

Katherine Murray



Awareness

An Owner's Manual



~ Awareness ~

An Owner's Manual

Katherine Murray

PRACTICAL ~ FAITH ~
Indianapolis, IN 2008

© 2008 Katherine Murray. All rights reserved. Please feel free to quote this book liberally anywhere and most importantly, use the ideas you find helpful here. The author respects and honors the good intentions of the reader and asks that if this work is found to bless the reader, the reader respond by blessing others in kind.

www.revisionsplus.com/practicalfaith.html

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Murray, Katherine.

Awareness: An owner's manual / Katherine Murray

p. cm.

ISBN: 1-928880-23-1

1. Spirituality. 2. Mysticism.

Set in Palatino Linotype with Calibri display.

For Ruby



Table of Contents

Preface	7
Arriving.....	11
Distractions	15
Learning	23
Innocence	29
Welcoming	35
Awakening.....	41
Sensing.....	47
Returning	53
About this Book	56
Author Info	58
Acknowledgments.....	59
Resources	61

“Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto Itself.”

—Thomas R. Kellyⁱ



Preface

Awareness. Within you is a listening center, wide awake, floating joyfully and with great peace in a serene lake of eternal consciousness. This listening self is not disturbed by news reports and plunging bank balances. Rather, the breeze blows, the sound of the lake soothes, the water refreshes and heals.

Reeds along the banks of the lake serenade you with hollow notes, running a scale, whistling a long, clear note. Crickets and locusts are their supporting percussion.

What do you feel on this lake of peaceful consciousness? Feel the sunshine on your face, warming your cheeks, your nose, your forehead. Feel the pleasant stretch of your muscles as you move your arms lazily in the water. Feel the smooth coolness of the water—like *satin*—on your toes, feet, and ankles.

A heron glides overhead—you feel yourself touched first by the shadow, then by the sight of the great wingspan passing overhead.

Relax.

Feel.

Hear.

Experience.

Feel your heart beat in gratitude for this great gift of quiet safety, perfect peace, and exquisite beauty. This is your home, and it never leaves you. This is your awareness.

“Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

—2 Corinthians 3:16-18ⁱⁱ





Arriving

We all experience moments of pure awareness. Maybe you just stepped outside on a cool, golden morning in early fall. Perhaps a crack of thunder ripped across the sky and you stopped to listen. Or you paused over your toddler's bed, listening to the lullaby playing on her music box, watching her in sweet, peaceful sleep.

Awareness is really very simple — it is the gentle arrival of our minds in the present moment. We are not replaying hurts or hopes from the past. We are not tallying our efforts

and planning our approach to the future. We are not worrying, plotting, struggling, or even looking forward to the next happy event.

We are here now, and we know it.

In this moment, all is well.

We have arrived.

“At the center of your being you have the answer; you know who you are and you know what you want.”

—Lao Tzuⁱⁱⁱ



A FEATHER THOUGHT

Gently, lightly let your thoughts quiet onto your breath. Relax your face, your hands, your shoulders.

You are perfectly loved and perfectly loving. Imagine your loving expression—a look of total love, when no hurts or worries can touch the light of God radiating through you.

Now turned your face and look at your heart with this expression of pure, radiant love.

Such a good heart, and the doorway to healing for the world.

Sit just a few moments bathed in loving awareness of the goodness of your own being.

When you are ready, speak a word of tender care and gratitude to your heart.

Close your time with several moments of silent appreciation, a word of thanks, and then open your eyes to your present awareness.





Distractions

Our awareness is a powerful gift that brings joy, peace of mind, and connection with all living beings. Awareness is being tuned in to life, love, creation, and spirit. Awareness is your key to intuition, your partner in prayer, your navigator in daily life, and the seedbed of all loving relationships.

All miracles, small and large, occur in awareness. And awareness—the arising of spirit through us in this moment—is available only now.

