

LUCID LIVING

Let's start by comparing normal dreaming to lucid dreaming. In normal dreaming, things seem real. We wake up with a pounding heart from a dream because it feels exactly like something that might happen in life! But with lucid dreaming you know it is a dream. You know it only appears real.

There's a parallel in the waking state: two possibilities.

1) **The normal, default waking state.** We might call this the waking dream state.

Same comparison with the normal dream state: everything seems real.

Your experience: the thoughts feelings, sensations, and perceptions feel real, like who you are. Because the identified mind feels it is at the mercy of these conditioned circumstances, it becomes very important to choose and control whatever experiences you can.

Here the ego-identified mind, the dualistic separate self, is born: to manage those thoughts feelings, sensations and perceptions. To create a buffer that gives you a sense of control, to make them as pleasant as possible.

Have you noticed that in action? That voice in your head? Rehearsing, justifying, and commenting on things as they happen? trying to make things as comfortable and safe as possible.

2) **The lucid awake state,** you understand that these conditioned experiences, while happening, are not what they seem to be, and they are not who you are.

Let's use an analogy to flesh out this and make it more real:

Going to a movie.

The pleasure of the movie experience is becoming so caught up in the story, the images and the characters that you forget that you are actually sitting in a cold dark room with strangers. That's the fun of it, you get to live something vicariously.

It's amazing how powerful this being drawn in can be. I had to stop watching horror movies fifty years ago because I would be scared in the dark for weeks afterwards.

And a movie only engages two senses: sight and sound.

Now let's imagine that movies were able to add other sense perceptions to the movie experience. Let's imagine we had VR equipment in a movie theater, so we actually experience the touch sensation of the characters.

Aldous Huxley, in his sci-fi book "*Brave New World*" imagined this kind of movies he called 'The Feelies'.

With the Feelies, people were so completely immersed that they were unable to leave the movie experience. They were captive to whatever the movie director wanted them to experience or feel. The Big Brother state was then able to control what people thought and believed.

Let's imagine that even beyond touch sensation the movies were able to add tasting and smelling. How hard would it be to not be able to pull yourself out of a movie back into being the person in the theater, even if you hated the movie? You would be trapped.

Now let's add thoughts and emotions. Imagine you're at the movie where you are thinking what the character is thinking and feeling what he or she is feeling.

Once the movie controls your thoughts and feelings, there is no longer a place that can say, Hey! I don't like this movie. I'm going to leave now." That would take an independent mind, but your mind is totally identified, totally synchronized with the movie. You cannot separate yourself from the movie. You are lost in the movie.

This is actually the predicament we are in. Because all of our senses are engaged, we are literally lost in the movie of our lives. We are lost in the action, the character, the scenery, i.e. the conditioned content: thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and sensations. It all comes in, and your consciousness becomes totally absorbed and at the mercy of it. We no longer know ourselves, our Being, which is watching and experiencing a human life, as itself.

We have forgotten who we are.

Now imagine lucid living. In lucid living, the same experiences are arising, but we are not lost in them. There's something in us that understands it's a movie going on and we are actually something different from the movie. We are the awareness that is watching and experiencing the movie.

What would be the fruits of this?

- less fear
- more curiosity
- more freedom
- more inner spaciousness

Sounds a bit like our practice, doesn't it?

What is needed to go from the waking dream to living lucidly?

What's the difference between being lost, unconscious in the waking dream state, and becoming awake to it?

Two things:

The first one is training the focus of attention to become conscious.

The second is removing false identification with conditioned experience.

Both of these are the proper focus of your practice. Let's talk about them.

Focus of attention

We all know what focus of attention means, This is something we all do intuitively all day long. When someone says, please focus on this power point slide, we all know what to do. Our focus is moving all day long, from one thing to another.

In the waking dream state, the focus of attention is completely directed outwardly. It is exclusively focused on the objects of experience. It is unconscious of where it is, moves around randomly, lost in experience, unconscious of where it is.

Another aspect of an unconscious focus of attention is that it is out of the moment. This is because the ego-identified mind has to distance itself from the flow of direct experience so that it can try to control and manage it. The 'out of the now' is it's buffer zone.

In the lucid state, the focus of attention is centered within. It is aware of being conscious. And with that, your awareness of your being becomes independent of whatever objects are arising, either in your mind, body, or in the world. As is sometimes said, "what is aware of anger is not itself angry".

