

Living in the Now

Spiritual teachers tell us to 'live in the now'. But what does that really mean and why is it important for our happiness? Is it practical to live in the now while engaging in normal daily life? Does it mean that we no longer have goals and don't plan?

In the following three quotes, Francis explains how the ultimate cause of suffering, which is the belief to be a separate entity, cannot exist in the now.

In the now, there is never a separate entity. The separate entity always comes as a past or as a future event. But in the now, there is never a separate entity, because only the now is real, and a separate entity is not real. So 'now' and 'ignorance' are mutually exclusive, just as water and oil.

[Francis Lucille, 2/11/2014]

If you drop time, you drop the person because the person exists only in time. Actually, the separate entity exists only in relation to the past or to the future. In the now, there is no room for a separate entity. In the now, there is only room for reality. So the person exists only as a past or future thought, as a thought about the past or about the future.

[Francis Lucille, 16/11/2014]

In the present there is never an ignorant entity to whom things happen. The ignorant entity can be something happening in presence, but it is not a presence to whom something happens. In other words, a personal entity never exists in the now. It exists always in reference to the past or to the future.

[Francis Lucille, 10/10/2015]

So why do we feel drawn to living in the past or the future? One reason is that a feeling of boredom tends to trigger daydreaming about the past or the future as a way of escaping from the now, and this comes from fear of emptiness or a sense of lack. Francis describes how this happens and explains how being aware of bodily sensations can help us distinguish this kind of day-dreaming thought, from innocent, creative thoughts that appear out of nowhere:

This impulse to think is not always present before thought. There are many thoughts that come out of thin air, so to speak, like vapour condenses into a cloud. Invisible, vapour in the atmosphere then condenses into a cloud and takes a shape. So many thoughts come out of thin air.

But the thought about the past and the future, the thought which is problematic often comes from some kind of pressure. Because in ignorance we don't want emptiness. Because in emptiness, in the absence of objects, consciousness realizes itself, consciousness perceives itself. In ignorance, we feel that this occurrence is dreadful, threatening, because we feel that that's the end of us. In fact, that's the end of the limited entity we believe to be. So as the situation evolves towards silence, we feel this pressure to do something, to occupy the silence with an object. And that is almost a visceral bodily sensation, kind of a sense of lack or a sense of fear, or a sense of desire that pushes us. And then we do something and we think about something. We go into something.

So it's interesting to discriminate between the kind of thought that originates from this kind of pressure, and the kind of thought that is purely speculative – 'Oh, that's interesting to think about this'. So then it doesn't come from a pressure, it comes from interest.

[Francis Lucille 3/2/24 Online retreat week 2 day 2]

As an imaginary separate entity, we don't choose our thoughts. So we cannot decide in advance 'I'm going to stop going into the past and future'. By definition, that would be going into the future. But in the now, as consciousness, we choose everything. So in the now, as consciousness, we can notice day-dreaming about the past or future and choose to drop it.

In the following quote from *The Perfume of Silence* Francis distinguishes day-dreaming from free thinking, practical thinking and higher reasoning. He explains how through catching ourselves in day-dreaming and dropping it, our body-mind gradually becomes realigned with our understanding:

Daydreaming is an avoidance of the now which is deemed to be boring. It is an escape from whatever is arising in the moment and it takes us into the past or the future. It relates to the thought that we are a personal entity.

There is a difference between daydreaming and what we could call 'free thinking'. Daydreaming could be called 'captive thinking' in the sense that it is captive of the notion that we are a person, that there is someone to whom the daydream is happening, a projected someone. In 'free thinking', thoughts arise freely and there can be strange associations, but there is no entity around which they revolve. It is very creative.

It is also necessary to have practical thoughts, for instance to make plans, to book the car into the garage, to make a shopping list, and so on. There is nothing wrong with these types of thoughts. They are an appropriate response to the current situation and do not need to hinge around a separate entity.

There is another type of thinking that doesn't depend on, create, or maintain the idea of a separate entity and these are thoughts about truth. They come from the truth and lead us back to it. We could call it 'higher reasoning'. It is only the first type of thinking, which revolves around a separate entity, that leads to misery.

