

Dharmette: Insight (23) Seeing with an Unmoving Mind.

Gil Fronsdal

July 09, 2025

Keywords: dukkha, samādhī, mindfulness, insight meditation, equanimity, impermanence, present-moment awareness, suffering, states of mind, non-reactivity

Hello and welcome to this continuing series on Insight, the Insight of Insight Meditation. And currently we're looking at the topic of *dukkha*, the Pāli word for suffering or stress, de-stress. One of the learnings to be had through meditation, through mindfulness practice, through *samādhī* practice, is that our experience of ourselves, our experience of the world, our experience of others, is very much contingent upon the state of mind we have. If we don't know that, then we assume that whatever way we're experiencing the world ourselves is how things are. But if we begin appreciating the state of our mind, how stable the mind-heart is, how concentrated it is, how calm it is, how open it is, how receptive it is—there's a whole slew of ways—how clear the mindfulness is, the state of the mind has a big influence in how we know ourselves, how we know others, how we know the world. And because the state of the mind can vary quite a bit, how we understand, see the world and ourselves can vary quite a bit too.

This is a radical thing to understand, and very different than how most people, I believe, go about their day. Most people don't know that there's a huge range of states of minds in which we can live in. So to not take as authoritative whatever state, whatever view that we have at any given time. The state of mind is fluid and changeable, and it becomes more so when we are a meditator, when we learn how to let go, we learn to get focused, we learn to become calm, we're moving through and between different states of mind. We begin appreciating that whatever state of mind we're in is just the state of mind for now. The way in which we see the world becomes a little bit more like a question mark, or a little bit more like appreciation.

This also is not necessarily the absolute truth. This also is just a byproduct of the state of the mind that we have. I think the more people meditate, the more they come to a profound

appreciation of the role the state of mind has in how we know the world, how we experience the world. It's a particular state of mind where we see the world as a dangerous place. Of course, the world is dangerous to some degree. But to constantly see it through that lens is a product of a particular state of mind or heart.

To see the world as a difficult place, to see the world as a beautiful place, to see the world as a place of belonging, to see the world as a place where we don't belong, to see the world as ours, see the world as not ours, to see ourselves as a wonderful person, see ourselves as a difficult person, see ourselves as an adequate person—all those conclusions, all those things are in part the product of a certain state of mind. If we're navigating these views, these ideas about the world, and only trying to readjust, fix, solve the world, solve ourselves, without appreciating the very way in which we're looking is part of the solution, part of what's going on. So rather than changing the world sometimes, we learn to change our mind. As we learn to change our mind and go through all kinds of different states of mind, we're all kinds of different ways of seeing, and experiencing ourselves in the world, then any particular state that we have in any given moment, we start seeing, well, that's just how it is now. This is impermanent, it's changing, it's not fixed, this is not necessarily the absolute eternal truth. This is just what's real and happening at this moment, and we learn to hold it lightly.

We learn to not make grand conclusions. We learn how not to fall into the delusion of permanence—it's always going to be this way. Even to this day, I fall into little states of permanence, like thinking, kind of almost subconsciously thinking sometimes, oh, this is how it is, and I just have to kind of figure out or cope with it. The particular way is sometimes when I have a lot of things I have to do, I feel a little bit maybe harried or a little bit the pressure of my to-do list. At some point when I feel it's strong enough, I've learned to just stop and sit and meditate for a few minutes. My state of mind quiets, and I realized that the state of mind was one that was at pressure in it.

Anxiety in it or responsibility that was in the forefront. They had a certain authority. I thought, this is how it is. But when I sit and meditate, the tension of responsibility, the tension of the to-do list or wanting or to finish or anxiety dissipates. Now I see things in a very different way. This means that when I, the more I am aware of this, the freer I can be and the easier it is to move between states.

So it's a long introduction to point out that how we see suffering, how we experience it, how we interpret it, our relationship to it has a lot to do with the state of mind that we have. If we only have one state of mind that we know that we're trying to address suffering, it might be like the bird that's pecking on the window. It's never going to get into the window, but it

doesn't know any better. Sometimes what we want to do is not try to solve the problem in the state of mind in which the problem has appeared. Sometimes we want to change our state of mind, our state of heart, by becoming calmer, more centered, more settled, to develop a clear sense of present moment awareness, where the present moment awareness is not caught in the grip of our preoccupations and concerns. As we begin to have this fluidity, as we meditate, there comes a time...