Until we begin to protect and nurture our awareness, we are at the mercy of many things that keep us from being fully aware and alive to the present moment. Very early in life, we develop a kind of time-based peripheral vision that causes us to continually search the past and connect it to the future, comparing and contrasting, evaluating and judging what went on *then* and what might happen *next*.

We replay the past in thousands of ways. We compare this summer with last summer—one seems “better” to us than another. We relive past hurts and let them color our relationships today. *I trusted him and he hurt me, you think. I’m not going to make that mistake again.*

We project into the future, dreaming of our hopes or frightening ourselves with our fears. We experience anxiety trying to plan for any eventuality. We work hard to maintain some kind of control over our lives. We try to live “by the book” and “do what’s right” and avoid creating bad karma. The now is clouded by phantoms of fear that say, “You need to do this...or else!”

Thoughts like these can mesmerize us and create a whirlpool of emotion. Before we know it, we are caught up in a cyclone of fearful thoughts, leaping out of bed in the morning and rushing through our day, trying to earn, build, create some kind of secure future.

These thought events, whether they are pleasant reveries or fears of the future, are all distractions that capture our awareness. If we are investing our attention and energy on *then* or *next*, we are not present now.

These distractions pop up from the past and paint phantoms of the future, and they may show us ways we've felt, things we've done, opinions we've heard, judgments we've made. Unrecognized, they can begin and then carry on their own conversations within us, motivating us and pushing us in directions we don't even recognize.

Until we find our own awareness and begin to nurture it, we are vulnerable to the

opinions, choices, expectations, evaluations, and projections of others. We can't even see the ways in which we create and then participate in our own webs.

Awareness brings love, peace, a sense of support and safety. Distractions tell you how you haven't measured up, how far you have to go, and make you question whether grace is really meant for you.

Distractions are the stuff of ego. Awareness quiets your heart so spirit can speak.

The good news is that the lake is serene and cool and magnificently beautiful. It's not going anywhere, ever. And all you need in

order to find it is a little bit of your own
willingness, the desire for awareness.

*“There is a Principle which is pure, placed in the human
Mind, which in different Places and Ages hath had
different Names; it is, however, pure, and proceeds from
God. It is deep, and inward, confined to no Forms of
Religion, nor excluded from any, where the Heart stands
in perfect Sincerity. In whomsoever this takes Root and
grows, of what Nation soever, they become Brethren.”*

—John Woolman^{iv}



A FEATHER THOUGHT

Notice where in your body tightness holds on. Ask the muscle, “My friend, what are you clinging to so desperately?” Let your breath move the tightness and soothe it until you feel the breeze moving gently through your body in a clear, unobstructed path.

You are the reed along the lakeside.

Feel the movement of your breath, your awareness, your thoughts, like ripples on the lake.

Don’t try to still the thoughts or quiet them. Notice that they are simply distractions, asking for your attention.

With a little wave and a gentle smile, release them and turn your attention back to the breath moving through you.

You are the reed along the lakeside.

Past and future worries and stories are distractions now. In this moment, all is well.





Learning

Awareness changes everything.

We discover early that learning increases our capacity to live successfully. As we gain experience, we learn how things work. Understanding our experiences helps us discover how we influence the world we live in—and how aspects of that world seem to influence us. We learn not to touch hot things. We learn to steer clear of some types of foods. We find out that certain situations make us feel stressed and anxious, while others calm and comfort us.

We learn to protect ourselves, and begin devising plans, routes, and elaborate maps that enable us to enjoy more of what gives us pleasure and less of what gives us pain.

The blessing of learning is that our fascinating minds are so gifted that we continue to grow in consciousness and grace as we apply what we learn. The challenge of learning is that unless we are aware of our own learning process—and know that we are choosing and shaping the reality we experience—we may use our learning to reinforce a fearful worldview that leaves us enclosed in a self-created bubble of experience.

This is not reality, and it is not peace.
This self-created bubble is simply the creation
of unaware thought, perhaps the projection of
our hopes and fears. And the unaware
thought, unexamined, may be nothing more
than the fearful, aggressive, or limiting
teachings of others, perhaps eons old.

