

## THE BIG IDEAS

### Seeing Beauty

Everywhere.

### Prescribing Medicine

For your neighbor.

### Dancing to the Tune

That springs from within.

### True Selfishness

Is demanding others to...

### Driving

With the brakes on.

### This Too Shall Pass

Impermanence, anicca.

### Symphony of Life

Let it flow.

### It's Depressed

See "it."

### Coffins

Jump on in! :)

### Life Is for the Gambler

It really is.

### Perfect Love

Casts out all fear.

### Suffering

Shows us where to work.

### Flash of Light

Life is brief!

# Awareness

## The Perils and Opportunities of Reality

BY ANTHONY DE MELLO · IMAGE © 1990 · 184 PAGES

"There's nothing so delightful as being aware. Would you rather live in darkness? Would you rather act and not be aware of your words? Would you rather listen to people and not be aware of what you're hearing, or see things and not be aware of what you're looking at? The great Socrates said, 'The unaware life is not worth living.' That's a self-evident truth. Most people don't live aware lives. They live mechanical lives, mechanical thoughts—generally somebody else's—mechanical emotions, mechanical actions, mechanical reactions."

~ Anthony de Mello from *Awareness*

Anthony de Mello, a 20th century Jesuit priest passionate about inspiring us to see the world with a deeper sense of awareness, compassion and love, doesn't mince words in this great little book.

Awareness.

If we want to escape the stimulus-response conditioning of our society and begin to truly live, we've gotta build it. And this book is full of a bunch of Big Ideas on how to go about turning up our Awareness.

Let's jump right in. :)

## SEEING BEAUTY EVERYWHERE

"Why don't I see goodness and beauty everywhere? Because you cannot see outside of you what you fail to see inside."

As we've discussed throughout these Notes, how people see the world is such a \*fascinating\* look into how they see themselves.

I'm writing this while on sabbatical in Bali and it always blows me away how some people choose to focus on the trash that's often thrown to the side of the road and the stray dogs that cruise around (and any of the other possible blemishes that exist everywhere in the world) while others focus on the beautiful smiles of the people, the serenity of the island and all that good stuff. Same world, different focus.

As [Emerson](#) says: "People seem not to see that their opinion of the world is also a confession of character."

How about *you*?

Have you ever noticed that when you feel better about yourself and your life, the world just looks a tad bit brighter and the people are a lot friendlier!?

De Mello also says this: "Anytime you have a negative feeling toward anyone, you're living in an illusion. There's something seriously wrong with you. You're not seeing reality. Something inside of you has to change. But what do we generally do when we have a negative feeling? 'He is to blame, she is to blame. She's got to change.' No! The world's all right. The one who has to change is *you*."

*"We see people and things  
not as they are, but as  
we are."*

~ Anthony de Mello

*"You are the one who needs to change, who needs to take the medicine. You keep insisting, 'I feel good because the world is right.' Wrong! The world is right because you feel good. That's what all the mystics are saying."*

~ Anthony de Mello

Next time you find yourself focusing on the ugliness of the world and not being able to see the beauty, think about pausing for a moment and seeing if you can find a little more beauty INSIDE you... and then see if that translates to a different view of your world!

## PRESCRIBING MEDICINE FOR YOUR NEIGHBOR

"Imagine a patient who goes to a doctor and tells him what he is suffering from. The doctor says, 'Very well, I've understood your symptoms. Do you know what I will do? I will prescribe a medicine for your neighbor!' The patient replies, 'Thank you very much, Doctor, that makes me feel much better.' Isn't that absurd? But that's what we all do. The person who is asleep always thinks he'll feel better if somebody else changes. You're suffering because you are asleep, but you're thinking, 'How wonderful life would be if somebody else would change. How wonderful life would be if my neighbor changed, my wife changed, my boss changed.'

HAH!!!

Imagine THAT image the next time you're suffering and think someone other than you needs to change to remove the pain: A Doctor diagnosing you then prescribing medicine for your \*neighbor\*. :)

## DANCING TO THE TUNE THAT SPRINGS FROM WITHIN

"A nice definition of an awakened person: a person who no longer marches to the drums of society, a person who dances to the tune of the music that springs up from within."

Beautiful.

What music are *you* dancing to?

Society's music that tells us to attend *this* University, get *this* kinda job, get married, get a house in *that* suburb and have 2.1 kids all by *this* (!) age, and..., and..., and..., and..., (exhaustingly unending) and..., and..., and..., and..., and..., and..., and...!?

Ahem.

Or, are you dancing to "*the music that springs up from within*"?

Of course, our dance may appear very similar in either scenario. But what's the *source* of your rhythm? Is it a conditioned set of expectations or a heart-felt inner music?

Important to consider, eh?

