

# The 3As: Aware, Active and Awaken

## 1) Listen to yourself: AWARE

The degree to which we can connect with others springs from our connection within; how tuned in we are with what happens inside us, so the first step towards mindful listening is to listen to yourself, to pay attention to your own chatting and train of thought. Spend five minutes every morning observing your thinking while keeping a soft yet constant focus on breathing in and out. Your breath is your home. Greet your own mind and label the thoughts it creates as 'thinking'. Don't judge or follow them, instead come back to the breath again and again. If you find this challenging you are on the right path. You are now aware of how hard it is to listen to your own breath, and stay present to it. Here you experience the 'monkey mind', its speed and its addiction to imaginative storytelling.

Advance your practice – when ready – by incorporating external sounds, for example, cars, birds tweeting, the wind, with the breath. Connect to where you are, maybe even open your eyes. Thoughts come, just notice the emotion they bring and let them go with a 'thinking' label, returning to the breath and the unique moment you are in. You're teaching the monkey to be present and open.

## 2) Listen to others: ACTIVE

While continuing your daily morning awareness practice, pay attention to how many times during the day your mind wanders when listening to someone. When that happens just come back gently to the conversation as you did with the breath in your morning practice. Now you're ready for the next level up. A simple yet powerful exercise to train the mind to slow down so it can really follow what is being said (remember the speed differential between speaking and listening that causes us to disconnect), is to practice 'word mirroring'. Initially practice with a friend or colleague: whatever they say, repeat it out loud. You'll soon notice how hard it is to stay focused. Your mind moves faster than their speech and wants to follow its own fast-paced thinking. Word mirroring trains the brain to slow down by repeating words while focusing on the content. It seems easy but is actually quite challenging.

With this increased awareness, use mirroring silently when people talk. If you miss some of what they say because your mind wandered, kindly interject, summarise the last concepts or words you heard, and ask for clarification. Don't be afraid, people do understand, and will appreciate your candor and commitment to them. As you continue to practise word mirroring, urges to interrupt, interject, assume and presume while listening will decrease and you'll eventually become an active listener. What's more, this new level of consciousness will result in a deeper connection with others.

You'll feel calmer, more expansive and in control of your emotions and responses, and able to create a richer space for you and others to connect and communicate at a higher level of acceptance, empathy and flexibility.

## 3) Listen to the energy: AWAKEN

Once active, mindful listening has become natural to you, a higher level of awareness will inform your communication. You'll become conscious of how each thought or word triggers an emotional response, which manifests in physical form both in you and the speaker. Instead of interjecting or tuning out you continue to stay engaged, open and flexible within the conversation. You meet the other where he or she is, intellectually and emotionally. When we listen at this deeper level, we tap into the coherence and intelligence that exists in

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our mind, heart and body. This space is available to us all the time and we can use it as our vantage point. Our receptiveness to the unspoken and the unmanifested awakens. This is deep listening or 'Global' listening. It feels immersive, engaging and meaningful for both parties; you are in partnership with each other. The space is warm, the energy fluid and creative. You inhabit the conversation completely, without agenda. From this field your empathy, intuition and curiosity sharpen; you are called to ask powerful questions that deepen your understanding and build from there.

This level of listening personally transforms both parties who experience it and bring to results that were unimaginable before. You experience flow.

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