*“It took the living quite awhile to catch up with the
believing, but it finally did. And when it did, a
progress began which never ended. As I lived up to
the highest light I had, higher and higher light
came to me.”*

—Peace Pilgrim^v

There is, however (thank God) some real light and beauty and healing shining here regardless. The cool air and smooth water is available in the Now, and you'll encounter it—first in glimpses, then in waves—when you begin to be aware of the bubble and look for ways to see beyond it.

The way in which you use your learning—to grow in grace or to protect yourself from the world you see—has everything to do with your level of awareness.

That's why you're reading this book. You've chosen to grow in grace.



A FEATHER THOUGHT

As you float on the lake, your fingers trail in the water, leaving tiny ripples of light and bubbles in their wake. Some areas of the lake are warm, having taken in the sun since morning's dawn. Other areas are cool, having rested in the shadows longer, awaiting their turn in the spreading daylight.

Within this perfect peace, know that there is always the ongoing process of warming and cooling, cycles of light, shadows and rest.

The system is whole and complete, there for your support and enjoyment. You don't need to do anything, be anything, act in a particular way to make it happen. *It is a gift to you.*

Know that your own system of learning, growing, and awakening is whole and complete, perfectly supported, offered to you as a gift simply because you are love itself.

Label any thought that begins with "I should have known" as a simple distraction, and know it is simply a place on the shadowing side of the lake, that is soon to receive its own perfect touch of daylight.





Innocence

We are born with a natural curiosity, a playful talent for learning, growing, and enjoying life. We toddle through our early years fascinated with bugs and butterflies, colors and music, life in all its forms.

Our capacity for joy and openness is our most precious birthright, and it needs to be protected and nurtured. However, by the time most of us reach adulthood, we have been hurt and bruised and frightened by a world that didn't know how to nurture joy and openness.

*“Light and joy and peace abide in you.
Your sinlessness is guaranteed by God.”*
— A Course in Miracles^{vi}

Our desire to share with everyone has been countered with caution to be sure you get what you need. Our natural desire to help another in pain has been admonished into watching out for ourselves in case we are victimized or taken advantage of.

Our inherent instinct to trust and appreciate the good in others is countered with suspicion and distrust of others' intentions.

Friends changes to foes—or at least competitors. Playmates from our playground days now become part of our network, and our relationships change and become utilitarian instead of spontaneous and joyful, fellow companions on a path.

As a child of God, a divinely created and conscious being, you are as beloved and innocent as you were the day you were born. God is pleased with you and all you've done, and no mistakes or tragedies on the road of your learning are held against you, now or ever.

“You must learn to get in touch with the innermost essence of your being. This true essence is beyond the ego. It is fearless; it is free; it is immune to criticism; it does not fear any challenge. It is beneath no one, superior to no one, and full of magic, mystery, and enchantment.”

—Deepak Chopra^{vii}

In the serene and perfect lake of your awareness, feel the safety of pure love supporting you as you float peacefully along. All of this creation—it’s for you. Your joy and openness are here, undamaged, perfect, intact. Meet your own innocence in its radiant fullness and simply enjoy, *enjoy*, this exquisite beauty.



A FEATHER THOUGHT

The heron overhead casts its shadow over the surface of the lake, gliding along perfectly in the afternoon sky.

As the shadow moves toward you, gather any little distracting thoughts that keep you from opening completely to your own innocence. Gather them quickly, and with a joyful breath, toss them upward into the air, to be carried by the heron to a distant place and dropped when they are well out of sight.

The heron's great wings easily bear away your regret and self-recrimination.

Float, now, in peace, openness, and joy.

Rest and whisper *thanks* for your clearing awareness.





Awakening

Awakening to our awareness can be a gradual process in which we begin to suspect that there's something more beyond the surface of daily events. We may notice synchronicities in our life—we keep seeing the same phrase, or number, or person over and over again, in odd places. We may discover that we seem to attract very similar experiences—sometimes painful ones, such as relationships that hurt us—and we relive the same circumstances over and over.