Becoming aware of the focus of attention is usually the very first instruction we get when we learn meditation. Using some anchor, such as concentrating on the breath, we are aware of where our attention is and come back to the present moment. By itself, coming back to the moment takes us out of this moving away from the now that the unconscious mind seeks. We are conscious of what we are focused on.

This leads to keeping touch with an inwards focus towards the Observer, the witness.

Identification

The purpose of insight practice is seeing clearly. All of the objects of the movie: the thoughts, the feelings, perceptions and sensations - we see them come and go.

Gurdjieff taught that we when put the word “I” next to anything that comes up in our experience, we become lost.

In actuality there is just seeing, just feeling, just breathing.

When lost in the waking dream state, we put “I” in to create “I” am thinking, “I” am feeling, “I” am breathing. We become lost, deeply asleep.

So in our practice, we take the word “I” out. Now we are touching actuality: just seeing, just feeling, just breathing.

We sit there, watching away, remaining present: everything arises and passes away before us, before the seat of consciousness. It begins to dawn on us that we are not what we think. We are not what we feel. We're not what we sense. We're not what we perceive.

We are what experiences them, what watches and observes them. This lucid consciousness has a new vantage point, and is not lost in experience. We call this developing the witness or the observer consciousness. The lucid waking state is where we know we are not the movie going on, and we keep some attention focusing inwardly on the seat of consciousness.

Living from the Observer is opening to lucid living.

As you learn to rest the focus of attention on the consciousness within, and lose your sense of identity with outer conditioned circumstances, dukkha cease to be a problem. It's just what you are watching. It changes all the time, but that's now just a situation, not a problem.

Identification with the movie still sucks us in from time to time, that's totally normal, and not really even a problem. Training the focus of attention, and seeing that we are not the conditioned objects, is the life saving ring that we come back to to pull us out of the water.

Hopefully, this analogy encourages us to practice and to understand the two important ingredients as you practice: the focus of attention, and freeing up identification, the keys to a freer, more joyful life.

Now this conditioning is very deep, so we have to keep at it, chipping away from the wall of illusion. It doesn't come from a weekend intensive.

We pull out of the intense identification with one human being's thoughts and feelings, we step back and begin to see everything.

So. practice is now a most precious jewel, the pearl of great price, that opens this door. That's why we bow after each practice period, in gratitude..

PRACTICE

It's good to take time to talk about our meditation practice itself. It's always good to look at our practice, fine-tune it, and make sure that it is aligning with what we truly want and what we are looking for. Let's talk a bit about how our practice is going.

We often assume when practice feels flat or has become perfunctory, or a chore that there is something wrong with us. Not true.

Broadly, there are two reasons why this happens.

One is that something difficult has come up in practice, that practice has made room for us to see, that we are not wanting to see or engage with. Emotional resistance to pain begins to shut down our practice. We'll talk about this in more detail next time we meet.

The other reason is that the Insight practice needs to change over time with the depth of our insight. If our practice does not keep pace with our level of insight, it begins to feel like it is actually holding us back in some way, or, at least, not serving us the way we would like it too.

My own experience with the past practice is that there are many stages or practice is ready to move or evolve. It's important to understand the progression of practice so that you can see where you are and understand what the next alignment might look like.

One example of this is many of us are taught noting when we begin practice. This is the labeling of what we notice coming up. Such as thinking, thinking, or planning planning, or remembering remembering. At a certain point this process is so much slower than the awareness itself it begins to feel constrictive. It begins to feel like it is holding us back.

‘Doing’ the practice is another aspect that must change with Insight. Doing happens when the small self is in charge of your practice and trying to get somewhere. Releasing the small, separated from being in charge is a surrender.

‘Seeking’ is another major impediment. Seeking is like an arrow, seeking something that is out of the moment. Seeking, in its nature, assumes that what the heart wants is not already present. Seeking must give way to trust and surrendering. Surrendering is like the ocean.

Please refer to the table of practice from class. In your own sittings, find yourself on the map. Start to become aware of the purpose of each layer, so you know when to move backwards or forwards as you need to.

HOMEWORK

1) Find yourself on the map.

2) Add a lucid layer to your practice. Our practice is to live lucidly, from the observer seat. This involves keeping some of the focus of attention inward, on the observing consciousness. This is also leaving the word “I” out of conditioned experiences, such as thoughts, emotions, sensations, and perception.

Before your sitting: take a moment to review, aware that you are:

- 1) Training the focus of attention to be conscious, so aware where the focus of consciousness is.
- 2) Stop putting the thought “I” next to each conditioned object that arises.

Remember and return to the observing consciousness as often as you can during the day, with kindness and encouragement for yourself.