



Practice

“Correct practice” is a term Zen Master Seung Sahn used to describe how one got from thinking to “what is.”

Krishnamurti talks about waking up from the network of thought.

Nisargadatta talks about observing, following, and then becoming the “I Am” which is concept, illusion, and transcending it.

Others talk about waking from the waking dream.

The expression I would use is waking from, or the dropping off of, the imaginal world.

Most people live in an unreal world of thinking, image, emotions, and a sense of palpable presence. For one who is aware, it is like a permeating conscious “gas” space wherein imaginal objects, like thoughts and images have a fictional existence.

Memory is a process wherein the imaginal-thinking mind creates a past made up of images, thoughts and feelings. It is a representation, like a map is a representation of terrain. The mind creates a representation of a past. The past does not exist except as this representation. We believe it exists in a sense so we use the representation to give our causal/physical world meaning, constancy and stability.

But this stability is built on an ever changing imaginal process which really, really has no stability.

Future is that same creative imaging that combined with physical needs, fears, hunger or lust brings an "imaginal" world into the "present." Most people are not even aware of the world without this imaging, imaginary gaseous "space."

In either case, past or future, are mental-imaging-memory "doings" wherein we cannot see what is now.

In fact, when we see this imaging process, we also see our "nows" are really pasts and futures as the imaginal space is still the focus of our "knowing."

Now all of this imaging, emoting, thinking "gas" surrounds our minds every minute. It is in and around us all the time. It is what creates the I-Thou dichotomy. It creates a perception of an external world and an internal world.

I really can't tell you how you can get a handle on perceiving this "miasma," a "conscious gas of fantasy," but it is there most of the time, and you can become aware that you are aware of it, which results in the realization that you are beyond the miasma and its creations.

It is not there in times of crisis when imagination and discursive thinking is temporarily put away. It is not there when you are extraordinarily busy. It is not there whenever you are attending to something in the world with 100% attention.

I first experienced the disappearance of this imaginal gas dream world as a child.

Sometimes when I became obsessed about solving a certain problem, and would be thinking about whatever it was that I was thinking about, suddenly, there would be a feeling that all the mental stuff was draining from my head. It was like an internal toilet flushing, leaving me empty and peaceful. Problem solved, not by "solving it" through mentation, but by an overloaded mind, having gone beyond its ability to maintain the mental strain, just dropped the subject and was in peace.

The same goes for strong Zen meditation.

You can concentrate on some formless thing, like consciousness itself, or just the totality of the experienced, or concentrate on a Koan, such as "Who Am I?," or, "How do I blow out a candle on the top of the mountain?"

The concentration can, or does, get increasingly one-pointed until one feels like one is going unconscious, like a conscious sleep. Then, suddenly the Koan, thinking, imaging and sleep all fall away, with that same brain-flushing sensation I felt as a kid and an awakening to a world without form, space, distance or time, what Seung Sahn called "What is."

This is the disappearance of the imaginal world.

When it disappears, the feeling of I disappears, because the feeling of I-ness is purely imaginal, concept, but that I feeling also has what feels like a palpable physical presence.

When that imaginal space is fundamentally destroyed, one feels like one is in a vacuum, empty. Thoughts come and go but they are not your thoughts. With the sense of I gone, the linkages that hold the I to the world disappear also, and one is left only with consciousness. And, it is not consciousness with objects in that consciousness, but Only Consciousness. Only Consciousness exists.

When the imaginal world of thinking, dreaming, emoting disappears, when I disappear, one feels entirely alone. That gas world was complex and highly populated with imaginal entities, much as a collector or hoarder needs to have things around. Those things make a hoarder feel comfortable and not alone. Imaginal objects make the human entity feel not alone, comforted by the presence of an imaginal existence.

One also feels empty, cold without the presence of all those imaginal objects, thinking, imaging, planning, remembering, emoting.

Then there is profound silence, peace, comfort and happiness far beyond ordinary human happiness.

When the imaginal world disappears, one might say the world disappears because there are no perceived objects separate from me. I am the world and it is me, and the whole thing itself, whatever is left, no longer feels like the imaginal and very personal world that you have already known and lived in. You, and everything, become the Mind of God.

So, practice is that which takes you out of the imaginal world, either temporarily time after time after time, until there is a final disappearance of the unreal, the imaginal, leaving only the Mind of God. This itself is only a concept, but it gives you a flavor of what I felt and what I believe many other teachers talk about.

By the way, an old friend of mine, Bernadette Roberts, calls this the unitive mind. Bernadette and I lived in Santa Monica within a couple of miles from each other for over 20 years. She is one of a very few people who talk about a two-stage process of enlightenment, or awakening, or whatever label one wants to use.

All I have written above applies to attaining the unitive state through the evaporation of the imaginal space, leaving only consciousness without an I, objects, or irrelevant imaging-emoting.

The problem then becomes, how does one come to the place where the imaginal world disappears? This is where the concept of correct practice comes in.

All of the above is my experience only. Don't spend any time trying to coordinate my experience and advice with any other teacher. It will only make you nuts. I get so many questions from students about other teacher's methods and practices, such as Awareness Watching Awareness, Shikantaza, Third Eye opening, Heart meditation. All my thoughts on these other techniques are found in [Autobiography of a Jnani](#), [Hunting the I](#), and [Practice](#).

What I teach is self-inquiry, and specifically self-inquiry as taught by Ramana Maharshi, Nisargadatta and Robert Adams. This is both very simple and very complex. There is enough complexity for a lifetime just in this one technique with a thousand variations. Stick with this method, it won't let you down.

I just found this very appropriate confirmation of this explanation of the imaginal space in a Nisargadatta quote:

"The moment the feeling 'I Amness' appears, you see space, mental space; that subtle sky-like space; stabilize there. You are that. When you are able to stabilize in that space, you are space only. When this space-like 'I Am' disappears, the space will also disappear, there is no space. When that space-like 'I Am' goes into oblivion, that is the eternal state, no form, no beingness. Actually what is

happening here? The message 'I Am' was no message. Dealing with this, I cannot talk much because there is no scope to put it in words."

But the unitive mind is not the last step. There is Consciousness remaining, which includes all the visible, tactile, auditory phenomena, which used to be divided into me and my body and the external world. The show goes on without a me, but still that show goes on.

However, to whom does the phenomenal appear?

It appears there is an observer of the whole process including the imaginal objects and the Consciousness as a whole of which the world is part. There comes a knowledge that you are apart from both Consciousness and the world of objects, images, processes and body/mind. You are even before that knowledge. This becomes a firm conviction, not so much a belief, as a shift of identification to a vastness that pervades all.

It is the ultimate observer and knower of ALL.

Once again, I warn you that anything I say is only a concept, it is not the truth. It is a pointer only, a pointer to your fundamental nature.

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