

We've seen the noisier commentaries when we are triggered, which are hard to miss. Let's now look at the seemingly benign narrative that goes on all the time.

This is a familiar interior narrative that gives us our sense of self. It's almost like we have a twin following us around, making comments that seem obvious and unnecessary (Look! there's a big dog! Our old neighbors had a big dog..... wow, it is so beautiful out today...this tea is pretty good....that lady has really red hair....)

So why does the mind do this? What is the purpose? I gave an example of a few years ago when I stepped outside into an arctic vortex, and my mind said "This is REALLY cold!" I realized that there was fear and discomfort around the cold itself, and by my mind making a comment about it, I was now dealing with my mind's commentary about the cold, not the cold itself, which felt like it had a little more control in it.

In this way, the psyche is constantly building a structure around us that is more comfortable and in control than actual reality. Instead of dealing with the cold, I was dealing with my judgement about it. Instead of the big dog, you are now dealing with your memory of a big dog. Instead of seeing the lady with red hair, you are dealing with your impressions and thoughts about red haired people. Can you see how this removes you from the moment and creates an artificial description of reality filtered through perception? The Buddha is quoted as saying, "Where there is perception, there is deception." He is describing how seeing life filtered through perception is not actually true.

Brain research scientists have come up with the term "default mode network". Any time the mind is not focused on a task, the DMN becomes active. Scientists describe it as an inner voice that: distracts, argues, rehearses, complains, justifies, introspects, analyzes, etc.

They have discovered that it is not truthful, it is a sort of spin master, and distorts things to fit our personal narrative more comfortably. I think of it as my internal Carl Rove, spinning an interpretation of life that puts me in the best light. It is constantly trying to bend

circumstances or facts, to find a point of view that will be more comfortable and make one feel more safe and in control. Or, at least, justifies complaining that things ought to be different, which is another way of saying that your viewpoint is the right one.

A couple of scientific quotes about the DMN:

Antonio Damasio: "Perhaps the most important revelation is precisely this: that the left cerebral hemisphere of humans is prone to fabricating verbal narratives that do not necessarily accord with the truth."

Michael Gazzaniga: "The left brain weaves its story in order to convince itself that it is in full control... The interpreter is really trying to keep our personal story together. To do that, we have to lie to ourselves."

The causative element is some level of discomfort that causes the DMN to activate. When you notice the voice, drop back into the feeling tone it is trying to deep six or avoid, as done in formal practice.

In noticing the discomfort beneath the narrative, we are on a subtler level, so it is harder to catch. The move from discomfort into voice happens in a flash. As Pema Chodron said, don't underestimate your low tolerance for discomfort.

Another reason it is hard to catch is that the force that flinches from discomfort likes to stay hidden, it does not want to be seen. It's the wizard of Oz's "man behind the curtain."

This more subtle voice seems relatively harmless, but it is fronting for one of the most powerful forces inside us: the force of delusion and fear. We did a little experiment in class to see how powerful and pushy this force really is.

We walked outside in the cold to experience a distinct (but relatively harmless) discomfort for each of us. We all noticed how our inner voices became activated, especially when we realized we had locked

the door and could not get back in (A gift from the dharma). The commentator went from mildly narrating along to becoming loud and insistent. It was fairly unstoppable until we were back in the building.

Let's explore two other aspects of this voice, that it lies to us, and that it seems personal and real. Not only "is it true?", also "is it me"?

Have you noticed sometimes it takes both side of an argument? We gave a number of examples from our lives.

- I totally deserved that raise! Well, no, I haven't been all that motivated at work lately, I could do better...
- He is completely unreasonable! Well, he does have a point....
- I'm always forgetting everything! Well, I do seem to be functioning in my life.....

Which one is true, which one is you?

Answer: none of the voices are true or therefore can be you. It cannot be you, because it is not true. It does not reflect or represent truth, either of you, or of reality. You are something much deeper, that contains the entire universe within yourself. You are not an argument, or a point of view. You are not the petty one, or the gracious and forgiving one, either the lower instinct (the id) or the higher instinct (the superego). You are what contains all this, the awareness that hears the voice.

When Eckhardt Tolle advises us to become free from the voice by listening dispassionately, he is speaking directly to this. Not believing it is the key to the 'off' button. This is not easy to do.

We must accept there's something inside that is not OK with life. Michael Singer calls it the psyche. I like Adyashanti's term: the ego identified mind. Buddhism refers to this as the delusional, separate 'self'.

This part, which is constantly prove that it is 'me', has an uphill battle that it cannot abandon, because it is not true. It's like trying to push back the tide with a broom. Once you commit to a hopeless task, you cannot let up, not even for an instant. So the voice does not seem to have an 'off' switch as long as you think it is true, and it is me.

When we are sucked down to this level of identity, we are completely at the mercy of our circumstances and the suffering they produce. Our happiness then depends on what is going on outside of us, which we have little or no control over. Life is pretty terrifying from this place, and we have all come to practice because we have lived this.

Cessation is possible.

You must make the commitment to stay conscious. It's one of the most important commitments you make. Here a sitting practice isn't a break in the day, it is starting the day by becoming conscious and then committing to return here as much as possible as the day goes by.

SUMMARY: On either level, triggered or background commentary, the voice is about two things: COMFORTABLE and IN CONTROL. The voice is the force of distraction from any kind of uncertainty or fear.

The Voice is actually trying to distract you, to take you away from the feeling itself. This freezes the feeling into place, the energy of it has nowhere to go, cannot work itself out, or be digested.

Our practice is to fall back into the underlying feeling and welcome it to be as big as it needs and stay as long as it needs. This begins to free up your heart and life energy and accelerates then process of becoming conscious.

This is a lifetime work. The process is to discover that you are not the voice, you are the one who hears the voice, who knows it is there.

You have the basic tools you need to get started. One is being able to observe the voice when it is active.

The other is the attitude that sees the distracted mind, and the voice, as a gateway, not as a problem that needs to be fixed.

HOMEWORK

1: Set a timer for a 5 minute period. You can either sit and relax, or do some task that does not take focus or concentration (sweeping, raking, walking).

Stop your narrative for this period of time. It will take concerted effort. Then, after the five minutes is over, notice how much energy it took. See what your voice has to say.

(Mine: thank god!! that's over.) The amount of energy it takes to stop the narrative is equal to the energy it takes to be running.

GOAL: to have some appreciation for how much of your life force the ongoing commentary - that is constantly building a shield between you and life - takes up.

2: Create an intentional small discomfort for yourself. Be creative. In class we stepped outside for a few moments to feel the cold. It might be arranging your desk so that you have to get up frequently to do your work. Or putting your cup of coffee in an inconvenient place. It might be not answering or checking your phone for a certain period of time. It might be getting up at a different time, or eating differently.

GOAL: to provoke the default mode network into action. Notice how it spins and tries to manage your experience.