

Introduction to

ABCT

AWARENESS

BASED

COGNITIVE THERAPY

*A new form of *Non-Dual*
Therapy as simple as **ABC***

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS AWARENESS BASED COGNITIVE THERAPY?

Awareness-Based Cognitive Therapy (ABCT) is a new form of ‘Non-Dual’ counselling and therapy – meaning that it is derived from insights rooted in Indian yogic philosophy and practice. The *original and concise distillation* of these insights is termed **The Awareness Principle**. This principle also finds expression in the manifold **Practices of Awareness** which together constitute what I call ‘The New Yoga of Awareness’. In contrast to other forms of therapy including other ‘cognitive’ therapies, its focus does not lie on the specific contents of consciousness (events, thoughts, feelings etc) or their relation, but rather on a Fundamental Distinction between *all* such contents – all elements of our experience - and the larger space or ‘field’ of awareness in which they arise.

WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM ABCT?

Counsellors, life coaches and psychotherapists, physicians and other medical and psychiatric professionals, social workers and carers, managers, teachers and parents, alternative health practitioners - and all those seeking aid or care from them.

HOW CAN THEY BENEFIT?

1. By learning to be fully aware of and open to their own subjective experience and emotions and those of individuals in their care, but ...
 - **Without** being overwhelmed by them.
 - **Without** feeling them as a source of constant ‘stress’.
 - **Without** having to shut out or act out, suppress or somatise their experience.
 - **Without** having to hide themselves behind a professional mask, role or persona.
 - **Without** having to clinically objectify or label another person’s distress or dis-ease.
 - **Instead** being open to and able to respond to any experience, person or situation in an aware, free and non-reactive way.
2. By showing those seeking their aid or care how they also can be fully aware of and open to their own subjective experience of themselves and others, but ...
 - **Without** being overwhelmed by their experience.
 - **Without** thinking there is something ‘wrong’ with them.
 - **Without** identifying with their experience and reacting from it.
 - **Without** having to shut out or act out, suppress or somatise their experience.
 - **Without** having to identify with medical labels and/or with the roles of bad, mad, sick or ‘difficult’ people.
 - **Instead** having a direct feeling awareness of the innate meaningfulness of their experience and behaviour, transforming it through this awareness.

WHO YOU ARE

Who are you?

You are not what you think.

You are not the self you experience.

You are not your experience of yourself.

You are not your experience of the world.

You are more than the sum of all your experiences.

You are more than the sum of all you have ever experienced.

You are the awareness of all you experience within and around you.

You are not your body or mind, perceptions, emotions or actions.

You are the awareness of all these elements of your experience.

That awareness transcends your body, mind and emotions.

That awareness is not bounded by your body or mind.

That awareness is not even your personal property.

Still less is it a property of your mind or body.

Instead you, your body and your mind, are

Shapes taken by awareness,

Within awareness.

THE FUNDAMENTAL DISTINCTION

There is the way we are feeling.

There is the way we think about it.

There is the way we express our thoughts and feelings.

There is the way they colour our view of the world.

There is the way they influence how we see others.

There is the way they shape our sense of ourselves.

There is the way they lead us to behave.

There is the way they affect our bodies.

And there is AWARENESS ...

Awareness of our thoughts and feelings.

Awareness of the way we express them.

Awareness of the way they affect our bodies and behaviour.

Awareness of how they lead us to act and react to others.

Awareness of the way they colour our view of the world.

Awareness of the way they affect our sense of ourselves.

And yet...

This awareness of our feelings and thoughts is not itself a feeling or thought.

This awareness of our bodies and minds is not itself anything bodily or mental.

This awareness embraces and also transcends each and every thing we are aware of.

That is why it has been called 'universal' and 'transcendental'.

Identifying with this 'transcendental' awareness transforms us. It frees us from identification with our bodies and minds, with our feelings and thoughts, sensations and perceptions, actions and reactions, behaviours and beliefs. At the same time it creates space for new, clearer feelings and thoughts to arise - and with them a new sense of ourselves. A sense of that Self that is not simply aware of this, that or the other. A self that is not simply aware but rather IS awareness – pure and simple. Not 'my' or 'your' awareness, but an awareness transcending 'I' and 'You'. The self that is nothing but pure awareness – the 'Awareness Self' - was known in the Indian philosophical tradition of 'Non-Duality' or *Advaita* as the Atman or Chaitanyatman. Achieving identity with this Self is the aim of all 'Non-Dual' or Advaitic traditions.

TIME TO BE AWARE

In robbing us of time, today's culture also robs us of dignity. But dignity has no great value in a culture devoted to progress, power and productivity. Since time is money in modern culture, few of us can afford dignity.

