

3-NO QUESTION SHOULD GO UNANSWERED

This is the third in a series of Reflections dedicated to answering questions raised about the work of the Sydney Banks Institute for Innate Health and of other organizations that base their work on the Principles of Mind, Consciousness and Thought.

The first essay (#40) addressed two questions: (1) Why does this differ from other work that links thought to reality and experience? (2) Why is finding respect, rapport and deeper human feelings within oneself central to all interactions, regardless of the subject-matter or of the circumstances? The second essay (#41) addressed another question: (3) Doesn't it suggest false hope to talk about "innate health" in a medical setting where people are suffering and dying from disease every day? (These essays may be downloaded from the Reflections section of the Sydney Banks Institute for Innate Health web-site, www.sbiih.org.)

Here is one of the most frequently asked questions raised about innate health:

Given the abysmal conditions in much of the world today – war, human rights violations, cruelty, prejudice, random violence – how could there actually be health in all people? If there is such a thing as "innate health," why is there so much violence and evil?

Consider the following real examples of the workings of our minds, and then we'll consider this question.

First example: Several years ago, on a television interview program, a reporter talked to a number of children who committed murders before they turned 17, were tried as adults, and were serving life sentences. One of them was a Dennis-the-Menace looking boy, with an unruly blonde cowlick and a face full of freckles. He was 17 at the time of the interview, having already been in prison for two years. He had shot a middle school teacher to death and wounded a vice principal, now wheelchair-bound. At the end of the interview, the reporter asked him what he thought about through all the empty days in prison. This is a close paraphrase of his answer:

Over and over, ma'am, I think about the day I did that awful thing. It's like slow motion. I think about taking my father's gun from the desk and feeling it in my pocket on the bus all the way to school. I think about walking down that hall towards the door where I could see the teacher through the glass. I was rubbing my fingers over the cold gun in my pocket. I think about how, in my head, I kept hearing a voice saying, "You don't have to do this. Stop now. This is not a good idea. Stop." Then I think about how mad that voice made me and how I pushed it out of my mind. I rushed ahead anyway and started firing the gun. But now, all I do is think and wonder, "Who was that talking to me? And, oh, God, why didn't I listen? Why didn't I listen to it?"

A few years ago, a man in Minneapolis named Sonny Jackson rose to address a conference of healthcare professionals. He wanted to explain what it was that made it possible for him, in his early 50's, to give up life as a criminal and become a counselor and mentor to others. After having spent most of his adult life in and out of jail, mostly for burglary and such crimes, not crimes of violence, he attended a class in which he came to understand how thoughts are created and how we make them our reality -- how our minds work. For several years since then, his life had been entirely different.

“Up until that time,” he said, “I never knew that you could have a criminal thought and just let it go. You know, not do anything. I didn't know you don't have to act on every thought that goes through your mind. I didn't know all kinds of thoughts come and go and you can follow only the ones that help you out. I didn't know you had to act on your criminal thoughts to be a criminal.”

Third example: Sydney Banks recently visited a prison in California to talk to more than 150 inmates who have been enrolled in a group learning about Mind, Consciousness and Thought. He was overwhelmed by the gentleness and caring and wisdom that came from the group as he talked with them. He related many stories to me. One was of a man who was known to the police as “Machete Man” because, when he wasn't in prison, he was on the streets with a huge machete, which he wielded aggressively at everyone who came close to him. He was considered a dangerous, violent and deranged criminal.

What he learned as he came to understand the nature of thought was that he was easily frightened by his overwhelmingly insecure thinking. He realized that he was the thinker making up all these “crazy” thoughts and taking them seriously. He saw that when he wasn't frightened, he was fine, just like anyone else, and able to relax and get along. He saw that the “fine” state was just as much a product of his own thinking as the frightened state. And he realized how to change from within himself. Now he is a peer counselor for others in prison and looking forward to being released some day and being an ordinary citizen, just enjoying life.

These examples are deceptively simple. But to reflect on what they imply is to start to consider how war, human rights violations, cruelty, prejudice and random violence arise within people's thinking, and how a change in people's understanding of that thinking could change the world. That such a change is always possible is the result of innate health, the inborn capacity of people to see things for themselves and redirect their energy and their thinking to create a different experience of life. This is a source of hope. It is true that the nature and power of thought is often ignored or misunderstood. People do fall prey to their darkest imaginings and bring them into the world. This is a part of life, after the fact of thought, which would diminish as more people saw thinking as something they do, not something forced on them by circumstances beyond their control.

The common human denominator is thinking. All people are always thinking their own thoughts. Everyone's thoughts look real to the thinker. The "reality" of the world beyond our thoughts is a mystery only unraveled through the workings of each person's mind. But our experience of that reality is understandable to us through our state of mind.

If I look out and see my neighbors standing by my fence in deep conversation, occasionally glancing towards my house, I have no true knowledge of what they're talking about. If my thought is directed into suspicion, I might think they are gossiping about me, or criticizing me. If my thought is directed into mischief, I might think they are planning a great practical joke. If my thought is directed into contentment, I might think they are admiring the new tree I planted in my front yard. If my thought is directed into gratitude, I might be thankful that my neighbors keep an eye on my house and watch out for me. If I walk out the door with any one of these thoughts on my mind, the way I greet my neighbors will be very different than it would be with any other of these thoughts. And thus, the human dynamic, the interplay of the thoughts and feelings from which we address each other in the world, plays itself out in small, everyday encounters.

If I ruminate about suspicion, "feed" those negative and potentially hateful thoughts and blame my neighbors for my bad feelings, I might walk out and yell at them to get away from my fence. If I reflect on gratitude, "feed" those positive and potentially loving thoughts and see my neighbors as caring friends, I might walk out and greet them. Either way, my actions might have nothing to do with what they are actually talking about – although those actions would have altogether different consequences.

My good friend and colleague, Dr. Bill Pettit, refers to "making deposits into the world bank of good will," which is a beautiful way to see how this works in life. Our experience, to me, is binary. It's either a 1, contributing good will, or a zero, not contributing good will, each time we engage with each other, whether individually or in groups. The numbers originate within our thinking, not outside in the world, but the cumulative thinking people do affects our life in the world we all share.

When hundreds of students commit violence to express their anger at the loss by a basketball team, they have no thoughts about consequences. They are led into actions by urgent thoughts they believe are "real" and they think are justified and created by their team's poor performance. The effect on innocent bystanders, or merchants, or on their team that tried its best is not on their minds. But it would have taken no less "life energy" for them to think of enjoying the game, think that the point of sports is to support your team and wish them well, regardless of the outcome, and go home quietly.

I was living in Washington State the year the Seattle Mariners almost won the World Series. They were welcomed home as heroes, as the pride of Seattle, as players who gave their best and gave their town a thrill, by a huge throng. This was a deposit into the world bank of good will; everyone left the richer for the experience. If the fans had turned surly

and blamed the team or the coaches or the manager for the loss and spurned the returning players, it would have left everyone poorer in spirit. If the World Series had been a treaty negotiation, the former could have led to peaceful ratification, the latter to acts of random violence. It is truly that simple.

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