However, even if we understand that something is a waste of energy, we may still keep doing it for a while. For instance, if a smoker understands that smoking is detrimental to his health, he may not give it up straight away; it may take some time. This doesn't mean that the understanding is not there. If, from the fact that daydreaming is present, you infer that there is no understanding, you are judging yourself. Having understood, realize that any understanding that is not applied is sterile. This delay in putting your understanding into practice is your decision. You can apply it immediately or postpone it.

If we drop a daydream, then the next time one appears, we will become conscious of it earlier. Each time we do this it becomes easier to drop it the next time, so the average duration of a daydream will get shorter and shorter. At some point, we no longer daydream because, before it takes root, we catch the impulse to avoid the now, which triggers the daydreaming in the first place. At this point the understanding, the moment of becoming aware of the daydreaming, and the moment of dropping it are simultaneous.

[Francis Lucille, *The Perfume of Silence: The Mother of All Problems*]

Truth-seekers sometimes feel that taking steps to avoid potential future problems is a sign of ignorance. But as Francis explains, that's not necessarily the case:

Regarding planning, different people on the same level of foolishness, or on the same level of wisdom, will plan differently. Some people are more thorough with their mind, so will tend to plan more, to plan more ahead. Others are more like birds, you know, they live from day to day. That's the path they have chosen. So, we cannot compare.

You may have a sage who lives just like the bird, you know, from day to day, not knowing. And you may have a sage who buys life insurance and saves for his retirement. Neither sign is a sign of wisdom, or foolishness. You see, because from a vantage point of usual wisdom, we could say, well, the one who is not planning, it's foolishness. On the other hand, from another vantage point, we could say, OK, the one who is planning is because he believes to be a person and plans for this person. None of that is true. ... And I would add that the one who is planning in this impersonal way should precisely be planning, otherwise he would face problems. And the one who is not planning but behaving impersonally, life will supply.

So there is not one size fits all, because what matters is the level of impersonality of the action. And impersonal action may look like planning or may look like the absence thereof. And personal action also may look like planning and may look like the absence of it. And so it's for you to make the call to see whether you are planning out of lack, out of a sense of separation, or out of fear, or out of caution, good management, excellency in management.

Basically in our life we have to allocate between what is achieved through this body-mind and what is left to God to achieve. And some people tend to leave a lot for God to do. Others, even in wisdom, they will also come from the vantage point that help yourself and then God will help you, but to participate in the universal dance by also putting this body-mind as an instrument at the service of the universe. Just as some people are more contemplative and some people are more active.

[Francis Lucille, 2015 Spring Retreat Week 2 Day 5]

Once we have a clear, experiential understanding of our true nature, it takes time for our old habits of thinking, feeling and acting from a sense of separation to disappear. Those habits were often developed in response to events and circumstances we encountered in the past. But those past events and circumstances were not the real cause. What is important is to notice when a habit that comes from ignorance arises, and then investigate the real cause which is the underlying sense of separation. Trying to dig up memories of those past events which allegedly are the cause of our ignorant habits is not useful. Here is Francis's explanation for why this is so:

FL: The real reason [*for ignorance*] is that we, as universal consciousness, choosing everything in the world, have chosen the circumstances that seem to be conducive to ignorance. Basically, we have chosen ignorance, as consciousness. We have chosen all the conditions in our past, in our birth, we have chosen our parents, we have chosen our schools, we have chosen the country we were born in, etc. That's the real cause.

So then, to investigate the alleged cause is useless. The reason why we would try to investigate the alleged cause is in the hope that if we know the cause, we can fix it. We can get rid of ignorance if we know how it came about. ...

But that's not the way it works. Because the past is the past. What has happened has happened. We cannot change the past. So the only way is in the now. It's through the investigation in the now that ignorance can be first detected and then uprooted. So we have to see that to try to find any explanation by digging into the past, is a useless endeavour.