Alexander Lowen

Today's world faces a grave economic, ecological, cultural crisis – indeed a global civilisational crisis. The word 'crisis' means a 'turning point' in time. The basic need expressed in this crisis however, is to find a way of being-in-time and being-in-the-World that is no longer dominated by 'busy-ness' - by doing – and aimed only at having. The new relation to time that human beings so desperately need at this time is one in which they give themselves more time - not just to produce or consume, work or play, but to *be aware*. For only out of a deeper, more sustained and meditative awareness of all we experience in the course of our everyday lives can we relieve stresses and come to better decisions and deeper more thoughtful solutions to personal, social and world problems. Only by taking time to be aware can people learn to be and relate to others in a more meditative and aware way – thus transforming human relations. And only through meditative awareness can important decisions, whether in personal life, business, management or government be properly pre-meditated, taken with full awareness of *all there is to be aware of*. Mismanagement, misgovernment, maladministration and maltreatment of others all stem from the self-defeating rush of busy-ness, from believing one has no time to be aware. In reality however, it is the very culture of busy-ness that slows down and delays aware, effective and empathic action. All the political, institutional and business powers of this world conspire to keep us busy in an *unaware* way - forcing us to sell our time to them in the service of ever-more productive and mind-numbing 'labour'. In return they sell us ever-more mind-numbing products - and equate 'quality time' with the purchase and consumption of these products.

Yet the global business culture of enforced economic conscription, speed and busy-ness also expresses a deep-seated fear of awareness – not least an unwillingness to be fully aware of all the ways in which, lacking awareness, human beings are currently destroying each other and the earth. This civilisational crisis and turning point in time tells us – it is high time for humanity to be aware. Only by giving oneself *time* for awareness can we come to dwell in an expanded space of awareness, one that can embrace every element of our experience of ourselves, other people and the world around us. Only through dwelling in this expanded space of awareness can we maintain awareness of more than one thing at the same time, more than one aspect of ourselves and others, more than one thing or thought, more than one feeling or voice within us, more than one choice before us. What we sense as 'time' is the very *space* of awareness, more or less expansive or contracted, we feel within the moment. Conversely, what we feel as having 'space' is the very *time* we give ourselves to expand the spaciousness of our awareness within the moment. Without giving ourselves time to be aware, the *space* of our awareness is contracted to a single focus and we lose a sense of the expansive field of awareness in which we dwell. We feel we lack 'breathing space' and call it 'stress'. But the breathing space we lack is a breathing space of awareness, one we can only create by granting ourselves and others time to be aware – the common purpose of both 'therapy' and 'meditation'

THE AWARENESS PRINCIPLE

THE AWARENESS PRINCIPLE is an important basic principle of psychology, yet one that is ignored in contemporary Western understandings of ‘consciousness’, as well as in ‘counselling’ and ‘psychotherapy’ as they have developed in the West.

That is because Western psychology has not yet recognised, as Eastern philosophy has long done, a most basic axiom of the principle itself, namely that awareness as such is quite distinct from its psychological contents, that as ‘pure consciousness’ it transcends everything we are conscious or aware *of*.

The Awareness Principle recognises the ‘transcendental’ character of awareness. It also recognises its ‘immanent’ character – that awareness is also present *within* each and everything we are aware of. Awareness transcends everything we are aware of – for it is the ultimate source of all that is. Precisely because it is the source of everything however, everything we are aware of also *is* an awareness in its own right.

Every sensation, feeling or thought, every physical or mental symptom – indeed every part of our body and mind – is itself an awareness of something *beyond itself* – for example a situation or something going on in another person.

A bodily sensation such as hotness or sweating is not just something we are aware of. It is also our way of sensing something beyond it – for example the heat of the Sun or something we are anxious about. Similarly any feeling is not just something we are aware of. Instead it is a ‘pre-reflective’ or ‘unformulated’ awareness of something or someone beyond itself (a relationship, situation or life question for example) just as a thought may be a reflective and formulated awareness of something beyond it. And a bodily symptom or mental state such as anxiety or depression for example, is not just something we are *aware of*. Nor is it a life ‘problem’ in itself. Instead the symptom is itself a bodily *awareness* of a life problem.

The Awareness Principle unites two major axioms therefore:

1. *Awareness* is everything
2. Everything is *an awareness*.

These two axioms are united by the understanding that since every atom and molecule, cell and organ, being or body, person or planet, is a shape taken by the universal awareness that is its source. In Awareness-Based Cognitive Therapy the two axioms of The Awareness Principle are united by a three-stage Practice of Awareness:

1. Giving time to be *aware* of each and every element of our experience, positive or negative, internal or external, in an immediate bodily way.
2. Coming to an awareness of the aspects of our life world and relationships that every element of our experience is *itself an awareness of* - pointing us to.
3. Ceasing to *identify* with any elements of our experience as such, but instead identifying and expanding with the *spaces* of pure awareness, inner and outer, within which we experience them.

