



Don't Side With Yourself , by Joseph Goldstein

Through mindfulness, our hearts become spacious enough to hold the painful emotions, to feel the suffering of them, and to let them go. But it takes practice—and perhaps several different practices—to open to the difficult emotions that we’re aware of and to illuminate those that are hidden.

There are some particular difficulties and challenges in being with difficult emotions. We often live in denial. It’s not always easy to open to our shadow side. And even when we are aware, we can get caught

in justifying these feelings to ourselves: “I should hate these people” look at what they did. From justifying these feelings of hatred and enmity (which is quite different than being mindful of them), there can come a strong feeling of self-righteousness. We forget that the feelings and emotions we have are all conditioned responses, arising out of the particular conditions of our lives. Other people in the same situation might feel very different things. Although at times it may be hard to believe, our feelings are not necessarily the reflection of some ultimate truth. As Bankei, the great 17th-century Zen master reminded us: “Don’t side with yourself.”

Self-righteousness about our feelings and view is the shadow side of commitment. We sometimes confuse this self-justification with the feeling of passionate dedication. But great exemplars of compassion and social justice illuminate the difference.

It is not a question of whether unwholesome mind states will arise in us—or in the world around us. Feelings of hatred, enmity, fear, self-righteousness, greed, envy, and jealousy all do arise at different times. Our challenge is to see them all with mindfulness, understanding that these states themselves are the cause of suffering and that no action we take based on them will lead to our desired result—peace in ourselves and peace in the world.

The method is mindfulness, the expression is compassion and the essence is wisdom. Wisdom sees the impermanent, ephemeral nature of experience and the basic unreliability of these changing phenomena. Wisdom opens our minds to the experience of selflessness, the great liberating jewel of the Buddha’s enlightenment. This understanding, in turn, engenders a compassionate engagement with the world. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, a great Tibetan master, taught: “When you recognize the empty nature, the energy to bring about the good of others dawns uncontrived and effortless.” And wisdom reveals that non-clinging is the essential unifying experience of freedom. We see

that non-clinging is both a practice to cultivate and the nature of the awakened mind itself.

T.S. Eliot expressed this well in a few lines from "The Four Quartets."

> A condition of complete simplicity
> (Costing not less than everything)
> And all shall be well and
> All manner of thing shall be well.

Published at www.awakin.org on Jun 18, 2018