

CRITERIA FOR VIEWING THE HEALTH OF THE ACTIVITIES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Every person's heart aspires for a better future, and health, happiness, sense of wellbeing, growth and making contribution are common goals in society. However, despite this it has become clearer than ever that the existing path humanity is on is not leading us to them.

When we look deep enough, we will see that one of the biggest sources of our problems is the consciousness; human consciousness seems to be the 'culprit' behind many 'sins and crimes'. However, in all fairness, the consciousness shouldn't be blamed; it has become the source of problems because we don't understand it well. Ignorance makes it difficult for us to use it in a sound, healthy way and especially to be its true master.

To address the problems caused by the activities of the consciousness, it is necessary to know about the health of these activities. Ren Xue provides a set of six criteria - normality, health, freedom, self-control, self-awareness and autonomy - that we can use for this purpose. These criteria can also be used as a standard for our work to improve the activities of the consciousness.

1. NORMALITY

If an activity of the consciousness is a reflection of truth (of the objective reality) or a response to the objective reality based on truth, it can be seen as normal. If not, it can be seen as 'not normal'.

Unhealthy patterns are the cause of most of the activities of the consciousness that are not normal. There are numerous unhealthy patterns and some of them are common to most people. In Ren Xue life cultivation, ten common patterns are used to gain a basic understanding of patterns and as a start to the work of changing patterns. They are referred to as the "ten fundamental patterns": polarized thinking, over-generalization, unfounded suspicion,

negativity, fixed expectations, greediness, self-centeredness, avoiding and hiding, stubbornness, and competitiveness. To supplement the work on these patterns, there are twenty behavioral patterns that practitioners can use to help them identify and work on their patterns. Let's look at three of the ten fundamental patterns to get a glimpse of how they can affect the activities of the consciousness.

Polarized consciousness

This refers to polarized activities of the consciousness, for example, seeing things as either black or white, good or bad; angel or devil. Taking an absolute view is also a manifestation of polarized consciousness. This view sees something as absolutely right or true, for example, the way modern science and religions are seen by their 'believers' as being absolutely true. This does not accurately reflect the truth that nothing is absolute in the universe, because everything is changing all the time.

Partial or Fragmented Thinking

This type of activity is a manifestation of the pattern of over-generalization – seeing only part of the total reality and exaggerating, magnifying or over-generalizing. This is a very common way of thinking and viewing reality. In psychology, commonly used phrases in everyday life such as "You always", "You never" are identified as such expressions. These expressions often don't reflect the truth and can easily trigger reactions that may start a conflict.

Self-centered consciousness

This refers to the activities of a person's consciousness being mostly centered around themselves and predominantly focusing on satisfying their own needs and desires. The development of self-consciousness goes through a few stages. During the first stage, from birth to the age of two, self-consciousness is non-existent as it has yet to be developed. Children aged 2~7 demonstrate strong self-centered consciousness as they relate to the world from their own experiences and perspectives without paying much attention to others' views. They are able to distinguish "self" and "non self" but they are not very clear about their relationships with others. The third stage roughly starts at age seven and extends through early adulthood. At this stage, patterns and all kinds of ideas and values

are still forming and developing. Self-centeredness manifests as holding onto our own ideas and ideals and expecting others to agree or go along with them. In adulthood, the pattern of self-centeredness is established, i.e., we mostly relate to the world through our own perspective. However, in the process of socialization, most people develop the awareness of the objective reality outside themselves and the need to follow certain social norms and ethics in order to be a well-functioning member of society. The majority of adults are able to move on from the self-centered consciousness of the adolescent stage.

2. HEALTH

This refers to the degree of health present in the activities of the consciousness, manifesting in the formation, process, and especially the effects of the activities of the consciousness. What is a "healthy consciousness"? It refers to activities of the consciousness that have positive effects on the totality of life (body, Qi and Jingshen) and therefore are beneficial for our health and growth in life. In contrast, a relatively unhealthy consciousness will produce negative effects.

Every activity of our consciousness also effects the outer world, including other people, other forms of life, and nature. We need to know if the activities of our consciousness are beneficial for growth and development and for building harmonious relationships.

As a general rule, when the activities of our consciousness are truly beneficial to ourselves, they will be truly beneficial to the outer world as well. If they are only "beneficial" to ourselves and harmful to others, they are not truly beneficial.

3. FREEDOM

This refers to the degree of freedom that the consciousness has or is able to exercise. This freedom can manifest on the levels of human nature, Xin, Shen, and Jingshen as a whole. The consciousness is intrinsically independent and unrestricted; this means that freedom is a quality of the consciousness. However, the degree of freedom manifested in the activities of the consciousness may vary. We can observe this on the levels of instinct, habit, and development.