THE AWARENESS PRINCIPLE AND THERAPY

There are many new ‘approaches’ to medicine, counselling, mental health and psychotherapy. **The Awareness Principle** on the other hand, as its name implies, is not simply a new ‘approach’ but a fundamentally new therapeutic principle or ‘paradigm’. As well as being a new therapeutic principle however, The Awareness Principle is also a fundamentally new philosophical principle, one that in turn provides the foundation of a new scientific principle or ‘paradigm’, a new medical principle, a new psychological and sociological principle, a new meditational principle - and a new spiritual and religious principle. Above all, The Awareness Principle is a new and highly practical life principle – a principle to live by.

Out of The Awareness Principle comes an entire range of new Practices or ‘Yogas’ of awareness. These Practices of Awareness provide a new foundation for life, just as it is The Awareness Principle itself that provides a new foundation for science. The Awareness Principle is the guiding principle for The Practice of Awareness. It is through Practicing Awareness in life that the Awareness Principle itself truly comes to life – not just as an abstract principle but as a way of life, not just as a philosophical or scientific principle, but as an intrinsically therapeutic life-principle.

The Awareness Principle as such is neither old nor new but is an ‘old-new’ principle. Its groundbreaking and authentic originality or ‘newness’ comes from making fully explicit – for the first time and in an entirely new way – a primary truth or ‘first principle’ recognised long ago. And whilst this first principle is implicit in both life and science – as well as in many forms of counselling, meditation and psychotherapy – its primary truth is still unrecognised. As a result, it has remained unformulated as a primary principle or ‘first principle’ – as a principle of both life and science. As a first principle it has been replaced by the principle of ‘first causes’ - whether of life and the universe as a whole, health and ill-health, or of human experience in all its shapes.

Whenever a new therapeutic principle or practice is announced, the key questions asked about it in today’s economically governed world are:

- **whether it is effective?**
- **whether it is economic?**
- **whether it is ‘evidence-based’ and therefore ‘scientific’?**

The final question is the most fundamental one in relation to the first two, for it rests on an unquestioned concept of ‘science’ itself. This concept in turn has led to counter-productive notions of ‘effectiveness’ and ‘economy’ based solely on so-called ‘objective’ criteria – those that can be reduced to measurable quantities. The basic presuppositions of the dominant Western conception of ‘science’ are not themselves the object of any possible scientific experiment. The Awareness Principle is a new *scientific* as well as therapeutic principle because it challenges these presuppositions in the most evidential or empirical way possible - in a way more ‘scientific’ than ‘science’ itself. It does so by recognising that the first, most self-evidential, experiential, ‘empirical’ or ‘scientific’ fact is NOT the ‘objective’ existence of a universe of things but *subjective awareness* of that universe. That awareness however, is not itself any sort of ‘thing’ or ‘object’ – and therefore cannot, in principle, be explained by or reduced to any thing or things we are aware of. The most basic presupposition of science is that it identifies reality with *objectivity*. The Awareness Principle reasserts the primary, universal reality of *subjectivity* – of awareness.

BASIC AXIOMS OF THE AWARENESS PRINCIPLE

1. The central axiom or 'First Principle' of 'The Awareness Principle' is that Awareness itself – and not any thing or universe of things we are aware *of* - is the First Principle of the universe.
2. Awareness is the 'transcendental' condition - the 'pre-condition' or 'field condition' - for our awareness of any thing or universe of things whatsoever.
3. Awareness embraces and transcends all that we experience or are aware *of* – all 'contents' of consciousness and all elements of our experience.
4. Just as dreaming cannot be explained by or reduced to anything we *dream of*, nor can awareness be explained by or reduced to any thing or things we are *aware of* (for example matter or energy, the body or brain chemistry).
5. Just as space is inseparable but at the same time quite distinct from every object in it, so is awareness inseparable and at the same time quite distinct from each and every thing we are aware of.
6. Just as space embraces, permeates and transcends every object in it, so does awareness embrace, permeate and transcend everything we are aware of in it.
7. Awareness of things is not itself a thing. Thus awareness of a localised object in space is not itself a localised object in space - it is non-local and object-free.
8. Awareness of a bodily sensation or symptom, drive or impulse, action or behavioural pattern, emotion or thought *is not itself* a sensation or symptom, drive or impulse, action or behavioural pattern, and is therefore intrinsically *free* of all such contents of consciousness.
9. Everything we are aware of also *is* an awareness. A feeling is an awareness of something – and not just something we are aware of, and so is a bodily sensation or symptom. Awareness is therefore not only 'transcendent' but also 'immanent' - present *within* all things.

