

Know Thy Self

Meditation One: Physical Perception

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In this meditation exercise, we will explore the nature of perception through our physical senses. We will identify the different aspects of awareness involved and examine the roles that each aspect plays in physical perception.

In order to effectively fulfill this task, there are certain environmental details that must be seen to first. Perform this meditation exercise in a room where you are assured privacy for the duration. Your room needs to be moderately lit – not too bright nor too dim – and contain at least one object for you to look at. The nature of this object does not matter. You must be able to sit or recline comfortably, without having to expend any energy to keep yourself upright. The ideal position for this meditation exercise is reclining, with your head slightly elevated above your chest, and your chest, slightly elevated above your abdomen. This can be achieved by lying on your back with a couple of pillows propped beneath your head and shoulders.

Since we will be working with all of the physical senses, you will also need to have readily available something to taste, something to smell and something to hear. It doesn't particularly matter what items you choose, so long as they can be sensed through taste, smell and hearing. In regard to sound, it would be best if you can work in a non-soundproofed room and thus rely on environmental sounds external to your room, but if this is not possible, I recommend a small bell or a piece of pottery or glass that you can make ring by gently tapping.

So, pause this recording and assemble everything you need.

Once everything is ready, make yourself as physically comfortable as you can and take a few moments to get settled.

(pause)

So, to begin . . .

Focus your eyes on the object you have chosen to observe visually.

(pause)

In the few moments you have been looking at your object, several things have transpired, all of which ***together*** have constitute your perception of this object. However, the ***only*** information your eyes have provided are the objective details of your object – all the rest of the information within your perception has come from other sources.

Look very intently at your object now and intentionally note each of its objective attributes. Note its size, its shape, its texture and its colors. These are the *objective* details that your eyes reveal to your intentional awareness.

(pause)

Now take notice of the emotional feelings and reactions that the objective details of your object evoke within you. How does its shape make you feel? Or each of its colors? Its size and texture?

(pause)

At first, these emotional responses involve you and you truly experience them, but now I want you to consider them *objectively*, without any direct involvement. Note them and accept them as *objective* facts. Focus your eyes on one specific aspect of your object at a time and objectively perceive your spontaneous emotional reaction to each one.

(pause)

And now, look at the object as a whole and objectively perceive your emotional reaction.

(pause)

These spontaneous emotional reactions to objective visual information arise from within the unintentional awareness and are rooted in your past experience with the same or similar objective details that are possessed by your object. This input from the unintentional awareness gives each objective detail personal *meaning*.

Take a few moments now to once again observe the objective details of your object and again perceive the emotional responses that arise. Try to trace these emotional responses back to the memories that founded them.

(pause)

Throughout the past few minutes of looking at your object and of perceiving your emotional responses to its features, you may have noticed an internal voice that provides a running verbal description of what you are perceiving. It voices your thoughts as they occur and gives names to everything you are perceiving and feeling. This voice also has its origin in the unintentional awareness and it is the means by which the unintentional awareness intellectually integrates your perception of the objective details with your emotional responses. It acts like a glue that holds the objective details and their emotional significance together in a way that you can comprehend.

When your attention is focused, the inner dialogue will naturally pertain in some way to your focal object. When your mind is unfocussed however, the inner voice becomes

mind chatter and it can then range over a broad spectrum of topics, ideas, feelings, etc., ultimately reflecting the contents of the unintentional awareness.

Once again, view the objective details of your object and this time, objectively note the contents of your inner dialogue.

(pause)

Now shift your attention to your emotional reactions and note the dialogue that accompanies them as well.

(pause)

Ordinarily, the inner dialogue and our emotional valuations provide information that we do not objectively evaluate or verify. In fact, we are most often oblivious of its existence as the major portion of perception!

Take a moment now to compare the objective information perceived by your eyes, with the subjective information provided by your emotional reactions and internal dialogue. How much, if at all, have your emotional reactions and inner dialogue distorted, informed or transformed your perception of objective details?

