

Violence of the Mind

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The path toward non-violence or *ahimsa* involves the identification and taming of the violent forces in our lives. Some are obvious--such as violence on TV, the news, and other media. Others are more subtle, such as the violence of the advertising industry, which, by definition, has to create a dissatisfaction, disharmony or fear in order to motivate us to buy products that we otherwise don't want or need.

Other forms of violence are more even subtle, or are frankly hidden. These forms are harder to tame since they elude our observation. Examples of such offenders are the toxins in foods, the chemicals in our health care products, and the waste that occurs in packaging, processing and living our material (compared with the rest of the world) American lives.

Violence as defined by Merriam-Webster means "injury by or as if by distortion, infringement, or profanation"; *Injury* is simply defined as "an act that damages or hurts". And so, violence is something that is harmful.

In my experience as a physician and yoga teacher (among other things), I have become aware of one of the most subtle, and yet most profound forms of violence--that of the mind. Before describing how we are, in essence, "our own worst enemies", let's discuss what the mind is.

One can think of the mind as a set of functions, such as those of a calculator. The functions of the mind include sensation, memory, emotion, language, abstract reasoning, judgement (predicting the results of an action in time) and imagination. (Some of these functions can be further subdivided, or grouped differently, but this is not important for our discussion). These functions have evolved over millions of years, beginning with the ability to detect light or food, and most recently the ability to form concepts and language. Their purpose is simple--to enable us to survive and reproduce. The power of language and imagination, from a purely evolutionary point-of-view is that these functions enable us to survive and reproduce better, in different environments, in different seasons, etc.

However what is the most important part of a calculator? Not the buttons, or the computer chip, but the *user*. It's the purpose for which we use the calculator that gives it value. Likewise, if we accept the premise that we are spiritual beings, then the user of the mind is the spirit, and the purpose of the mind is to serve the intentions of the spirit.

This distinction between mind and spirit is the subject of numerous yogic and other spiritual texts, and can be elusive. Furthermore, there are several concepts about the mind that have evolved over the past 100-200 years that are just plain wrong.

The most common misunderstanding of the mind is that it is something that is created in and by the brain, like a TV produces images on a screen. However, this view of the mind has significant fallacies. Decades of research has failed to locate any specific mental function in any specific region of the brain. The gut, or gastro-intestinal system, contains trillions of neurons and produces virtually every neurotransmitter that the brain does. In some ways, there is a mind "in" the gut as well as one that occurs "in" the brain. Furthermore, research in the 1960-70's suggested that we have a different mental functions "in" the right and left sides of the brain. Brain research "determines" the roles of regions of the brain by damaging or stimulating each region. However, going back to the TV model, if we damage a particular transistor, and the picture becomes fuzzy, does this mean that the transistor's function is to "unfuzzy" the picture? Recent theorists, such as Rupert Sheldrake (see references) suggest that the brain is more a receiver of mind, rather than the creator of mind. If this is true, then the mind is closer to a TV and is still there to serve the purposes of consciousness.

The way out of this dilemma of trying to localize the mind is to understand the difference between structure and function. Think of a simple can opener. It's function is to open a can. It's structure includes two arms, a blade, a gear, and a handle. While each component seems to have an individual role, if any one component doesn't work, the can does not get open. The *function* is the sum-total of all the parts, and more. Sometimes this concept is described as "the whole is greater than the some of the parts". Before moving onto the mind, let's look at another example that is more analogous--that of computer hardware and software. Let's say you are running some software such as a word processing program. A child comes to you and asks, "Where is the program running the computer?" Is it in the keyboard? No. Is it in the monitor? No. Is it on the hard drive? No. Is it in the memory? No. Is it in the CPU (Central Processing Unit)? No. The correct answer is, "it is everywhere and nowhere". Trying to locate a function within a structure is a logical fallacy. It is like asking the question, "Is green true?" If the question is wrong, then any answer cannot be meaningful.

Asking the question, "where is the mind?" is fallacious for the same reason--it confuses structure for function. The mind can best be defined as "the functioning of the body". Our mind exists everywhere and nowhere. One might ask, "do you need your toes to do math?". While on the surface, the answer may seem to be no, the accurate answer, supported by research, is that "one can do math better with toes than without". To support this apparently strange idea, scientific research has clearly shown that

children or adults with movement disorders do not have the same cognitive abilities as those that have full movement potential. You may open a can with a dull blade, and do word processing with limited memory, but the function (software) works better if the hardware is better. However, the relationship is not linear.

Now, coming back to the mind, the major problem with the mind is that, like the calculator, we tend to think that we are our minds. However, we are not our minds; we are the user of our minds. Our spirit (or consciousness, or soul, or will--similar words for this discussion) is not our mind.

The mind, like a computer, is programmed by numerous factors--such as our genetics, our childhood and adult experiences, our food, our lifestyles, etc. This programming gives the mind certain abilities, such as the ability to do addition, but at the same time creates limitations and patterns of thought.

It's within these patterns of thought that we find the violence of our minds. These patterns include the comparative pattern, that compares us with our friends, neighbors and colleagues. Another pattern from our socialization taught us that "aberrant" thoughts should be dismissed. However, such "aberrant" thoughts are often the seeds of imagination, creativity and inspiration. Another pattern is that of ignoring our impulses. We have an urge to do something, or to not do something, but we have been programmed to suppress that inner voice, that inner message. Oftentimes, we kick ourselves later, sometimes years later, for not listening to that voice. The voice in our head that tells us we are not good enough, or smart enough, or slim enough, are all patterns of the mind, not much different than the annoying TV commercial that you find humming due to it's sheer repetition--not that you would ever buy the product.

So, how do we escape this programming of the mind, or even better, re-program the mind? Well, first, by understanding that you are not your mind. That you are spirit and that your mind is there to serve you. Next, you need to practice separating mind from spirit. The way to do this is through a yoga and/or meditative practice. By some definitions meditation (and yoga, called "meditation in motion") is the process by which the spirit treats the mind as an object--by simply observing it. Somehow, the process of observing the mind, without either listening to it, nor rejecting it, simply observing it, causes a change in it's programming. By "objectifying" the mind, it's patterns, including the violent ones, become unhidden and clear. Once observed, then consciousness can re-direct the mind.

There are several forms and styles of meditation, such as sitting meditation, walking, doing yoga, journaling, etc. each of which can give one further clarification on the distinction between mind and spirit. In some cases, such as where the patterns are deep, the help of a guru (teacher, mentor), psychotherapist, acupuncturist or other professionals can be helpful in the process.

IMPORTANT NOTE: This general information should not be used to make decisions about medical care without the involvement of a knowledgeable practitioner.

For More Information

- O See Dr. Cheikin's related articles on: Detoxification, Elimination and Simplification and What We Really Need
- O Dr. Cheikin's website, www.cheikin.com, has helpful articles on related topics
- O Call to be placed on Dr. Cheikin's contact list for future lectures, workshops, classes and other services.
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