BASIC MAXIMS OF THE AWARENESS PRINCIPLE

The awareness of any content of consciousness is not itself a content of consciousness. It is essentially content-free.

The awareness of any thing is not itself a thing. It is thing-free.

The awareness of a thought is not itself a thought. It is thought-free.

The awareness of a feeling is not itself a feeling. It is feeling-free.

The awareness of a sensation is not itself a sensation. It is sensation free.

The awareness of an impulse to act or react does not itself impel us to react – it is action and reaction-free.

FROM FOCAL TO FIELD AWARENESS

Most forms of counselling and psychotherapy - including traditional forms of Cognitive Therapy - take as their starting point particular elements of our experience or 'contents' of consciousness – whether life situations or events, 'dysfunctional' thoughts, emotions or body sensations, dream symbols or somatic symptoms, reactive or 'maladaptive' behaviours. They then seek to link these, intuitively or 'scientifically' in chains of 'causes' and 'effects' (Diagram 1). Even if multiple causal 'factors' or reciprocal relationships between different elements are admitted, the model remains based only on *linear* relations between elements. Other models (Diagram 2) see the different elements of our experience as part of a structured whole, a 'complex' or 'gestalt' that is more than the sum of its parts.

Diagram 1

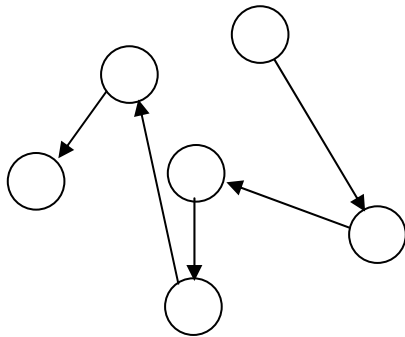
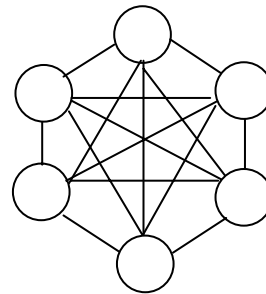


Diagram 2

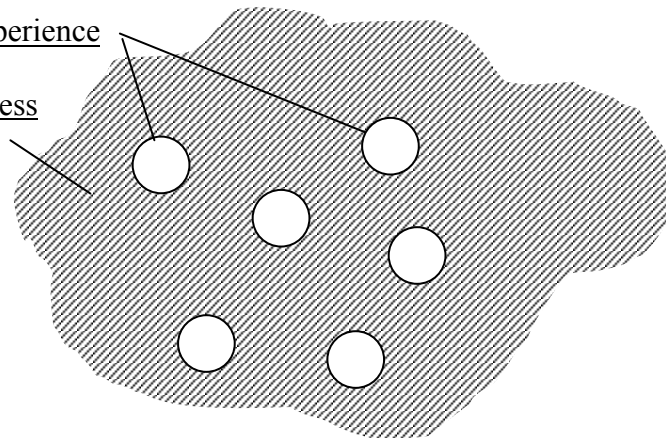


Both models reduce the individual soul or psyche to elements of the individual's experience, whether linked in causal chains or seen as structures or complexes of interrelated elements. Both models - and the approaches to counselling and therapy deriving from them – also ignore the larger background field of *awareness* (hatched area in Diagram 3) from and within which all elements of our experience emerge.

Diagram 3

elements of experience

field of awareness



AWARENESS BASED COGNITIVE THERAPY

The more we *focus* awareness on any given element(s) of our experience however, the less sense we have of the larger background *field* of awareness within which alone they stand out or ‘ex-ist’. Yet it is only from and *as* this awareness field - which is present not only around but *within* each of its elements - that we can feel ourselves into these elements. It is in this way that we can gain a true *inner* sense of each element and of their *inner* connection.

That is why **Awareness Based Cognitive Therapy** is based on a ‘Fundamental Distinction’ – the distinction between all such contents of consciousness and elements of experience – every possible thing we are aware of – and *awareness as such*. Instead of encouraging the client to focus awareness on *localised contents* of consciousness or *elements of experience* such as bodily sensations, thoughts, recollections or emotions and to turn these into clinical ‘objects’ of analysis and manipulation, the aim of **ABCT** is to help the client to experience the essentially non-local or ‘field’ character of awareness - and the inherent freeing and therapeutic effect of identifying with this ‘meta-cognitive’, ‘transcendental’ or *field awareness*.

