

## NOTES FROM: *Awareness*, by Anthony de Mello

**SUMMARY:** What does it *feel like* to imagine oneself as intimately connected with Reality - with everything that exists - and to live with your eyes, and your heart, wide open?

Anthony de Mello points the way to an understanding - and *awareness* - of what such a fully realized life feels like, and just like life, this book is full of surprises. *Awareness* began as a series of lectures that were later combined into a book, so it helps to imagine him speaking to an audience while you read it, and that you are *in* that audience.

De Mello was a Jesuit priest and spiritual teacher and he uses stories, parables, jokes, and striking insights - which he combines with his deep humanity and infinite care and affection - to wake people up to the life that's been sitting right in front of them the whole time they've been alive.

De Mello's whole "project" is to get you to see Reality in a completely different way - the way you would if the "doors of perception" were cleansed. Mainstream psychology and what passes for religion these days don't really solve your problems; they just *exchange* your problems for *other* problems.

Waking up to Reality and Life itself isn't "supposed" to be comfortable either. Nobody likes being woken up! But Reality is so much more miraculous and incredible than most of us ever glimpse on a daily basis, and waking up is very much like breaking out of prison.

We're imprisoned in our concepts, our ideas, our blind beliefs, and prejudices, but to break out of this prison and actually experience life, the first step is to *realize* that you are in prison and that there is a way out. Anthony de Mello shows us all the way out in this book.

There's also this relentlessly curious self-observation that de Mello was known for, and his gift was to inspire feelings of care, connection, and curiosity in all of his listeners and readers. He taught that awareness isn't something "extra" that you have to add to your to-do list. It's not a task, or an obligation, but *a way of seeing*, and a way of bringing yourself to life.

De Mello taught that you don't have to "add" anything to your life to make it - or yourself, for that matter - into everything it *could* be; rather, it's a process of *subtraction*, of dropping your attachments, your labels, your concepts, and all the other obstructions to your happiness, which is, after all, your natural state.

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"But I'll promise you this: I have not known a single person who gave time to being aware who didn't see a difference in a matter of weeks. The quality of their life changes, so they don't have to take it on faith anymore. They see it; they're different. They react differently. In fact, they react less and act more. You see things you've never seen before."

"The most difficult thing in the world is to listen, to see. We don't want to see. Do you think a capitalist wants to see what is good in the communist system? Do you think a communist wants to see what is good and healthy in the capitalist system? Do you think a rich man wants to look at poor people? We don't want to look, because if we do, we may change. We don't want to look. If you look, you lose control of the life that you are so precariously holding together. And so in order to wake up, the one thing you need the most is not energy, or strength, or youthfulness, or even great intelligence. The one thing you need most of all is the readiness to learn something new. The chances that you will wake up are in direct proportion to the amount of truth you can take without running away. How much are you ready to take? How much of everything you've held dear are you ready to have shattered, without running away?"

"Do you want to be happy? Uninterrupted happiness is uncaused. True happiness is uncaused. You cannot make me happy. You are not my happiness. You say to the awakened person, 'Why are you happy?' and the awakened person replies, 'Why not?' Happiness is our natural state. Happiness is the natural state of little children, to whom the kingdom belongs until they have been polluted and contaminated by the stupidity of society and culture. To acquire happiness you don't have to do anything, because happiness cannot be acquired. Does anybody know why? Because we have it already. How can you acquire what you already have? Then why don't you experience it? Because you've got to drop something. You've got to drop illusions. You don't have to add anything in order to be happy; you've got to drop something. Life is easy, life is delightful. It's only hard on your illusions, your ambitions, your greed, your cravings. Do you know where these things come from? From having identified with all kinds of labels!"

"Understand the obstructions you are putting in the way of love, freedom, and happiness and they will drop. Turn on the light of awareness and the darkness will disappear."

