

GREEN TEA LEAVES  
Monthly newsletter of Awarezen  
~ August 2025 ~



Friends,

From the perspective of individuality, the drama of everyday existence seems so real and solid, impervious to change. Even though we subscribe to a vague notion of impermanence, we do not actually see the moment by moment disintegration of all there is. Hence, we cling to this limited bodymind experience and become stuck in our constricted identities.

From the perspective of cosmicity, nothing really happens from their own side. Everything simply manifest spontaneously as natural displays of cosmic awareness. Awareness in itself does not perceive or conceive of “things” that inherently exist from their own side. Rather, awareness is absolutely still in its clear-light emptiness — no subject, no object — yet remaining nondually cognizant of mental and sensory appearances as mere appearances. Awareness perceives all things through the localised perspective of each and every sentient being, while simultaneously witnessing all as mere appearances in their emptiness.

Awareness sees and knows each thought and feeling, every psychological event and operation, every life event and circumstance of every sentient being across time and space, in all dimensions and planes of being — but from the vantage point of limited sentient minds. An enlightened mind is thus not a limited sentient mind of a limited person in space

and time, even though they may appear as a physical bodily form located in New York, Beijing, or Bodhgaya. An enlightened mind is pristine awareness in essence and expression that witnesses and knows all there is to know in the cosmos. Such awareness simultaneously knows conventional and ultimate reality — both dependently arisen phenomena and persons as they appear and as they exist in emptiness at the same time.

### *What is Consciousness?*

Consciousness is a word that needs clarification and unpacking. From a Buddhist and specifically Dzogchen perspective, consciousness can be coarse, subtle, or subtlest. Coarse consciousness is the consciousness conflated with all sensory and mental operations of the everyday mind. Subtle consciousness is known as substrate consciousness (*alaya vijnana*), which is the underlying flow of cognizance and luminosity in which is stored all the seeds and imprints of volitional activity (*karma*) and delusive mental afflictions (*klesha*). Subtlest consciousness is primordial consciousness (*amala vijnana*) that is unborn, pristine, unobstructedly free, non-local, and atemporal. Substrate consciousness is saturated with reification or self-grasping ignorance. Primordial consciousness is empty of reification, devoid of all traces of self-grasping and ignorance. It is not merely “empty of content.”

Substrate consciousness is realized through calm abiding (*shamatha*), equivalent to what Advaitins call Self-abidance. Here, there is no penetrating wisdom that cuts through the bed of reification connate with consciousness. Reification is unseen and unrecognized for what it is due to the darkness of ignorance that pervades it. Reification can have differing degrees of subtlety. It is not merely apprehending objects of consciousness as concrete and impervious to change but involves hidden grasping of consciousness itself as real and absolute. Even though the experience of tranquil immersion in substrate consciousness is one of bliss, luminosity, and non-conceptuality with a sense of seeming infinitude, it is nonetheless an afflicted consciousness gripped by self-grasping. Self-grasping is the wrong perception of inherent existence of person and phenomena. Consciousness itself is that phenomenon, wrongly grasped as final substance of reality.

### *Distinguishing Primordial from Substrate Consciousness*

Primordial consciousness is only realized by cutting through substrate consciousness. This is accomplished by wisdom, the sharp *vajra* of insight. Without this wisdom, mere abiding in substrate consciousness is not going to free oneself from suffering in all its depth and dimension. It also limits the ability of consciousness to be of utmost benefit to all sentient beings. Resting here, in *shamatha* which ranges from access *jhana* through the first four *ghanas* and all four *aruppas*, does not confer omniscience — the ability to know the mental and physical activity of all sentient beings and all happenings throughout space and time.

Only full flowering of unbroken abidance in primordial consciousness confers such omniscience. This is the ocean of wisdom consciousness (*dharmakaya*) of all the buddhas

of the three times. By contrast, resting in substrate consciousness might feel infinitely luminous and “empty” but such emptiness is mere emptiness of limited content and felt boundary, not genuine emptiness of inherent existence (*svabhava*) as perceived by enlightened buddhas. While seemingly infinite, such substrate consciousness can only experience the world of content through the sensing, perceiving, feeling, and thinking of the limited and individual bodymind. This is far from omniscience. It also accounts for the observation by some Advaita teachers that God’s Being or Consciousness is never conscious of any limited object save through the individual mind of the individual being. Such statement betrays the lack of authentic realization of primordial consciousness or pristine awareness, the authentic Buddha-mind.

### *Mind of God?*

One can equate this Buddha-mind with the mind of God, which is beyond even the subtlest reification of the self of phenomena. For the mind of God, everything including itself is empty of inherent existence even as it directly and immediately perceives all knowable events and phenomena across space and time. This attainment might seem far-fetched and ludicrously impossible. Yet, the very fact that our limited minds are naturally cognizant and luminous, however limited its scope, offers the potential for its infinite expansion in magnitude and vista. The essential nature of cognizant luminosity is unborn, unchanging, and stainless, not subject to increase or decrease. But the scope of its knowing capacity can be potentially developed to the point of omniscience. That very potential is the seed of enlightenment (buddha-nature) in sentient beings. This connate cognizance, luminosity, and emptiness of consciousness means that there is no fixed fate, status, or limit to the potential of mind for absolute freedom.

### *Everyday Wisdom*

Try out these ideas for the next month:

1. *Start and sustain as best as you can a daily meditation practice.* Set a regular convenient time, twice daily, if possible, to sit in mindfulness and introspection with relaxed ease and grounded stability. Use the breath as your object if you like.
2. *Learn the methods of mindfulness of breathing from a credible source.* For example, writings and teachings of Lama Alan Wallace, Bhikkhu Analayo, and Chan master Shengyen are viable options.
3. *Explore consciousness by learning to “settle the mind in its natural state” (a Dzogchen shamatha method taught by Lama Alan).* Discern mental activity and content from the luminous cognizant space of the mind, as a platform for future deeper probing.

Bon voyage on your journey of interiority.

Blessings,

C