This whole chat reminds me of a couple of Transcendentalists:

Henry David Thoreau tells us: "*If a man does not keep pace with his companion, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.*"

While his mentor Ralph Waldo Emerson ([see Notes](#)) reminds us: "*And truly it demands something godlike in him who cast off the common motives of humanity and ventured to trust himself for a taskmaster.*"

Let's turn our music up and get our grooves on, shall we? :)

## TRUE SELFISHNESS

"Part of waking up is that you live your life as you see fit. And understand: That is *not* selfish. The selfish thing is to demand that someone else live their life as *YOU* see fit. *That's* selfish. It is not selfish to live your life as you see fit. The selfishness lies in demanding that someone else live their life to suit your tastes, or your pride, or your profit, or your pleasure. That is truly selfish."

That's a really powerful distinction. To live your own life according to your own values, according

*"When you cling, life is destroyed; when you hold on to anything, you cease to live."*

~ Anthony de Mello

to de Mello, is NOT selfish.

To tell SOMEONE ELSE that \*they\* should live according to your values, however, IS selfish. I dig it. You?

## DRIVING WITH THE BRAKES ON

"You're much more energetic, much more alive. People think that if they had no cravings, they'd be like deadwood. But in fact they'd lose their tension. Get rid of your fear of failure, your tensions about succeeding, you will be yourself. Relaxed. You wouldn't be driving with your brakes on. That's what would happen."

What an awesome image.

Can you imagine driving your car with your brakes on ALL. The. Time?

(Quick help with the visualization: Don't forget the screeching sound as the brakes get worn down. And make sure you include that terrible brake dust smell! :)

Yikes.

Get rid of your fear of failure.

Gently release the brake pedal. Relax. Be yourself.

Ahhhh...

## THIS TOO SHALL PASS

"Everything passes, everything."

Ah, impermanence.

Everything passes.

Reminds me of Abraham Lincoln and my Vipassana meditation teacher, S.N. Goenka.

First, Goenka: One of the key ideas during my 10-day silent Vipassana meditation experience was the idea of *Anicca*—a Pali word that means "impermanence." Life is change and we suffer when we get stuck and don't allow the wheel of life to keep on spinning and doing its thing. In fact, the word for "suffering" in Buddhism is *dukkha*, which is the word they use to describe a potter's wheel that is no longer spinning smoothly. It's stuck a bit and screeching. *That's* suffering. ([See Notes](#) on *Big Mind Big Heart* for more mojo on that!)

Solution: Flow with life.

*Know* that everything passes, everything.

Now to Abraham Lincoln. He says: "*It is said an Eastern monarch once charged his wise men to invent him a sentence, to be ever in view, and which should be true and appropriate in all times and situations. They presented him the words: 'And this, too, shall pass away.' How much it expresses! How chastening in the hour of pride! How consoling in the depths of affliction!*"

Are you stuck a bit on something? Might it help to remember that this too shall pass?!?

## SYMPHONY OF LIFE

"As the great Confucius said, 'The one who would be in constant happiness must frequently change.' Flow. But we keep looking back, don't we? We cling to things in the past and cling to things in the present... Do you want to enjoy a symphony? Don't hold on to a few bars of the music. Don't hold on to a couple of notes. Let them pass, let them flow. The whole enjoyment of a symphony lies in your readiness to allow the notes to pass..."

*"The 'I' is never threatened;  
it's only the 'me' that  
is threatened."*

~ Anthony de Mello

*"I'm talking about self-  
observation. What's  
that? It means to watch  
everything in you and around  
you as far as possible  
and watch it as if it were  
happening to someone else."*

~ Anthony de Mello

*"Yet my experience is that  
it's precisely the ones who  
don't know what to do with  
this life who are all hot  
and bothered about what  
they are going to do with  
another life. One sign that  
you're awakened is that  
you don't give a damn about  
what's going to happen in  
the next life. You're not  
bothered about it; you  
don't care. You are not  
interested, period."*

~ Anthony de Mello

Wow. That's beautiful.

Change. It's a theme ALL the great teachers come back to you again and again and again. (Some things *don't* change. ;)

Makes me think of Marcus Aurelius' genius *Meditations* ([see Notes](#)) where he talks about change AND the symphony of life quite a bit as well. He says: "*O world, I am in tune with every note of thy great harmony. For me nothing is early, nothing late, if it be timely for thee. O Nature, all that thy seasons yield is fruit for me.*"

He also says: "*Time is a river, the resistless flow of all created things. One thing no sooner comes in sight than it is hurried past and another is borne along, only to be swept away in its turn.*"

So, what are *you* clinging to?

Don't hold on to a few bars of the music, my friend. Allow the notes to pass and let's enjoy this beautiful symphony!

## IT'S DEPRESSED

"Never identify with that feeling. It has nothing to do with the 'I.' Don't define your essential self in terms of that feeling. Don't say, 'I am depressed.' If you want to say, 'It is depressed,' that's all right. If you want to say that depression is there, that's fine; if you want to say gloominess is there, that's fine. But not: I am gloomy. You're defining yourself in terms of the feeling. That's your illusion; that's your mistake. There is a depression there right now, but let it be, leave it alone. It will pass. Everything passes, everything. Your depressions and your thrills have nothing to do with happiness. Those are swings of the pendulum. If you seek kicks or thrills, get ready for depression. Do you want your drug? Get ready for the hangover. One end of the pendulum swings over to the other."

I love that.

Feeling down?

Look at "It."