"Some people see awareness as a high point, a plateau, *beyond* experiencing every moment as it is. That's making a goal out of awareness. But with true awareness there's nowhere to go, nothing to achieve. How do we get to this awareness? Through awareness. When people say they really want to experience every moment, they're really talking about awareness, except for that 'wanting.' You don't want to experience awareness; you do or you don't."

"I challenge anyone to think of anything more practical than spirituality as I have defined it - not piety, not devotion, not religion, not worship, but spirituality - waking up, waking up! Look at the heartache everywhere, look at the loneliness, look at the fear, the confusion, the conflict in the hearts of people, inner conflict, outer conflict. Suppose somebody gave you a way of getting rid of all of that? Suppose somebody gave you a way to stop that tremendous drainage of energy, of health, of emotion that comes from these conflicts and confusion. Would you want that? Suppose somebody showed us a way whereby we would truly love one another, and be at peace, be at love. Can you think of anything more practical than that? But, instead, you have people thinking that big business is more practical, that politics is more practical, that science is more practical. What's the earthly use of putting a man on the moon when *we* cannot live on the earth?"

"The highest knowledge of God is to know God as unknowable. There is far too much God talk; the world is sick of it. There is too little awareness, too little love, too little happiness, but let's not use those words either. There's too little dropping of illusions, dropping of errors, dropping of attachments and cruelty, too little awareness. That's what the world is suffering from, not from a lack of religion."

"The moment you put things into a concept, they stop flowing; they become static, dead. A frozen wave is not a wave. A wave is essentially movement, action; when you freeze it, it is not a wave. Concepts are always frozen. Reality flows."

"Have you ever experienced your is-not-ness? In the East, we have an image for this. It is the image of the dancer and dance. God is viewed as the dancer and creation as God's dance. It isn't as if God is the big dancer and you are the little dancer. Oh no. You're not a dancer at all. You are *being* danced! Did you ever experience that?"

"Life is a banquet. And the tragedy is that most people are starving to death."

"Spirituality means waking up. Most people, even though they don't know it, are asleep. They're born asleep, they live asleep, they marry in their sleep, they breed children in their sleep, they die in their sleep without ever waking up. They never understand the loveliness and the beauty of this thing that we call human existence."

"Even the best psychologists will tell you that, that people don't really want to be cured. What they want is relief; a cure is painful."

"The whole world is crazy. Certifiable lunatics! The only reason we're not locked up in an institution is that there are so many of us."

"When you renounce something, you're stuck to it forever. When you fight something, you're tied to it forever. As long as you're fighting it, you are giving it power. You give it as much power as you are using to fight it."

"It's not that we fear the unknown. You cannot fear something that you do not know. Nobody is afraid of the unknown. What you really fear is the loss of the known. That's what you fear."

"I dare not stop to think, because if I did, I wouldn't know how to get started again."

"Are you enlightened?"

"How would *I* know?"

"The trouble with people is that they're busy fixing things they don't even understand. We're always fixing things, aren't we? It never strikes us that things don't need to be fixed. They really don't. This is a great illumination. They need to be understood. If you understood them, they'd change."

“As soon as you look at the world through an ideology you are finished. No reality fits an ideology. Life is beyond that. That is why people are always searching for a meaning to life. But life has no meaning; it cannot have meaning because meaning is a formula; meaning is something that makes sense to the mind. Every time you make sense out of reality, you bump into something that destroys the sense you made. Meaning is only found when you go beyond meaning. Life only makes sense when you perceive it as mystery and it makes no sense to the conceptualizing mind.”

“Eternity is right now.”

"Many wrongly assume that not having negative feelings like anger and resentment and hate means that you do nothing about a situation. Oh no, oh no! You are not affected emotionally but you spring into action."

“We never feel grief when we lose something that we have allowed to be free, that we have never attempted to possess.”

“There’s only one reason why you’re not experiencing bliss at this present moment, and it’s because you’re thinking or focusing on what you don’t have. Otherwise, you would be experiencing bliss.”

“There’s not a single evil in the world that you cannot trace to fear. Not one.”

