

“I am afraid we may need to take a look inside,” said Dr. Drastic...

Introspection revisited

It seems natural for us as human beings to engage in some amount of inward looking. I would argue that this is only true in certain circumstances, and that it is very interesting to first of all consider what these circumstances might be. Let us consider two common-place possibilities:

1. Perhaps we can all see that if we experience a sufficiently intense bodily feeling, then we will tend to be drawn into that. If it is pleasant we will also be looking to stay with it. If it is unpleasant we will be trying to get rid of it. This is *feeling inducing thought*.



2. Feelings may, however, not only arise from sources in the world, but also from our own minds. In this case I would suggest that it is as though we are placing a mental object in the body in order to elicit feeling from it. In this case it is our very inward looking that is the source of the feeling. This is *thought inducing feeling*.

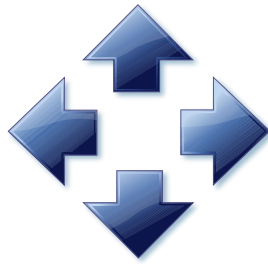


The spinning together of these two possibilities, I would suggest, is what we would call an emotion, *thoughts and feelings mixing together*.

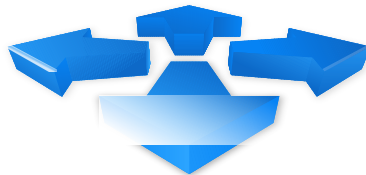


If, however, we start to really consciously examine such experience we can find, rather radically, that there is suffering involved in both pleasant and unpleasant bodily feeling. The pleasant feelings are always uncertain and we may want to get out of the spin of emotion altogether. The practice of meditation is one of highly conscious introspection based on the above understanding. Yet it is not inner analysis aimed at choosing one thing and rejecting another, because when bodily feelings are no longer a goal in themselves (but just signs of what is going on in the world) then all our old emotions become irrelevant. They can be discarded as we stay with the outside world in the present moment.

Whilst such mindfulness is established we are then guided by a new set of feelings, spiritual feelings, with their own dynamics which are associated with the conscience. The meditator will be faced with a flood of new thoughts and feelings that need to be listened to and acted on while they align their lives with the spiritual goal. Our effort will be to keep our conscience happily clear through our virtuous conduct. The meditator may then eventually be able to empty their mind (notice how different this intention is to the sensuous one of trying to fill our mind with pleasant things).



Then they arrive at each new moment of sense experience with a fresh mind that is not adding to its observations but able to see and act clearly in the present.



This situation matures into a state where the new thoughts and feelings are no longer clung to or perceived as being on the inside but instead seen as being within the world, as the dependently arisen phenomena they really are. Introspection will then discover only a bright emptiness (*samādhi*) and we will discover that it was just an assumption that thought and feeling necessarily or inevitably arise inside and that we therefore would have to look for them on the inside. Then we can avoid creating ourselves all that trouble.



“Don't worry,” said Dr. Wise-nose.

I offer this for your reflection.

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