



Lesson #1 - Beta vs Unconscious Alpha

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Welcome, great to have you here.

Today let's talk a little bit about brainwaves. It's going to be helpful for us to understand the brainwaves. There are four primary brainwaves and how they relate to our daily life and of course to meditation.

Now, as I have said, there are four brainwaves of which human beings spend most of their waking time in only one, certainly modern human beings. And that brainwave state is beta. Now the beta brainwave state is an active, doing, focused, task-oriented type of brainwave. The nervous system is in an aiming mechanism; it's in an aiming state and most of us in the modern world spend almost our entire days in beta. Now this is not true if we were to test individuals that were, for example, living close to the land, who were first nations people living an indigenously primitive lifestyle, people in the Amazon, that sort of thing. They will spend a lot more of their time in another brainwave state. But modern people, since we are so task-oriented, so future oriented, spend most of our time in a beta brainwave state. Now, because it's a task-oriented state, because it's sort of a predatory state, it's aiming all the time, it's actually quite stressful for the nervous system. And that stress builds up and over time can cause disease and, of course, cause us to be highly reactive, because when we are aiming at something, anything that gets between us and our target is our opponent, is the blockage, is the thing we are going to want to want to lash out at. We are going to feel some

frustration. And so although the beta brain wave state is important, and is necessary for our daily life, we want to get a little more balance in our lives, through our days, and we want to be able to enter into what we have described as an alpha brainwave state more often, which is a rest and recovery state.

Now we are going to talk about alpha quite a bit more today, but before we do, I'm just going to describe the typical process of the human being going through their day. They get up. They start their task. They go into beta. They spend most of their time in beta until they get exhausted and when they get home, they have dinner, they are resting and digesting, they watch TV. They're in an alpha brain wave state. They go to bed. They start dozing off. They have a daydream. They go to sleep. That daydream is a theta brainwave state that goes deeper into REM sleep, which is a deeper theta brainwave state for having dreams. And then eventually that dream state passes, and they may go into delta, which is a dreamless state; there is no memory. Then of course they may go in and out of — switch between theta and delta throughout the night. Wake back up the next morning, things to do, they are back in beta brainwave state.

Alpha is the key to meditation. When someone is in a meditated state, they are in what we would describe as alpha. Now the key here is that the alpha brainwave state is also associated with watching TV or just sort of sitting and zoning out, not daydreaming, but just sort of relaxing and zoning out. Now there have been studies on TV watching to see how long it took the average person to go from beta to alpha when watching TV and for the average person, it is about one minute. And so that one-minute feeling a shift in the body from beta to alpha, is very important for us as meditators. It's helpful for us to get a sense of the difference between the felt experience of beta, we all know what that's like, when the mind gets hyper-focused. For example, if you would like to understand what beta is, all you need to do is start thinking of your to-do list. You might think about multi-tasking, you might have to remember a time when you had to do several things at once. You start to feel a little bit hectic, a little bit frantic. That's a high beta brainwave state when we get into a sort of frantic or agitated state. When people are debating, like on our debate stage, they are in a high beta brainwave state. It's highly taxing to the body. People who are giving speeches, they are in a high beta brainwave state. And so, they give a speech for fifteen, twenty minutes, afterwards they are quite exhausted, quite tired, they need a rest. It's because it is very taxing on the body. Now most of our daily to-do activities are not necessarily in a high beta brainwave state but in a softer, greyer beta brain wave state, so it's not as exhausting, but it is exhausting. And if we stay in it long enough, it's highly taxing on the body and this can cause disruptions of our digestion and disease, high blood pressure and all of that. If we were wise, if our employers were wise, they would encourage us to

shift between alpha and beta more throughout the day. It's actually more efficient if we allow the brain and the body to recover so that it can work at its peak efficiency when in beta. But that is not where we are at yet in society.

In any case, it's important or helpful for us to start to get to know the difference between these states. And so, what we are going to do is to start to think about your to-do list tomorrow. If you don't have a big to-do list tomorrow, you could do some long division. Think of some math problems, but to-do lists are generally better because they're really aims. You might think of what you have to do at work, or you might remember a time when you had a lot to do, and just sort of imagine as if you are going to be doing that now. Spend about a minute. You can see my voice is picking up speed right now, I'm already doing it, I'm going into beta as I'm talking about this. And you can feel a bit of tension in my voice, right. All right, so I'm going to give you about a minute and just really think about, close your eyes and look away. I just want you to imagine your to-do list and imagine you are really doing stuff, imagine what you have to do. What do you have to do? You may notice as you were thinking, "I've got to prepare the lunches for my kids," "I got to get them out the door by seven," "I need to drive them to school," "I gotta use the restroom," "I gotta make time for that too." "I've got to head to work, and when I get there, I have to do this and that and the other thing," and you might notice that your breathing becomes a bit tight. You might also notice that your head starts to lean forward a slight bit as you're focusing, as you're aiming and you're thinking these things. You may notice that the feeling in the body isn't exactly pleasant. This is a beta brainwave state.

Now if we do it with our eyes open, we can get into an even deeper beta brainwave state. So again, look off. Look at a certain point on the wall and really think about what it is that you have to do. You might think about things that people said to you that you didn't like. Arguments you had. Once you have done that for a bit, you are in a beta brainwave state. Now the key point here is, for example, arguing or debating, that sort of thing puts us in a high beta brainwave state. How do we recover from that? That's what we want to know.

And so, what we are going to do is, we are just going to do the opposite. Let's see if we can't switch from beta into alpha. Now the alpha we are going to go into is an unconscious alpha. What we are going to do is turn away from the screen because I don't want you watching me when you do this. I want you to vacantly stare, kind of slump into your chair, relax, release all your pressure and just sort of vacantly stare mindlessly. Give yourself just a minute to rest. Soften the eyes. Now if I feel my own body, I notice my breathing has settled, my eyes are getting heavy, almost wanting to close them. It would feel good to close

them, and I could probably drift off the sleep pretty quickly this way. And that's what an alpha brainwave state does. It brings the body into a rest and digest state.

If you have already used a fair bit of energy throughout the day, when you stare vacantly and relax, and just release all your to-dos, your nervous system shifts into what I call an unconscious alpha state. It's like preparatory state for sleep. Why I call it unconscious is because it's a state that's not aware of what is going on in our environment. We are not really aware of what is going on in our bodies. This is not a state that we would associate with a warrior, for example, who on the battlefield has to be calm and clear and aware spatially at all times. But we do need to know the difference between that beta brainwave state and the unconscious alpha state because that's the platform from which we are going to launch our meditations moving forward.

And so, there is homework that I am going to offer you now. And that is to just spend some time, maybe tonight before you go to sleep, you'll turn on the TV, and just kinda notice how long it takes while watching TV for your body to shift into that rest and digest state. That unconscious alpha brainwave state. The average person it takes about a minute. You will get caught up in the story, you will feel your body relax. Now the key point here is let's not watch a TV show or movie that is suspenseful, or humorous, or overly exciting like a horror thing. That's going to keep us in an elevated maybe more beta brainwave state. We are going to watch something that is a little more mundane type of TV show, a run-of-the-mill type type of TV show, something that we are interested enough in, but that's not going to keep us in a beta brainwave state.

And so, I want you, if you have a journal, take note of how long into the watching that you notice your body really relax, that you felt your blood pressure dropped a bit. You might have even felt your breathing changed and those are all hints that your brainwave shifted from beta to alpha.

Hope to see you in the next lesson.