“When I’m listening to you, it’s infinitely more important for me to listen to me than to listen to you. Of course, it’s important to listen to you, but it’s more important that I listen to me. Otherwise, I won’t be hearing you. Or I’ll be distorting everything you say. I’ll be coming at you from my own conditioning.”

“I got a pretty good education. It took me years to get over it.”

“Negative feelings are in you. No person on earth has the power to make you unhappy. There is no event on earth that has the power to disturb you or hurt you. No event, condition, situation, or person. Nobody told you this; they told you the opposite. That’s why you’re in the mess that you’re in right now. That is why you’re asleep. They never told you this. But it’s self-evident.”

“When you change, everything changes.”

“I want to tell you exactly how you’re expected to be and how you’re expected to behave, and you’d better behave as I have decided or I shall punish myself by having negative feelings. Remember what I told you: everybody’s a lunatic.”

“Awakening should be a surprise. When you don’t expect something to happen and it happens, you feel surprise. When Webster’s wife caught him kissing the maid, she told him she was very surprised. Now, Webster was a stickler for using words accurately (understandably, since he wrote a dictionary), so he answered her, ‘No, my dear, I am surprised. You are astonished!’”

"Nobody was mean to you. Somebody was mean to what he or she thought was you, but not to you. Nobody ever rejects you; they're only rejecting what they think you are. But that cuts both ways. Nobody ever accepts you either. Until people come awake, they are simply accepting or rejecting their image of you. They've fashioned an image of you, and they're rejecting or accepting that. See how devastating it is to go deeply into that. It's a bit too liberating. But how easy it is to love people when you understand this. How easy it is to love everyone when you don't identify with what they imagine you are or they are. It becomes easy to love them, to love everybody."

"One cannot say anything about the awakened state; one can only talk about the sleeping state. One hints at the awakened state. One cannot say anything about happiness. Happiness cannot be defined. What can be defined is misery. Drop unhappiness and you will know. Love cannot be defined; unlove can. Drop unlove, drop fear, and you will know. We want to find out what the awakened person is like. But you'll know only when you get there."

"No theory adequately covers reality. So I can speak to you, not of the truth, but of obstacles to the truth. Those I can describe. I cannot describe the truth. No one can. All I can do is give you a description of your falsehoods, so that you can drop them. All I can do for you is challenge your beliefs and the belief system that makes you unhappy. All I can do for you is help you to unlearn. That's what learning is all about where spirituality is concerned: unlearning, unlearning almost everything you've been taught. A willingness to unlearn, to listen."

"The fact is that you're surrounded by God and you don't see God, because you 'know' about God. The final barrier to the vision of God is your God concept. You miss God because you think you know."

"The poor little fish in the ocean says, 'Excuse me, I'm looking for the ocean. Can you tell me where I can find it?'"

"Happiness releases you from self. It is suffering and pain and misery and depression that tie you to the self. Look how conscious you are of your tooth when you have a toothache. When you don't have a toothache, you're not even aware you have a tooth, or that you have a head, for that matter, when you don't have a headache. But it's so different when you have a splitting headache. So it's quite false, quite erroneous, to think that the way to deny the self is to cause pain to the self, to go in for abnegation, mortification, as these were traditionally understood. To deny the self, to die to it, to lose it, is to understand its true nature. When you do that, it will disappear; it will vanish."

"I am He who is; you are she who is not."

"You thought you were the dancer; you now experience yourself as the dance."

"Who says that worrying doesn't help? It certainly does help. Every time I worry about something, it doesn't happen!"

“Do not suppress desire, because then you would become lifeless. You'd be without energy and that would be terrible. Desire in the healthy sense of the word is energy, and the more energy we have, the better. But don't suppress desire, understand it. Understand it. Don't seek to fulfill desire so much as to understand desire. And don't just renounce the objects of your desire, understand them; see them in their true light. See them for what they are really worth. Because if you just suppress your desire, and you attempt to renounce the object of your desire, you are likely to be tied to it. Whereas if you look at it and see it for what it is really worth, if you understand how you are preparing the grounds for misery and disappointment and depression, your desire will then be transformed into what I call a preference. When you go through life with preferences but don't let your happiness depend on any one of them, then you're awake.”

