

Understanding Your Mind

"You have power over your mind—not outside events.

Realize this, and you will find strength."

—Marcus Aurelius

When you think about your mind, what are you considering? What is your mind? Is it the electrical signals that flow through the neural pathways of the brain, or is it something altogether different? Do you understand the nature of your mind? Do you believe that your mind and your brain are one and the same? Where does awareness and consciousness fit into the picture?

These are questions that most of the clients I work with have never considered and that we will now begin to explore. But please be aware that I am only going to touch the surface or fringes of these ideas, as I want you to decide for yourself how deeply down the rabbit hole you wish go.

The White Rabbit

What is the nature of your mind? This is a question that has been pondered by great yogi's, philosophers, and scientists alike, and no clear picture has yet been developed. Your mind is at work in all states of consciousness and unconsciousness and is of a quantum nature, meaning that you are only aware of it when you are observing it. In other words, your mind is not physical in nature, i.e. the brain. Rather, it has structure in the form of subtle conditions and energies that can be observed through tangible and verifiable effects, which means that you can recognize the influence it has on the outer world through your experiences, or, on a physical level, this influence is

recognized as feelings due to the release of neuropeptides. Just like you can see and use your hands and your feet, your awareness recognizes and uses your mind. The mind is in constant motion and is always thinking for it cannot exist without thinking as it is made up of thought, and it is those thoughts that make up your reality. In other words, it is always considering, planning, reacting emotionally, or looking for other ways to create engagement with our sensory experiences. It is responsible for the overseeing of thought into form.

In order to learn how to see the workings of the mind, you must become the observer of the mind and step outside the activity that is taking place within it. Basically, if you are driving your car with your eyes on your cell phone, you can't pay attention to what's happening on the road around you. You must become the observer of your thoughts, emotions, and actions in order to not only understand them but to gain a deeper knowledge of yourself and how best to meet your needs and wants even as challenges appear. Just like in order to safely drive your car from one place to another, you need to know how to operate the vehicle, and you need to keep your attention on what is happening around you and continually make adjustments to your speed and your direction of travel as well adjusting to any environmental conditions that may arise like a sudden rain storm or high winds.

Consider that you do not go through the day thinking about how to use your brain to think, the mind just does it. Just like you don't think about using your throat to swallow when you drink something, your body just does it. And so, just like the muscles that make swallowing happen are not the throat, the brain is not the mind. Yet the mind uses your brain to complete its tasks or think your thoughts, and it uses it 24/7, but it is not of the brain, nor is it limited to its use. The mind does not reside in one location, it moves to where your awareness goes. It is attached to the outside world, and because of its dualistic nature, the mind by itself is not equipped to make intelligent choices. To make a fully intelligent choice, you need balance in heart and mind with consciousness and awareness.

Painting the Roses

You lose your power over the mind when you start to allow it to direct your thoughts and actions. Once you give your mind the power to run things, you no longer have control of your life, you've become the pinball bouncing chaotically off everything that happens. In order to retake control, you must learn to quiet the mind and stop experiencing life through it and start to experience it through the eyes of your observer. By doing so, you are no longer personalizing the outer world or what is happening, and when you stop doing that, you are better able to see the reality of things. Objectivity sets in and provides you with a sense of empowerment as you are more clearly able to find solutions to the challenges that you're faced with big and small.

So, if the mind is not the brain, it is not aware, it is not intelligent, and you are not the mind, what is it? Or, rather, what is its function? When you look at the function of the mind, you first notice that it is always driving us to do things. It is in constant movement, which causes conflict, and that in turn propels choice, and that creates more movement, and round and round we go until we learn to reclaim control. The basic underlying function of the mind is to be an instrument used by your awareness to understand the physical or outer world as well as the internal or emotional world—to make sense of it, or, rather, to correlate all the input into meanings that our consciousness can understand and use, aka intelligence.

Tea Party

This is where things get a little trippy, because when I talk about awareness, I am speaking about the eternal self. You see, awareness is not bound to time or space, it has no form or function, and it has no regard for good, bad, right, or wrong, and

awareness does not bring about consciousness, nor does consciousness bring about awareness. Like the mind and the brain, the two are tied to each other but not of each other. Consciousness uses awareness like the mind uses the brain. Let me explain it this way; a comatose person upon waking up will often say that they were aware of everything that was going on around them, though never showing any signs of consciousness, and a conscious person can remain in a debilitating state of unawareness for years, seemingly trapped in an internal world. Consciousness without awareness is as useless as awareness without consciousness, as there is no decreasable level of intelligence in either one alone. Which means that until consciousness and awareness are teamed up, you lack true intelligence.

What does all that mean? It means that you must understand and master how your mind is using the information gathered by your senses, and in so doing, you gain control of your mind, and you are able to make conscious choices rather than simply react. It means that when your heart and your mind are congruent in the choices you make, you are using all of your intelligence.

You must learn to manage your mind in order to get what you want. If you allow your mind to constantly focus on negative thoughts, then you are doomed to live in a negative world with very few joyful experiences, the world of resistance. The goal here is to actually get to the point where you no longer have to manage negative thoughts because they are no longer what the mind gives energy or power too. Not saying that bad stuff won't happen, but once resolved, it won't be swimming around in your head hours, days, weeks, or years later.

Off with Her Head

One of your mind's favorite ways to trick you is with a game of connect the dots even when there are no dots. This game is called cognitive fusion. Cognitive fusion is

the process of attaching a thought or a feeling to an experience, or anchoring feelings and thoughts to an experience. For example, your friends have set you up on a blind date, and you are really hitting it off and magic is in the air, then you find out that your date works at the club where both of your exes cheated on you, and your mind jumps right to the conclusion that this person is a cheater and barriers are thrown up.