

LESSON 2 • JANUARY 2

“I have given everything I see [on this street, from this window, in this place] all the meaning that it has for me.”

Practice instructions

Exercise: Two times—ideally morning and evening, for one minute.

Same basic instructions as yesterday, just using a new idea. In selecting subjects for today, look side to side and behind you.

Remarks: Like the previous lesson, this one focuses on being totally indiscriminate in your selection of subjects. The comments in paragraph 2 about avoiding “selection by size, brightness, color, material, or relative importance to you” (2:1) are a brief reference to the Course’s theory of selective attention. According to the Course, we are highly selective in what we attend to visually. We pay attention to things that visually stand out and therefore catch our eye (see M-8.1) and we pay attention to things we value (see M-8.3:7). Notice that both of these factors—things that visually stand out and things we value—are included in the sentence I just quoted. This implies that we are supposed to practice the lesson without our usual habit of selective attention, because that habit assumes that the different things in our visual field are *truly* different, and this lesson is meant to teach us that they are not.

Commentary

The meaning of yesterday’s lesson is now a little clearer; “Nothing I see means anything” can be understood to say, “The only meaning anything has for me is the meaning that I give to it; there is no intrinsic meaning in anything.”

When I first practiced Lesson 1, I recall that the first object my eyes lit on was an excellent new photograph of my two children. At first, my mind rebelled at saying, “That photograph does not mean anything,” because it sure meant something to me. But the next morning, on Lesson 2, I began to see what the lessons were getting at. The photo, in itself, has no meaning at all. To the vast majority of people in the world it really would mean nothing; but to me, it meant something because I had given meaning to it.

When we begin to realize that our perception is formed by our minds, and not vice versa, it can be a startling revelation. If this lesson seems trivial or obvious to you, try applying it the next time “everything I see” includes someone who, in your perception, is betraying you, lying to you, or abandoning you: “I have given this situation all the meaning that it has for me.” Not so trivial!