

## Mind Instruction

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We've been practicing with observing the sensations of breathing, any compelling body sensations, feelings, emotions, or thoughts as they come and go. These are the contents of the mind, the things that tend to show up when we pay attention. We can also turn the attention, turn it around to notice the environment of the mind itself, the background of the mind, the quality of the mind. Thoughts can be, individual thoughts can be really fleeting. Unless we put them all together one after the other, then they seem very solid. But they really, you can't hold on to a single thought.

Emotions last a little longer, like a wave that rises and recedes, a wave of anger, a wave of happiness. States of minds and moods can be longer lasting and very slow moving, like clouds moving across the sky. They might look like they're standing still. They have a more pervasive quality. They color the space we're in. For example, we may be in an open, spacious, wonderful state, and we hear loud sound we don't like.

And for a moment, we can be very irritable, just for a moment, and then it's gone, and then we're back to this happy, spacious state. Or we might be in an irritable mood, you know, woke up grumpy, wrong side of the bed. And the dog comes by wanting to be petted. And a sweet wave of affection arises as we pet it. And then kind of might return to our grumpy mood. Sometimes they're very incalcitrant, these attitudes or states.

And the state of mind, you know, in the *suttas*, they look at certain aspects of it. And so I'm going to mention them, you know, there's... And see if you can connect with each one of them, just for a moment, to really get that flavor. The mind might feel expansive or contracted. It might feel tense or relaxed, tired or alert, calm or agitated, resistant or accepting, or scattered or focused. Regardless of our mind state, we can be mindful of it. If it's a wholesome mental state, we can nurture it.

If it's not a wholesome state, if we're mindful, we're less likely to be influenced by it in an unhelpful way. So as you sit here now, your eyes gently closed. Take a few deep breaths and with each exhale relaxing a little more into the cushion or chair, into the earth. And when you're ready, allowing the breath to return to normal, to its natural flow. Now you might get a global sense of how you feel right now, briefly allowing the attention to meander throughout the body, relaxing any obvious tensions, allowing your attention to rest on the felt sense of the breath, relaxing into the rhythm of breathing in and breathing out.

We might notice other body sensations arise and pass, or maybe emotions come and go, or thoughts may come and go. These are the contents of the mind, arising and passing away. Now you can turn the attention to notice the mind itself, the quality of the mind, the mood, the attitude, the environment of the mind. Is the mind expansive or contracted, centered or scattered, wanting or satisfied, aversive or pleased, joyful, peaceful? If there's any tension there, see if you can relax it or soften around it. And becoming aware of the spaciousness that's all around.

Within that spaciousness, there might be some activity, some movement. In this wider field, you may notice the sensations of breathing, coming and going, physical sensations, emotions, thoughts, the objects that come and go. Between these movements of the mind, between these objects, there's space, there's stillness, tranquility. The stillness and tranquility can hold any agitation that arises and passes. It can hold the rising and passing of the breath, passing feelings or thoughts. Between all these movements, there is stillness, tranquility, a calm ocean of mind.

Anything that arises is like a wave that rises and recedes. If I wanted to have an intimate conversation with a friend, might go to a quiet park, sit on a park bench, the sun shining on us, and it would create a certain atmosphere that would tend to make it prone to intimacy, the intimacy of the setting. But if we tried to have the same conversation on a busy city street, it would be much harder to come by that intimacy. So in the same way, the atmosphere of the mind, the attitude of the mind, that quality can have a major influence on how we experience things. For instance, you know, I've hurt myself when I was like really feeling happy, you know, and it was like, oh, okay, you know, it was just, you know, something that happened.

But the same experience in a mind that's contracted, you know, it becomes much bigger and much harder to be with. It's not to make one right or wrong, but we want to really pay attention to our attitude, to this background that we, that's always there. And if it's an unwholesome mind state, can we nurture a wholesome mind state instead? Can we see it, feel it, and really notice what we can bring in to make it more wholesome? You know, for instance, you

know, one of the things that I used to do, I went for a period of my life where I did this because I would notice, you know, I'd get up in the morning to meditate and, you know, sometimes my mind was just, okay, let me get this over with.

And there's been days like that, right? You know, so I started really paying attention to that attitude, that impatient attitude, a little bit tight. And I imagined that the Dalai Lama was coming over into my mind, you know, and, you know, coming over for tea and we were going to have a great conversation. And how would I feel? How would I be in that moment, you know, there? You know, the factors of awakening would show up.

You know, I'd be really paying attention. Mindfulness would be strong. I'd be really interested in everything they said, investigation. You know, my energy would rise from the, you know, it's so interesting, gosh, the Dalai Lama, and joy would arise, you know. And as I listened, I would, you know, I would find just a peacefulness of the calming factors, the unification of a mind that's like right here, really, really here with no distractions, just listening. So it would, you know, it would always make me kind of smile and just, you know, wouldn't necessarily change in a huge way, but it would be the orientation of how my, what I'm nourishing in myself.

Um, and not necessarily recommending that you do something, you know, sometimes just seeing it and being soft with it, you know, oh yeah, this is a, my mind's really tight, you know, oh, that's *dukkha*, you know, and then compassion arises, which, you know, automatically is a wholesome mind state. So we're not going to try to force the mind to be different. We're just going to open to it and bring in the quality of openness and curiosity and care. As we develop these seven factors of awakening, you know, the mind becomes more and more refined over time. And, you know, we might not see the change day to day, but it just slowly, slowly.

It begins to be at a place where those factors predominate in our lives, not just at meditation, you know, when we get concentrated and, you know, for extended periods of time, but in our daily life when we're making tea, when we're talking to a friend, when we're joyfully sitting at the computer. So, yeah, so, you know, appreciate these jewels. Appreciate them. So I'll end with a quote from Ashan Sumato. I often think about this, you know, contemplate on it.

The spacious mind has room for everything. It's like the space in a room. It's never harmed by what comes in and out of it.

So thank you.