
Perceptions and the knower

1. Can it be said that Perception (the Dictator) is the 'Ego'? Or is 'Ego' only part of the Perception (or the Dictator)? Is the knower a separate entity all together?

Our experience is awareness, mind and body. The mind objects are perceptions, feelings and thoughts. These are in Buddhist terminology called the five *Kandas*. This is what makes up the world we experience. Their property is to arise and cease on their own accord as processes or just phenomena. The ego (delusion or *avijja*) is this sense of self that is there that gives this sense of an owner of this awareness, owner of these perceptions, owner of these thoughts, owner of these feelings and owner of this body. Then this misunderstanding gives rise to a sense of control over the five *kandas*. This sense of control over things that arise and cease on their own accord gives rise to suffering - by attaching to them suffering arises. When it is seen that these five *kandas* are not me or mine -that their true nature is to arise and cease and that in letting them be - the power of delusion, the ego reduces. The misunderstanding weakens. Wisdom and clear seeing arises. Then there is no longer an identity with the awareness, mind and body. Then what is left is just knowing things arise and cease, with no particular person doing the knowing. There is no knower. The sense of someone doing the knowing is also this sense of self attached to awareness.

These teachings are of course to be applied to your own experience and investigation and see for yourself if it is true and reflect, does this understanding lead to less suffering?

Focusing and meditation

2. How does the technique of Focusing developed by Eugene Gendlin , taught by the Karuna Institute buddhist psychotherapy body and practiced by some monks in the Amaravati tradition relate to meditation?.

**Can it be used instead of meditation to get to the same goal?
does it only achieve part of that?**

Meditation is cultivation, *bhavana* or development. It is the development of our understanding of the mind and body. This requires sustained attention of what is being investigated. This can also be called mindfulness. For sustained attention to take place there needs to be present moment awareness. Using an object that is in the present moment like the breath or the body can help train in staying with the present moment. After some time, this object needs to be let go of. When present moment awareness is strong then it no longer depends on that object as an anchor. It can then stay with and observe whatever arises without getting caught up. Within that space tranquillity and joy will arise naturally. Through this continued observation with curiosity, an understanding relating to the true nature of the

phenomenon being observed arises. This understanding gives rise to a change in the relationship between awareness and the object of observation. There is then a natural letting go of any attachment towards the phenomena. There is a freedom from being bound to it.

Caring for the sick and dying

3. (a) Whilst I understand impermanence and death are the nature of life and inevitable, I struggle when faced with a real situations.

This is where the practice is. Through experiencing real situations. The understanding that arises through experience is then a heart-felt understanding. A true understanding. An intellectual understanding is not perfect. It depends on our education, culture, etc. It is restricted by our own judgements. Whereas one which is understood in the heart is free of such biases and is then truly understood. Then no matter what the conditions are, the heart will not be fooled otherwise.

(b) Last month my son was sick for about three weeks and I was initially very calm and mindfully doing everything I needed to do in the situation.

That is good. You have continued to observe what was happening.

(c) However as time went by and he was still sick, I felt no control over the situation, I struggled to surrender and do my best.

You noticed losing control and also not being able to surrender to it.

(d) My mind was clouded with worries and constant fear.

You have been aware of what was in the mind.

(e) I eventually had to face my fear and do what I can do and he got better after three weeks.

You have faced your fear. We have to just observe and watch this whole process happen. The stress comes when we cling to the process. When we try and control it. When we try run away from it. If we are able to continuously observe and let go. Then the process just unfolds until what is left is fear. Our attachments are out of fear. When this is seen through. Then the power of the attachment falls away. The whole process can be seen without stress if we don't believe in it or personalise what we are observing. We just observe with compassion and curiosity. This is interesting? What this about? Just watch where it leads to, without grasping or stopping at any understanding.

