

## **Deep Psychology: The Quiet Way to Wisdom**

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### **Introduction**

Psychology for thousands of years has been the study of your mind. Quite literally, this meant your own mind. This was accomplished by quietly observing your own mental events as they arose and fell away from consciousness. Such a practice was easy to understand conceptually but required prolonged effort for the promised results. Back in the days before the advent of the printing press, television and computers people had spare time they were willing to commit to mental exercises and meditation. Those who consistently practiced over longer periods of time reported much improved awareness, thinking and decision making. Presently the ancient study of your mind and the underlying, deeper psychology is rarely taught within the western educational system and thus largely unknown in the West. What follows is review of the Eastern view of mind and what can be done to better improve our minds both in everyday environments but especially under high risk environments.

### **Discussion**

Western psychology has a negative orientation with a preoccupation with external behavior. Thus the dominant concern has been how to get stressed or mentally ill people back to “normal” everyday sickness often through drugs. Very little emphasis has been placed on maximizing mental health let alone mental potential. A recent survey “of 30 years of psychology publications counted 46,000 papers on depression-and a piddling 400 on joy”. As a result the American Psychological Association has launched a new effort to bring more focus on positive emotions.

Science in its inception was and still is anti-mind. If you can’t see, hear, touch, taste or feel it, then it can’t be studied by science and therefore does not exist. Scientific psychology has shown a steady trend to shift away from actual mental events to correlated physical events. Formerly the definition of psychology was the study of your mind. Thirty years ago it shifted to the study of your mind and behavior. Today’s definition is the study of human and animal behavior. Your mind is now ignored if not lost. Science says “The brain minds us”; thus giving us our minds, filling up our minds and then telling us to mind (it, the brain). The shift has been from talking therapies to behaviorism and then to cognitive behaviors with emphasis on the mind functioning as a computer. Today science says the mind merely “emerges” from the firing of neurons in localized and distributed networks.

In contrast, Eastern Psychology has a positive orientation and starts with normal people in their everyday life situations. The concern is how to get normal people, who are viewed as more asleep than awake, to awaken their potential mental skills. There are two minds discussed in Eastern psychology. The everyday mind functions much like the brain

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driven mind of the West. The essential difference is Eastern psychology says there is a deeper mind, ultimate mind, that is non-material and usually obscured by the everyday mind. Meditation quiets the everyday mind, thus gaining access to the deeper mind.

Fortunately, counter trends in the past ten years have brought Western neuroscience and Eastern psychology back into contact for a fresh look. This presentation reviews the deep ancient principals of mind to promote awareness of the mind as it actually exists and what it has the potential to become. Such personal awareness is best accomplished through a practice of both formal and informal mindfulness meditation. To appreciate why meditation is the single most powerful way to improve your mind and thus reduce accidents and fatalities involves looking at your everyday mind and the nature of accidents.

When looking at wildland fire fatalities, accidents, near misses and unsafe actions, individuals and organizations tend to focus on physical causes and ignore mental causes. This is surprising since the rule of thumb of military and industry safety experts is that 20 percent of the causal factors are physical, while 80 percent of the causal factors are due to mental errors.

Firefighters do not go to their deaths thinking in the morning that this is a good day to die, so let's violate the Fire Orders and other safety concerns. But this conclusion pretty much reflects the thinking of most wildland fire accident investigators. With wise attention the real question is what were they paying attention to and basing their actions upon while embedded in a dynamic stressful situation? When people respond they do so based largely on habitual patterns of behaving and thinking. If we accept that 80 percent of accidents are due to mental errors then, to correctly understand the implications, we need to add that 80 to 90 percent of our mental effort is unconscious in the sense we are not aware why we do what we do.

We are on autopilot most of the time. Most of our actions make more sense from an autopilot perspective. After an accident we imagine we would have been aware of the warnings because we have seen the outcomes and go back in time in a more fully awake state looking for warnings. Perhaps the best way to more fully understand this issue is to read Daniel Goleman's book *Vital Lies, Simple Truths: The Psychology of Self-Deception* which outlines much of the underlying Group Think, analogously, Self Think and underlying Blind Spots.

