

Internal Tone of Voice

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There is poetic quality to insight, and a corresponding insight to the poetic use of language. The poetic use of language is transcendent of thought and creates a different relationship to the understanding of perception. Changing the relationship to perceptions, frees us to bring neuroplasticity to life when we can discover new meanings in everyday events. Neuroplasticity is the adaptive capacity of the brain and innate intelligence to adapt and change in response to events and experiences. Daniel Siegel states that mindful practice helps form "response flexibility, the capacity to pause before we act." In this capacity the mind can notice that an impulse has arisen and to disconnect from automatic behaviors. In so doing, awareness practice creates a "space" between impulse and action that allows us to be more flexible in our responses. # Being more flexible in responses can help shift the perception of obstacles as setbacks for someone who is depressed, or shift the internal talk of someone who is self-critical and anxious.

The abovementioned capacity is not only adaptive, but is part of the common experience of those who do a regular awareness practice, (mindfulness meditation) as well as those who practice a poetic voice of being. Such ways of approaching life and Being can be practiced and developed into skills. Softening of the inner voice can assist us in treating ourselves less harshly, and to transform our relationship to self as well as all our other relationships. This developmental piece is actualized when the content of thought, is recognized for its endless potential for misperception and misdirection and allowed to diminish as an unskillful means for being present. (In that a content of thought approach replaces direct experience with the narrative, critical judgments that become our habituated, believed sense of identity). We are taught early in life, that the development of our thought is the main area of the development of who we will become, so that there has become a great level of investment in thought as the mainstay of our identity. By contrast, when Mindful and Aware, we begin exploring a different approach to being through exploring the nuances of the experience of being; using language, perception and simplicity to dissolve layers of clouded thought in the warm light of compassion. A soft and nurturing space is the neuroplastic vessel of Beingness capable of holding any content directly in experience.

Apart from the use of language as a facet of poetic expression, language can be misleading when it is given to stand for thoughts that it proposes to express or describe. As a description of experience, thoughts and language are often confused and attempts are made wherein thoughts and the language it represents are switched around. The meditation practitioner has access in awareness to the recognition and the potential impact of such reifications³ via the gradual softly intent observations and labeling of thought forms, content forms and the processes these forms incline us to. + Observation then fosters a spacious container for thought

habits, associations and identifications that remove the meditator from the moment of experience, and replaces them with direct experiencing. With practice, the meditator can spend more time in the moment in more direct contact with experience, wherein alternative and creative voicing of what is, can be found. Awareness practice (mindfulness) brings awareness to the being-ness that is so often ignored. This shift in focus and approach is a paradigmatic shift, and eventually reveals novel uses of an attention and a language experienced in the moment.

This is Poetic Consciousness, the awareness of being. The Listener, the writer, and the reader who adds the voice to verbalized forms of poetry each are called to awareness to the degree of the shift of consciousness, only paralleled by the pause and provocation of humor and punch lines. Without the confidence to make creative leaps, anxiety and depression can cloak the light of personal empowerment with self-abrasive self commentary that like cataracts imperceptibly cloud light and vision in their wake.

In awareness practice, it is useful to first become acquainted with the process of how the content of thought pulls us from experience via our identification with thoughts. Some of the beliefs about how this operates have been attached to us at the core by frequent association with fear, anxiety, hurt, grief and shame, which can go unprocessed in the present, leaving a buried and stored set of emotions that eventually become associated with unpleasant thoughts and bodily sensations and taken for granted as the undisputed truth. Some of this so-called truth may entail negative and self-limiting self-criticisms, self appraisals and self-identities that seem rock-solid. The being with ourselves in the moment that constitutes mindful, awareness practice adds a poetic quality to the language, transforming our relationship to thoughts, and removing the seemingly solid "me" from the previously assumed conditioning/habits framework. No longer unaware, {we- go} without the "me-go."

So rife with confusion is the identification with thoughts that in a paralyzing quest for certainty, people find themselves spoon-feeding themselves self-criticism in hopes of routing out the uncertainty with maximum efforts at self-improvement, in hopes of purging the "defects of character" that have lead to mistakes in life, as if it might be possible to compulsively perfect our believed, flawed status. Then when after maximum effort, we still take our thoughts of ourselves to be our true identity; we begin all over again to criticize by thought what we have thought. This stops us from seeing our experience, and stops us from being free to love and care for ourselves. Could this be part of the cyclic nature of depression?

