



Awareness and an End to Suffering

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I recently spoke to a client who told me that he was plagued by what I would describe as useless thought – feelings of inadequacy, distractions, negative thoughts, worries, even fears. The first thing that I said to him was that, at the very least, he could count himself among the horribly small percentage of people who are actually aware that they are, in fact, having useless thoughts. If psychology shows us anything at all, it is that the average so-called normal mind is dead to the world, is running on auto-pilot and is totally unaware – unaware of pretty much everything, from the fact that it is actually in a particular and unique time and place (called Now!), to the fact that it is being harassed by an ongoing deluge of useless thought. So, for starters, my friend was at least one step ahead of the posse.

But what do you actually do when you find yourself being mugged by your own mind? Do you fight back, do you struggle, do you try to run away? And who can you call on for help? Well, first of all, who you gonna call? There is no one to call on for help – there's no such people as the Thoughtbusters! You're on your own. Why? Because you are the only person on this planet having those thoughts – and it is you who decided to pay attention to them, even though you might have done so completely unwittingly. You can't run away – there's no hiding place from your own thoughts and there's little point in struggling or trying to fight back. Thoughts are like a big bully – all they're looking for is your undivided attention and submission – struggle or fight back and you're giving them your energy, just what they wanted in the first place!

What you're to have to do is come to your senses and simply ignore the thoughts – they'll never go away but a thought without your energy is a nothing. Thought is meaningless until you decide to actively entertain the thought – direct your attention somewhere else and the thought, however useless, toxic and persistent it might be, simply isn't.

Remember that unique time and place that I mentioned earlier, Now? That is where you need to direct your attention – it the place where life is actually lived, where opportunity abounds (if you'd stop paying attention to your useless thoughts) and where dreams come true. It is the only time and

place where universal energy can respond to your own energy. If you want anything worth having out of life, this is the time and place that you need to be.

Being aware of the here and now is awareness. That might seem like a stupid sentence, but I've come across so many people in search of the meaning of awareness. It really is very simple, because, if you're aware of Now, you're aware of yourself in Now. This is self-awareness! Being aware simply means "being attentive to" which, in turn, means, in really simple English, paying attention. Paying attention to what? To Now of course! To what your eyes are actually seeing, to what your ears are actually hearing, to the aromas (however subtle) that fill your nostrils, to the taste (often even more subtle) in your mouth to what you are feeling. And it is feeling that I would like to dwell on for a moment.

Getting in touch with your own body is the superhighway to awareness. Feeling your feet strike the pavement or sink into the deep-pile carpet each time you put one foot in front of the other is your direct connection to the here and now. Feeling the way the chair you're sitting on (hard or soft) supports you is a priceless piece of "now information" which you need to pay attention to. Noticing the way your legs are crossed, the touch of the fabric of your clothing on your skin, the way your legs are positioned as you stand still, the list is as long as you want to make it.

But, here's the key point. My friend, the one with all the useless thoughts, said to me "I get it, when you're walking you're aware that you're putting one foot in front of the other." "Got it in one!" I replied. "And, when you're thinking a useless thought, you're aware that you're thinking a useless thought!" "No!" I responded – "When you find that your mind has wandered to a useless thought, you're aware that you're putting one foot in front of the other as you walk!" The walking is real, the thought is not. The walking is your connection to Now, the thought is your one-way ticket to whatever hell you want to go to.

So, there you have it – what the Buddha described as "the end of all suffering" – awareness. And the really exciting thing about awareness is that it is entirely in your own hands.