

# *Citta* (3 of 5) Contracted Mind, Scattered Mind

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

mind state, mood, narrow, tight, spacey, drifting, vague, dull, over-energized, non-reactive awareness, sloth, torpor, agitation, restlessness, remorse

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This is the third talk on the third foundation of mindfulness, mindfulness of the *citta*. *Citta* is a wonderful term. We're taking it to be the mind state, the general quality of the mind. Here, the mind isn't necessarily limited to what we think of as the mentality related to the brain, the control tower, but rather the general state of being, the state of mood. Once we settle in, relax, and really feel ourselves deeply, what is the general quality of our being that we have? That is probably closer to what this mind state is.

Sometimes it does feel very closely connected to the mind in some way. Exactly where this is, it doesn't matter too much. What matters more is that we are meeting and being aware of the inner quality of our being or the state that we're in.

When meditation gets deeper and quieter, the body becomes more and more subtle. Sometimes the sense of the body kind of disappears or is not really prominent very much at all. That which is left seems to belong much more to the mental world or the part of being-ness that is not so body-centered. So maybe it's more clearly recognized as the mind state.

There are eight sets of instructions or eight pairs of things to notice in the third foundation of mindfulness. What is interesting is that it is particular aspects of the mind (mind states) that are emphasized. I think the reason for that is these are mind states that are most useful to notice for the purposes of the path of liberation. If you're really interested in becoming free, notice these aspects of the mind.

That is distinct from other ways that people are interested in their mind, such as their preferences, expectations, the content and stories of the mind. There are all kinds of priorities about what we might want to pay attention to.

The description here is very simple. As I said yesterday, it begins with knowing the mind when it's with greed and without greed, with ill will and without, with delusion and without. Those are the first three pairs. The fourth one of these eight pairs is to notice whether the mind is contracted or scattered. Exactly what these words mean in Pali is not really that clear. The commentaries associate contracted with sloth and torpor, and scattered with agitation, restlessness, and remorse.

We each find ourselves in relation to those words. Something very simple would be a sinking mind that gets dull and duller, or an over-energized mind that's restless and scattered, or a mind that gets really small. It is fascinating to be aware of ourselves really consumed with some preoccupation or really caught in something. In that caughtness or preoccupation, the whole state of the mind seems to get very, very narrow and small. It is like this becomes the be-all and end-all – that everything is kind of wrapped up around, contracted around, some black hole in the mind. The gravitational pull is so strong that light doesn't come out. We're so wrapped up in something.

Sometimes the mind just seems like it's scattered, or someone has their mind in the clouds, or someone just feels really spacey. Not because we feel spacious, but just spacey and hardly here. The mind is kind of drifting and vague. So those are different words that maybe touch into what the Buddha is talking about here in contracted or scattered.

Of course, the mind can be other ways, but a mind that has greed in it, or a mind that is without greed, it might be scattered or it might be contracted and small. Or it might be expanded. It might be energized, agitated, and distractible. Or it might be really tight and small and focused on its desires. The same thing with ill will. A mind of ill will might be contracted or scattered. A mind of delusion might be contracted or scattered. So these things can coexist.

We simply touch into this quality of the mind that somehow feels dull, contracted, scattered, or over-energized. And we begin to notice the range of ways in which this works. It could be very big, or it can be very subtle the way this works. Then notice what happens when you're clearly mindful of it. This is where the magic begins happening.

What happens if you cannot be for or against your mind state? It's easy to be against something that feels uncomfortable or not so nice. But what is it like for you to not be for it or against it? Or be for it or against it and put that up on the shelf or put that aside for now, and just bring simple, clear recognition to the quality of your mind state. To meet a scattered mind as a scattered mind. To meet a contracted mind as a contracted mind, as if you're getting a PhD in quality states of mind. As if you have to write a whole chapter on what a scattered mind is like or a contracted mind is like. So you have to be a naturalist. You have to really stay present for it and not disturb it too much. Just be there with it.

But what we're really getting a PhD in is not in the scattered mind or the distracted mind. We're studying what happens when awareness – non-reactive, non-desirous, non-aversive awareness – meets that. When simple awareness meets it, touches it, recognizes it, observes it. What happens to the quality of your inner life, the mind, when it is known and seen in this simple way?

It is so easy to get pulled into the mind, or be reactive to the mind, especially if it's uncomfortable or doesn't feel good. Or it feels really great, and you get pulled into it and celebrate it. But what happens with the magic of just meeting it and seeing it? That is what we are studying here.

This is a paradigm shift from being interested in *what* we're experiencing (because we think that is important and we have to adjust or fix it) to being more interested in the experience of awareness of experience. It shifts the paradigm; it shifts the direction.

For example, it can make us less selfish. When we're looking at the experience itself and trying to get just the right experience or reacting to it, so much of the self comes along. But if we sit back and just know the mind state, "Oh, this is how it is," then what happens in that meeting? Does the contracted mind begin to open up? Does the scattered mind begin to settle? Does the dull mind get a little more light? Does the distracted mind get less distracted? So what happens in that meeting? That is what's interesting.

As I said yesterday, we are talking about the third foundation. So, to do this in a refined way assumes that the mind is fairly quiet and stable. We've developed some concentration, some stillness. So you don't want to be ahead of yourself. You want to practice with what is appropriate for you.

Sometimes it is appropriate just to do mindfulness of breathing or mindfulness of the body. Settle in and let go of your thoughts and come back. If the mind is too energized, it might not work well to do mindfulness of the mind. But as it gets settled, that's where it gets more interesting to start becoming aware of the mind.

This tends to happen naturally by itself, so you don't have to be ahead of yourself. If you just keep doing the practice, with time the body becomes more subtle, more settled, or calls for less attention to itself. At some point, meditation becomes not so concerned with pleasant and unpleasant sensations anymore. That concern recedes a little bit. Then what's left to become aware of is the state of the mind.

Over the next two days, I'll talk about the final four pairs of mind states that the Buddha taught. We are shifting now from the first four pairs to the second four. The second four pairs of mind states tend to be more states of meditation, or the states of mind that begin opening up or appearing when we have really learned well to have this non-reactive mindfulness meet our experience, including meeting all the different vagaries of how the mind states might be. But as we learn that meeting, then the mind begins to shift and change. To be able to recognize how the mind changes is a little bit the task of these last four.

So, one thing I've been fond of talking about today is this meeting of awareness and our experience, awareness and the mind, and how it brings the hands together into namaste, this gesture of respect. As you explore and consider your own mind state, maybe as you go through today, you'll check in and see how it is. You might think of that meeting as a bow of respect, that we meet our experience with respect. Thank you very much.