Awakening can also happen all at once, in moments of epiphany. In prayer or meditation, suddenly you glimpse a transforming view of God's love. This happened to Brother Lawrence and to Thomas Merton, among many others.

"...in the winter, seeing a tree stripped of its leaves, and considering that within a little time the leaves would be renewed, and after that the flowers and fruit appear, he [Brother Lawrence] received a high view of the providence and power of God, which has never since been effaced from his soul."

—Brother Lawrence ^{viii}

For me, awakening has been both incremental and sudden. My studies, my loves, my prayers, my learning and inner work have prepared the ground, and sudden warm inflows of understanding, love, compassion, and fullness pour to fill the new space in consciousness with beauty, color, and life.

Sometimes preceding the warm understanding there is a painful, jangly, broken time that feels dark and dry and desolate. The older I get the more quickly I remember that the painful experiences are doorways, and that the power of my noticing—and my ability to stay with my awareness—grows a bit clearer and stronger each day.

The awakening you experience will be your own, and it will arise in a perfect and loving dawn that is in tune with your own seasons. You may have pain. Open to it. You may have joy. Open to it as well. Use both experiences as doorways to the truth of your being. Be willing to hear, to see, to feel, to risk. The lake is there the whole time—your peace, your awareness, your loving self, your Godlight—will not let you down.

When you find yourself noticing more and more your own influence on the types of experiences that arise in your day, when your mind begins to be curious about how much of your experience you're creating and how much you're receiving, and when you begin to

breathe more deeply, feeling increased gratitude, and find more space for contemplation, you can know that your awakening is opening and growing, spreading like light on the water.

Rejoice! Enjoy! Smile at the sun, the clouds, the reeds, the water. Enjoy your fellowship with the fish. And know this sense of precious belovedness is truly yours and will only grow from this point on.

Nothing can take it away from you, ever. No other force exists to remove or challenge it.

There is only Love. And you know where to find it.



A FEATHER THOUGHT

The first time you find the still lake in the center of your listening, you may wonder why you'd ever want to spend time there. Our outer worlds are so fast, and so loud, and so stimulating that taking the time to find open inner space may seem empty, meaningless, futile.

As you awaken, you begin to realize that the outer valuing that drives the sense of time and meaning begins to shift. It was all learning. You can leave it on the banks of the lake for now, and look closer.

A little experience at the lake shows you that there is much here to enrich your awareness. Looking closer brings you in touch with your senses, inner and outer. Looking closer opens up a vastness in thought and spirit you didn't know existed before.

Space and peace and beauty are all yours in awareness, right now.

Enjoy, expand, breathe, relax.



Welcoming

Awakening, we find the great listening center deep within for the first time and make our way to the water's edge. At first we may stay only seconds; later, minutes; eventually, our returning trips create a path that enables us to find the lake and slide effortlessly into the water whenever we choose.

The discovering and befriending of our awareness helps us try on this peace consciousness that never fully leaves us. The water is right here, a breath away.

The more time you spend in the company of peaceful awareness, the more the essence of that consciousness stays with you. Soon you are carrying that energy with you back into your everyday situations. You are driving in traffic, but you're floating on the lake. You are leading a business meeting, and instead of the anxious and closed faces of the other board members, you see smiles and openness. People are breathing and telling stories. There is life in the room.

The arising moment begins to present you with opportunities in which your connection to awareness can transform or bless. Welcome what arises. Know that it is for your blessing.

“On the night on which he was to attain enlightenment, the Buddha sat under a tree. While he was sitting there, he was attacked by the forces of Mara. The story goes that they shot swords and arrows at him, and that their weapons turned into flowers.”

—Pema Chodron^{ix}

A bird’s call, a baby’s cry. A stray dog.
A fawn resting in the woods. An angry sibling.
A misfigured credit card statement. All are
opportunities the arising moment brings to
you to be blessed by your peaceful awareness
of the listening center.

