

What is an emotion?

In Buddhism we see all emotional suffering as constituting some kind of lack of response from the mind. This is different from understanding our suffering to be a question of merely being exposed to our own negativity or that of other's negativity. Instead it is recognising suffering as an expression of need, and seeing the potential of the mind and heart to satisfy those needs and thereby resolve the whole situation.

Our initial lack of response can be originated in our own inability to hear the underlying needs. Secondly, our ability to respond to these needs is hampered by our reactions, through the dominance of habit. The stirred up emotions can be so intense that we end up lost in them, responding to them rather than to their causes. But in the spiritual training we can begin to calm these reactions, to calm our minds in the face of them and step back from them. And so we can see them for what they are – a kind of automatic pilot. And then through mindfulness we take the joystick in life, so to speak, and steer ourselves in a better way.

Then our training of the mind can go in different directions – we can meditate, or contemplate, or even both:

Regarding meditation we can strengthen our mindfulness further and add positive qualities to our attention in the present, patience and kindness, for example. Such qualities can become universally wholesome spontaneous responses, to all life situations. As for contemplation, our calmer mind gives us the space we need to question our perceptions of life, to find more skilful alternatives that are both completely benevolent and also in line with reality or the truth, and that acknowledge our needs and also dare to question them.

I offer this for your reflection.

Ajahn Kalyāno

<http://www.openthesky.co.uk>