The aims of **ABCT** are achieved on the basis of the following ‘four recognitions’:

1. Recognition of **The Fundamental Distinction** - between awareness as such and specific things we are aware of (contents of consciousness).
2. Recognition that awareness, like space, *transcends* all we perceive or experience within it.
3. Recognition of **The Fundamental Choice** - between identifying with things we experience, or identifying with the spacious *awareness field* in which we experience them.
4. Recognition that awareness is not only ‘transcendent’ but ‘immanent’ – present within all things, and that therefore anything we are aware of, including thoughts, emotions, sensations or symptoms of dis-ease, is *itself* an awareness.

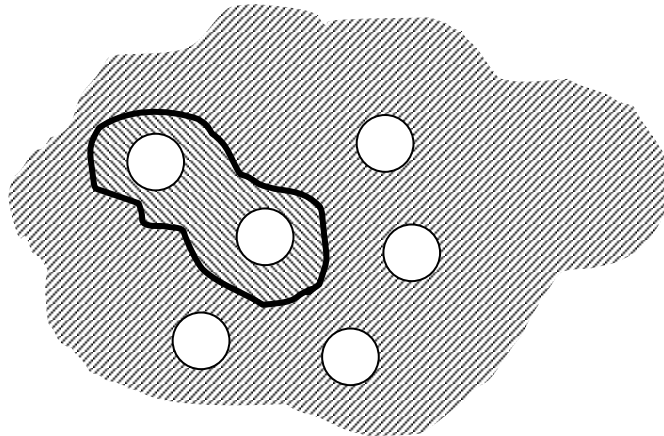
These four recognitions allow the client to practice the **Basic Awareness Cycle**:

1. **Being Aware** of all there is to be aware of. This needs time. Giving ourselves the necessary time to be more aware of things and aware of more things is the common essence of both therapy and meditation.
2. **Bodying Awareness** – not verbally labelling the things we are aware of but giving ourselves time to be aware of our bodies and of our wordless bodily awareness of things.
3. **Being Awareness** – giving ourselves time to distinguish anything we are aware of from the very awareness of it - and identifying with or ‘being’ that awareness itself.
4. **Being the Awareness that things themselves are** – giving ourselves time to feel what any ‘thing’ we are aware of (for example a mood, body sensation or symptom) is itself a (hidden or indirect) awareness of. In this way we no longer experience the thing as a thing at all but as an awareness of something or someone else beyond it - thus returning us to step 1 in the awareness cycle (**Being Aware**).

‘BEING AWARENESS’ AS FIELD AWARENESS

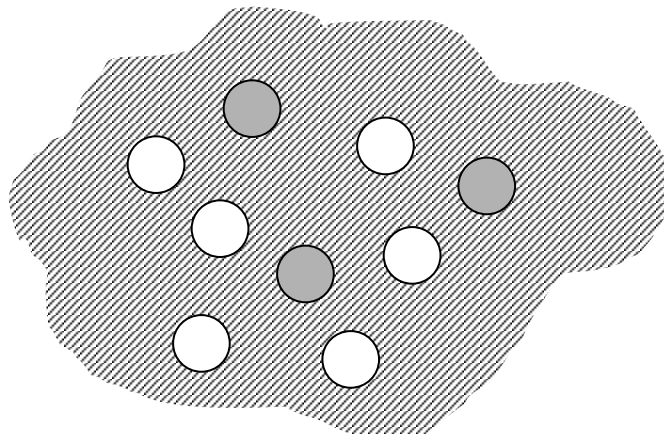
‘Being Awareness’ means identifying with the ‘spaces’ of awareness, inner or outer, in which we experience things - within which each and every element of our experience emerges and takes shape. This means stepping back into *field awareness* rather than seeking some external and ‘objective’ vantage point from which to focus on the different elements of our experience. In reality no such ‘objective’ vantage point is possible. That is because all possible vantage points - for example thoughts about our experience or theoretical models of it – are themselves *part of* our experience and nothing separate or *apart from it*. They too emerge from and take shape from within that larger space or field of awareness which is the true essence of the ‘soul’ or ‘psyche’ – not its elements or contents – even though this field of awareness is in turn coloured and toned by each of the elements within it. Focal awareness narrows our awareness field. The more bounded and contracted our awareness field becomes however (see bounded area in Diagram 4) the less elements of our experience we are aware of within it.

Diagram 4



If we identify with the spacious *field* dimension of awareness on the other hand, we not only embrace more elements of our actual experience in awareness, but also create space to allow hitherto hidden or latent elements of our experience (grey-shaded circles in Diagram 5) to come into awareness.

Diagram 5



A BASIC COURSE IN AWARENESS

Training in Awareness-Based Cognitive Therapy begins with its ABC - A Basic Course leading to A Basic Certificate.

The Basic Course in ABCT is a group course designed to develop the following three basic capacities or competencies.

