

# 2019-12-07 Liberating The Mind

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

mind, liberated, contracted, clinging, practice, people, feel, liberation, expansive, preoccupied, bothered, aware, generosity, thinking, meditation, hands, citta, contraction, absence, developed

## SPEAKERS

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So, first I want to thank you all for being here and practicing this way. I take it as a wonderful thing and, and I feel that it's a fortunate thing to spend a day with people who are practicing so well getting together and sitting this way. You know, it's kind of in a general sense perhaps, if you gather 50 people together to spend a day together in a small room like this, it's maybe not the most obvious circumstances for harmony. But you know, there's pretty harmonious maybe because we don't speak to each other. But it's quite something to have the shared devotion to the practice engagement. When it I think of the practice as being a kind of a commitment to truth, showing up for what really is here and had a shared commitment, at least to try to do that keep showing up for this to be true to this is a really exceptional thing to find in this world. And, and I think it's wonderful that we've spent this day together this way. Thank you. And what's on my mind is to talk about the mind. So we'll see how that goes. In. The thing English word mind is pretty ambiguous what it actually refers to, as far as I can tell. Probably the word consciousness is easier to figure out what it is, but people no one's figured that out either. But mine maybe is an abstraction. It's a kind of a general idea about something, but to actually pinpoint exactly what it is. This probably doesn't work because maybe the mind isn't the particular thing. Maybe it's the Gestalt, maybe it's the kind of the, the, the are the impression we have the idea we have of the whole of all the different mental functionings we have in mental operations, at least whenever we can kind of be aware of it to know. And in the ancient Buddhist language, there's a word for mind that is chipped up, see I TTA. And that's probably just as vague. That it's not a specific singular entity or thing that we can say, Okay, this is what it is. It's a kind of the same thing as kind of a, an impression or an idea or, or perception or a general sense of something. But even though it's a general sense, that you know that we can't really specify exactly what it is, it's still a very important reference point people use it a lot. I just use it to set my mind I said, and to give this talk and, and in the teachings of the Buddha, he uses word Cheetah for mind quite a bit. And one of the very singular most significant or powerful for me kind of places where he uses it. That kind of gets with my attention that this is an important thing is he uses it to talk about more often than not when he talks about liberation, spiritual liberation awakening. He doesn't say it's a person who's liberated, the most he does that sometimes it's not ruled out. But the most common way he talks about liberation is that it's it's not the person is liberated but the mind that's liberated. And there you go, very common expression is, the mind was liberated. Through non clinging, and the mind doesn't cling to anything, it's becomes free. The mind that becomes free. What about you? Do you get left behind? Do you do not count? It's all about your mind. And what is this? So, what is this mind that we have? And how do we know where to how do we recognize that one of the very strong teachings of the Buddha has around mind is that the mind can be developed, it can be cultivated, it can be changed, it can be trained, it can be tamed, it can be mastered. That it's not a fixed thing. It's not something which is unchangeable. Some true essence which will always be there, the true mind or something, the month whatever it is, it's something that can be trained, developed. And,