Welcome it all. Bring your peace
forward, and sprinkle it around, like holy
water from the lake of your deep awareness.

And watch—and *thank*—as the situation
unlocks and begins to flow.



A FEATHER THOUGHT

A fish jumps a dozen feet past you on the surface of the lake. A beautiful, rainbow arc appears for a fleeting moment, and then he quickly slips back beneath the surface with a small splash, the drops sounding like prayer chimes.

For you and with you and around you, life arises, expresses, and resolves in and out of your awareness. You are part of this life arising. The fish may have seen you, arising there as he broke the surface of the water. You then disappeared as he entered his familiar domain once again.

We each arise, express, and resolve for each other in countless ways—through physical presence, thought, prayer, and more—throughout our lives. We are all One in the arising moment, the whole unfolding of Love's many expressions.

Feel a part of it and feel your freedom to arise, express, and resolve, along with all your fellow thoughts of Love.





Sensing

The sensual world provides us with infinite opportunities for awareness. Touch, taste, hearing, sight, and smell give us contact points with the richness of the outer world. Intuition, emotion, thoughts, and prayers tune us in and enable us to experience contact with our inner and transcendent world—the world that extends beyond space and time, limitation and boundary.

Sensing what arises in our awareness is our primary means of healing ourselves and

our world, because *each arising is an invitation*.
When your foot aches, it is calling for your attention and care. When your heart is wounded, it needs your tender attention and prayer support. When your child throws a temper tantrum, she needs your love, your safety, your arms.

Our senses provide the point of contact with the created world and, as such, each response offers us communion, the kissing of body and spirit. When I am hungry and get myself something to eat, I am not only satisfying an instinctive need to survive; I am affirming the goodness of the universe in caring for my needs. When you turn on your turn signal in rush hour traffic and someone

lets you in, they are not just being nice; they are expressing the reality of kindness in the created world.

Our sensual contacts with beauty, comfort, warmth, sustenance, sound, texture, color, and light are kissing and full receiving the breathtaking goodness—the absorbing *abundance*—that is all around us.

*“On a day when the wind is perfect,
the sail just needs to open
and the love starts.
Today is such a day.”*

—Rumi^x

Let your clear awareness, your freedom from past learning, and your welcoming of the arising moment take you into a truly rapturous experience of the full beauty and blessing overflowing for you in this precise moment. It is here, right now, all yours.

“I have a sense that this underlying heavenliness is the real nature of things. Not their nature, but the deeper truth that they are a gift of love and of freedom, and that this is their true reality.”

—Thomas Merton^{xi}



A FEATHER THOUGHT

Senses tickle, amuse, please, and perturb. Your senses offer you a good report of the world—*mmm, something smells good*—or a bad report, showing disorder, chaos, pain.

Our inner and outer senses welcome us to a moment of awareness, but the invitation doesn't end with the fulfilled experience of taste, touch, hearing, sight, or understanding. Our senses point us to the Now, in which the sensations are occurring.

As you breathe, feel the breeze move through your nose and down into your lungs. Notice your stomach and chest rising and falling in response to your breaths. This is now. This is here. Your mind and body are aware and awake, together, observing. Spirit is the witnessing, the loving, the life.

When you are enjoying something you sense physically, spiritually, emotionally, or psychologically, take it one gentle step farther—into the transcendent and ever-present Now of your experiencing. And, opening your heart, whisper *Welcome*.





Returning

Awakening to your awareness blesses you, others around you, and all the worlds touched by your own. Whether you get only the tiniest little glimpses of awareness or you swim there for days or weeks at a time, know that every moment in which your spirit is truly present is a moment in which more light is available to all.

When you have freed your mind of distractions that send it hurrying off to the past or scurrying into the future, when you begin to

be curious about the deep listening center at your core, when you yearn for rest and peace on the lake of awareness, you will discover that you find your way back easier each time. Soon it will be effortless.