A.

The capacity of participants to precisely and concisely explain the basic principles of ABCT to:

- 1. peers and other professionals**
- 2. clients or people in their care**

B.

The capacity of participants to successfully apply the basic practices of ABCT:

- 1. in their life and relationships outside work**
- 2. in their work and professional relationships**

C.

The capacity of participants to effectively teach the basic principles and practices to at least two individuals in their care over a fixed number of time-limited sessions.

Evaluation of these three primary competencies for certification purposes will be based on self-reporting and self-assessment questionnaires, oral and written testing, audio-taped sessions and individual supervision of candidates. Complementary individual training sessions are available on request to all participants in the basic group course.

BASIC TRAINING METHODS

The principal medium used in The Basic Course to give participants an effective understanding and experience of the Awareness Principle and its Practice is a precisely sequenced series of awareness-raising questions and exercises designed to first of all cultivate whole-body awareness and then to experience ‘pure’ awareness in its fundamental character – as the very space (inner or outer) in which we become aware of things. For the *relation* between awareness as such and different things we are aware of is not only ‘analogous’ to the relation between the seeming emptiness of space on the one hand and sensory objects in space on the other – it IS that relation. A basic message of the course is that space as such is not essentially an ‘objective’ dimension of ‘physical’ reality, but a basic dimension of subjectivity or awareness itself – that which allows both things and thoughts to emerge (Greek ‘physis’) into or stand out (‘ex-ist’) in awareness.

BASIC AWARENESS-RAISING QUESTIONS

1. Name one thing you are aware of in the space around you.
 2. Example answer: ‘a notepad’.
-
1. Name one or more *sensory* qualities of that thing you are aware of.
 2. Example answer: ‘white’ and ‘made of paper’.
-
1. Can you distinguish between the thing and the space around it? (Yes)
 2. Could you be aware of the thing without a space in which to be aware of it? (No)
-
1. Is the space in which you are aware of the thing ‘white’ or ‘made of ‘paper’? (No)
 2. Is the awareness of the thing ‘white’ or ‘made of paper? (No)
-
1. Name one thing you are aware of inside you.
Example answer: ‘depression’.
 2. Name one or more *sensory* quality of that ‘depression’.
Example answer: feeling ‘heavy’ or ‘pulled down’ into myself.
 3. Name one thing that that ‘depression’ is itself an awareness of.
-
1. Can you let yourself sense and identify with the spaces in which you are aware of both thoughts and things, instead of with those thoughts and things themselves?
 2. Can you distinguish between thoughts you are aware of in your head and the inner head space in which you are aware of them? (Yes)

THE ‘ABC’ OF ABCT

‘A’ FOR AWARENESS AND ACTION

The aim of ABCT is to cultivate an on-going Awareness of all the different dimensions of our experience within the moment, and at the same time distinguish that awareness from any specific thing we experience or are aware of – including our overall self-experience. Being distinct from anything we are aware of, awareness is what frees us from passive identification with different elements of our mental, emotional and bodily experience. In this way it also allows us to act in ways that are not simply a reaction to our experience of ourselves, other people and the world.

‘B’ FOR BODYHOOD AND BREATHING

The term ‘mindfulness’ is a poor and misleading substitute for ‘awareness’. That is because awareness is not a product of ‘the mind’ or something purely mental. Awareness itself is neither mental nor bodily. It is awareness of our bodies and minds, our bodies *as well* as our minds. Only through awareness of body and mind – not just mental awareness – can we become more aware of the interaction between the direct wordless, bodily dimensions of our experiencing and their mental reflection in thought and language. That is why the cultivation of sustained awareness is impossible without full body awareness – ‘bodyfulness’ as well as ‘mindfulness’. We breathe air through our mouths and noses into our lungs but it is with and through our entire body surface - and all our body’s senses - that we breathe in our awareness of ourselves, other people and the world. Awareness of our breathing is the key to awareness of our body and self as a whole. ABCT is about giving ourselves breathing space – time and space in which to simply be aware. Awareness itself is not a product or property of the body or brain, nor bounded by them. It is awareness itself that ‘bodies’ – taking on countless bodily shapes and communicating through the language of the body as well as through the word.

‘C’ FOR COMMUNICATION AND COGNISCE

We do not need to verbally share all the things of which we are silently ‘cogniscent’ or aware. For that silent awareness of ourselves and others communicates directly to others whether or not we express it in words. Yet both everyday inter-personal communication and counselling or therapeutic communication (‘talking cures’) are distorted by the belief that verbal ‘sharing’ is essential for the awakening and communication of awareness. It is the other way round. Only through the direct cultivation of mental, emotional and bodily awareness can we communicate that awareness to others directly – not just ‘in words’ but ‘through the word’ (‘dialogically’) and through the language of the body. Verbally ‘sharing’ things we are ‘cogniscent’ or aware of – not least in counselling or therapy - easily becomes a substitute for silently deepening the direct awareness of them, and thus communicating, silently or through the word, from this deepened awareness.

