

Kalyāṇa (4 of 5) The Beautiful Mind

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This talk will be the fourth in this series on the role of beauty, *kalyāṇa* in the teachings of the Buddha, in our practice and in our lives. The teacher I practiced with in Burma, U Paṇḍita, once wrote:

Body and mind are like a garden in this sense: if neglected, defilement-weeds will grow. But if the plot is well-tended, it will be beautiful and fruitful.

So as we practice meditation, practice Buddhism, it's an action we engage in: the action of sitting down to be quiet, mindful, attentive. The action of being generous, of being kind. The action of cultivating our ability for generosity, kindness, wisdom, equanimity, and peacefulness. As we cultivate these beautiful flowers, beautiful fruit grows in the garden of our hearts. If we neglect, if we're not mindful, not aware of what's here, if we're not self-aware, it's all too easy for old habits, conditioning, and impulses to take over. Without awareness, it's all too easy for those to be weeds – things that are not really what we want, things that actually may be obscure, creating obstructions, or making it impossible for the beautiful flowers to grow.

The book by U Paṇḍita where the above quote is from is titled: *The State of Mind Called Beautiful*. That's the topic for today's talk: a beautiful mind, or the state of mind that's beautiful. I don't know what he was thinking, but he knew Pali very well, and knew the teachings of the Buddha. It's possible that he was doing a wordplay, because the word for 'mind' or "state of mind" is *citta*. But that same word in Pali is what's called a homonym: same pronunciation, same spelling, but has a second meaning. It's a different word, but it's a homonym. That second word means 'beautiful.' So in Pali, the expression *cittaṃ cittaṃ* means beautiful mind. The fact that somehow these homonyms exist with the same word meaning 'mind' and 'beautiful' speaks to the potential of the mind to become beautiful, to become *kalyāṇa*.

Sometimes a different word is used for the mind or the mind in meditation that also means beautiful, which is *sobhā*. The Buddha talks about the mind, beautiful mind, beautiful heart. The word 'heart' is also a translation of *citta*. In English, we tend to separate these two out, but in ancient Buddhism, it's ambiguous. It's rather a choice of the translator whether *citta* is translated as 'heart' or as 'mind.' Some of you might prefer 'heart.' This word *citta* can mean other things, such as 'beautiful.' It can also mean 'brilliant,' and 'wonderful' – all dictionary definitions of the word.

We find that the Buddha has all kinds of related words to describe the mind, the mind state – not inherently exactly, but its potential, what it can become when we tend our garden well and allow things to grow. There are words like brightness, bright, luminosity, luminous. One of my favorite descriptions of the potential of the mind that comes usually in deep concentration is that the mind becomes, "purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfections, malleable, workable, steady, and imperturbable." Wow! It's a wonderful potential. It's like a celebration of the mind. Sometimes the state of the mind – what the mind can become when the garden has really been developed – is as wonderful as looking at a natural wonder. Or to look out across the Pacific Ocean on a clear day under a blue sky. Or to look out across the Sierras, the great mountains here in California. Or to look into the Grand Canyon and see the immensity of time, depth, and beauty.

The mind can be that. Our minds have that capacity. There's a way of discovering the mind, opening to the mind, and seeing. It's a wonderful thing. We have this potential inside for something amazingly beautiful, a treasure that can be discovered, cultivated, or grown inside.

One description that the Buddha gives is, “With an intellect – with a mind that is open and uncovered – one develops a luminous mind.” When our mental functioning is open and uncovered. Imagine that, you’re taking off the covers, the hindrances, the preoccupations – and it’s open. We have this idea in English that an open mind is a beautiful mind. So it’s open; then we develop a luminous mind.

There are other words the Buddha used that also speak to and are evocative of this potential of the mind. As you hear some of these words, maybe at some point in your memory, in your life now or in the past, you had some taste of what this could be like in meditation or something. Not that you have to have it now. But, maybe it’s evocative of some taste, smell, sense, or some memory of something.

