

Citta (4 of 5) Big Mind, Higher Mind

September 9, 2021

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

expanded, large, receptive, open, luminous, spacious, ultimate, unsurpassable

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This is the fourth talk on mindfulness of the mind. I will try to explain a little more about what the guided meditation was about. When the Buddha teaches the classic teachings on mindfulness practice, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the third foundation has to do with mindfulness of the mind, the state of mind. In the description of how to practice that, there are instructions to notice eight pairs of mental states. The first four have a lot to do with noticing the presence of how we relate to the world, how we get involved in the world. There can be desire, greed. There can be ill will, hostility, hatred. There can be delusion. There can also be ways of relating that are without those.

So the mind is somehow still involved in the world of thoughts, feelings, and all this. It's possible in meditation to feel that shifts and changes – that the contractions, tightness, and tension of greed, hatred, and delusion begin to abate. Other motivations of how to relate to the world come, like generosity and love. Also, in how we relate to the world – or are confused about the world, not quite knowing whether to be connected and preoccupied or not – the mind goes through a transition where sometimes it doesn't know whether to collapse, get tired, and fall asleep, or get overexcited. Or the mind can be agitated and doesn't know what to focus on. Or the mind can get contracted in itself or scattered in all kinds of ways. But it's still a mind that's concerned with things in some way.

As mindfulness gets stronger – as we're able to be rooted here in the present moment, not so inclined to get caught in our thoughts and preoccupations – then the experience of the mind shifts to a kind of mind state, a mind way of operating, that is not so incessantly concerned with relating to things. If we're involved or swept away in thoughts, we're relating to the thoughts. If we're preoccupied with our feelings, then the mind is involved with and focused on that. But when we stop focusing on this stuff, then the mind starts to become freer from its preoccupations. And then we start experiencing the mind more as its own thing, its own state.

It's very hard to talk about what the mind is. We might say mind state. I've been calling it a state of being, the quality of our inner life. Some people might call it the heart, the quality of the heart. Exactly what the mind is we don't know. But we don't have to know for the purpose of meditation. We just have to recognize something about how awareness, consciousness, feels. We might call that the gestalt or the totality of our mental activity, the state of our mentality. It is this inner world of knowing, of being conscious, of being aware. And we start feeling the quality of that.

When the mind is no longer preoccupied with things, the mind starts feeling more peaceful and calm. Some people find the mind feels more expanded and large – large mind, big mind, expanded mind. This is a little bit of imagination because what the mind is, in part, is a reconstructing apparatus. The mind takes in all the data from our senses and memory, and shapes and constructs it in some kind of way. This is an understanding apparatus that we have.

Whether there is actually space in the mind that we're making or it just feels that way, we don't know. We close our eyes and it feels like a vast, maybe luminous darkness or light might be there. Or without a sense of seeing, there is a felt sense of perception being expansive and taking in things that are beyond the edges of our body. Not in a telepathic way, but a sensing that awareness is open. It's not about focusing on anything at all. It's the absence of being concerned with anything. Awareness, consciousness, still operates, but it's not eclipsed by our concerns.

So the mind that is not always relating to things is a mind that starts feeling qualitatively different. There is a deeper level of peace, calm, ease, spaciousness, stillness, and silence. There starts to be a shift when the mind is not always incessantly relating to something. We can learn to recognize that shift, and for each person, it will be different. Hopefully, I have given enough different words because some words will work better for us than others. This shift is a shift to something that feels more healthy, satisfying, and free.

The condition that supports much of the unhealthy ways in which the mind operates – the ways that we suffer; feel anxiety; feel caught in desire, ill will, and confusion – is our rumination and preoccupation with things. We're spinning stories and ideas that are kind of deflating, telling ourselves the same things over and over again. We're reminding ourselves of painful stories. But when we stop doing that, stop being in the world of thoughts, ideas, and about-ness, then the mind doesn't have that stress anymore. And it turns out that the mind without stress feels very satisfying and peaceful. Nothing has to change in the world except how we relate to everything, how we hold things in the mind, in awareness.

So there comes a radical shift. As we begin recognizing the quality of the mind, at some point, we can recognize the quality of the mind that's not preoccupied, not focused on things, and not always relating to things. Some people say that this mind is receptive – open, receptive mind; open mind; open awareness. Now the mind is maybe not the mind. People say it's more like awareness, more like consciousness. It can feel boundless. It can feel like it has no limit. So the Buddha says that one can know that the mind is large, or one can know that it's not large – it's small still, maybe because it's preoccupied.

Sometimes we can watch the mind oscillate between becoming large and getting narrow. We're not stable in that settled mind, and so a thought might arise and we get involved in it. We can feel how things get contracted again. Some people even find it get darker. The light goes out as we get involved in these thoughts. But if we're pretty settled, it might be easy to let go of it, and then we come back to this larger, more luminous, spacious mind.

As this develops further, the Buddha talks about a mind that feels as if it's with an ultimate feeling, kind of an ultimate state. Maybe "ultimate" is not the right word, but it could also mean higher. Now we're into a higher state of being, a higher state of mind – something that's really exalted or special. Maybe "special" is a good word. Now the mind is with something special. The mind feels really good and we know it. There's a clear knowing, "Wow, there is a purity, a clarity, a crispness, a freedom, a peace here that is qualitatively different." This is a mind with a high quality.

However, the traditional understanding is there can be a wonderful feeling or sense that as high a quality mind as that is it's not the highest potential. The highest potential is a mind that is called unsurpassable. This is when there's no duality or no separation between the knowing of it and the special mind itself. They become one and the same almost. The knowing is so special and is no different than what the mind is.

So all this ability in the third foundation is a description of what happens when the mind is settled and concentrated and mindfulness is strong. Don't feel like you have to be there, or you're a poor meditator if you don't recognize what I'm talking about. It's good to know the description of the map of what can happen in meditation because at some point you might touch into something like this. "Oh, this is what the text is talking about. Now I understand." "Now I see it," rather than, "What do I do with this?"

The mind, the heart, consciousness, awareness – it's one of the precious things. There is a paradigm shift in how we live fully and completely in this life when we know there is a new game in town. The old game was to always be concerned about things and always relating to things as if that's the only game in town. It's a fine game at times; we're not rejecting it. But now we know there's another game, another paradigm, of how to be.

It's possible for the mind to be receptive, aware, conscious for sure, but it's not locking into things or globbing on. It's not organizing itself to be focused and relating to things all the time. But the mind is receptive and can still know, and it allows for some deeper response from within that would not happen if we're only responding from the paradigm of relating and relatedness.

Hopefully, this makes sense and if not, just throw it away and someday maybe it will. We'll spend one more day on the Buddha's teachings on the third foundation. I look forward to our time tomorrow. Thank you.