A helpful contemplation to also have when one is faced with one's own or someone else's sickness, ageing or death. Is to contemplate the nature of this body. The nature of the body to fall sick, age and die. Not just as an intellectual knowing but a true heartfelt connection of

'o this is what the body really is like'. Whilst you are with them you can then contemplate how attachment to a state of health has led to so much sorrow. How an attachment to state of health has led to so much fear. We begin to notice the dangers of this attachment by not truly understanding the true nature of this body. Which is truly out of our control. It doesn't belong to us. It is part of nature.

(f) It's not always possible to maintain an alert mind, when there's no proper sleep or food , and there is stress, then the balance is lost and I loose the awareness and clarity I would normally have. What would be your advice when faced with difficult situations which you don't have control over?

The first thing to do is, not to wait till one is faced with such situations. If we apply our practice and contemplation to every single mundane experience in life. No experience is any different to another. It is yet another experience to understand.

Yes, one must look after this body. It needs adequate amount of rest and food. However, if the mind isn't caught up in clinging then it doesn't create stress and there is no tiredness that comes because of the mind, though the body may feel tired. So, you rest for the body. So, when you are in a situation where you are having as you were to care for another person - given the trail of question this is perhaps the difficult situation you are referring to here - just be there with kindness, compassion and generosity with the pure intention of just giving with no expectations of being thanked or of them even getting better. It is okay how they are. You are helping then in their journey whatever it may be. Then also reflect that kindness and compassion on to yourself as well. Reflecting how you are being kind, compassionate and generous. This will bring joy to your heart. Then the giving becomes a joy. It is not a stress. Tiredness doesn't arise when one's heart has these qualities.

Listening and tiredness

4. I notice I loose my awareness level when I'm exhausted at the end of a long day or when I have met a lot of people and taken in a lot of different things they say, I loose my awareness after some time and when I come back, I am even more exhausted. Please can you throw some light on these?

When you are with people again as before, be there with kindness and compassion. Then the practice to do is just listen with acceptance. Be open to the sound, the thoughts and feelings without any judgement. No stories of even whether they are male or female. This is being mindful and aware of what is being heard. You are fully present. When we sustain this, it is like just meditating on the cushion. Instead of the breath now we have sound and we are fully aware. We remain calm. We have to let go of trying to make something out of what is being said. That's the thinking mind trying to 'solve the problem'. We are just open, accepting and listening – then there is no space for clinging. Then stress doesn't arise. There is calmness, there is kindness. Then trust in that space for the right response to arise.

Also, a good practice is to take a couple of minutes between encounters with people to notice your breath and reflect on loving kindness.

Sitting posture and painful feeling

5. I find it impossible to maintain the same sitting posture for more than about 30 minutes due to severe discomfort in my legs. I have tried the technique of focusing on the 'pain' sensation but this does not reduce the discomfort. Do you have any advice on this?

This depends on how long you have been practicing for and of course if there is a physical reason for the discomfort in your legs. One technique is to slowly change your posture after watching and waiting for a few extra minutes. Then extend the period by a few minutes each time. This way slowly stretching your mind as well as your muscles.

Watching the pain sensation to reduce it, wouldn't work. It may work initially. As we have no expectation that the pain will go away when we just observe it. As we are curious to know what it is. What happens is that we let go of trying to control the pain. The pain then like any sensation arises and ceases on its own accord.

However, when watching it next time, there is the hope that it will go away if it is observed. Then there is desire behind that. Then the pain will continue to exist.

Our intention in watching sensations is to understand them. Not to get rid of them. Through the understanding we no longer make a problem out of it. As we realise it wasn't the pain that was the problem. The pain was just another feeling. It is the disliking and aversion that comes out of our delusion (sense of self) that is the problem.

When observing feelings that are not pleasant, having a practice of loving kindness and compassion is very helpful. We can bring that feeling of loving kindness and compassion to this painful feeling. As our natural reaction towards it, is aversion. Then slowly as the aversion subsides, we can begin to fully accept the pain and observe it. Watching it, just to understand its behaviour. What is this?

When you understand the pain for what it is. You then question, who was then causing the suffering? - and look back at the mind.