Cheri Huber, the noted meditation teacher states, "It's not just what you say to yourself, but the tone of voice you use when you say it" * This may at first sound like a clever twist on the old adage, "It's not just what you say, but how you say it," but it has profound implications for a society wherein becoming released from the vise-grip of self-abrasion is not only needed, in consideration of the tremendous cost to our lives of depression and anxiety, it also is a call to the challenge of finding available opportunities to make strides into the spiritual and emotional dimensions of self-kindness and self-compassion. Finding the way to self-kindness is a developmental stride fostered by a "soft intention and an intention to soften" (the relationship

to the self). 1 A step towards the actualization of such practices is the use of labeling as a transitional connection to the subtle and poetic nuances of experience which fosters openness to Beingness. Huber goes on to suggest that depression presents opportunities for spiritual growth and development when the meditator learns to be kinder and more caring to the self, via doing the practice that de-identifies with a ruminating thought context.

The specific practice of the labeling of sensations, thoughts and emotions in mindfulness practice helps the practitioner to keep grounded in the body rather than focusing on the ruminating mind, and to see thoughts as just thoughts, and emotions as just emotions. When it comes to difficult emotions, this labeling practice allows enough "spaciousness," (sense of distance/perception), so that a shift in perspective develops, reducing overwhelm, adding tolerance, and reducing the perception of solidity. This has been described in imagery as the difference between viewing the beauty and power of a waterfall, and standing under it.

The practice of naming a difficult emotion may reveal a sense of struggle with it that we can "soften to," allowing for a lessening of resistance and dissonance. The avoidance habits which incline us to make such feelings go away, are gently replaced with allowance, making room for soothing and healing.

Christopher Germer, Ph.D., suggests, "Try to adopt a gentle, accepting tone with your labels." He further states that if the inner-voice is harsh, (while labeling emotions in mindfulness practice), this is reflective of aversion-trying to cast an emotion off). Such recognition is, as well, a step toward awareness, and as such the occurrence can be a signal to return to softening. Germer goes on to suggest that we label difficult emotions several times in a kind, gentle voice, then returning to the breath. If the practitioner becomes bored, and lingers further, without prejudice, a shift occurs, often revealing unpleasant or unfamiliar feelings that can also be softened, and transformed. Germer states, "The practice of labeling emotions can transform us into poets, searching for subtle nuances in emotional experience, unflinching in the face of discomfort." 2

No longer viewing discomfort, and pain as solid entities, allows us to dance with them, move through them, and most of all be compassionate with self and other even when seeming to be in a struggle with them. Not turning away from these aspects of life enables the meditation practitioner to learn more often from aspects of life that he/she has inclined to escape from or to get rid of, even though that has been unskillful.

There is inherent in such an approach a return to connections to knowledge, empowerment, even enlightenment that has been refreshed or created for the first time. For what if the self that we have taught ourselves to be in thoughts is as different from the actual, the true self, as the map is to the road?

The meditation practitioner is likened to the poet, exploring a given moment of life, anew. How much is the observer changing that which is observed? " The objectivity the poet must avoid is the reification of experience; a wrong subjectivity seeks to impose the narrow concerns of the

self upon the world...Buddhist awakening is not about excluding the world of human feeling but about perceiving how one moon shines in many dewdrops." 4

It is when the awareness practitioner remembers to practice and renews the soft intention to do so without judgment, that the softening of the critical and fault-finding ruminative reflexive habits and conditionings subside. No longer hostage to the content of thought and the slavish identification with it, a new access to the experience of the powerful compassionate presence of being is revealed. This state has been called in Zen Buddhism, "No-Mind."

"Rather than understanding the mind, the East developed a totally different approach, and their approach was disidentifying with the mind: 'I am not the mind.' 5 In the self compassionate mindful practice this is a pointer to the essential path. It becomes gradually a more and more familiar verity, crystallized in warmly and kindly attended awareness; moment by moment, breath by breath. It becomes the softer internal tone of voice, first a whisper that is nearly imperceptible, then later it is heard inside whether or not it is spoken. The Neuroplastic path has been cleared and one is free to walk.

There are moments in both formal and informal mindfulness practice wherein we have the capacity to experience life as it is. At such times we may have the insight into impermanence and can be liberated by "No-mind." People are capable of transcending and outrunning pain, disease and suffering through the powerful force of kindness. Compassion and Self-Compassion are the skills that provide the vehicle to that capability. The internal tone of voice is an observable, changeable process present for discovery, curiosity and exploration. It is not a possession, yet we may share it through compassion, kindness and connectivity.

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3 "How Thoughts Are Not Facts", Ned David Bratspis, MA, LMFT, an internet published essay, www.RelaxingOne.com ,2011, Gig Harbor, WA (Writings link)

4 Nine Gates; Entering the Mind of Poetry, Essays by Jane Hirshfield, Harper-Collins Books, New York, 1997

5 From Medication to Meditation, OSHO, Osho International Foundation, C.W. Daniel Company LTD. ,Saffron Walden, England, 1994