‘ABCT’ AND ‘CBT’

Traditional forms of ‘C.B.T.’ – ‘Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy’ – are now the most highly-promoted form of non-drugs based psychotherapy. Their common and central claim is that it is a “scientific fact” that “our thoughts cause our feelings and behaviours, not external things, like people, situations and events”. (National Association of Cognitive Behavioral Therapists). It is absolutely true that our thoughts about things affect our emotional reactions to them, and may therefore intensify or reinforce habitual feelings or behaviours towards them. Yet someone whose life has just been affected by such ‘things’ as losing a job - or a bomb wiping out their entire family – will not easily be convinced of the ‘scientific fact’ that what they are feeling is ‘caused’ by their thoughts and not these ‘things’. For their ‘depression’ is not a ‘thing in itself’ - neither a brain disorder nor a mechanical effect of their thoughts. It is the expression of an *awareness* of undeniable things.

Proponents and practitioners of traditional C.B.T. are certainly right in claiming that people can change the way they feel and act by changing the way they think – in particular so-called ‘automatic thoughts’ they have in response to situations. The simple fact of the matter however, is that we cannot change a single thought or thing without first being aware of it. A thought itself is just as much a thing we are aware of as any other thing – whether a feeling, event, person or object. Yet this subjective awareness of our thoughts is something quite different from turning them into objects of our mind or intellect – *objects of other thoughts*. The practice of C.B.T. on the other hand, rests on the therapist turning the client’s thoughts into clinical objects of the therapist’s own ‘scientific’ thoughts. That is why, although their focus may be on the client’s ‘automatic thoughts’ and their unwanted emotional effects, most ‘Cognitive Behavioural Therapists’ are unaware of the paradox that their own ‘Cognition’ of their clients and their Therapeutic Behaviour towards them is shaped by thoughts no less ‘automatic’ than those of their clients - albeit ones that spring from their supposedly ‘scientific’ theories. Like traditional CBT, ABCT is essentially a form of ‘psycho-education’ - specifically ‘Education in Awareness’. For in contrast to CBT it recognises that awareness as such – being both thought-free and thing-free - can instantly and automatically free us from identifying emotionally with ‘automatic’ thoughts about things. And yet we cannot be aware of our thoughts without giving ourselves Time to Be Aware – the very essence of both therapy and meditation.

‘Awareness Based Cognitive Therapy’ could also be termed ‘Re-cognitive Behavioural Therapy’. That is because awareness is what allows us to recognise our thoughts about things as just that – thoughts. This prevents us from confusing our thoughts with the very things they are about - for example with the events they might be a response to or the feelings they may seek to give expression to. Recognising thoughts AS thoughts is what prevents us from both identifying with our thoughts and from identifying thoughts about reality with reality. Yet to recognise thoughts AS thoughts means being aware of them as ‘things in themselves’ – albeit ‘thought-things’ that we experience in our inner mind space, and not the sort of ‘things’ we experience in physical space. C.B.T. declares it to be an objective “scientific fact” that it is thoughts, not things, that cause people to feel and act the way they do. In contrast, neither Thoughts nor Things can in any way ‘cause’ people to act or feel the way they do if they are aware of both as distinct things.

THE HISTORIC ROOTS OF ABCT

The Awareness Principle and Awareness Based Cognitive Therapy have their roots in the 'Doctrine of Recognition' central to the tantric philosophies of 'Kashmir Shaivism', as expounded by its principal teachers or 'gurus' - Utpaladeva, Somananda, Abhinavagupta, and Kshemaraja. At the heart of the Doctrine of Recognition is the understanding that ultimate reality has the character of an unbounded space or field of awareness that is the source of all things and that comes to recognise itself in each and every thing experienced within it. Like The Awareness Principle, 'The Doctrine of Recognition' recognises all 'experiencing' and all 'cognition' as essentially subjective - NOT as a 'cognition' of 'objects' by isolated 'subjects' or 'selves', but as the self-*recognition* of universal subjectivity or awareness in every thing it experiences.

**“things that have fallen to the level of [being seen as] objects
of cognition ... are [in reality] essentially awareness”**

Utpaladeva

We do not cognise our bodies primarily as 'objects', of perception or reflection. Instead we experience them - subjectively - from within. The same principle applies not only to our experience of our own bodies but to our entire experience of the world around us and every 'thing' within it. For these too, are not essentially 'objects' of perception or reflection but an experiential reflection of a transcendental 'witnessing' awareness or subjectivity. Similarly, what we call 'thinking' does not turn things we experience into 'objects' of 'cognition' or mental 'reflection'. Instead thought itself IS the reflection of direct subjective awareness of all we experience. It is through the self-reflection of awareness in both things and thoughts that awareness comes to recognise itself in both.