and when it becomes developed, he refers to the mind sometimes as being aluminous. Sometimes he uses the word bright, illuminated. Sometimes he uses words like clean, the mind becomes clean or purified, or the mind becomes malleable or workable. Ready. Imagine that your mind is ready ready for what is a state of readiness for whatever comes, maybe ready, ready for liberation. And these kind of all these kind of descriptions of it, that it's pure, clean, luminous, bright, clear. In other words, it's sometimes described as that in mind becomes expensive or large, big mind then they talk about big mind are the same word is there in the teachings of the Buddha we just don't call it big mind we usually translated as expansive mind mahaki and a comment concentrated mind, the mind can't get concentrated in Another place where you see this word mind citta pretty tremendous emphasis in the Buddhist teachings in terms of development is that when the Buddha taught mindfulness practice, part of the instructions for this four foundations of mindfulness, there's a whole foundation called Mindfulness of the mind of citta. In anapanasati, sequence of mindfulness practice, there's a whole section about experiencing the mind. And then there's concentrating the mind and settling the mind. That's part of it. So as a category this word mind is very important. citta but what is it? What in the world is it? How do we know it? Can we see it? Can you know you know what your mind is? Maybe you and maybe you know it, but you can't explain what it is. Maybe your nose when you see it. Maybe you know what, when it wanders off, and you bring it back Maybe you know it when it's, you know, contracted or on fire with anger or shame or something is wrong with the mind is really hot or contracted or shriveled up. You ever had a mind that felt like a raisin? You know, try it out. So how do we know the mind? And what is it? So thinking about this, the idea of the mind becomes liberated. What is it liberated mind? Like how was that experienced? What's that feel like? What's that? What's happened? How do we know we look into the mind and see the mind is being liberated. And so it's if if two people are holding on to each other really tightly where their hands they'd be they're really codependent and clinging and they're not Don't let go no way they're gonna let go of each other. They're there that they maybe even hate each other. But they're not they're completely not gonna give up and they're holding on for dear life holding on tight. And then someone comes along well meaning person says, you know, by the way, it's not really required to have his life grip on each other's hands. You could even just for a minute, release it. They break your hands from that grip. So they think that's a good idea. So they do it. And so their hands now are liberated from each other. The hands are liberated. Maybe they're not because they're just just as much tied up in each other but their hands are liberated. What is the evidence of that liberation? What are the evidences is now there is this empty space between the hands that wasn't there before. the liberation of the hands is partly marked or recognized by the absence of clinging, absence of grasping, and something which is an absence the space between them. When the mind becomes liberated, it no longer has any grasping, any clinging, any contraction to anything. And how does the mind known? If it's not clinging to anything, sounds like a fist the hand which you physically you can see on the side of the hand release this of the fist is open. Can you see that in

mind is the mind like just a thing like an open hand? You can see Oh, look, there's no there's definitely a thing there. You know, there's, there's a thing in the mind, that was clinging and now it's there, but it's not. It doesn't I don't think it works that way. Once we become aware of the absence of Thinking liberation freedom. Is that absence, the spaciousness to look for a liberated mind. You won't see it. You see this expanse, empty expansiveness there. And that's what the Buddha said he's ever been summoned across totally liberated. There's these there's these certain beings like gods and moron, devilish characters who can apparently read people's minds. When someone's fully liberated, their minds can't be random. Are they mindless? Probably not. But what's characterized as liberated mind? Is the space, this absence of something that's not there. Does that mean that there are blank? Does that mean that they're no longer have a mind? No. But to look for the mind you won't see it. It's like, you probably most of you have a lot of memories in your mind. You know, I could I could probably say, you know what happened to you when you were? You know, I don't know what, last year of high school.

Maybe it was bad news to bring up but you know, and you probably didn't think about the last year of high school all day until I brought it up. But where, where were those memories living? If you went to look for the place where they resided, where they are kept, you won't see anything. They're not kept in any visible place. You know, so they're there, but they're not in the visible sphere of the mind. So, it's possible you'll go home today. And on the way there, you'll run into someone who's maybe has a flat tire or something and you seem like clearly that there's trouble and so you with your generosity you stopped to help them out. Maybe you change your tire for them in the rain because you have a good rain jacket or something. So you were generous and caring for that person. But you didn't know that what you're going to be that way you turn around and look at your mind sitting quietly, peacefully, and find that generosity. Does it live there Connick waving a flag. You might have the idea that you can be generous but that movement of generosity is there. It's not in the visible sphere. There's something about this I don't want to say invisible this this empty sphere of the mind. And the mind is not seen. But it's still can operate. So what is it that a person who's not liberated? What are they see when they see their mind? When it idea is what you see in your Mind if it's not particular things operating like generosity or remembering or the ideas you have, but the mind itself, what people will see or feel is the, the holding of the mind the clinging of the mind, the grasping of the mind, the grasping of the mind, is what gives the mind shape gives it a sense and so people grasp a lot of they caught up preoccupied, will often say their mind got really small, narrow, get really involved in something and, and even your, your forehead gets tight and you feel constricted somehow. And the mind can feel like it gets really small like the sphere of it, that range of it caught up in its preoccupation. And then something might happen next, you might suddenly be asked to go outside because look, there's a beautiful rainbow and you go outside, and it's looking at that rainbow something opens up in the mind. And now mine feels more expansive. But that Nick, then maybe only then you realize how contracted it was. But that contracted sense is there because we were contracted because we were clinging to something holding on to something. And so often, the ordinary mind as we get mindful of it, as we get mindful of it more and more, we'll start feeling seeing feeling sensing something. The quality of the mind, the shape of the mind, the character of the mind, the location of the mind. Oddly enough, if your mind has a location,

