

Citta (5 of 5) Knowing the Mind

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

settled, unsettled, *samāhita*, unified, stable, composed, steadied, unsteadied, let go, liberated, unliberated

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On this fifth day of mindfulness of the mind, I want to emphasize that there are many things that we can notice about the mind. The mind is multifaceted. We can spend endless time in the labyrinth of the mind, being mindful of all things. But in offering these teachings of mindfulness, I believe that the Buddha is pointing our attention to that which is most useful to notice – what is, in a sense, onward leading to freedom, to peace.

The eight categories that the Buddha talks about in the instructions on mindfulness of the mind can be divided into two groups. One group has to do with the mind that is relating to things. So a greedy mind relates to things. A mind of generosity relates to something. This is the mind that is involved with the world. And that's an important part of the mind. We want to find a way to come to a mind that is wholesome and healthy.

At some point, as the meditation settles, there is a shift, and what becomes more important is not what the mind is relating to or how the mind is relating, but rather that the mind is at ease and at peace. The mind is not actively involved in relating. The awareness begins to be spacious and settled, and we can start noticing the mind in and of itself, independent of what the mind knows (which is how I like to think of this). We might be aware of some thing, but at some point, we become more interested in the quality of awareness than what we're aware of. Certainly, it can possibly be disassociated in unhealthy ways if we don't notice what's happening. But starting to notice the quality of the mind is what allows the mind to begin to settle more deeply.

The second to the last of these eight categories is to know a settled mind as a settled mind, and to know an unsettled mind as an unsettled mind. We're beginning to track how well the mind is settled or not settled. Sometimes the translation here is to know a concentrated mind as a concentrated mind. However, the Pali word is not *samādhi* (the usual word for concentration), but rather, *samāhita*, which means to be settled, to compose, to be unified, to be stable. So, at some point, we start feeling in degrees that the mind is starting to get settled, composed, unified, stable. We start feeling that the mind doesn't move so much.

If there's a sound, we get interested in it, and the mind moves to notice what that is. We say the mind wanders away into thought. Direct your mind to the breathing. Place your mind in your torso as you feel the breathing. So all these expressions involve movement.

But, at some point, the mind doesn't need to move anymore. It can be aware and be very still. It becomes like a big, open space where things arise in the space and are known, but the mind doesn't have to go anywhere because it's happening within the space. Things are known, but they arise within the mind, in a sense, in awareness. So awareness doesn't have to go anywhere, move anywhere, or turn anywhere. It's just very still, very spacious, very open. For some people, the mind becomes settled, composed, stable. It depends on how we want to translate these terms. People orient a little differently to different terms.

It's also possible to know when the mind is not stable and steady. And that's the task – to know that difference. To know that difference makes a world of difference. The instructions here are just to know, just to be familiar with it. It doesn't say to adjust it, change it, or make it better. There is something very powerful that begins happening when we just meet the experience with a knowing mind. We're just there to be with it, to recognize it – so we recognize when the mind is not settled.

The more settled the mind becomes, the more we'll recognize how the mind is unsettled. Sometimes we can feel, "Oh, my mind is really settled," and then at some other time in meditation, we realize, "Oh, it's possible to be even more settled." The mind that was settled is now seen as being a little unsettled. It's like we think we've reached some level of peace – "This peace is really it" – and later we find, "Oh no, there's a greater potential for peace that is possible."

Becoming familiar with how the mind is – just knowing very, very simply – allows something to deepen, open, and relax. Don't be excited by the mind state if it's exalted, big, and wonderful, with lots of joy, rapture, peace, and equanimity, or if there is lots of agitation and difficulty in the mind. The idea is to become very equanimous about it or easeful with it, especially when the meditation goes deeper and deeper. Become as familiar with it, or as easy with it, as brushing your teeth. It's that ordinary; nothing exciting. It's wonderful but not exciting. The mind doesn't move or get excited by itself and its state.

Having a particular mind state is not necessarily what is important. What becomes more important is the knowing of whatever the mind state is. The mind state begins to change and settle as it's known. But we don't get enamored with the mind state. We stay appreciating the significance of the knowing.

As we learn that knowing can be more and more equanimous and peaceful, something lets go. And then this is the last state of mind in the list: a liberated mind. One knows a liberated mind as a liberated mind, and one recognizes what an unliberated mind is like. So something lets go, and in the wake of letting go, we know something new about the mind. We know the mind that has let go.

Letting go also has stages. We might let go deeply and think, "Wow, that was full," and then later, we discover there are deeper levels of letting go. The more we let go, the more we'll recognize when we haven't let go, when the mind is not liberated. This is actually quite important because whatever degree of liberation or letting go we have of the mind, that becomes a support, a guide, to highlight where there's still practice to be done, where we still cling and get caught. Rather than being disappointed, this is really useful because that is where the path of practice is found – becoming familiar with and seeing how we're caught. And we go through the cycle again until the mind settles and something lets go more deeply and more deeply.

So, mindfulness of the mind. Sometimes we're aware of the agitated mind as agitated. Sometimes we're aware of a settled, stable mind as a settled, stable mind. Sometimes we'll know a liberated mind as a liberated mind. And we'll cycle through all these, remembering that what's important is not the state of the mind, but rather the knowing of it. That's where something really significant happens. Thank you very much.