

Unconscious us

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In this reflection, I will attempt to show that we (at least you) are unconscious of what you have been posting here on this page or elsewhere. It is even generally true that we are unconscious of what we are thinking, saying and doing. Even when we think we have given a good Buddhist talk or a clever lecture—we were not conscious of what we have done.

For that matter, when we are making a literal or ironic statement, telling the truth or lying, joking or being serious, or whatever, we do so unconscious of the fact. This is clearly the case so long as we are unawakened.

Review

In fact, this is not as difficult to understand as it sounds. For a moment, just sit quietly and recall how we acted as carefree children playing by ourself with our own imagination or with some other children. Or, recall those times when, as a young person, we felt very upset or low about some event. Looking back with some careful thought, we will realize that, at the time, we did all those things without being conscious of what we thought, said or did.

If you cannot do that, or thought that you were conscious all that time, then, you need not read any further. Just delete this file and get on with whatever you have been doing. None of my writings will help you think more deeply or more clearly. Otherwise, there is a good chance that you will learn something new about how our mind works according to early Buddhist teachings.

So we think

The first reason we do not notice that we are **unconscious** regarding what we think, say or do is because we think we have a direct access to those events. This is especially true of our sense experiences and sense activities. We see, hear, smell, taste or touch something and we **know** what it is. (I am omitting any experiences we are not **aware** of, to simplify this reflection.)

The point here is that we **think**, we see, hear, smell, taste or touch something. Again, when we carefully work to recall these events, we realize that we were often enough mistaken about such experiences. Yes, I know, that you are thinking: What about what I am thinking **now**: I'm reading this and understanding all this! So you think, but give yourself the benefit of the doubt, because you have been distracted from reading this, and were thinking something else.

Reactive tendency

Since you have followed me thus far, let us now go a little deeper into this interesting mental puzzle the Buddha has been trying to clarify to us. We do not really experience any seeing, etc. We have only done something with our eyes, etc. We have not been really experiencing seeing, etc, because we have **always** been reacting to them. ("Always" here does not apply when you are awakened.)

All our thinking, speaking and acting are **reactive**: we think, say or act according to the way we have been programmed since day one. That is why some of us, despite being Buddhist, still sillily wish one another the greetings of a non-Buddhist festival and even have a pagan tree in our house driven by the excitement instead thinking of the Bodhi tree. We had no choice but to unconsciously act that way. We have been domesticated in various ways to do just that! Stimulus-reaction: We are more Pavlovian than we think!

Interpretive bias

“No, that’s not true!” you think. This can’t be right because the writer is not a charismatic public figure, just a local chink; who does he think he is, anyway. Yes, that’s the way it works. This shows that we are also **interpretive** in all our actions. We are not merely or clearly seeing, hearing, etc, but seeing with a bias, hearing with a bias, etc.

That **bias** is rooted in greed, hate or delusion. We are hardly aware of this. Perhaps, with better understanding of Buddha Dhamma and a more open mind (when we stop making silly unconscious posts on social media), we review our actions and realize that we have been acting out of greed, hate or delusion. We have been reacting to the slightest provocation that we have project for ourself; we have been interpreting everything instead of seeing things as they are!

Anyway, I don’t think you will understand the preceding paragraph just yet. It will take some time: you need to re-read this some years later after a better understanding of how our unconscious tendencies work on us. All right, so you have heard of **latent tendencies**, which helps. But don’t jump into any conclusions; then, you will lose the thread of this rather abstruse reflection.

We act before we think

The point is that there is so little time for us to **think** before we act (the person who invented the maxim did not understand the psychology of mind). In fact, we always act first, and then, OOPS we go. Then, we think of something clever to correct our misdeed or react to the reactions of others to our stupidity. We are clever to that extent, and we keep duping ourself. This double bind keeps us in our uroboros, samsara; it keeps us looking for someone to argue with just to prove our existence. (Understandably, the streamwinner is said to be emotionally independent.)

I think I have said enough to help us wonder how we really think, speak and act. Unconsciously. The way out is understanding the Buddha Dhamma. We need to discover this for ourself. You may like to start by reading this paper on the latent tendencies.¹

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¹ **Anusaya** (SD 31.3): <http://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/31.3-Anusaya.-piya.pdf>.