When we become aware, the state of mind is characterized by being very still, imperturbable, non-reactive. The state of mind is spacious, open, receptive. The state of mind is equanimous, steady. Sometimes it feels very broad. It feels like the state of mind, the awareness maybe feels like it expands way beyond the boundaries of the body. Or maybe it feels like there's a quiet still place deep, deep inside where that's the refuge, that's the home.

We're not turning away from anything, we're not avoiding anything. We're quite available for whatever shows up. But we're available from this quiet, peaceful place. Like when I went, I lived for a while with my great-grandmother. She lived in a small little apartment, in a three-story apartment building, and I had a little room on the side. She doesn't seem like she's so old now that I'm so old, but back then she was in her 80s.

She would sit in her chair, kind of very soft, maybe like a rocking chair or something, with a blanket over her knees. I would go visit her in her small little room, living room where she was in, and filled with a little white lace that she had crocheted, I guess, on the table in different places. We wouldn't talk very much. We would just sit in silence together. She'd be very still and quiet. But it was so comforting to be with her.

I felt like this was peace. This was love. This was wonderful, wonderful just to be with her and accompany her and her to accompany me. She went through a lot of challenges in her life. So for her to come to this place of peace and quiet, I think it was a refuge for her too. It was certainly a refuge for me.

So to find that, come to that place deep inside ourselves, to be able to let go of the ordinary states of mind that sometimes we're attached to in ways we don't even realize—how attached we are to being in this kind of way in the mind—and to let all the tension in the mind dissipate in quiet, and come to a place where we can gaze upon our suffering quietly, gaze upon suffering peacefully, gaze upon suffering without being for and against it, without trying to fix it, without defining ourselves by it, without being the victim of suffering. But we gaze upon it with a stillness, as an imperturbable, unmoving kind of awareness that maybe is everywhere at the same time, or maybe is at the center of all things, or something. Are the shifting states of mind to come to a place where we know that we can be aware of any-

thing at all and not be affected by it, not be troubled by it? So in relationship to suffering, to suffer but not be troubled by it, to feel stress, feel discomfort, and not be preoccupied, be it caught in it, but to kind of be our own great-grandmother, just peacefully, quiet, present, available, seeing, knowing, not shutting anything out, but knowing from an imperturbable place, knowing from a non-reactive place, knowing from a profound stillness within. This isn't easy to do, but as we go through the practices of *samādhi*, the practices of insight, we're going through different states of mind. At some point, we start feeling, sensing, intuiting this place of profound stillness that has space to let everything be just as it is.

Nothing has to change, but we're aware of it in a still way. In relationship to suffering, we know suffering, but we're not troubled by suffering. We know suffering, but we don't suffer because we're suffering. We just know the discomfort as discomfort. We just know the stress as the stress, the tension as the tension. It's not anything that needs to be fixed or solved because in that place of stillness, in a certain kind of way, there are no problems. It's just what is here. This is not the absolute state, this is not the final conclusion, this is not how it's supposed to be, what I'm talking about today. But it's one particular state of mind that we can tap into. As a Dharma teacher, when I'm supporting other people in practice, I'm less interested in the state of mind that people attain or have, than I'm interested in the fluidity, the ease, by which people can move between different states of mind.

That's where the freedom is. As we become more free and relaxed and can move freely between states of mind, then at some point this idea of the unmoving, imperturbable, still, equanimous mind becomes highlighted. It becomes a game changer to be able to understand suffering in this kind of very free way, but we're not defined by it or troubled by it. Then that might carry over into our ordinary states of mind, where we begin to now see how contingent and our reactivity is and how unnecessary our reactivity is. We can learn to leave suffering alone and be free. So I hope this makes sense.

And I hope it doesn't trouble you. The idea is to support you to be untroubled through all this, and we'll continue this adventure tomorrow. Thank you.