if you can turn around look at your mind and seems to have a location in the United States, a common location for the mind is in the brain. That seems like of course, that's where the gray matter is. There isn't that where all the mental stuff goes on. If you ask Burmese where Their mind is the point to their heart. If you ask someone who is really deep in practice, and free, where the mind is, one of the answers they might give, is they don't point to anything. They just spread their water, their arms really wide. They want to, you know, just, there's no location. They do have a location for the mind is a kind of grasping and clinging. It's very subtle. And, you know, relatively innocent to do or something like you know, you know, baby so much suffering involved. But when the mind gets really quiet and still, even the sensitive location can feel like a contraction. And so as people practice, and get still enough to no longer be preoccupied with their thoughts, productive pride with their feelings, their body sensations, their emotions, no longer caught up in the objects of what we can be aware of. Then we start becoming aware of the quality or the state of the mind. So that's important to maybe to repeat. Ordinarily, when people go through the world, and we were, you know, mostly when we're awake, we are aware and we're aware of many different things. But I think for the most part, ordinary people going around their busy preoccupied lives, they're focusing on what they're aware of. And so involved in what they're aware of, they're not aware of themselves being aware. So I might be really concerned with you know, almost anything but I was really concerned about where am I gonna get dinner tonight? There's gonna be a dinner for me and a food. How do I find it when I was working? raining, how do I get about? How do I deal with dinner and dinner? So this may be a survival thing. So I'm just thinking dinner thoughts. And I'm so involved in the dinner thoughts, that I'm not thinking at all. You know, here I am sitting here being mindful. And there's a lot of thoughts coming up dinner thoughts, and I can be aware of my mind

knowing it that my mind is kind of spacious and open and I can see these thoughts bubble up and they float through. I'm not like that. I'm just like, dinner, you know, that's it. I gotta get dinner and where's the way to get it? And so, this idea of, you know, we're concerned what, what's happening. Part of the movement of mindfulness meditation is to begin to quiet the mind feel safe, feel satisfied, contented enough, to feel the suffering of being preoccupied and learn how not to be so directed with the attention always. about something getting something. One of the things we can preoccupied by is our physical discomfort and meditation. It's nice for that to change as we meditate and model set up settle in. But one of the things happens with people as they develop meditation is that within reason, they're not so concerned about how uncomfortable the body is. It's not a big attraction. It's not like a major show. Oh, my knees hurt. Okay, I'll go back to my breathing. Whereas when people are new, my knees hurt and they're gonna have to amputate. I better do something. You know, this is terrible. I'm gonna be you know, and I had this little speck on my shoulder when I was in Burma. teeny little speck, I think still there. I've never seen it before. I've been sitting meditating for four months, my mind was a little bit. You know, it could get it could get kind of preoccupied by something and it's like zoned in Oh no, I'm getting cancer. So I had to ask that because see a doctor to doctor came to see me and I showed it to him. He looked at me like, I didn't know between a few look of feeling sorry for me and exasperated. There's nothing. But somehow My mind was fixated on that thing. So hope that gives you an idea that we often get, you know, we're concerned with what we know, not the knowing itself.