That is why, as long as we continue to even think of things as mere 'objects' of 'cognition' – whether sensory, emotional or intellectual – we fail to achieve a state of truly awareness-based or 'recognitive' experiencing. For aware experiencing means being able to distinguish each and every thing we experience from the very awareness of experiencing it - the 'Fundamental Distinction' central to ABCT. The intellectual understanding and recognition of this distinction in thought is itself central to applying it in life. For in the practice of awareness through ABCT, as in the practice of Tantra, there is no contradiction whatsoever between use of the thinking intellect and abiding in meditative thought-free awareness. That is because both teachings and practices are based on The Awareness Principle - the understanding that the awareness of a thought or concept is in principle both thought-free and concept-free. The very terms and concepts of ABCT, as expressed in its Basic Axioms and Maxims, are therefore themselves recognitions of an awareness that is free of verbal concepts – that awareness which, according to the Vijnanabhairava Tantra **“is always a subject and never an object.”** As such they can serve as 'mantra' by which to guard ('-tra') that object-free awareness ('man') and to liberate ourselves through it.

For more on the yoga and science of awareness see
www.thenewyoga.org and www.thenewscience.org

SUMMARY: FUNDAMENTALS OF ABCT

The Fundamental Aim

To provide an innovatory form of therapy – one that is not to be based on any specific elements of experience or contents of consciousness (whether social situations, bodily sensations or symptoms, mental-emotional states or behaviour patterns) but on the pure awareness of those experiential contents.

The Fundamental Benefit

Freedom from stress and suffering through identification with our field of pure awareness – rather than unaware and passive identification with different contents of consciousness that we experience within that field.

The Fundamental Principle

This is called The Awareness Principle. This is the recognition of awareness itself as something distinct from, transcendent of, and immanent within all things we experience or are aware ‘of’.

The Fundamental Axioms

These are the basic axioms of The Awareness Principle:

1. Awareness as such is the ‘transcendental’ or ‘a priori’ condition, ‘pre-condition’ or ‘field condition’, for our awareness of any thing or universe of things.
2. Awareness cannot be reduced to or explained by any thing or things we are aware of (for example matter or energy, the body or brain).
3. Just as space is inseparable but at the same time quite distinct from every object in it, so is awareness inseparable and at the same time quite distinct from each and every thing we are aware of.
4. Just as space embraces, permeates and transcends every object in it, so does awareness embrace, permeate and transcend everything we are aware of.

The Fundamental Need

Giving ourselves more *time to be aware* of all there is to be aware of, inwardly and outwardly, within us and around us.

The Fundamental Distinction

Learning to distinguish between each and every thing we are aware of and the awareness of it.

The Fundamental Choice

Choosing to identify with the awareness of things we experience rather than with things we are aware of experiencing.

The Fundamental Principle

Awareness has the character of the spaces, inner and outer, in which we experience things, rather than any thing we are aware of, inwardly or outwardly, in those spaces.

The Fundamental Means

Identifying with awareness by identifying with the spaces, inner and outer in which we experience things.

The Fundamental Saying

Not 'I am this'. Not 'I feel this', 'I think that', but 'I AM AWARE OF ... thinking, feeling, experiencing this or that'. Indeed 'I AM THIS AWARENESS'.

The Fundamental Freedom

The freedom to act from the awareness of what we are experiencing rather than just react from unaware identification with that experience – with things we are aware of. Identification with awareness IS freedom - freeing us from identification with every element of our experience, and thus freeing us to choose our actions with awareness.

The Fundamental Maxims

The awareness of any thing is not itself a thing. It is thing-free.
The awareness of a thought is not itself a thought. It is thought-free.
The awareness of a feeling is not itself a feeling. It is feeling-free.
The awareness of a sensation is not itself a sensation. It is sensation free.

The Fundamental Delusion

Ultimate truth is absolute objectivity. Space and time are dimensions of objective reality. That there is nothing outside of this objective reality is the philosophical delusion of objective science - 'absolute objectivism'.

The Fundamental Truth

Ultimate truth is absolute subjectivity. Space and time are dimensions of subjective reality – of awareness. That there is nothing *outside of awareness* is the philosophical truth of subjective science - 'absolute subjectivism'.

The Fundamental Scientific Fact

The fundamental scientific fact is not the objective existence of a pre-given universe of bodies in space and time but the subjective awareness of such a universe.