

Attention

Attention is part of consciousness. Within consciousness there is awareness, attention, concentration and absorption.

Attention is not separate from that to which is attended. This basic truth is a foremost consideration of the nature of reality, as living being experiences it.

This being said, there are various dimensions of attention which significantly alter and energize attention, which is crucial to the growth and well-being of all living being.

Dr. Lester Femi, of Princeton, correctly identified two dimensions of attention, that being: object versus immersive attention and narrow versus dispersed attention. However, the other dimensions of attention not identified such as, voluntary versus involuntary attention, active versus passive attention as well as emotive attention, in which attention is directed to pleasant and or unpleasant conditions which of course is largely influenced by cognitive interaction with various conditions.

In the of objective versus immersive dimension, attention can be focused on a specific or individual object such as a tree, rock, forest or mountain. Those "objects" are seen as, or experienced as, individual and separately independent things. This is the object end of the dimension.

The other end of this dimension of attention is immersion. When one abides in immersive attention individuality is dissolved into unison. It is there and yet, not there as something separate from everything else. Perhaps an instance of immersion in the physical sense, would be an ice cube dissolving in water. Initially the ice cube appears to be separate, due to the various interacting conditions such as, temperature. However, as those interactions change so does the cube. In this case it dissolves and becomes part of the water it always was.

Object versus immersive attention is very much associated with what Buddhism refers to as form and emptiness. Though there are myriad forms in the universe, there is not one that exist independently from all the others. No form or thing has independent existence. It is said to be empty. Diversity and unison coexist simultaneously!

Narrow versus dispersed dimension of attention involves a spatial dimension of attention. Attention may be narrowly focused on a single object or thing (physical or mental), or it may be a wide and broad focus, encompassing many things or objects. Focus in this dimension of attention can be represented by the following symbols (<or >). Again, the interaction of any living being with the rest of its environment will dictate how this lens is focused.

The dimensions of voluntary versus involuntary attention and active versus passive attention are dimensions of attention that are influenced by their interaction with the cognitive function of volition.

One may choose to direct attention to a specific "object of attention". That object may be a book, a pretty face, food etc. With voluntary attention the individual controls the direction of attention to the "object of attention". In the case of involuntary attention, it is the "object of attention" which dictates the focus of attention. This can be easily realized when a sudden or unexpected danger presents itself. In this case the "object of attention" dictates focus of attention. Attention can be involuntary captured by pleasant or unpleasant conditions.

The dimension of active versus passive attention is related to voluntary versus involuntary attention. The difference is that in active versus passive attention, there are degrees of awareness (conscious versus unconscious) that one may be attending to something. This dimension of attention can have a profound impact on the functioning and well-being of an individual.

My old Zen master, the Rev. Kondo Nakajima, once said to me, "If you want to know why you're suffering, just look at what your pointer is stuck on. Your pointer is your attention. Attention and concentration, which is sustained attention or focus on one thing or condition, is the power of the mind.