As a practice settles in, and we're not so driven by our clings or desires or fears or safeties are our you know, our sense of self or conceit, all these things that kind of drive ordinary human life, those quiet down. And then because of that, there's not so much fuel to be fixated on the objects of attention, be preoccupied by them. And there's we start becoming aware of the mind itself, the state of the mind, the state, whatever the mind is, so becoming aware the quality of the mind. And the quality of the mind starts being seen in different ways it's contracted, it's scattered, it's fragmented, it's tired, it's dull, it's bright, it's sharp, it's expansive. It's open. It's a Buddha talks about an unrestricted mind versus a restricted mind. And we start seeing the quality of the mind the state of the mind. And in fact, that's the instructions in mindfulness practice, at some point in practice, to start being mindful of the state of mind. And, and some of the descriptions of the state of mind to recognize whether it's an expansive mind or a non expansive mind, to know whether it's a concentrated mind or an unconcentrated mind to know whether it's a liberated mind or an unliberated mind. So these things can be known, but they can't be known if we're kind of so concerned about what's for dinner, you know, or do they like me? or What am I going to have for vacation next year? Next year, but what I'm gonna have for the next vacations for the next 10 years, sitting meditation going through the list, you know, you're so involved, then you're not going to notice the quality of the state of the mind. It takes a certain kind of sense of safety, openness, relaxation, ease, letting go to start noticing the mind. And that process of letting go. starts, also then releases the mind from its shape from its contraction from its narrowness from its location even. And, and the mind then becomes more clear, more luminous. more expansive, more bright, more clean, more malleable and more softer, more wieldy. They also talked about the mind becoming imperturbable, the next big word in perturbed mind, as to say that then ordinary English, unbothered mind. That'd be nice to the mind that doesn't get bothered by anything. I think it's one of the great advices I was given in meditation was when I was told when you meditate, don't be bothered by your thoughts. No, that was an interesting idea. Because I was being bothered, you know, it's like got to stop this and the problem it shouldn't be should be still don't be bothered by them. And actually not being bothered by them made it a lot easier to settle my thinking mind. Because it wasn't really when I was bothered by thoughts. I was bothering my thinking. Steering it up. So, unbothered mind imperturbable mind. And economists mind. There's all this potential the mind has. And so the mind is not a thing. In a sense, it's a, you know, it's, it's a maybe it's the sum total of, you know what's going on in the mind. But all that says a lot of processes, people's mental processes, and those processes can be changed. And

the Buddhist practice is, is a practice of training the mind developing the mind cultivating the mind, so that it becomes calmer, more focused, more compassionate, more economists, more joyous, more happy, more tranquil. There's all these. It's all these wonderful words in Buddhism, for a good mind. And there's a, there's a whole long list of things that are joyful in Buddhist practice lots of joy and happiness that that goes on joyful mind. Now, all these good possibility potentials to the mind has that can grow in practice. What do you think happens to the mind when you cling to any of those

