

Feedback on Values Misalignment

Values guide us toward fulfilling our purpose. They consist of a set of beliefs or principles that define how we want to live and interact with others. Firm values set boundaries and limits to help us maneuver through life and inform our decisions and actions.

The values of the path of sacred life support our purpose to further life on Earth.¹ Before we act, we discern whether our intended actions align with the sacred values. The sacred values serve as the guard rails that protect us from straying from the path and lead to interbeing and furthering life on Earth.

We have a built-in feedback system that warns us when our intended actions conflict with our fundamental values. This warning on values misalignment comes from within our own being rather than from an external source.

The feedback warns us to adjust our behaviors to become more aligned with our values, a basic learning process. Just as when we walk, we make small corrections to keep ourselves on the path, we use feedback about our values alignment to stay within the limits and bounds of our values.

In the past, others called this inner warning of misalignment of values with actions as shame. Modern psychologists name it cognitive dissonance. Let's call it a values alert. For those on the sacred path, these alerts help us learn how to live our values. Having these value alerts hardwired into our being points to the critical importance of having a moral direction in life.

Primarily, we experience a misalignment with our values as stress or anxiety. That stress and anxiety show up as the dominant mental health problem of Western culture may give us cause to wonder whether these high levels have roots in people deeply knowing that our Western willingness to harm others violates the most fundamental values of life.

Experiencing anxiety when deciding about what to do points to a potential values misalignment. Deep within our being we know that what we want to do conflicts with an important life value, causing us distress. The anxiety makes it difficult to know what to do. If we recognize this anxiety as a warning, then we can wisely pause from acting and investigate our values concern.

Anxiety heightens the emotional charge and confusion surrounding a potentially harmful decision to act in ways that conflict with our values. The wise know to never act when emotionally charged or confused, when we do not know what to do in ways that further life on Earth. Too often, we ignore the anxious warning and act rashly to have our self-centered way. Yet with sufficient awareness and self-discipline we can heed the feedback of our inner being and avoid acting against what we value by doing the harder but right thing to do: telling ourselves NO.

We may ignorantly convince ourselves to indulge our temptations to do harm by rationalizing our harmful behavior: a little bit won't hurt, everyone does it, I deserve it, I must do it. After we have done the deed, then rationalization sets in to cover our shame and remorse. Our acting against our values

¹ **Values of the path of sacred life (work in progress):** reverence and respect for the sacred and the sacredness of life, gratitude for the experience of life on Earth, humble surrender to the sacred knowing of what to do to further life on Earth, compassion, loving interactions, equitable sharing and caring for the Earth, patience, and self-discipline to recover and preserve our balance with Earth Interbeing, By living these ways, we deepen our loving awareness of the sacred and sacredness of life and Earth.

unmoors us from the path. Desperately, we try to justify our actions to feel alright about ourselves, to not feel guilty. Out of shame, we may hide our action from others.

We regret what we did and would do anything to take back what we have done. Now we remember all the times we have reacted to the same stimulus and then regretted our anger, interfering in the lives of others, impulse buying, or whatever. If we can recognize that we have been down this dangerous road numerous times before, that may move us to get serious about disrupting the pattern of impulsive behavior. We will repeatedly experience this regret until we have sufficient attention and self-discipline to stop ourselves from harming others and the Earth.

Recognizing the anxious emotional charge surrounding a decision alerts us to the threat to our values commitment. Take a hard look at the values our impulsive urges us to ignore. We accumulate the energy from the practice of saying NO to small temptations to give us the strength to say NO to harder ones. Every time we deny ourselves the temptation to harm ourselves or others strengthens our self-discipline.

Deepening our commitment to live a valued life serves as our best defense against indulging our temptations to harm and ignore our values. The more we live them, the more they become part of us. The best way to avoid anxiety is to live within valued ways so deeply that they naturally set boundary limits for how we live.

We live in a harmful culture which has only one value – money. Because we have so little experience in aligning our lives with principled values, it will take time for us to view values as anything more than wise sayings. We learn to heed the warnings of our inner being to protect us from acting harmfully.

The confusion and uncertainty of not knowing what to do makes us feel insecure and unsafe. We delude ourselves into believing that acting in ways that conflict with our values to exert our control over a situation will give us security and safety. On the path, we learn we can only find security and safety in an uncertain reality from living valued ways.

Ask not for whom the warning tolls. It tolls for thee.

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