(pause)

What you have just accomplished is intentional-objective perception. You have intentionally perceived the objective details of your object and you have *objectively* perceived the subjectifying responses of your unintentional awareness to those objective details. Even though your perception included a great amount of subjective information from your unintentional awareness, you nonetheless perceived it with your intentional-objective awareness.

Your intentional-objective awareness is, of course, your essential Self.

Next, we will use our intentional-objective awareness to perceive sound. Close your eyes and focus your awareness upon your hearing. Listen for external noises (or ring your bell) and focus intently upon your perception of the sound.

Note its objective details of pitch, loudness, duration, rhythm, etc.

(pause)

And now focus upon how you feel emotionally about this sound. Does it please you or displease you or neither?

(pause)

Note the contents of your accompanying internal dialogue and objectively perceive its relevance.

(pause)

Note that when perceiving sounds whose origins you cannot see, your mind generates its own images to describe the sound's origin. These are closely related to your internal dialogue and emotional reactions and share the same subjective source within your unintentional awareness. With your intentional-objective awareness, observe the images that your mind puts forth to depict the sound's origin or cause.

(pause)

Now compare the differences between the objective details of the sound and the subjective content provided by your unintentional awareness.

(pause)

Next, we will use our intentional-objective awareness to perceive aroma. Close your eyes and focus your awareness upon your sense of smell. Inhale the aroma of your chosen item and focus intently upon your perception of its scent.

Note its objective details and note what parts of your olfactory organ are affected by the aroma.

(pause)

And now focus upon how you feel emotionally about this scent. Does it please you or displease you or neither?

(pause)

Note the contents of your accompanying internal dialogue and objectively perceive its relevance.

(pause)

Note that when perceiving an aroma, your mind immediately tries to define it, tries to name what it is you're smelling through images. These are closely related to your internal dialogue and emotional reactions and share the same subjective source within your unintentional awareness. With your intentional-objective awareness, observe the images that your mind puts forth to define the aroma.

(pause)

Now compare the differences between the objective details of the scent and the subjective content provided by your unintentional awareness.

(pause)

Next, we will use our intentional-objective awareness to perceive flavor. Close your eyes and focus your awareness upon your sense of taste. Lick, sip or take a small bite of your chosen item and focus intently upon your perception of the flavor.

Note the objective details of the flavor you perceive with your tongue.

(pause)

And now focus upon how you feel emotionally about this taste. Does it please you or displease you or neither?

(pause)

Note the contents of your accompanying internal dialogue and objectively perceive its relevance.

(pause)

Now compare the differences between the objective details of the flavor and the subjective content provided by your unintentional awareness.

(pause)

Next we come to our exploration of perception through our sense of touch or physical feeling. There really is no adequate name for this sense – the terms “touch” and “tactile” merely cover one aspect of all that this sense reveals to our awareness. The tactile aspect is geared toward sensing the *external* environment and is reliant upon nerve endings within the layers of skin capable of detecting objective environmental factors such as texture, temperature and pressure. The non-tactile aspect on the other hand, is geared toward sensing our *internal* environment, such as a muscular ache, an itchy patch of skin or intestinal gas, and is likewise reliant upon specialized nerve endings, except that these include sensory nerves spread throughout our body’s deeper tissue and bone.

Ultimately, this is the sense that most ties our awareness to our physical body and to physical existence. It also pervades or influences perception through our other four physical senses. For example, if what we are looking at is too bright, we *feel* discomfort in our eyes; if a sound is too loud or too shrill, we likewise *feel* discomfort in our ears; and, with both smell and taste, tactile sensations are involved as you draw air in through the sinuses and take food or drink into the mouth.

Each of these tactile sensations that occur during the *process* of perception subtly, or not-so-subtly, influence the resulting perception, especially at an emotional level. For example, if it physically hurts our eyes to look at something, we stop looking at it and form a negative emotional memory that keeps us from looking at similar should we encounter it again. Conversely, if it gives us physical pleasure to look at a thing, then we keep looking and form a positive emotional memory that leads us to seek out the observation of similar things.