No self-recrimination is needed or helpful as you care for your growing awareness. Each self-judging thought is simply a distraction in which you're comparing yourself today with who you were in the past. Let it go, release your expectations, be here now. Self-judgment is distraction, nothing more.

Let it all go with the heron and come back to the water. The reeds are singing. The

water is warming. Enter into your heart and listen to the perfectly arising moment, the essence of love, offering you peace and uninterrupted connection in the vast openness of all possibility.

It's good to be back.

“If you want to know where God, the Buddhas, and all the great beings live, I can tell you. Here is their address: in the here and now. It has everything you need, including the zip code.”

—Thich Nhat Hanh^{xii}





About This Book

This book is a simple notebook of teachings, ideas, and images that been part of my own learning as I've discovered the value and importance of nurturing awareness as we learn and grow in faith.

Awareness enables us to be receptive spiritually; it points us to areas in our lives that need healing; it keeps us open for God's guidance and companionship; and it frees the space around us so that love can arise naturally and harmoniously.

Our awareness is a sacred window through which we can glimpse ourselves as truly made in the image and likeness of God. It is my hope that by reflecting on the small writings in this book, you will lean on the windowsill awhile, finding rest and nourishment, and soaking in the love, care, support, and constant presence of the One who loves us both with a perfect Love that can never be lost, delayed, or diminished in any way.

May we continue, together, to grow in grace.



Author Info



My name is Katherine Murray and I'm a writer, editor, mom, nana, and

student of Spirit in all its beautiful and varied expressions. I've written more than 50 nonfiction books on all sorts of topics and have published *Practical ~faith~*, a blog on learning and growing in faith, since 2000.

Please feel free to share your thoughts about this book by visiting my blog at

www.revisionsplus.com/practicalfaith.html or

writing to me at *kmurray230@sbcglobal.net*.



Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge all the wonderful teachers and texts that have assisted me as I learn and grow in faith.

These teachers and works, among many others, have been very important to me—offering just the right light at just the right moment:

- The *Bible* (all translations)
- Thomas Merton
- George Fox
- Douglas Steere
- Martin Buber
- Peace Pilgrim
- Rumi and Hafiz

- Fred Rogers
- Pablo Neruda
- Florence Scovel Shinn
- St. Theresa of Avila
- Antonio Machado
- Wendell Berry
- Chogyam Trungpa
- Pope John Paul XXIII
- Mary Baker Eddy
- Carl Jung
- Mary Oliver
- Lao Tzu
- H.H. the Dalai Lama
- Jean Klein
- Sri Ramana
- *and many more...*



Resources

ⁱ Kelly, Thomas R. 1941. *A Testament of Devotion*. New York: Harpercollins, 3.

ⁱⁱ New International Version, Study Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lao Tzu. *Brainy Quote*. Available at:
www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/l/laotzu386562.html.

^{iv} Mott, Amelia. 1922. *The Essays of John Woolman*. London: Macmillan, 180.

^v Pilgrim, Peace. 1982. *Peace Pilgrim: Her Life and Work in Her Own Words*. Sante Fe, NM: Ocean Tree Books, 16.

^{vi} Foundation for Inner Peace. *A Course in Miracles*. New York: Penguin, 163.

^{vii} Chopra, Deepak. 1982. *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*. San Rafael, CA: Amber-Allen Publishing, 18.

^{viii} Lawrence, Brother. 1958. *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 15.

^{ix} Chödrön, Pema. 2000. *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times*. Boston: Shambala, 65.

^x Ladinsky, D. 2002. On a day when the wind is perfect. In *Love Poems from God: Twelve Sacred Voices from the East and West*. Used with permission. New York: Penguin Putnam, 80.

^{xi} Merton, Thomas. 1988. *A Vow of Conversation: Journals 1964-1965*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 44.

^{xii} Nhat Hanh, Thich. 2002. *No Death, No Fear: Comforting Wisdom for Life*. New York: Riverhead Books, 105.

~ *Peace* ~



For a loving tomorrow...