A mentally based warning list of what firefighters need to pay attention to may help. But it would still fail in the same manner that the Fire Orders and all lists fail. When you first observe the lists and pay attention they energize awareness in much the same way as reviews of recent accidents. But in time most list items start to be ignored largely in that they are Watch Outs rather than Don't Do's. Once the process of habitually ignoring the list items begins, your mind will automatically short circuit the awareness process and then you will not even be aware of what your mind earlier noted. A second automatic response is when you notice the warning and the underlying threatening feeling then shift attention elsewhere, externally this time, to something less threatening. Thus the warning goes unheeded. Both processes are covered in Goleman's book.

A few mental rules on how your mind works routinely would help. One mind rule is that awareness and thinking are normally on autopilot. Another mind rule is that you can only attend to one object at a time. Still another mind rule is that you have limited mental capacity. So, for example, when you attend to any stressor, that stressor will interfere

with clearer awareness and thinking. Your mind will habitually operate on the fireline in whatever manner it operates routinely away from the fireline but generally worse due to more stress. It follows that if you're waiting to take greater mental notice once you get to the fireline you're a bit late. In summary, if you understand the above and how your mind works then you have to be working on better awareness and thinking 24-7-LIFE. There is no other way. Yes, unfortunately, you can't buy it outright or pay someone else to do it for you. You have to commit to good old fashion hard work to gain the benefits.

Fortunately training and practices are available to get you off autopilot so you can become more aware, see subtle interactions, analyze correctly and think clearer. You do this by practicing meditation. The first lesson in meditation is often to keep your mind focused on feeling your own breath. Actually, any object will do. What you, me and everyone who has every tried to do this notices in a few minutes is that you can't keep your mind focused on even a simple object let alone the complexity we are all embedded in. If you have insight in what you have just observed in meditation the real shocker is, if you're not controlling your own mind, who or what is. This is in no way a trivial observation but lies at the core of what you are attempting to accomplish.

You have now come face to face, or more appropriately, mind to mind with your own mental autopilot. "You" struggle in the meditation to focus on the selected object and your "Autopilot" struggles to take your focus where it normally goes. If you keep a record, Autopilot wins most of the time. But with more and more practice you become more skillful and start to gain back some control and thus an element of real mental freedom. As a result you gain all the above mentioned benefits which you will become aware of in the meditation process. Meditation means mind control but it also means mind protection. Once you begin taking control you acquire protection from your mind going off on side trips when you need it the most, like under risky fire conditions. You begin having fresh observations on a daily basis which carries over to the fireline by keeping you more aware. With less autopilot interference you have more of your total mental capacity available, more energy and feel fresh and more alive.

The above seems clear to me but I have a lot of psychology and meditation training so I'm not sure it is clear to you. The real issues above only become clear once you take a prolonged look at your own mind and realize the implications. The mindfulness meditation then becomes the work or practice you do to get your mind back. And it is your observation of mental improvement that keeps you practicing 24-7-Life. To quit is to fade back to autopilot.

Recent meditation research by Western neuroscientist and psychologist is changing the way we think about the mind, brain and human potential. The new research shows that people who meditate regularly, in time become much more aware, less stressed, more positive, and healthier than non-meditators.

My conceptual presentation fills your mind with more knowledge and arouses your interest but only actual meditation practice results in truthfully knowing your own mind.

### **SUGGESTED READING FOR MINDFULNESS (INSIGHT) MEDITATION AND THE UNDERLYING PSYCHOLOGY**

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[www.mindandlife.org](http://www.mindandlife.org) Research efforts between Western scientists and Buddhist meditators.

[www.umassmed.edu/cfm](http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm). Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare and Society.

[www.vipassana.com](http://www.vipassana.com) Online free vipassana (mindfulness) meditation courses and articles.

[www.whatthebleep.com](http://www.whatthebleep.com) Quantum physicists, neuroscientists, philosophers and religious leaders in dialog about recent movie.