the mind gets contracted, it gets tight, the more tight and contracted it gets, the less joy and clarity and brightness there can be. So, you can after a while, you get a sense that clinging to any of the goodness of the mind is harmful for that goodness. And so just let go, like, like, one of the ways to to kind of darken the mind the light Have the mind is to have conceit around what's happening? Look at me, I bet I have the brightest, cleanest, hottest line on the planet. Things have gotten tight again, dark and dark and, and so to feel that movement and the effect supports us to keep letting go keep opening. And some people don't appreciate because when they look into what's left, there's nothing there. What good is that? You have a practice that leaves you with nothing. The mind becomes nothing, but it's not really nothing. It's just that the visible mind what we see, has no isn't defined by anything. So the healthy functioning of the mind still operates. There's still intelligence there's compassion. There's joy, there's wisdom, there's all this stuff can operate. And it operates a lot better when there's no contraction when there's no clinging to anything. And so to trust this empty mind, expansive mind, you know, it isn't it is not an empty mind in the sense of being. I've had an empty mind I had a wheat allergy when I was in my 20s I didn't know it. And so it feel bad. And I wanted to comfort myself I worked at a bakery. So I want to comfort myself so baguettes are a comfort food for me. So it gets good, unlimited access to it. And I feel worse, but I didn't make the connection. So then I feel worse so then I would want to eat more The comfort food and if overs and so I remember one day walking through San Francisco. And it wasn't this beautiful, luminous, clear, empty mind. It was a blank mind. It's my mind just was not working. They have to institutionalize me. It was like there was nothing, you know, it was really kind of a dark moment, but just complete this shutdown. But the luminous mind liberation is not shut down. It's actually vibrant, full and capable to participate. So with that over that is a background. I'll tell you his own story. And maybe now you'll appreciate the story more than be horrified. And the it's coming I think of as a myth. So there was Bodhidharma was that Zen teacher who said to have brought Zen to China from India and There's a story of him going, showing up at the Capitol, the Emperor with the Emperor had an audience of the Emperor and, and the Emperor saying, What's the highest, most holy, sacred thing. And he thought he'd have a lot of Buddhist temples. So he thought he was going to be praised for all the temples he'd built. And Bodhidharma said to him, nothing's holy, nothing holy. Well, that didn't go over well with the king, or the Emperor. So then bring your body armor left. And they say that he went, he found a cave in the mountains, and he meditated there for nine years. During those nine years, the person who became his successor came looking for him and was in this in a monk who was been practicing for many years and hadn't had much luck with his practice and felt kind of distressed and just a new person who was in town. So he went And he stood there in the wintertime. And, and outside the cave, but he couldn't get pretty darn close attention. Probably stood there for many days. And then in order to show his sincerity, that he was really serious about all, he cut off his arm, and handed it brought it to put the Dharma. So that's, you know, if you're pretty, they must been pretty important for him. So that got pretty darn close attention. And so what's up? What do you want from me?

And he said, I'm really distressed, and I'm looking for a peaceful mind. And Bodhidharma said to him, okay, bring me your mind.

And then he was liberated. Would you bring if someone said, Bring me your mind. You turn in and look for it, you find anything that you can actually come and you know, put in the bowl here in the bell. So I'm

probably the monk had been practicing for a long time, he probably had let go of a lot of things already. And so when he looked into the mind, he didn't see anything. And there was something about not seeing anything that allowed him to let go in the deepest way. So the cheetah, this mind, one of the things that I think about it, I see it, I think of it as a potential. The mind exists in us as a potential. It's not a thing. It's not the essence of who we are who we are. But it is kind of the good news of Buddhism. The good news that this mind that we have, can be developed as a potential to develop and be Come, really a mind that you feel happy to live in, happy to have along. It just feels like a great companion because rather than being your enemy or your Nemesis or the mind that's challenging for you or bothering you a lot, it becomes really it has the potential really becoming something as your best friend. It can be developed the sense of potential and growth. And, and some of that development is actually actively developing things like concentration and loving kindness and generosity and all kinds of good qualities of mind that actually developed and grow. That's a part of this whole process. And some of it has to do with letting go and letting go of all this stuff that gets in the way, all this stuff that limits the mind until the mind becomes unrestricted in the unrestricted mind and then The mind becomes liberated not you by a time that happens, you don't mind but you're not you maybe it's a relief that it's not you just the mind good British so the kid that the mind very interesting thing that we have don't have can't find it's there are support. So I hope that this talk maybe was a little bit provocative for you to kind of take turn your attention around hundred and 80 degrees and what do you see? Is your mind so thank you very much for this