercise, you attempt to maintain simultaneous awareness of more than one thing at a time. Many combinations of "things" are possible; for example, music and cutting your vegetables, selecting your food for dinner and your breathing, or perhaps even two different lines of thought. To start with, try to be aware of your sensations (the inside) and something such as sounds, a small task, or music (the outside). Be creative. Another useful place to start is with awareness of your breath, but don't try to regulate or change it.

Use divided attention to study yourself. It will show you yourself in your surroundings; it can help you see the relationship (or lack of it) between the world and your inner states. Also, dividing your attention creates a higher degree of consciousness by making you intentionally aware of more of the world around and inside you, all at the same time. Higher degrees of consciousness will not come by themselves; you must work to make them come, and this is one way to do it.

T.E.C.

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Question - How to see the difference between quality of attention and range of attention?

Teacher - Words can be so slippery. What I mean by saying "quality" is to relate it to the quality of will-effort that you make inside, and a little bit more.

A detail I didn't include in the paper is that in our ordinary state, attention is absent from one place because it is attracted to another. Quality of attention means either you control it or it controls you. Different ranges of awareness are impossible unless you control it. If you don't control your attention, then you will be aware of only one thing at a time.

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Question - I want to know how divided attention relates to the idea that "when you sit, just sit" that you find in literature about eastern mysticism. I see

people with their cellular phones in their cars, and they seem to be dividing attention, but they drive badly. It seems contradictory to me.

Teacher - Those people aren't dividing attention; their attention is being attracted from phone to car and back, so they don't do either very well.

Dividing attention does complicate things and make them more difficult. It's superficially contradictory. Try to think about what is better. For our purposes, better might not be more efficient. Our method involves expanding the range of awareness, and at first your awareness will be rather shallow. Later, your efforts will intensify and deepen your awareness of the expanded range.

G.F. - You're trying to get a process going, and it involves awakening your driver, which is in the intentional part of the intellect. Divided attention develops the intentional parts of functions.

Try the "watch exercise" in the "Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution". Take a watch with a sweep second hand, sit down, and look at the watch while being aware of yourself looking at the watch. Keep thoughts and imagination from interfering, and try to do it for three minutes.

R.S. - Is it so simple that you can just sit and be blank except for that? An infinity of things are going on. In Walt Whitman's poetry, a wider awareness is displayed. When he walks through the woods, he is aware of the woods and the world beyond. Someone else may be aware only of the fight he had with his wife earlier, or her concern about her job.

A.R. - This is the third time I've heard this question - I've asked it, too. The contradiction between "remembering yourself" and "forgetting yourself" is in the mechanical intellect. We're programmed in school to "compare and contrast", which sets us up to pigeonhole things.

When we don't divide attention, we pay the price later. For example, at work, if I get absorbed and intense on a project, I lose energy; it's exhausting.

Divided attention is simultaneous, not consecutive.
Experiment - try to keep two thoughts in mind at once.

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Question - How can habits of observation that we are accustomed to use for external objects also be depended upon for observing such a subjective thing as attention? If it is normal to observe by looking, how do you observe attention, which you can't see?

Teacher - What you can know and how you know it is a philosophical question. For a practical approach, you must find what you can trust inside yourself. Find little units of measurement inside, such as what you're aware of, whether you like this, whether you dislike that, and so on.

On another scale: the only outside objects that reliably can help you to see your level of attention are your fellow students. They are your reminding factors.

J.C. - From one point of view, what can be depended on is our response to objects. What will respond in us are our features or weaknesses. My response to having a tape recorder here tonight has been a change in my attention. Others may be able to see their own features in their responses to this external object.

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Question - I've observed that remorse of conscience occurs in the part of the emotions that uses attracted attention. What psychological shift and attendant change of attention is necessary to clean conscience?

Teacher - There are two aspects to this kind of work. First, the feeling of remorse tends to stimulate lower emotions. Watch for any trace of sentimentality. It takes a lot of study to be able to do this, but it isn't complex - you can recognize it. Don't allow your feelings to descend into guilt or self-judgment. Second, take the feeling higher by connecting it with your aim - and with the feeling of common sense. Don't live in the "La Brea Tar Pits" of remorse.

Ask yourself if there's something you can do that in some way can affect the situation - to reconcile it - and if you feel such a thing, it has to become your temporary aim. Then you must connect this temporary aim to your permanent aim for evolution. This can raise it.

J.O. - It seems that the moments exist and the energy exists for us to feel conscience, but it is necessary to look at the things we do instead of feeling conscience. The mechanical intellect will think about it, comment on it, and discuss it, both internally and externally, but the effort must be made to switch to feeling about it.

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Question - I notice I spend a lot of time imagining what the future will bring or what the past was or was not. I wonder how to study myself scientifically and apply the ideas of the system to myself at the appropriate level for where I am. How to work at a practical level?

J.W. - To engage a function that is in imagination, engage it in some intentional act.

