

OBSTACLE ILLUSION

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In the practice of meditation one finds the key to freedom from suffering, the human birthright, and the road to the true nature of being. This occurs in the repetitive process of awareness, which surpasses the chief obstacle to the truth, the content of thought, and the habit and conditioning of the illusion created by identification with the content of thought. By identifying with the content of thought we subtly come to believe in a separate and alone, permanent self. The past and the future keep the Illusion strong as we identify with narratives spun from what has been and what may be. It is so commonplace a gambit, that it is hard to notice without practice. The work toward this moment of being takes practice. The practice of awareness is a practice of non-identification, non-attachment, and recognition of impermanence. The practice in the end achieves mostly the removal of the chief obstacle to freedom, peace of mind and happiness. The expansion of consciousness which allows such an achievement clarifies the presence of illusion, the reification of a separate self that is empowered to block connection with the true self. Many traditional meditation teachers have pointed out that we don't completely obliterate the illusion, but rather come to a working cognizance of its impact in the process so that recognition may be factored accordingly, rather than a continuum wherein the impact is only noted after unskillful misdirection has resulted. That such patterns can and may be disrupted, allow for the peace of periods of stillness, which can be found outside the realm of thought. Thus our typical approach of trying to think our way through, which has not worked can be relied upon not to work this time. The pattern of duality entrenches the phenomenology of dualism.

Mindful meditation focuses and concentrates on the process of thought and is witness to the pull of the ego, the false self and identity created by separateness and the misery it generates through trancelike and dreamlike misperception. To remember to be aware, to be in non-judgment, be in the moment, to disidentify from the content of thought is a connection to the infinite. Noted meditation teacher, Eckhart Tolle, has stated, "enlightenment...is simply your natural state of felt oneness with Being (that which is beyond name and form)...a state of connectedness with something immeasurable and indestructible..." And..." you cannot find the present moment as long as you are your mind..." (identified with mind-stuff/content). 1

In stillness, then we enable the process of connection (especially), the awareness of no disruption in the connection that is always present with Being. Spaciousness from the undertow of mind, thought content and identification with their products gives glimpses into eternity, into the moment. Along the way there will be challenges. Strong emotions can challenge the practice of mindfulness. The urge may be strong to return the habits and conditionings that have been triggered by difficulty. A mindful approach to strong emotion allows you to "keep your seat, aside from the desire to run away." (Anxiety)..."When we are able to become completely one with irritations or feel the abstract quality of the irritation as it is, then irritation has no one to irritate..." 2 Thus the way out is through. This furthers the purpose for practice in the now. Skills come from the now. As in the adage, "smooth seas don't make good sailors," merit is gained in the purposeful being with the moment. "Beginners often take their awareness of their distraction as a sign that they are overwhelmed by thoughts, but it is usually a

sign that they are less absorbed in their thoughts and more capable of observing them... “When we experience intense emotions-conflict, confusion, excessive desire, hatred, or delusion- we become mindful of this emotional state. We create the aspiration to know, acknowledge, and absorb the disturbances of others through our own.”³ This is the way that practicing mindful awareness in the moment with an open heart fosters compassion. “Thus meditation allows us to discover a freer, more open awareness that is always available, even when we are caught up in emotional reactions...in doing so we discover the intense tenderness of our aliveness.”⁴ This discovery gradually dissipates the fog of illusion layered in by the identification with thought content, the belief of duality.

Memory comes into the working operation of these practices, as often as one recognizes that the lacuna of habit has entered the space of awareness, these recognitions signal to use the breath, or the internal feeling of aliveness as supportive re-entry portals into the moment. The depth of the connection to Being can be “installed,” at any moment of practice. Savoring such moments has been suggested as a learning technique by Psychologist and Mindfulness teacher, Rick Hanson.⁵ In a particularly self-compassionate suggested practice of Eckhart Tolle, the practitioner keeps some of their attention (after the deep connection with Being has regularly been established and practiced), engaged on feeling the “inner body,” rather than engaging 100% on either the external world or the mind (content of thoughts). In this way one becomes accustomed to feeling the deep connection to Being as portable and adaptive, regardless of the situation. This also introduces the process orientation (paradigm shift) of intrinsic connectedness with the unity with spirit or as it is phrased in Tolle’s work, “the unmanifested.” By being aware on some regular basis of the unity of all, the felt sense of connection with that life force develops, lessening the identification with thoughts, and the expectations of past and future problems and obstacles that magnetize suffering. ¹

Awareness practice is not so much a shift in thinking as it is a constancy of presence with Being. It is the direct experiential and adaptive embodiment of the unity of all being beyond thoughts and obstacles. ...” When I first came to a spiritual practice, I thought I would learn to sit and all my conditioning, my suffering, my past would just go away and I would simply be centered. Now I see that sitting means sitting with all of that, allowing it to be exactly as it is, not needing to do something about any of it...when conditioning can just come up and pass away, it loses power, it loses momentum.”⁶ For the practitioner, now is the moment to work patiently, with acceptance and compassion; all are components of skill and wisdom. ...” It’s about being willing to experience within ourselves whatever arises, without needing to make it different. When we see our drama and difficulties not as a catastrophe but just as conditioning, we can approach them with less heaviness and more compassion...”⁷

Compassion is the means of awareness practice and the end. There is an altruistic and pervasive if soft intention that emerges when the judgmental and critical habits and approaches to life have been softened and when the connection with Being has been practiced, awareness is like a universal container that has room for whatever is. In the space of such a capacity, perspective is inevitably possible.

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3 Aronson Ph.D., Harvey, Buddhist Practice on Western Ground, Reconciling Eastern Ideals and Western Psychology, Shambhala Publications, 2004, Boston & London

4 Welwood, John, Toward a Psychology of Awakening, Buddhism, Psychotherapy and the Path of Personal and Spiritual Transformation, Shambhala Publications, 2000, Boston & London

5 Hanson Ph.D., Rick, Hardwiring Happiness, The New Brain Science of Contentment and Confidence, Random House, New York, 2013

6 Huber, Cheri, There is Nothing Wrong with You, Going beyond Self-hate, A compassionate Process for learning to accept yourself exactly as you are, Keep it Simple Books, USA, 2001

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