

Discernment and Judgment

Many people have only a vague idea of the difference, especially in a spiritual sense, between discernment, judgment, and preference. Very few people are aware of the catabolic effect of judgments (see my article "[Levels of Energy](#)" for more information on catabolic and anabolic energy).

What Is Judgment?

Judgment is an opinion or criticism misusing the power of comparing. It is a form of projection and feeds the ego's deception of being better (or worse) than someone or something else. The person judging makes the assumption that s/he has the power and the right to determine what is good or bad in general. That person has decided that his/her viewpoint is the only one that is correct and is thereby not open to other points of view. When we let go of these judgments it opens us up to greater opportunities and experiences.

A mindset grounded in judgment creates a lot of catabolic energy. Making judgments, consciously or unconsciously, prevents us from taking responsibility for our own life. By making judgments which justify our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, opinions and actions, we fool ourselves into thinking that we are good and right, and that other people are bad and wrong. Judgment is one way of kowtowing to what is socially accepted, hiding our insecurities about fitting in and feeling accepted by others. By living life this way, we are surrendering our power to the fluctuations of the majority opinion rather than being true to ourselves and living with a conscious intention for what we really want to express in our lives.

In reality, whenever I judge someone by thinking or saying, "she is such a bitch", for example, it is a projection. It is a reflection of my own state of mind, something I don't like about myself. By judging someone else, what I am really doing is judging myself!

Nothing in the Universe is inherently bad or evil independent of our evaluation. If good and bad were intrinsic qualities and therefore true regardless of human assessment, then those labels would always be present no matter what time or place we were in.

Judgments actually close us off from the very things that cause us pain. They are a protective mechanism that prevents the opportunity to re-examine the original hurt and heal from it. This is because judgments keep us from distinguishing between the reality of what actually occurred in the past and what is really happening right now. They perpetuate the original pain through denial rather than allowing healing by perceiving the current reality. Every time we judge we are looking outside of our self as to what we believe should or shouldn't be happening as if we don't have anything to do with the interpretation of what happened then or is happening now.

Our judgments are based upon what we believe should or should not have happened and should or should not be happening now. Usually we have countless justifications for each of our judgments. Our ideas and conclusions undoubtedly seem reasonable and logical, at least to us. Regardless, they are still our constructs. They are conclusions of our own mind. They are the story we tell our self about what we think reality should look like. When we judge someone, we hurt our self as much or more than the person we are judging. Every single time we think (or yell or whatever) a fiery judgment to the world it effects our reality, and usually in a negative way.

Judgments ignore the most obvious truth of all: WE are the creator of our own judgments! We are the ones who are interpreting our own experience. We are not recognizing that the difficulties we are having now are actually all about us and not about someone or something else. The judgments we make are essentially a precursor to the universe as to where our next lesson in this life needs to be.

Judging is damaging for other reasons as well. Other people will sense our negative judgment (maybe not consciously, but definitely subconsciously) and will often respond negatively back to us. Being judgmental often leads to taking actions that waste a lot of time and money. Plus, judgment will always close our hearts to the presence of love!

What Is Discernment?

Discernment is the cognitive ability of a person to distinguish what is in our best interests and what is not. While using discernment we make good choices for ourselves, and for the highest good of everyone concerned. When we use discernment, we are tapping into our inner Self, which is much deeper than our egos passing judgment. This is the ability to perceive clearly.

Discernment is stating what is without the emotional charge. The deeper and more often we go within, the easier it will be for us to be aware of what really is in any situation regardless of how emotionally charged it may be. That is the power of a spiritual practice, and the power of removing the veils that cover our eyes, which distort what we see.

Nothing in this world is bad. It is important for us to distinguish the difference between “bad” and “don’t want” because the terminology we use will have an effect on our attitude. Looking at something as “I don’t want” rather than “bad” makes it a personal preference and not so much of a false global statement of truth. Making this distinction gives us our power back. We are still free to prefer anything we wish. We don’t have to give up any of our preferences.

Discernment is a crucial form of self-care. It is a vow to our self to stay close only to those who respect our boundaries, know how to love us with their open heart, treat us with kindness, and choose to behave in a way that is guided by integrity. This does not mean we can’t hang out with people who choose to behave in ways we might not like or approve. In each individual situation we have to weigh the pros and cons of doing so and discern if it is for our highest good to continue to hang out with them or not. For example, we might have a very important lesson to learn from someone in an area of life different from the area in which we do not approve. Also, the people who need us the most are often those who cross our boundaries, and we might be able to teach them a valuable lesson in a loving way.

