

Clear Recognition (5 of 5) Comprehension of Non-Delusion

July 2, 2021

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

sampajāna, clear comprehension, stereotype, bias, assumption, clarity, impersonal, not-self, temporary phenomenon, absence, stepping back, distance, freedom, projection, impermanent, wisdom, entangled, peace, openness, non-involvement, questioning, thinking, thoughts

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We have come to the last talk in this five-part series on clear comprehension or clear recognition (*sampajāna*). These are four things we can clearly recognize, know and see. The fourth is clear comprehension of non-delusion. That is kind of a mouthful – what is it? How do we clearly comprehend non-delusion? One way of understanding this – that I appreciate, delight in, and am sometimes amused by – is to have clear comprehension of thinking. When a thought arises, we can recognize it as a thought. I find this very helpful in interpersonal situations when I have thoughts about someone.

The other day I met someone for the first time in an unusual situation. Given the context and something about how that person appeared to me, I had a bias or predisposition to a certain stereotype. “Oh, this is that kind of person.” Because I have a practice of watching my thoughts, I could see that thought arise. Immediately I knew: “Oh Gil, this is just your thought. It is your interpretation of the situation. You better stay open here to find out what is going on with this person and who they are.” In fact, I quickly came to see this person was not my stereotype – not what I thought.

I think that all of us have biases or stereotypes – thoughts and assumptions about people. Stereotyping is a normal part of the mind operating in the world. We sometimes come to a simplistic understanding of a complex situation in order to find our way. It is what the mind does. The thought that arose about that person was not *my* thought. *I* was not behind the thought or attached to the thought. *I* did not criticize myself for having it. Immediately, I just saw, “Oh, this is a stereotype; this is an idea,” and then could adjust accordingly.

If I had stayed in the stereotype – got caught and involved in it – I would have some responsibility. It would be in my court. I could cause harm that way. But when I saw the stereotype as: “This is just a thought; let’s be careful and investigate here” – that was clear comprehension of non-delusion. The non-delusion of questioning my thought – stepping back and asking, “Wait, what is going on here?”

There is also non-delusion in not taking thinking too personally. “Oh, this thought is just the arising of phenomena.” We see it as just phenomena. Because of that clarity of seeing, there is freedom from the thought. We do not have to interpret it, berate ourselves, or identify with having that thought. It is just a thought.

We can also be aware of that clarity: “This is non-delusion” – keeping it very simple. The thought belongs to an impersonal, not-self world. We see it as just a thought coming up. We recognize it. The thought is not fixed; it arose and is here for a moment. We do not have to get involved and pick it up. In and of itself, the thought is an impermanent, changing, temporary phenomenon.

Seeing the thought as a temporary phenomenon is also clear comprehension of non-delusion. We are not deluded by it. We see it as not-self and temporary. Taking a thought as permanent – “This is it; this is the truth that I’m going to hang on to and stay with” – that is delusion.

The ability to clearly recognize our thoughts as they arise can be delightful. Sometimes it is amusing, more than distressing, when there is such clarity of recognition that we know we are safe. We are safe from getting pulled into, involved in, or acting from the thoughts that come up.

That delight can be there even when the thoughts are true. Then, with wisdom, we might decide whether to speak or act on them. There is a kind of stepping back and recognition: “Oh, look at that. There is a thought, a

perception, an assumption, an idea.” We have that kind of distance. We can see it as an amazing phenomenon of nature – like looking at a tree in a park. Lately, we have sunflowers growing in our garden. They are beautiful, bright yellow. I delight in them. So we can have a kind of delight with what arises in our minds.

Even when our thoughts are uncomfortable, there can be a kind of stepping back and clear seeing. There is clear recognition that the knowing – the awareness – is not caught in, entangled in, or reactive to the thinking. “Oh, this is good.” Having this freedom, this space, this interval where some clarity and wisdom can arise – is also clear comprehension of non-delusion.

I love the expression “non-delusion” because it is the absence of delusion. Calling it “clear comprehension of wisdom” might mean we are supposed to be wise or have wise thoughts. Rather, we see: “Oh, here there is no delusion. There is no clinging or aversion. I am not living in the judgments. I am not living in the thoughts and seeing the world through them.”

There is a place of non-delusion, which is not exactly a thing or a form of wisdom about which one can propositionally say, “This is true.” The non-delusion is in the act of stepping back and being clear. The clear recognition, freedom, and spaciousness allow thoughts, feelings, emotions, impulses, desires, and aversions to arise, but there is non-delusion about them. They are just thoughts – an aversive thought or feeling, a desire that arises. Whether or not we act on any of them, there is space to make that choice. There is an interval, a time, and the ability to choose.

Non-delusion sets the foundation and the context for living a life of greater clarity, generosity, and freedom. Coming from a place of non-delusion allows us to see others better – to be better friends, listen better, and be more attuned to other people. We are not seeing them through the filter of our delusion, projections, assumptions, bias, or stereotypes. It is so useful.

As we meditate and become more still and quiet, it is useful to become attuned to thinking and to recognize how subtly thoughts creep in. For example, you are sitting quietly and peacefully, the mind is silent, and you have a thought, “I’m not thinking anything.” You believe it is true, even though you just had that thought. You do not see that the thought is contradicting itself. Many little thoughts creep in. Some of them are evaluations, judgments, and commentary about what is happening in the present. Some are quietly in the background, far away – thoughts about things in the future or fantasies.

To get more sensitive to how thoughts arise, beginning when they appear. This is not meant to be a lot of work. As we train ourselves in mindfulness to be present and recognize what is here, one thing we can recognize is thinking.

If you can see a thought when it first arises, there is tremendous potential to discover non-delusion. The non-delusion that the thought is temporary. The non-delusion of not identifying with the thought and making it me, myself, and mine. The non-delusion that is not entangled or caught in the thought – not reactive to or swept away by the thought. The non-delusion that is akin to space, peace, openness, and a certain kind of non-involvement.

This is not a non-involvement that is automatic, habitual, and maybe neurotic at times. Rather, the non-involvement is a whole different paradigm. It is a radically different way of living that is centered not in our thoughts, beliefs, assumptions, and ideas, but in clarity, peace, and non-delusion.

Over this weekend, I hope that you will experiment with seeing thoughts when they first appear. In that opportunity, when thoughts first arise, see whether you can find non-delusion there. See if you find non-entanglement and a certain clarity, wisdom, and freedom by seeing a thought when it arises as “just a thought.”

Thank you.