That being said, in the course of the sadhana, there might be revealing moments when you can trace back a current psychological feature of yours to events in the past or to a similar feature in your parents. And you catch yourself red-handed and you say, OK, yes, that is not the proper way. It may happen and then when it happens, you say, 'OK, thank you for this insight'. But you

don't have to seek such insights by digging into the past. That's a useless enterprise.

[Francis Lucille, 2015 Spring retreat Week 1 day 4]

We can still learn lessons from the past – we notice a way of thinking or behaving and recognise it as a pattern that has occurred several times previously. But that recognition, that remembering happens in the now and relates to what is occurring now. As Francis explains, whatever memories or insights we need from the past are given to us effortlessly in the moment:

It is not really useful to go into the past. We have to leave the past where it belongs, in oblivion. And the same thing for the future. We should be in the now, and looking at the future, see a bright light. Looking towards the past, see a bright light of love, of warmth, of presence, of infinity. And then whatever punctually needs to be done about the past or about the future, needs to be remembered about the past, needs to be done about the future, will remind itself to us, effortlessly. We can still think about the future by planning for a trip or purchasing tickets for concerts, etc. But it's effortless. Planning for retirement, but not with the person involved, not with the fear of death.

[Francis Lucille, 2015 February retreat Week 1 day 3]

Does living in the now preclude having any kind of goal? In this extract from *Truth, Love, Beauty*, Francis explains the difference between a personal intention that comes from a desire to escape from the now, and an impersonal intention which comes from the joy of the now:

'Following your bliss' is in the now. 'Acting out of desire' relates to the future.

When you follow your bliss, you are accepting the current circumstances and possibilities. When you are in a state of desiring, reality is not good enough for you. When you accept the totality of the situation and then follow your bliss, you are allowing the situation to develop on its own without imposing your will as a person. You are a gardener who does no pruning and allows the plants to grow naturally. There is no fear; whereas, if you desire something, you fear you're not going to get it.

There can be a goal in following your bliss and it may look like a desire. It is not a desire if the happiness is already present at the beginning of the path which leads to the attainment of the goal, and if ultimately it doesn't really matter if the goal is reached or not. Indeed the goal may change along the way. The outcome is not as important as the action itself. The joyfulness is at the beginning of the action not at the end. ...

A 'personal' intention is one that involves a personal individual who is seeking relief from the now; an 'impersonal' intention comes *from* the now, from the joyful, total acceptance of what is. There is not a somebody who intends, although there might be a body whose needs are taken into consideration.

[Francis Lucille, *Truth, Love, Beauty*: Before the Big Bang]

Living in the now implies openness and not-knowing. In this extract from *Eternity Now*, Francis describes what it feels like to live in the now:

In this openness we live in the now. There is nothing to gain, nothing to lose. Awareness is not something to be acquired at the end of a process. We already have all we need. We are fully equipped, without any missing parts. In the beginning, we may experience this total absence of problems, which has now become our new condition, as a neutral state. This is because the mind is still running like a motor whose cord has just been unplugged. When we become a little more acquainted with our new perspective, we feel the bliss of the now, which is causeless and

absolutely non-objective. It is like tuning in to a new frequency and listening to a Mozart piano concerto after hearing several hours of garbage on the radio. Then we simultaneously live at two levels: the usual objective world in front, and a new level in the background from which the music, the beauty originates. This level is not a specifically localized place. It is a metaphysical space, the background of the mind, the core of our being.

When we live in listening, we will notice a change in our feelings, thoughts, the way we sense our body, and the way we interact with others. Welcoming is a universal law. The night is welcoming, the sky is welcoming, the birds and the trees are welcoming. When we are surrounded by welcoming human companions, we live in beauty. Our shared presence gives us a taste of what the lost paradise might have felt like.

[Francis Lucille, *Eternity Now: Our True Nature is Not an Object*]

Contemplation

Welcome whatever appears in the now from moment to moment. Allow whatever arises spontaneously in the now to flow through you without trying to grasp it, resist it, or memorize it. That which comes unexpectedly in the now always comes from grace, from silence. That which comes from silence resonates with silence in us. It reveals silence.

[Francis Lucille, *The Perfume of Silence: There is No 'There'*]