The Level of Instinct

Freedom on the instinctive level is well manifested in the activities of the consciousness at the stage of infancy. At this stage there is no need to consider morality and the restrictions of social norms. Unhealthy patterns are not yet established, so life is not plagued by the problems they would normally cause later in life. Life is relatively free.

The Level of Habit

The degree of freedom gradually decreases after the infancy stage. As the amount of information retained in the reference system increases, alongside the work of many other factors, the patterns of the consciousness gradually form. In this process the freedom of the consciousness is gradually lost. In adulthood the patterns are so well established that freedom of the consciousness can barely manifest. This may be contrary to most peoples' experience as they feel that they have freedom and autonomy in determining all the decisions and choices they make. However, this is only what is perceived on the superficial level. The 'free' consciousness that we perceive is largely the product of the patterns of the consciousness.

The Level of Development (Transformation of Self)

This is what humans need to make an effort to achieve. Confucius aptly describes this level as "following the desires of the heart at will and yet never crossing any boundaries inappropriately". In other words, there is no need to observe any rules and yet everything we do follows the laws of life and the universe.

When we have continually made progress in changing unhealthy habits, especially the patterns of the consciousness, the potential of Jingshen, special abilities, realization, and wisdom will continue to grow. When wisdom starts to manifest, free consciousness will also gradually manifest.

4. SELF-CONTROL

Human consciousness has the innate ability to exert self-control. However, people often find themselves inadequate in this respect; and sometimes even completely lose self-control. This is often experienced when we try to change an unhealthy habit, no matter how much we hate this habit and want to get rid of it. When we want to change the way we react to situations with a strong emotion, it

can be equally difficult. We can often feel helpless as the emotion seems to be overpowering. Furthermore, lack of self-control plays a role in the many immoral or even illegal activities that humans take part in, often causing damage to themselves and other people. In many parts of the world, there is a shortage of prisons. Is it that people don't mind going to prison and losing freedom? Of course not. Lack of self-control plays a big role there. Humans certainly still need to cultivate self-control.

Often people use will power to strengthen their ability to exercise self-control, which may work. However, when applied in a forceful way, it is possible to create new problems or even cause issues on the psychological or personality level.

The recommended way to cultivate self-control is to identify the real causes and work on them. It is also important to work on Xin, and derive the driving force from the five Xin for everything we do in life. Xin is much more powerful than will power and is much more natural and effective for motivating us to do what is beneficial for ourselves and others. Most importantly, Xin is necessary to work on unhealthy patterns so the True Self can manifest. This is how we can take full control and be the true master of our own life.

Translated into action in every present moment, we do what is beneficial for life by making adjustments to or correcting what is not beneficial, including all our thoughts and actions. This means constant and consistent effort. In Zen Buddhism, it says "constantly cleaning it to keep it free of dust". When there is dust, the best thing is to clean it as soon as you see it.

5. SELF-AWARENESS

This refers to the degree of awareness of all activities in your own life, including the internal state, thoughts and actions, and the capability for self-examination and self-evaluation.

Self-awareness is one of the basic requirements for changing and uplifting life. We need to rely on self-awareness to know if there is anything in life that is not following the laws of life and therefore causing harm. We need to rely on self-awareness to identify what needs to change.

Self-awareness is also the key to success when we work on the problems we have identified. As mentioned in the previous section, effort needs to be made constantly and consistently in every

present moment. This means we need to be aware of what is happening in every moment to know if there is any thought, state or action that does not follow the laws of life. If there is, adjustments need to be made immediately – the moment it is detected. This is how real change can happen.

At the initial stage, self-awareness can be applied by using the consciousness to observe. When the time is right, the work can be advanced to Jue Cha. This is the main practice of the ninth method of Yuan Gong.

6. AUTONOMY

Autonomy refers to the degree to which we are able to be the master of our own life.

Human consciousness at the current stage of evolution, due to lack of understanding of life, is controlled by predominantly unhealthy patterns of the consciousness. In other words, patterns have taken the place of the True Self and become the master of life. The consciousness therefore acts mostly on behalf of patterns.

Autonomy is a natural quality of human Jingshen. Restoration of autonomy is a natural outcome of human evolution. This effort includes learning to gain true understanding of the laws of life and of Jingshen and living in accordance with these laws. It is essential to remove abnormal, unhealthy factors from life by changing unhealthy patterns. This is a very important condition for the manifestation of the autonomy of the consciousness. It is only when the True Self manifests that we can truly become the master of our own life.

SUMMARY

Normality, health, freedom, self-control, self-awareness and autonomy can be set as goals and provide the driving force for developing higher realization and wisdom. The progress we make in them also leads to the development of our ability to uplift our own lives and help others and society to make progress. As an individual, each person can rely on these criteria to create a new path. When more and more people are walking on this path, the culture of working together in harmony will gradually develop, marking the development of true civilization. True civilization will be driven by self-cultivation, realization and wisdom.

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