

Mindful Work

What motivates us? (The eight worldly concerns)

If we look honestly at what drives us, what motivates us in every action that we take, we will discover that two forces are at play. The first is wanting, and the second is not wanting. This can be alternatively described as attachment and aversion, or craving and avoidance etc.

We reach towards the things we feel we need, and we reject or avoid the things we fear or which we suspect will create discomfort.

Breaking these two forces down further, we can identify eight factors in four pairs. These are as follows:

Material wealth:

1. Seeking money or material wealth, and holding on to them.
2. Fearing losing money or material things.

Praise and blame:

3. Seeking praise and encouragement from others.
4. Fearing getting blamed, ridiculed, or criticised.

Fame or reputation:

5. Seeking the limelight or power.
6. Fearing being ignored or getting a bad reputation.

Sensual experiences:

7. Seeking sensual pleasure or excitement.
8. Avoiding unpleasant experiences, pain or suffering.

If we're successful in getting what we want, we may be delighted, feel warm inside, act with more confidence etc. If we're frustrated and don't get what we want, our reaction may be one of anger, anxiety, depression, distraction etc (you name it!).

You may conclude that simply by devising better strategies to get what you want, and holding on to it tightly, all will be well. It will not. Life is not like that. Sooner or later everything we feel is ours, will slip away; not least our health, and when we die all the wealth in the world is no use to us. Holding on to material wealth, being praised, keeping our reputation, or continuing to seek sensual pleasure is not only futile, but it takes a lot of energy, and running on that treadmill is a never-ending source of most of our worries and suffering.

The dominant Western paradigm is that being happier means having more. It is incorrect. Whilst that new iPhone may thrill us for a while, we will sooner or later feel it's not enough and crave the new version when it comes out. Like taking drugs, you need more and more to get satisfaction. If we're stuck in this world view, there's no end to dissatisfaction. If we lose our job, or a partner leaves us, or any one of a million random events occur, as they do, do we have the resilience to cope?

It is a very fruitful exercise to explore for ourselves which of the eight concerns is most relevant for us, and how it affects our behaviour.

Part 2

So then the question is: how can we create a new framework by which to live our lives, in a way that is meaningful, satisfying, and resilient to life's ups and downs? How can we expand our view beyond the criteria of success that we have created for ourselves, or that of our pervasive culture and environment, as if it's the only way?

This article cannot give you the answer. But it may hopefully offer you that important question to address.

A key tool in the process of resolving this question is mindfulness:

- By tuning-in more acutely to these eight forces, we learn to recognize their incipient power. Recognition is the first step to understanding what's really going on in our lives, which we can then use to habituate ourselves to new ways of being.
- By stepping back with more objectivity and equanimity to life's events, their power to tip us off balance is reduced.
- By becoming more familiar with the calm and clear mind that underlies our worries, we get to know that happiness comes from within, not from outside.

A final recommendation is to regularly practice empathy and kindness. They will eat away at self-referencing, help us see the bigger picture, and thereby strengthen our resilience.