Confucius: “The one who would be constant in happiness must frequently change.”

“Until somebody told you you wouldn't be happy unless you were loved, you were perfectly happy.”

“You become happy by contact with reality. That's what brings happiness, a moment-by-moment contact with reality. That's where you'll find God; that's where you'll find happiness. But most people are not ready to hear that.”

“Why bother about tomorrow? Is there a life after death? Will I survive after death? Why bother about tomorrow? *Get into today.*”

“Live in the present moment. This is one of the things you will notice happening to you as you come awake. You find yourself living in the present, tasting every moment as you live it. Another fairly good sign is when you hear the symphony one note after the other without wanting to stop it.”

“The concept always misses or omits something extremely important, something precious that is only found in reality, which is concrete uniqueness. The great Krishnamurti put it so well when he said, 'The day you teach the child the name of the bird, the child will never see that bird again.'”

“If you don't look at things through your concepts, you'll never be bored. Every single thing is unique.”

“Happiness is not something you acquire; love is not something you produce; love is not something that you have; love is something that *has* you. You do not have the wind, the stars, and the rain. You don't possess these things; you surrender to them.”

“My country was one country once upon a time; it's four now. If we don't watch out it might be six. Then we'll have six flags, six armies. That's why you'll never catch me saluting a flag. I abhor all national flags because they are idols. What are we saluting? I salute humanity, not a flag with an army around it.”

"How does one cope with evil? Not by fighting it but by understanding it. In understanding it, it disappears. How does one cope with darkness? Not with one's fist. You don't chase darkness out of the room with a broom, you turn on a light."

"I'm satisfied with very little and I enjoy it intensely. When you have enjoyed something intensely, you need very little."

"There is yet another illusion, that it is important to be respectable, to be loved and appreciated, to be important. Many say we have a natural urge to be loved and appreciated, to belong. That's false. Drop this illusion and you will find happiness. We have a natural urge to be free, a natural urge to love, but not *to be loved*."

"When you renounce something, you're stuck to it forever. When you fight something, you're tied to it forever. As long as you're fighting it, you are giving it power. You give it as much power as you are using to fight it."

"The only way someone can be of help to you is in challenging your ideas. If you're ready to listen and if you're ready to be challenged, there's one thing that you can do, but *no one can help you*. What is this most important thing of all? It's called self-observation. No one can help you there. No one can give you a method. No one can show you a technique. The moment you pick up a technique, you're programmed again. But self-observation—watching yourself—is important. It is not the same as self-absorption. Self-absorption is self-preoccupation, where you're concerned about yourself, worried about yourself. 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. What does that last sentence mean? It means that you do not personalize what is happening to you. It means that you look at things as if you have no connection with them whatsoever."

"Nourish yourself on wholesome food, good wholesome food. I'm not talking about actual food, I'm talking about sunsets, about nature, about a good movie, about a good book, about enjoyable work, about good company, and hopefully you will break your addictions to those other feelings. What kind of feeling comes upon you when you're in touch with nature, or when you're absorbed in work that you love? Or when you're really conversing with someone whose company you enjoy in openness and intimacy without clinging? What kind of feelings do you have? Compare those feelings with the feelings you have when you win an argument, or when you win a race, or when you become popular, or when everybody's applauding you. The latter feelings I call worldly feelings; the former feelings I call soul feelings. Lots of people gain the world and lose their soul. Lots of people live empty, soulless lives because they're feeding themselves on popularity, appreciation, and praise, on 'I'm O.K., you're O.K.,' look at me, attend to me, support me, value me, on being the boss, on having power, on winning the race. Do you feed yourself on that? If you do, you're dead. You've lost your soul. Feed yourself on other, more nourishing material. Then you'll see the transformation. I've given you a whole program for life, haven't I?"