Say, "*It's a little down today.*"

YOU are NOT the depression. Observe it. See it as separate from your purest self.

And, let it pass. (Pretty, please. :)

## COFFINS

"The way to really live is to die. The passport to living is to imagine yourself in your grave. Imagine you're lying in your coffin.... Now look at your problems from that viewpoint. Changes everything, doesn't it?"

Powerful. And, more than a tad bit morbid but a theme echoed by many great teachers. (Quoted a few below.)

Imagine you're lying in your coffin. It's closed. And cold. You're underground. Dirt is being shoveled on top.

... You there?

... Now, from *that* scenic location, look at your current problems.

... Changes everything, eh?

... Now... LIVE!!!!

*"What leads to growth is painful experiences. Suffering points up an area in you where you have not yet grown, where you need to grow and be transformed and change. If you knew how to use that suffering, oh, how you would grow."*

~ Anthony de Mello

More de Mello death mojo: "You're not living until it doesn't matter a tinker's damn to you whether you live or die. At that point you live. When you're ready to lose your life, you live it."

And a couple friends:

Seneca ([see Notes](#) on *Letters from a Stoic*) says: "Rehearse death. To say this is to tell a person to rehearse his freedom. A person who has learned how to die has unlearned how to be a slave. He is above, or at any rate, beyond the reach of, all political powers."

More Seneca: "You want to live—but do you know how to live? You are scared of dying—and, tell me, is the kind of life you lead really any different from being dead?" And, "As it is with a play, so it is with life—what matters is not how long the acting lasts, but how good it is."

Carlos Castaneda ([see Notes](#) on *The Wheel of Time*): "Death is our eternal companion. It is always to our left, an arm's length behind us. Death is the only wise adviser that a warrior has. Whenever he feels that everything is going wrong and he's about to be annihilated, he can turn to his death and ask if that is so. His death will tell him that he is wrong, that nothing really matters outside its touch. His death will tell him, 'I haven't touched you yet.'"

## LIFE IS FOR THE GAMBLER

"Life is for the gambler, it really is."

This is, remember, a Jesuit PRIEST talking.

And if HE tells us life is for the gambler, well, then, I'm in! :)

Seriously, though. How are you playing small? How can you expand into your life?

Let's take a few more risks. It's a truism (that's true ;) but do you really think you're gonna be on your death bed and wish you took less risks?

As de Mello says: "Live dangerously, and when I say 'Live dangerously,' I mean live according to your own self, whatever the cost. Whatever is at stake, live according to your own consciousness, according to your own heart and feeling."

## PERFECT LOVE

"Perfect love casts out fear. Where there is love there are no demands, no expectations, no dependency. I do not demand that you make me happy; my happiness does not lie in you. If you were to leave me, I will not feel sorry for myself; I enjoy your company immensely, but I do not cling."

Sometimes I wince a bit when a celibate priest is telling me about love, but this is beautiful.

Leo Buscaglia ([see Notes](#) on his great, must-read book, *Love*) says this: "As soon as the love relationship does not lead me to me, as soon as I in a love relationship do not lead another person to himself, this love, even if it seems to be the most secure and ecstatic attachment I have ever experienced, is not true love. For real love is dedicated to continual becoming."

How's *your* love? Let's get rid of the fear and move toward perfect love...

## SUFFERING

"Do you want a sign that you're asleep? Here it is: you're suffering. Suffering is a sign that you're out of touch with the truth. Suffering is given to you that you might open your eyes to the truth, that you might understand that there's falsehood somewhere, just as physical pain is given to you so you will understand that there is disease or illness somewhere. Suffering occurs when you clash with reality. When your illusions clash with reality, when your falsehoods clash with truth, then you have suffering. Otherwise there is no suffering."

Brilliant.

In her great book, *Loving What Is* ([see Notes](#)), Byron Katie tells us that: “*The pain shows you what’s left to investigate.*”

Rumi ([see Notes](#)) tells us that: “*This discipline and rough treatment are a furnace to extract the silver from the dross. This testing purifies the gold by boiling the scum away.*”

Our suffering just points out where we have a little (or a lot! :) more work to do.

The trick is to be able to hold a high level of AWARENESS and SEE that rather than \*be\* the suffering.

So, are you currently suffering? Can you bring a little more awareness to the challenge, maybe shift your perspective and see the opportunity to grow a bit?

## FLASH OF LIGHT

“An Italian poet said, ‘We live in a flash of light; evening comes and it is night forever.’ It’s only a flash and we waste it. We waste it with our anxiety, our worries, our concerns, our burdens.”

Well that puts it in perspective, eh?

As Dan Millman says ([see Notes](#) on *Everyday Enlightenment*), “*Life is brief—a flash of lightning, a snap of eternity’s fingers.*”

Do you GET (I mean \*REALLY\* get!) just how brief life is??!

And do you really want to waste it on anxiety, worries and all that jazz? Schew. Didn’t think so. Me, either. :)

So, what would your highest self do in this moment?

Let’s string more of those together and enjoy this flash of light!

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## About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He’s spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at [heroic.us](http://heroic.us).