

The Mind - a parent who just can't say no



“Nature is enough for everything she asks of us. Luxury has turned her back on nature (...) pressing man's intelligence into the development of vices. First she began to hanker after things that were inessential, and then after things that were harmful, and finally she handed the mind over to the body and commanded it to be the out and out slave of the body's whim and pleasure.” (Seneca, Letter 90)

Imagine a parent and a child.

The child, like every child, continuously asks for things it wants. “I want candy, I want to play, I want to watch TV, I don't want medicine, I don't want to go to school, etc...”.

How should a parent respond to these wants? Will he/she give the child everything they want, unconditionally?

Or would parenthood entail a thought process, an inner and outer deliberation, to determine which of these needs are essential and helpful, and which are inessential or worse, harmful? We too have inside us a parent and a child. A mind and a body.

Our body also has its wants and needs. It needs food and rest, it wants comfort and enjoyment, it wants to avoid pain, to procreate and to survive. These are legitimate needs, but should they be realized, unconditionally, at all costs?

Usually, our mind is like the parent who can't say no. It becomes, as Seneca says, the out-and-out slave of the body, constantly occupied in getting those things that the body wants, whether directly or indirectly.

But when the mind is left to itself, detaching itself from the body's desires, what is it then?

Then the mind can become an objective observer, who can give the body what it needs, which is not necessarily what it wants. The parent-child analogy is not perfect, because the body will never grow up to become a mind.



But when the relationship between the body and the mind matures, the body can become something as important, which is really what it should be, a messenger, an obedient servant of the mind, a means for the mind to realize its highest ideals.