

Mindfulness for the soul, locally speaking

“All that we are” the Buddha says, “is the result of what we have thought.”

Eknath Easwaren, a professor of English literature and world-renowned meditation teacher, says, “that our health is to a great measure the result of what we think of ourselves.” In other words, my body believes everything I say to it.

My thinking and belief system are as impacting on my emotional and physical wellness as the food I eat. As a wellness professional for nearly 40 years, I have observed that there is nearly always a relationship between what we think and how we end up behaving and feeling. It is very easy to act as if we have permission to think whatever we wish. We can make ourselves sick with our thinking.

But we can also improve the quality of our health with our thinking. Stuffing our heads with negative thoughts about ourselves and others, literally, “local” consumption, can be equally as harmful as stuffing our bodies with unhealthy foods, drugs and excessive alcohol.

Do I notice the inner dialog that runs through my being on any given day? What do I say to myself when I am late for an appointment or fall and hurt myself? What do I say when I am feeling lonely? What do I say about myself when I lose a job or relationship that I loved, wanted, needed?

Do I have a belief system that I can say whatever I wish to myself and not have any repercussions? My mental and spiritual health today is often the direct result of what I thought yesterday and how I am now feeling and behaving today toward others and myself.

Belief Systems

In 1955, H.K. Beecher, the chief of anesthesiology at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, documented research of more than two dozen medical case studies demonstrating that up to one-third of patients healed from essentially nothing. The term commonly used to describe this phenomenon is the “placebo effect.”

The philosopher often referred to as “father of American psychology,” William James, trained to be a to be a physician, but never did practice medicine. In an article written in 1864, James asserted that the real power of healing was less about procedures and more about how the doctors helped their patients feel about themselves. He wrote: “The doctor does more by the moral effect of his presence on the patient and family, than by anything else.” More and more we hopefully come to see, to believe, that we are touched so very deeply by what we say to each other and to ourselves. Such a simple remedy is always with us. No tools required. If life-affirming beliefs do in fact have the power to reverse disease and heal our bodies, then we must ask ourselves an obvious question: How much damage do negative beliefs carry? Scientist Greg Braden in “The Divine Matrix” tells of a powerful example of group meditation and mindfulness in an experiment documented during the war between Lebanon and Israel in 1982. Researchers trained a group of people to “feel” peace in their bodies while believing that it was already present within them, rather than simply thinking about it in their mind or praying for it to occur. They used a form of meditation for this experiment. At appointed times during the month, these

people were positioned throughout war-torn areas of the Middle East and during this window of time the group were meditating and 'feeling' peace inside themselves. Astonishingly, terrorist activities ceased, the rate of crimes against people went down, the number of emergency-room visits declined and traffic accidents dropped! When a small percentage of the population achieved peace within themselves, it was reflected in the world around them. The study became known as the International Peace Project in the Middle East.

The researchers were also able to identify how many people are needed to share the experience of peace before it is mirrored in their world. The number is the square root of one percent of the population. For example, in a population of one million people the number is about 100.

There are probably thousands more documented studies and writings by many wise men and women that state a similar message: we must discipline our mind and cultivate that discipline on a daily basis; cultivate a personal spiritual relationship with a part of us that is always wanting to be fed.

*Compassion begins at home. *

How can I know anything about the attributes of stilling the mind, if I do not take the time to do so, to practice stillness? How do I know if prayer works, if I do not take the time to pray?

Gandhi did not take time theorizing and philosophizing. He would always say, "Why not learn by getting down to the actual practice."

All that I personally continue to learn is that for my own well being I must take responsibility for my own breathe, my own thinking. No one can do this for me. No matter how much I "know," research, understand . . . it is only in my taking action, being willing to "change my mind," on a daily basis, to pause and breathe, that makes any real difference in my thinking.

And I also have to cultivate a real sense of humor along with compassion for my human frailties. To become willing to notice that I often forget, or choose to not do, what makes me feel better about myself. I must then be gentle with myself and again become willing to begin anew. Compassionate humor and forgiveness for my human frailties, is a huge dissolver of pain and suffering. The more I practice mindfulness and the more I practice being willing to change my mind, and to begin anew, the more often I practice not berating myself because I did this and I didn't do that, the more often I find myself actually practicing what I speak. It works.

There is a story that in India they give an elephant a baton to hold in it's trunk as it is led through the streets, otherwise the elephant's trunk would be grabbing whatever was available swinging from one side of the street to another. I have to give my mind a baton, a prayer, a mantra, a focus for attention. I need to respect that it needs help to participate in my overall wellness.

I need to give myself words to read that re-enforces the goodness of humankind. I need to keep a gratitude list. I need to practice loving kindness to others and myself. The power of prayer and meditation can change my mind and improve my health.

"There is nothing as disobedient as an undisciplined mind, and there is nothing as obedient as a disciplined mind." Buddha