

WIPITS: What Is Practice in This Situation? A Worksheet

WIPITS, or “What is practice in this situation?” is an acronym that reminds us to consult the five dimensions whenever we’re confused about what’s going on in a particular situation.

WIPITS lets us take the entirety of the situation into account, we’re less likely to mistake our opinion cache for reality.

Often awareness is scant in at least one area. Since the WIPITS categories cover the main modes of human perception and functioning, they can help shed some light on the whole tree of life—branches, leaves, and eventually the roots as well.

Even if the five dimensions aren’t too familiar conceptually yet, we have a lot of living behind us, and besides, much of WIPITS is self-explanatory. Even if the full-empty dimension sounds like pea soup for now, let’s keep it on the table, so that it will be fit for consumption when the time is ripe.

Each dimension includes a brief description, followed by suggestions for honing awareness in each area.

1. **Physical dimension.** This is the who, what, where, and when—the location, situation, people, things, action, and sensory phenomena involved in the situation. Hone

awareness of this dimension by feeling the body’s sensations and movements; tune in the sounds, sights, smells, and the sense objects that are the stuff of life.

2. **Mental dimension.** This includes our thoughts relating to a situation. Hone awareness of this dimension by knowing what thoughts are passing through. See if you can differentiate between the objective ones—factual data and concepts held in common in a culture—and the subjective or personalized ones, like opinions.
3. **Emotional dimension.** This is the mood or emotional tone we hold, either in general or as a reaction to a particular situation. Hone awareness of this dimension by seeing if you can differentiate the various components that make up an emotion—the thoughts, bodily sensations, sense of self, and the intensity that characterizes emotions. Is there a word that describes your emotion or mood?

4. **Open awareness dimension.** This is the environmental spaciousness that enmeshes the whole situation, the inclusivity of the moment. Hone awareness of this dimension by letting the sounds and spaciousness of the environment invite the senses to open in all directions. Letting awareness oscillate from something inside the body (such as breathing) to something environmental (like sounds) opens things up as well.

5. **Full-empty dimension.** Here we encounter the wonder at the heart of things, even if it's primarily an intellectual intimation at first. Full-emptiness, or absolute-relativity, isn't just the fruition of awakening; it encompasses the entire path of practice, backed by zen's vows to live beneficially and non-harmingly, and to awaken to the undividedness and compassion of our actual nature.

When all of the descriptions and intellectual concepts concerning these dimensions fall away, what remains? Can you think of ways to cultivate the aspiration to awaken on a regular basis?

A shorthand version of WIPITS is:

- What's going on?
- What am I adding?
- What am I leaving out?
- What do I truly know?

—Elizabeth Hamilton, excerpted from
*Untrain Your Parrot—and Other
No-Nonsense Instruction on the Path of Zen,*
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