



Awareness (Perls' concept of "actuality")

Awareness is characterized by contact, by sensing, by excitement and by gestalt formation. For awareness, being fully in contact with the reality is indispensable. Sensing determines the nature of awareness: whether distant (e.g. vision or sound), close (e.g. touch) or internal (e.g. muscular sensations or mental phenomena such as dreams and thoughts). Awareness is heightened by the arousal of interest and emotion, towards excitement.

Always accompanying awareness is the desire to form a gestalt: to focus attention within a field of information such that a meaningful organized whole emerges. In this searching process a foreground item or figure stands out in its context or background. Greater awareness results from a free embrace of different possible relationships inherent in a field, so more and more meaning is integrated towards a realization of truth, most often a simplicity; lessened awareness results from fixation on any one aspect.

The following Awareness Exercises are based on those taught by Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt psychotherapy.

Exercise 1: Here-and-Now

Over the next few minutes describe at each moment what you are aware of. Begin every sentence with: 'Right now...' or 'At this moment...' or 'Here and now...'.

Note difficulties and resistances that arise. Why did you cease the exercise just when you did? Were you tired? Had you gone blank and ceased forming sentences? Did you daydream or wander off? If so where did you tend to go? (Some people find that it is as if they were in the past or in the future, without awareness that it is here and now that they reminisce about the past or anticipate the future).

Repeat the exercise again, utilizing all your senses, describing everything that is happening and that you are feeling whether distant, close or within. Then consider: What is your actuality? Can you actually feel it? Can you feel that it is yours?

To the extent that your feeling of actuality, of contact with the present moment, has been obscured by wearing a personality mask, the effort to experience actuality will rouse anxiety (masked, perhaps, as fatigue, boredom, impatience or annoyance) - and what specifically rouses your anxiety will be the particular resistance by which you throttle and prevent full experience..

With practice, you will no longer need to verbalize in this way to maintain the discipline of Here-&-Now consciousness. To re-acquire the full feeling of actuality is an experience of tremendous impact, of moving to the core. The sense of fear at the realization of the actuality of being alive is overcome. It is no longer necessary to alter or suppress the truth. Practice the exercise in many different circumstances.