

The art of *Noticing* and how to practice: **By DEEPAK CHOPRA™ MD, FACP,**

Although meditation has become widely popular, higher consciousness baffles and intimidates people. It seems like a faraway exotic attainment, and perhaps more myth than reality. But higher consciousness is just a convenient catch-all for expanded awareness. Reaching any higher state depends on a simple, very basic axiom: You cannot change what you are not aware of. Grasping this statement takes only a minute, but the point is critically important.

To be aware is also called being mindful. It is very desirable to be mindful. It keeps you in the present moment. It involves being alert and open to new experiences. Mindfulness is detached: you are open to the present moment but are not attached to any outcome that you either desire or fear.

Yet mindfulness has a built-in catch. How do you remind yourself to be mindful when you have drifted away from the present moment? Mindfulness is the very state you are not in. Telling someone to be mindful is like saying “Don’t forget to remember.” Fortunately, you can get past the catch. It involves the simple act of noticing. Your mind is designed to notice things all the time and sending the signal to you.

When you notice a friend in the crowd or something appetizing on a restaurant menu or an attractive stranger, what actually happens? You flick a switch and start to pay attention. The thing you notice is selected from lots of other things you are not noticing. When you see a friend in the crowd, you ignore the other people all around.

The one-minute lesson, which you can adopt immediately, is

1. Notice when you feel distracted, stressed, angry, anxious, or otherwise out of tune. Don’t dismiss this perception.
2. Pause. Whatever you are about to say or do, whatever reaction you are in the middle of, back away from it.
3. Put your attention in the middle of your chest in the region of the heart, close your eyes, and take a few deep breaths until you return to the situation with a clear mind.

These steps are simple, but noticing can be extremely powerful. You have found the key to change, following the axiom that what you are not aware of, you cannot change. By noticing, you give awareness an opening that it doesn’t otherwise have.

Noticing can change the course of history, as in 1928 when the Scottish medical researcher Alexander Fleming returned from vacation to find, much to his annoyance, that green mold has spoiled some open dishes of cultured bacteria. Instead of reacting as he and other researchers always had, simply throwing out the tainted specimens, Fleming noticed, paused to think, and realized, in a stroke of awareness, that he was observing a powerful killer of bacteria. Penicillin was born from an observation made hundreds of times before but without truly noticing what was going on.

Noticing doesn't simply flick a switch; it invites you to rethink, reframe, and go deeper than your normal reaction. In an instant you call upon the mind's natural ability to reflect. We do not notice at random. Instead, we notice

Something we're looking for

Something we judge against

Something we fear

Something we might be attracted to

Something that offers an explanation or solution

These are the ingredients in everyone's agenda, even though no two agendas match. In my new book, *Total Meditation*, I outline the best agenda for effortlessly nurturing higher consciousness.

The best agenda is to promote your personal growth by noticing opportunities to be more conscious. Catching yourself doing something unconsciously is an important part of this agenda. But there are also other dimensions of the total meditation agenda:

- Notice when someone else needs attention and appreciation.
- Notice an opportunity to give or be of service.
- Notice an opportunity to be kind.
- Notice when help is needed.
- Notice beauty in Nature.

Setting your inner agenda to take advantage of such opportunities helps reset your deeper awareness. Like the internal clock that notices what time it is even when you are asleep, deeper levels of consciousness know much more than your thinking mind does. In particular, your deeper awareness is the source of the most valued things in human existence: love, compassion, creativity, curiosity, discovery, intelligence, and evolution.

Set your agenda to any of these things and it will turn into opportunities that you begin to notice more and more. Alexander Fleming was primed to discover penicillin because he was already a noted researcher with important findings to his credit. A loving mother is already primed to notice if her child feels unwell, something that might escape the attention of a negligent parent.

To notice is to open the door of awareness. What you do after that is up to you. In total meditation you notice much more than you did before, but there is no obligation to act in a certain way. Consciousness can accomplish anything, but consciousness is its own reward

In daily life, shifting your inner agenda also involves getting past the kind of noticing that doesn't serve your personal evolution. Noticing other people's faults, being on the lookout to correct someone else, assigning to ourselves the role of rule enforcer, or judging people as winners or losers are wrong uses of noticing. There's no getting around the fact that agendas have a dark side. It is hard to notice something without immediately judging it.

In total meditation, it is important to be aware of your judgments but not act on them. We are all too practiced in likes and dislikes, acceptance and rejection, attraction and aversion. These opposites dominate our inner agendas. But simply by favoring a new agenda, you can change, and in time what you notice will more and more be self-enhancing. Freedom from judgment begins by not favoring judgments you know are negative. Noticing isn't random. You can begin right now to notice opportunities to wake up. This alone is enough to greatly accelerate your personal evolution.