

Spiritual Awakening in a Complex World by Alice Gardner

Awakening is an often used word, and it has many meanings including what we do every morning after we have slept. When we awaken in the morning we do so without effort—it just happens. We awaken because of noise, or simply because we have slept long enough. This is a wonderful metaphor for spiritual awakening.

Spiritual awakening comes to us not as a linear effect of our efforts to follow our religion, to try to be the right kind of person or to try to be spiritually awake. These are, in a way, all an extension of our dreams. Spiritual awakening can as easily come to us through the noise of a disturbing world or through simply having been asleep long enough in our dreams of separation and suffering. As we awaken we discover that before and behind whatever the content of our dreaming has been, who we always have been is something quite beyond our previous imagining.

Let us look into what could be meant by the noise that may disturb us into spiritual awakening. Could it be the sort of noise that comes from inside our own beings—from our hearts feeling unsatisfied by our current lives? Could it come from our unwillingness to settle for the shallow satisfactions of the material world—from a disturbing knowing that we are here for a higher purpose? Could it come from a yearning to fulfill that? This is the sort of noise that heightens when we listen to each day's news about the current events in the world. We are so often deeply disturbed by the details of the human condition and the critical issues of modern life. How can we accept this world as it is? How can we meet its issues with equanimity and compassion?

There is a long-time circulated statement from the Hopi Elders that ends with the statement “we are the ones we have been waiting for.” They tell us in no uncertain terms that our current generation is the one that will make a difference in the world and that we can no longer look to the future for resolution of our spiritual yearnings. As we look at the world the way it currently is, we wonder how this could be true! It does make sense if we consider the noise of the world situation as an awakening force! This noise is as effective as if our neighbor had put on their favorite music at top volume at 5 AM!

Usually when we ponder the intractable issues of the 21st century, out of habit we want to try to fix things outwardly. We want to feed the hungry, heal the sick and right the wrongs in the outer world and on a massive scale if possible. But then we notice what has come of that through past efforts! People do manage to do some good, but never get to the root of the problems which seems to lie somewhere in the core of human nature. Also many times we can see that our solution to one problem simply leads directly into the next problem that needs solving. Take as an example the invention of better and better defensive weapons with which to protect ourselves or the wonderful ability to heat our homes with fossil fuels!

Fixing things outwardly is a well-established habit for how to deal with our problems that comes from a mind-centered (ego-centric) stance in life. Our thought-based sense of who

we are makes us only consider surface level fixes for world issues that actually go much deeper. The issues that our world is presenting us with can be met more effectively on the level of their origin by going beneath the surface. We can look into what they bring our attention to about ourselves. Each disturbance to our peace of mind is a pointer towards inner resolution of something that is disturbing our own hearts. In that way life's disturbances can be seen as a part of the awakening force that they are designed by life to be. To approach the world issues (or personal issues) inwardly, in no way hampers our ability to offer concrete service as needed (such as feeding the hungry). It is not an either/or. Looking inward for resolution simply is adding another dimension to our awareness of our situation, and this opens up the possibilities for what can happen.

Now we may ask, as we feel disturbed by some dilemma or issue or find ourselves angry about the way that the world is—what inner way of being is this issue asking me to put my attention on? We follow the trail of our attention inward, to plumb our own depths where we find the entirety of human nature, not just the parts that we think *should* be there. The trail of our attention inevitably leads us to the roots of whatever the human tendency might be. We find that we know in our hearts just how the situation that triggered us came to be in front of us—because it is a part of who we are in that inner place of oneness. It is a part that we would have liked to reject. Here we can find everything that we thought we would like to be angry about in the world scene. The issues themselves serve us by bringing us to awareness of these parts in ourselves, and if we are willing, to the opportunity to feel what is in our own hearts, lying behind the outer manifestation in the world which was our trigger. We must feel these things to heal their outward forms! If we reject outer things with our anger and judgment, and tell ourselves that we are right and others are wrong, we are only reinforcing what we would reject. It is only by feeling and including all of the things that we would have previously judged, which is feeling and including all of ourselves, that we become free of them.

Often we have been told by our religions and spiritual traditions that we need to be forgiving. Could this be the same thing? It is my sense that it is the same in a very deep sense. We become capable of forgiveness when we find the thing or person in need of forgiveness in our own hearts, and meet them there with compassion. It is ultimately a matter of forgiving ourselves! In that place of connection, we find that forgiving others and forgiving ourselves is the same thing. Whatever we have difficulty forgiving in our outer experience, is connected directly to a place where we ourselves are in need of attention and compassion. Trying to fix or change other people's outer behavior without connecting inwardly first, will never hope to touch the deep connectedness through the heart that our outer experiences can be opportunities for.

Our judgments about our world and mind's limited view of things are being outgrown. The broader reality of who we truly are is what spiritual awakening brings to life. When we have slept long enough we naturally become ready to move into a new awareness of ourselves and of our world. Unless we are willing to complacently watch the pollution, violence, poverty, hunger, injustice and all the rest of it, we feel moved by the life that is in us to address these things. We mustn't think however, that outer activity is all we can manage, because our ability to change the outer world of form is so very limited. Taking

the route of inner responsiveness can be far more powerful than our outer actions of fixing. Through the portal of connectedness with our world through our own human hearts, we can meet intimately with whatever issues we face in our experience of life. We can find the roots of the disturbance that they cause, deep in the source of our own humanness, and meet them there in peace. We can come to terms with them inside ourselves.

As we free ourselves internally, we then act outwardly or not, as our situation allows, and our actions then carry a different energy. We have met the supposed “enemy” inwardly and there is no more need to carry anger or blame with us like a club with which to defeat an outer enemy. Now we are in this together, and there is now a different way that our actions are accepted by those who might otherwise have stood against us in opposition. Without the internal processes of enemy-making, we do not find ourselves confronting outer enemies and needing them to change in order for us to be at peace. Instead we are able to notice that people who hold different ideas than ourselves broaden our sense of self, teaching us about the breadth of the One that is who we truly are. All is included in that One. Nothing is excluded. We still do what we can when a way opens for us, but we do it with a new and unifying energy, breathing vitality into our actions, and causing everything in our vicinity to lilt towards awakening in its own way and in its own time.

1541 words

© 2007 Alice Gardner

Alice Gardner is author of the new book: *Life Beyond Belief, Everyday Living as Spiritual Practice*, available at www.awakepublishing.com. You are invited to also visit www.wideawakeliving.com, a sister website written by Alice as a support and inspiration for spiritual awakening no matter what your tradition. Alice also offers mentoring services by telephone.