The perceptions of physical feeling are normally *processed* by the unintentional-subjective awareness before they even register within the intentional awareness. In other words, we create an *immediate* emotional valuation of the sensation. This is a biologically “hard wired” feature of instinctive self-preservation which generates an immediate response to physical threat. For example, when you touch something so hot that it burns your fingertip, your hand immediately withdraws without your having to first think, “Oh, that’s too hot, I’d better not leave my finger there while the skin melts.”

In spite of this biological imperative of self-preservation, we are quite capable of intentional-objective perception through and with this sense. We cannot, of course, *eliminate* the unintentional-subjective component, but we *can* observe it objectively and without involvement, and take it as a piece of objective information concerning how the sensation affects us.

So, let’s get back to our exploration and put these words and ideas into practice.

Close your eyes and sense the air temperature of the room you are in. Is it warm? Cool? Or just right?

(pause)

Note the value judgment inherent to determining the temperature. It is completely based upon the variation of the temperature from your “comfort zone”. If the temperature is lower than this zone then you judge it cool; if higher, then you judge it warm. The only *objective* information revealed is the relationship of the actual air temperature to your personal comfort level.

Now let’s turn this sense inward and perceive the interior of our own bodies. Notice the sensation of the air entering your sinuses as you inhale, or passing over your tongue, if you are breathing through your mouth. Focus your awareness upon the exact physical location of this sensation and experience it closely.

(pause)

Again, there is the immediate value judgment of relative warmth or coolness of the air and of its relative goodness or badness. But beyond this emotional *reaction* to the physical sensation, there is the objective *experience* of sensation. The objective experience *includes* the unintentional-subjective valuations, but it’s more than just how

we feel about the sensation -- it's also our actual real-time experience of the sensation as it is occurring.

Focus your intentional awareness upon this experience of the sensation of the inhaled air passing over nerve ending and ignore any emotional value judgments that arise.

(pause)

Now follow this sensation inward. Sense the air as it touches deeper areas of your sinuses and then throat. With each inhalation, follow the sensation deeper and deeper until you actually feel the air filling your lungs.

(pause)

Now expand your focus so that you are sensing your entire chest area as a whole. **Experience** the feeling of your chest expanding with each inhalation and contracting with each exhalation.

(pause)

Now shift your awareness to your right hand and experience all of the sensations present within it.

(pause)

Now expand your awareness so that you experience the sensation of your entire physical body as a whole. Spend a few moments here now, **experiencing** what it feels like to be in your physical body. Freely allow the subjective emotional judgments to arise and let them inform you of your emotional attitudes about your own body.

(longish pause)

Focus again on the sound of my voice and gently return to an awareness of your surroundings.

(pause)

Open your eyes and sit up from your reclining position while I say a few words.

I hope that from this brief exploration you have learned a few important things about physical perception. First among them is the degree to which your unintentional-subjective awareness influences the process of perceiving. And second is the degree to which your intentional-objective awareness can intercede in the process of perception and make of it something much more informative.

When left to the unintentional-subjective awareness, perception informs us mostly about ourselves and about how we relate to the world. But when we intercede with our intentional-objective awareness, perception begins to inform us about the objective reality that exists separate from our emotional reactions to it. It also provides us with an objective perception of our own subjectifying content and its relationship to the objective reality.

Use of our intentional-objective awareness reveals the subjective filter through which we normally perceive the world and ourselves.

I suggest that during the coming days and weeks, you use the faculties of the intentional-objective awareness in your acts of perception. Truly see the things you look at and experience the sensations you encounter. Savor them to their fullest and draw from them their objective meanings hidden among your subjective reactions. Use your senses and your awareness to spend time truly experiencing life within the miracle of your own body!

My best to you!