J.C. - One aim of science is to come to facts based on the observations that are made. So when you observe yourself, you want to come to some definite conclusion as to what you're observing. Another thing I gather about science is that the thing observed and the thing observing can't be the same thing. You must try to separate yourself from the thing you're observing, and if that's you, then you've got to separate you from you.

J.D. - Another aspect of science is finding the relationships between the facts. It is through shocks that one finds these relationships.

Teacher - Another aspect of science is verification of work that has been done before. We have a map of knowledge prepared by many people who have gone this way before. Knowledge by itself is useless for our purposes. You are trying to accumulate enough

information to see patterns - to see if the patterns described by our maps actually exist.

The mechanical part of the intellect thinks you've got to sit down with pen and ink, in a particular spot, with a block of time, in order to think something through. This isn't necessarily so.

Control your attention as often as you can think of it, and try to remember what you see when you do this. Also try to keep a theme in mind for a period of time, whether a day, week, or month. Try to relate all your observations to this theme, especially the observations that seem unrelated. This helps because we can't control which observations we make, so we have to use the observations we actually do make.

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Question - How can I verify ideas without either believing or being skeptical?

Teacher - There is a trick to it: you don't want to blindly accept things you haven't verified, but you do have to suspend your disbelief long enough to study an idea. For me, it is most important to be sure of what I do and do not understand. If I don't understand it, but I think it's so, then I believe it. I can't avoid believing, but I can and must tell the difference between what I believe and what I understand.

J.C. - There's also an element of when. Sometimes we understand something and later deny it. Relatively real faith means not going back on something you've already verified.

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Question - How can I develop the exercise of divided attention?

Teacher - Through developing frequency, duration, and depth. Frequency is clear: do it more often. Duration: do it longer. Depth is where the gold mine is.

Vary the exercise. Place attention on your foot, or a toe, or a finger, for example, to develop the instinctive element. Place some attention on your moving function. Try to watch your intellectual imagination without getting absorbed in it. And try to figure out what you're feeling - right now.

Change scales. Divide attention to one of your organs. Or to a point three feet behind you.

A.Z. - Try not to assume that you know what dividing attention is; that you just have to do it. I find I need to know the exercise again for the first time.

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Question - How can I keep my level of attention more stable throughout the day, so that it doesn't become so erratic?

Teacher - I don't know of a direct way to do this. Being varies. Try to make use of the energy and controlled attention that you're blessed with when you're blessed with it. In an organic manner, something can grow from this. Being can become more consistent with time.

J.O. - Hold on to your energy; don't give more to life than is asked for. Don't volunteer and add on things that may come from your own mechanical tendencies. It wastes your energy.

J.W. - Try to stop expressing negative emotions; it saps your energy. For example, when you tap your fingers in impatience or irritation, you express negativity through the moving function, which is a leak of energy and a distraction.

R.S. - One of the ideas of the work is to start by observing yourself without changing anything. This is a bit of a trick, because observing yourself does change things. It's hard to maintain attention on the mechanical parts of functions and remain in them.

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Question - It seems to me the act of self-observation inevitably changes that which I am trying to observe. Sometimes it seems that trying to observe my state of awareness causes it to stop and disappear. It's as though when the attention tries to turn and look at itself, it doesn't see anything. How does the practice of self-observation relate to this phenomenon and deal with it?

Teacher - In my experience of practicing different ways of observing myself in the moment, I've found something developing inside of me. It is that something which has the capacity to watch.

It's very important to get the mechanical part of the intellect to be quiet when you're trying to observe. It's got questions, ideas, observations, and associations for all occasions. It also tries to do the watching, but it can't.

J.C. - The fact is that we've got mice in the house and each time we turn the lights on, the mice scatter. This can be a pretty accurate metaphor for what occurs when we turn our attention to some of our I's. Well, most people know that you can't catch mice by turning the lights on. You've got to do more than that: you've got to set traps. In this work, you have to invent the mouse traps.

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Question - How to account for moments of awareness in the present moment regarding past events? That is, if you weren't aware of what was happening then, but you can see it now, how do account for that?

Teacher - This is a mystery, that memory seems to be only partly subject to time. But don't kid yourself: if you weren't exerting effort to be aware in that moment, then you weren't particularly present.

J.C. - We think that we are our intellects, but we have at least four other functions, all of which are much faster than the intellect. It may take the intellect a long time to catch up.

J.O. - Sometimes when you catch a shark and cut open its belly, all kinds of stuff pours out: little fish, tin cans, boots, hooks, and fishing line. It's undigested material. Digestion doesn't necessarily all take place at once; some things are harder to digest.

Glossary

conscience: The emotional realization of the truth about oneself.

features: Predictable patterns of feeling, acting, and reacting. Weaknesses.

identification: A state of attracted attention; also a fixed attitude.

i's: Each thought, sensation, or feeling is an i. Because each i believes it represents the whole, we say we are made of "many i's".

work i's: I's that are able to exert the effort to work on oneself.