Research has found that the most loving and compassionate people are those with the greatest boundaries. Because they are diligent about protecting their boundaries, they can be in the world with an unguarded heart and still feel safe. Believing that closing our heart is the only way to feel safe will cause us to practice less compassion and experience less joy.

Discernment comes from understanding both ourselves and other people, having a balance between confidence in our own abilities and humbleness (not being arrogant about it), and from having compassion for those who suffer and for those who cause us pain.

Judgment Versus Discernment

Discernment may seem to some people like judgment, and the difference is significant. In using discernment we make a distinction between what attitudes, thoughts, actions and behaviors are

productive, relationship enhancing, moving towards the greatest good of all, which creates anabolic energy versus judgments that are destructive, hurtful to relationships, and generally unhealthy, which creates catabolic energy. Judgment closes the heart. Discernment allows it to stay wide open but protected with clear boundaries.

Loving and accepting those who violate others is not about condoning the behavior or even tolerating it in our own life. There are consequences to this kind of behavior. We can have compassion for those who engage in such behaviors and that does not mean we must keep them in our life. It is imperative for us to set proper boundaries in the face of these kinds of behaviors. We can set boundaries that protect us and our loved ones without making someone else wrong. The moment we judge others, we lower our own vibration and are out of the vibration of love. Judgment itself is the ultimate violation of all spiritual principles. Love and discernment can coexist, and love and judgment cannot.

The basic difference is: discernment sees what really is, while judgment sees what it wants to see or what it thinks fits into its value system. Remembering to differentiate this way is not always easy. A great way to begin is whenever you are out in public, focus more on the details. Avoid getting lost in the stories about "people who live in this part of town are all criminals," "teenagers always do really stupid things", or "I had a horrible experience in that store twenty-three years ago". It is paramount for us to know our feelings and thoughts in these situations, and especially to notice all the themes in the stories. The more commonalities we identify, such as the fear of being alone and the fear of not feeling safe, the more we uncover the stories that are dictating our life. Many judgments have roots in these stories, and in order to fully release these judgments you have to get to the origin of the stories and the pain associated with them.

Practicing Discernment

In order to deepen our spiritual awareness we need to develop discernment. It is vital to go beyond the mind's tendency to analyze and judge everything and we need to see beyond all the mind trash.

A great experiment to try is to open your heart and withhold judgment. Practice discernment to see what it feels like. My guess is you will feel freer and have stronger connections with others. Withholding judgment sometimes is not easy because we are so used to denouncing people, cultures, things, religions and everything else that our judging minds have already made up our conclusions about. Condemning things is almost always a reaction from fear or ignorance.

Discernment is the power behind the choices we make according to the truth of who we really are. Differentiating in this way helps us grow, expand, and understand what is happening in our world right now. Discernment is the voice of the rational and intuitive mind working together within our own unique consciousness. Therefore, discernment is one key to personal sovereignty and healing.

The path of consciousness from judgment towards discernment happens when we let go of the stories we tell about our self and others from the past and step into the compassionate reality of our Self in the present. Freedom is the result of this journey, and we are reminded that there is very little outside of our self except for that which we have invented in our mind. The truth is that reality is really awesome when it is experienced fully in the present.

Practicing Non-judgment

In addition to practicing discernment I encourage you to simultaneously practice non-judgment. That means to refrain from the impulse to label or judgment something. Discernment works from a place of

deep neutrality and is not passive. It allows the highest action to come up when needed, and most things that happen don't need nearly as much action as we often think they do. Most things that occur or are said to us are not really about us, and learning to practice non-judgment is the first step to moving into the place of discernment.

Allowing Judgments to Dissolve

Discernment does not need to make a big splash in front of everyone. That is what our egos like to do with their judgments. Discernment is simply stating what is and what is true, and from that point of view, it makes living our life so much more effortless because there is nothing to protect or defend.

There can be a lot of work leading up to profound discernment, and as we continue working on it, our judgments will gradually dissolve. It is not always easy to see reality, especially when things appear to be in conflict with our core beliefs. However, it behooves us to always strive to see things the way they really are the best that we can. We rarely, if ever, know everything in any given situation. We do know that behavior that is judgmental, labeling, blaming, critical, cruel or hateful is catabolic. Keeping our aim towards discriminative thinking will create more anabolic energy. It is productive for us to recognize behavior and attitudes that are not in accord with the highest good for all concerned, and for us to set boundaries for ourselves against these without adding new attitudes, behaviors, and actions that are just as catabolic.