

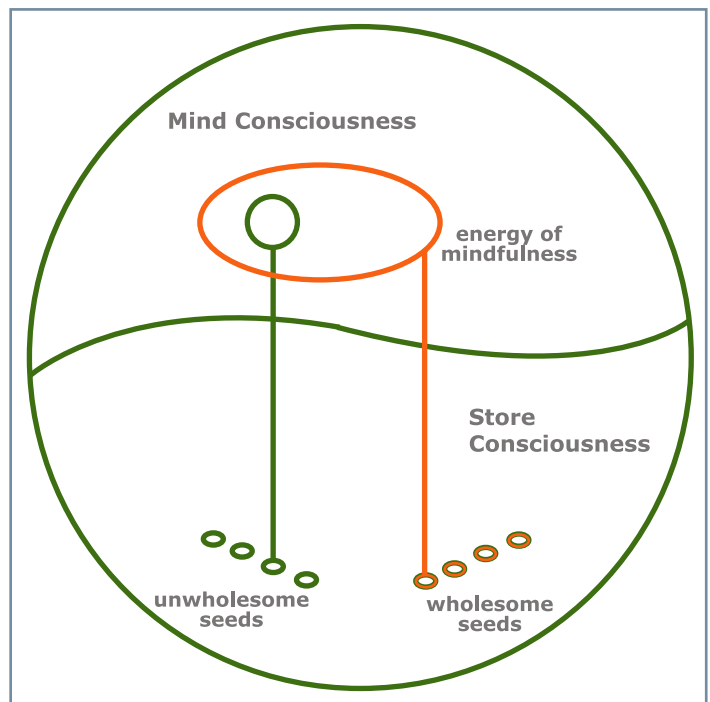
Figure 1: Emotional Transformation through the Energy of Mindfulness

According to a theory in Chinese Buddhist psychology (Thich Nath Hanh, 2006) the totality of phenomena and experiences exist in the form of potentials in Store Consciousness. All possible emotions (Mental Formations) are stored and we may think of them as seeds. Store consciousness is like the soil in a garden, containing all the seeds. Mind consciousness is touched once any of these seeds manifest on the level of mind (see diagram). If for example the seed of happiness is watered it grows into our mind consciousness - it then manifests and is present in our field of experience. To illustrate this let's look at anger for example: It might not be present in your Mind Consciousness at this moment, but that does not mean it is not there. It is there too, deep down, present as a seed in Store Consciousness. If it is watered for example if you are being accused unjustly, it will manifest on the level of mind consciousness.

If a strong emotion arises such as anger or jealousy then we are in danger to get carried away by the pain and the power of the emotion. We might be pushed to say or do something hurtful, something we might regret later. So what can we do? According to this theory it is possible to transform 'unwholesome' emotions and nurture 'wholesome' ones by applying the energy of mindfulness. If we are capable to notice anger as it manifests in body and mind, then the energy of mindfulness is present. In other words we can train ourselves to invite the energy of mindfulness to come up simultaneously with whatever else manifests in the field of Mind Consciousness. In fact mindfulness is always mindfulness of something. It cannot exist by itself alone.

The practice is this: As anger (or any other emotion) arises mindfulness is invited to take care of the (unpleasant) feeling, embracing it tenderly like a mother soothing a crying baby. Just bring your awareness to it and feel it as it is. To hold the anger means to look at it, rather than through it (the technical term in emotional intelligence research is to avoid cognitive fusion with an emotion). You allow the feeling to be recognised rather than suppressed (and identified with).

The energy of mindfulness is said to be sun-like. It penetrates feelings just as sunlight is absorbed by vegetation. After a little while anger will subside naturally and return to Store Consciousness again. If we manage to embrace an unwholesome emotion with mindfulness and stay with it until it subsides, it will return back into store consciousness a little weaker. The seed will have lost some of



its energy. The next time it is watered we have the chance to repeat the cycle. Just like this, bit-by-bit, unwholesome emotions lose their grip over us - are transformed. Wholesome emotions, such as joy or happiness, when embraced mindfully only grow stronger and occupy mind consciousness longer. Thich Nath Hanh refers to this transformative energy as "the miracle of mindfulness".

C.G. Jung used the metaphor of shadow and light. He invited us to reclaim the shadow - the difficult things in our life. We tend to instinctively avoid the shadow. We want to feel well and happy. So we try to suppress difficult feelings by occupying our mind consciousness with entertainment, food, TV, you name it. Thich Nhat Hanh explains how this would block circulation and lead to illness, similar to bad blood circulation. Jung too understood that paying attention to the shadow was of vital importance for transformation and healing.

To make use of mindfulness in a challenging situation, is not easy at all. Therefore it is wise to train and strengthen the seed of mindfulness during good times, when walking, eating, listening or cleaning the dishes. Only if our energy of mindfulness is strong we have a chance to wholeheartedly welcome difficult situations in our lives as gifts that help on the path of healing and transformation.

For further information on the subject and its relevance to social and cultural change see:

- Mary Jane Rust talk on "Shadow and Transformation" at: <http://www.schumachercollege.org.uk/community/ecopsychology-shadow-and-transformation>
- Thich Nath Hanh talk "Social Change at the Base" at: <http://plum-village.org/dharma-talks/video/24-social-change-at-the-base.html>
- Thich Nath Hanh book: Understanding our Mind (2006)