

Basic Distinctions between Thought & Emotion

By Michael Benner, *The Ageless Wisdom Personal Development Program*

1. ***Awareness*** — to perceive, notice or realize — is fundamental to existence. ***Intelligence*** is the ability to organize awareness into understandable patterns.
2. ***Mental intelligence*** includes conceptual abstraction, logical reasoning, learning, planning, creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, and decision-making. It is objectively oriented (unbiased — who, what, where, when, how and how much).
3. ***Emotional intelligence*** refers to self-awareness, self-control, motivation, empathy, and relationship management. It is subjectively oriented (personal — why) and reveals our conscience, values, and ethics. The four basic emotions are happy, sad, angry, and fearful.
4. ***Thoughts*** are mental consideration, deliberation, and intention — usually as words or images. Technically called ***cognition***, thinking facilitates knowledge and understanding by means of logical reasoning, memory, creativity, insight, and sensory perception.
5. ***Emotions*** are affective responses and expressions felt somatically much like physical sensations. Collectively, they form belief systems that can enhance (intuition, joy) or inhibit (instinct, anxiety) knowledge and understanding.
6. ***Instinct*** is the fight-or-flight reflex. It is fear-based, felt in the pelvic region, and triggered by a primal urge to survive conflict by conquest or avoidance. ***Intuition*** is the love-based illumination, felt in the heart area, revealing expanded insight and understanding of what to move toward and embrace. Instinct and intuition, collectively, are often called “*gut feelings*.”
7. Both thoughts and emotions can arise spontaneously from the unconscious (task unrelated) or result from some physical activity or experience (task related).

8. Thoughts and emotional feelings influence and stimulate each other. They comingle like flavor and aroma. Thoughts are like a line drawing while emotional feelings are like color, shadow, and texture.
9. *Thoughts are the energy* that determines direction (steering wheel). *Emotions are the force that moves or resists*. Enthusiastic feelings drive us forward (accelerator). Fear and anxiety hold us back (brakes).
10. Whether deliberate or intrusive, thoughts are transient yet stream continuously, even as we sleep. Emotions are more persistent, yet ebb and flow. The absence of emotional feeling is called *flat affect*.
11. Thoughts and emotional feelings often conflict with themselves and each other, leading to confusion, ambivalence, and anxiety.
12. Thoughts can be wrong. Emotions are indisputable, *though what we think they mean is often wrong*. Attempts to understand emotional feelings with thoughts are futile. The language of feelings is intuition. The phrase, "I feel like..." will be followed by a thought, as in, "I feel like I'm a failure." Also, "I feel..." followed by the word "because," leads to judgmental thoughts, excuses, rationalizing, defensiveness, and accusations.
13. Anxiety comes from excessive thinking or physical stimulus carried as muscular tension. Anxiety disorders promote binary absolutism — all-or-nothing, right-or-wrong, either-or; also racing thoughts (ADHD or monkey mind), and obsessive thinking and compulsive behavior (OCD). Stress also promotes panic attacks, depression, phobias, drug and alcohol abuse, various eating and sleeping disorders, even heart disease and cancer (dis-ease). When physical tension is consciously released, the mind becomes relaxed and calm as emotions feel more still, safe and secure. Like water, disturbed emotions are opaque, while quiet, still emotions become transparent.

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