

Mindfulness – The Tyranny of Attention



The Buddhist influence on spirituality, particularly through vipassana and simplified versions of Zen, has resulted in increasing numbers of seekers mistaking the practice of mindfulness for proper meditation. Teachers such as Thich Nhat Hanh have popularized mindfulness as something supposedly ‘wonderful’ and ‘heavenly.’ Many superficial teachers circulate the facile view that Zen is ‘being in the moment,’ as well as general nonsense about ‘being in the now.’ If this is truly what has become of Zen, it is sad indeed.

Limiting the spiritual path to slogans like ‘presence,’ ‘just being,’ ‘staying in the moment’ or ‘abiding in the now’ builds an artificial construct of understanding which is empty and meaningless. No one really knows what the terms ‘now’ or ‘being’ actually signify, even though they are parroted over and over again by both teachers and seekers. The ego should not be underestimated. It also has the capacity to ‘be in the moment,’ and it has cleverly created all of the fake spirituality we see around us today. The ego can even convince itself it is actually experiencing the now, although all it really experiences is a slight touch of its own fragmented presence together with the recognition of its immediate environment. Such experience is not the ‘now,’ but the immediate past, which is constantly receding. It is like travelling in the last compartment of a train and looking out through the rear window as the tracks endlessly fall away behind you.

Those who condition their followers with these kinds of concepts are not qualified to teach on the subject of enlightenment. This is not real teaching: it is at best therapeutic and at worst a form of

brainwashing. People who ritually attend so many satsangs in the West are looking for a quick fix of Advaita clichés on awakening and consciousness to help them relax and feel better. If one were forced to choose between this addiction and an addiction to medication or alcohol, these quick fixes might well be a preferable option. However, one thing is certain: a teacher who knows his essential nature would never fall so low as to reduce his teaching to such superficial platitudes. There are much better choices to be made.

We should all be a bit mindful, but to create a whole path out of mindfulness is to exaggerate its benefits. Is mindfulness really such a good thing? Even the word itself has a rather nasty connotation – ‘full-of-mind.’ Mindfulness is another term many people use without understanding; they do not understand the mechanism of mindfulness, and they do not understand ‘who’ is being mindful.

Mindfulness actually refers to something very basic; the practice of developing and solidifying the function of the observer. The observer represents our external attention, that which links itself to objects or thoughts. Without this external attention, we could not identify anything in the world of duality. Animals are naturally mindful; it is a fundamental aspect of their consciousness, because being attentive to our environment assures our survival. So, it is no wonder nature has prioritized the evolution of attention. But why should humans need to practice being more mindful if, in doing so, they are never likely to surpass the abilities of the average cow or dog? There is something seriously amiss with seekers who fail to recognize the absurdity of this.

The problem with human beings is that the energy of our consciousness has become very dispersed due to the excessive development of the mind. Our mind has evolved disproportionately to the rest of our consciousness; we have, in a sense, become cursed by our very ability to think. An animal either pays attention to what is going on in its environment, puts its consciousness in a non-active mode or falls asleep. However, a human can never similarly switch off. He is constantly chasing his thoughts and involved in mental chaos.



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The attention of an animal is fully conscious of its surroundings, but has minimal connection to its own subjectivity. We could call this kind of attention ‘unconscious mindfulness.’ Unconscious mindfulness can support our survival, but cannot free us from being lost in the mind. While this is obviously not a problem for animals, it is a problem for humans.

The human observer is constantly confused, because he is forever fluctuating between paying attention to thoughts or to the external reality. The observer’s energy is invariably divided between the two, so he is neither fully present to the mind nor to empirical reality. What adepts of mindfulness are trying to achieve is either the stopping of the mind, so they can be fully present to the outer, or being fully present to the outer, as a means of stopping the mind.

The futility of these practices is that, no matter how developed the observer is, it cannot embrace the mind and the outer world simultaneously. It is too primitive, too weak. If someone is exceedingly fragmented, chaotic and neurotic, his next logical step may well be to develop the observer. But we must approach this practice with caution and be careful what we wish for. To have an overly developed observer can be more painful than being lost in the mind and, in the long run, present more of an obstacle to our spiritual evolution. At least, when one is unconscious, one can hardly register one’s suffering; “ignorance is bliss.” Obviously, there is nothing truly blissful about being unconscious, but it is certainly a relief to be able to forget about one’s fundamental suffering.

The practice of mindfulness has lower and higher forms. In its lower form, one is being mindful of the outer reality, present to the world. In its higher form, one is being mindful of the mind itself. The higher purpose of mindfulness is to awaken the subjective dimension of attention, which can only happen through cultivating mindfulness of the mind and thoughts. Through this, the observer can begin to separate itself from thought and feel its own subjective presence. The observer actually awakens in the context of its relationship with the mind.

To see mindfulness of thought as the means and end of practice itself is to miss the point. The true purpose of these practices is to become conscious of *who* is mindful. It is not about the observer observing the observer and getting even more confused, but rather about the observer feeling himself directly. Proper mindfulness develops a continuity of attention as the base of our subjectivity, which needs then, through correct self-feeling, to be identified as our very me.



Unfortunately, the practice of mindfulness as it is traditionally taught is not geared toward awakening of our me. As such, it is difficult to say whether it is more helpful or harmful to the average meditator. When done in excess, it is without doubt detrimental to the delicate balance of our holistic consciousness.

An even deeper mindfulness, if we wish to use the word, is directing our attention to our pure nature, rather than to an object. This highest form of mindfulness is not done by the observer, but by pure attention, the inner attention that flows from conscious me toward our fundamental subjectivity and the universal I am. Ordinary mindfulness uses our limited resources of concentration and is simply very tiring. Being constantly mindful is actually painful; it is better just to relax, be less aware and be more connected to our inner existence. Inner attention is an aspect of our feeling intelligence which is naturally effortless. Indeed, in each act of recognizing our pure nature, it rejuvenates itself through the empowerment of our light.

Those who have been practicing mindfulness for years and years need to get more in touch with their spiritual intelligence and look within to meet their essence of pure subjectivity. There is no dignity in doing futile, mechanical practices. If their teachers don't know any better, such seekers should look for teachers who have real knowledge of the dimension of consciousness. Mindfulness practices are acceptable for spiritual babies, but there comes a time when one has to stop being a baby and free oneself from the tyranny of attention. There is enough suffering in the world. Why add more?

Our consciousness is very delicate; it requires balance. Too much attention creates stress and is in conflict with simple relaxation. The idea of promoting so much attention developed from the need to control the mind. When an ordinary person relaxes, he or she immediately falls into daydreaming or endless thinking. In these cases, relaxation is no different than being unconscious, or more accurately, subconscious. However, we do not go beyond the mind by controlling it with attention and mindfulness, but through becoming positively conscious of our pure nature. As we embody our inner self, there is a natural flow of recognition toward the mind and environment, but it is relaxed and in harmony with our fundamental absence. True consciousness is beyond the attention generated by the observer; it is illuminated by the pure attention of the soul. The soul is fully conscious but, at the same time, positively spaced-out. She is conscious and not-conscious at the same time. From the standpoint



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of our inner self, excessively activating the external attention of the observer is simply gross and primitive. This type of attention can be likened to a militant soldier standing on guard who wants, above all, to control everything; it is tyrannical. To let go of this control through surrender to our deeper consciousness is freedom – freedom beyond mindfulness.

Blessings

Anadi

For a full glossary of terminology you can visit our website: www.anaditeaching.com/glossary

