

Thank you all for your emails throughout the week detailing inner conversations and our time together.

A few things that define the voice in our heads:

- It is out of the moment. It takes you from direct experience. When you are engaged with it, you are not present for the rest of your life: the sights, sounds, smells, and heart presence that makes life worth living.

- It comes from past perceptions that filter what you see, thus you don't see what is actually happening. Rather, we tend to see what we expect. We expect what happened before to recur, to the point we make it recur in our heads even if it doesn't in real life. This is especially true with ongoing situations, such as work environment, long term relationships such as family or partners.

For example, I ask my partner to pick up something on his trip to the store. Perhaps in the past he had grumbled about being asked. So, after asking him, my voice goes off on a rant about how he will be irritated, grumbly and I will pay for my request in some way. I defend my request and brace myself for an unhappy and snippy person returning from the errand. However, he comes back perfectly cheerful and happy to have been of help. I see the cost of believing something that was untrue, and basically re-enacting it inside, which further deepens the pattern and expectation of irritation (against reality!) for the next time. It is insanity, yet there it is.

The Buddha is quoted in the sutras as saying, "Where there is perception, there is deception." What does this mean? It means once we have bought into a perception (see: cycle of dependent origination), we have falsely 'become' someone who has created an experience that is totally unreal.

- The voice comes from conditioning, it is not personal. What kinds of conditioning creates the inner voice? Pretty much everything: families, communities, school, religion, politics, world and local events, workplaces and culture, you name it. Yet how much of this

do we personally choose? Almost none. So how can we be responsible and 'own' the voice? We can't. We are not the voice. We are what hears it.

There's also a universality of the human experience. Was there any example in the class homework emailed in that you could not identify with? How personal do these stories feel, now that you have seen a variety and understand they are common to us all?

We experience it personally, but it is not personal to us as an individual, meaning we do not choose it, nor can we control it, because we did not create it. Seeing this helps loosen the identification with the voice, understanding this is a part of the human condition of living at the content level of life. This is where the observer gives us a bit of distance, some equanimity.

Broadly, there are two basic categories of experience with the voice.

The first is seemingly benign ongoing commentary, almost like we had a twin following us around who commented on everything. (Look! There's a poodle. Our family had german shepherds, I like those better.... The fall color is just beautiful!..... Ok, I need to find socks to match these pants... are they out of the wash?.....)

The second are ones that are triggered by a disturbance, where the voice creates stress by resisting or defending. This tends to be the level where we see it as a problem, such as waking up at 3 am and not being able to turn off the defending, arguing, etc. This second category share the characteristics of being stressful (we want it to shut up), it is persistent (keeps cropping up), and it is repetitive (even after we are bored with it).

The second kind are much more noticeable, so we start here.

Each of us picked an example from our journal or notebook, an instance when the inner conversation felt triggered. We then introduced the concept of meditative inquiry in working with our voice by using a work sheet.

In introducing the inquiry process, some principles are helpful.

- None of it is random. Then work sheet is adapted from the work of Byron Katie, who has a profound understanding of this process. Every stressful thought, which is unbidden and stressful, is that way because comes from a thought/perception/belief that is not true and contrary to the dharma, which means how things actually are.

It's a transformative practice to inquire and see how believing untrue thoughts is the cause of all suffering, and we do mean all. It is an opportunity to wake up into truth. It holds within it the seeds of the delusion that cause all of your suffering. As Katie says, loving what is frees us.

Developing the habit of inquiry and seeing all this leads you into happiness and freedom. It begins as a formal practice we must sit down and do, and, like mindfulness, eventually becomes a pattern of life. This form of inquiry will be our homework this coming week.

You were all given a copy of the inquiry worksheet, and we worked through an example together. Then we each sat down and worked through our own examples, and shared them with a partner.

One of the comments afterwards is how this inquiry process takes us to a deeper level with our daily 'stuff'. Another was how something seemingly small or insignificant had deeper roots than expected. The word 'should' is a red light that we are thinking contrary to what is.

What's the common denominator every time that voice starts up?
The voice arises when life is being resisted. This can feel like trying to spin facts to be more comfortable with something, or trying to control a situation, or trying to make it go away or to withdraw and numb out.

The voice comes up as a response when the psyche feels some kind of stress. The trigger could be a thought, a visual stimulus, a remark someone made, even the weather. Our memory banks are amazingly accurate in how any different element of an experience, when it arises, can synapse a whole event.

We all know this: how certain smells can evoke past holidays and the feelings of those holidays, how seeing someone who reminds you of a family member brings up the impulse to like or dislike that new person accordingly. The point here is nothing is random, even a dark feeling that seems to come out of the blue. It's all connected, and thus worth investigating.

All stress is caused by uninvestigated thoughts and beliefs we carry around. In classes a couple of years ago, we looked at things that stressed us, and worked out that for each one, it was not the circumstance itself that was the suffering. It was what we brought to it. Outside life cannot stress us. That's an inside job.

So this week our homework uses the voice to start to see the thoughts and beliefs that trigger us during the day and begin to investigate them more closely.

HOMEWORK : seeing what's underneath.

IN THE MOMENT: Switching from the outflow (the voice) to the trigger. When your voice starts up, stop and notice whatever the discomfort was in the moment before that is being resisted.

WORK SHEET INQUIRY:

Print out some of the work sheets. This must be written. Don't try to do this 'in your head', because the mind will slip around you.

Once a day complete a worksheet. Pick an incident during the day you noticed the voice triggering. Even small episodes can be deep and rich.

See you next week!
Susan