The mind’s capacity for beauty and this luminosity are also described as the mind becoming clean, a clean mind, cleansed, and pure. A mind also that becomes confident, concentrated, elated, and happy. Also the mind that becomes expansive, a great mind, a peaceful mind.

Furthermore, when the Buddha talks about someone becoming awakened, actually he often doesn’t talk about somebody become awakened. He talks about *citta*, the mind that is awakened, the mind that’s released, liberated. This mind is very important for the Buddha. He talks about the mind in wonderful ways. He’s never dismissive of the mind. He never sees the mind as a problem or something to be liberated from. Rather it’s a mind that is liberated.

The Buddha didn’t have a lot of respect for *viññāna*, which is translated into English as ‘consciousness,’ oddly enough. So probably the English word ‘consciousness’ is not the right translation. But whatever *viññāna* is, it can be a burden. It’s impermanent. It’s not self. It’s *dukkha* – suffering and unsatisfactory. In a sense, oddly enough, we want to become liberated from whatever *viññāna* is, consciousness.

But the Buddha never says that about the mind. The mind is never referred to as impermanent, not self, and suffering. Not that it is permanent, self, or the opposite of suffering. But somehow the mind is something that doesn’t fit that category. The mind can become brittle and frightened, agitated and unsteady, sluggish and restless, confused. It can go wandering off. The Buddha talks about a hostile mind as well. So certainly the mind can become fragile and difficult. It’s not that we’re getting rid of the mind, the mind is being – maybe I shouldn’t say this word – beautified. We’re discovering, growing, or developing this beautiful mind.

How is this discovered? How do we define the liberated mind? How do we find the beautiful mind? I can’t stress enough that the Buddha considered the mind to be something that can be cultivated, shaped, conditioned, supported to grow, to develop and become strong. What that requires is action, which I talked about yesterday: the action that’s beautiful, beautiful deeds. The doer of beauty reaps beauty.

So how can we engage in the practice of Buddhism, the practice of mindfulness of breathing, mindfulness of anything? The practice of concentration, the practice of generosity, goodwill, kindness, patience – all the different practices of Buddhism, the ethical practices, the precepts? What would it mean if those actions were done in a beautiful way? Chances are we would not do it with greed. We would not do it with conceit, or selfishly. We would not do it with tight expectations – wanting, striving, and pushing. The very quality of how we would do the practice comes into play when we’re looking at the quality of mind that’s beautiful.

I imagine that each of you will have a different reference point for the idea of beauty. I encourage you to find some reference point, some understanding of beauty that inspires you or is meaningful for you. How can you engage in your life, live in beauty, practice in beauty? Keep coming back to a mind that can do things in beautiful ways. Now I know it’s hard to do. I know there are lots of conditions and forces that frustrate, frighten, and cause the mind to be other ways. But don’t give up on the possibility of a beautiful mind.

It’s even worthwhile acting as if the mind is beautiful. Sometimes “as if” is sincere enough. It’s not like we’re pretending it’s different. We know the mind is challenged. But “as if” begins creating a different context in the mind and freedom of the mind. We’re exercising the freedom of the mind not to be caught in the weeds of what goes on – to step out of it – the act of mindfulness itself, stepping away, observing, and recognizing. How can we have some sense of beauty, peacefulness, clarity, some feeling of cleanliness or goodness in the way we’re practicing?

We offer, in the ways that we act, the ways that we practice, bringing a sense of beauty into it, which begins to allow the mind state of beauty, and the state of mind to grow and develop. At some point, we start recognizing that, in fact, in ourselves is one of the greatest treasures that exist – a greater wealth than you will ever have in the bank or under your mattress. A piece of art more beautiful than anything at one of the world's great museums. That beautiful thing is your own mind.

I hope that as you practice, you will discover that you'll see nothing more beautiful in this universe than the beauty of a liberated mind, a clean mind, a pure mind. That your mind – you'll see that you have that. It's amazing that this should be the case.

Then with that beautiful mind of yours, I'm confident that you will naturally, easily, relaxedly have all the compassion and care you need to have for this world that we live in.

May it be that your beauty is a partner with your compassion and love. You're beautiful. Thank you.