

Satipaṭṭhāna (38) Mindful of the State of Mind

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

third foundation, awareness, mindfulness, *citta*, thinking, colored, shape, sense, feeling, contracted, spaciousness, preoccupied, inner life, desire, aversion, openness, beauty, beautiful, knowing, dharma pleasure, wellspring, well-being, reified, spiritual, am-ness

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With this talk, I am introducing the third foundation for awareness – the third foundation upon which to cultivate and grow our capacity to be aware and mindful. The third foundation of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* represents a real turning point that began at the end of the second foundation. The focus turns from awareness mostly of the body to the mind.

In the second foundation, we are aware of the pleasant and unpleasant feeling tones that have to do with sense contact. We can also become aware of pleasure, delight, or well-being – and sometimes what is unpleasant – that does not belong to the world of sense

contact. It is like a welling-up inside. In a sense, our inner life responds to some deeper wellspring that does not have to do with our thoughts, memories, what is happening around us, or circumstances in the world. This pleasure points to the spiritual – that which is not of the flesh. It is the dharma pleasure that can come with practice.

This sets the stage for the third foundation, where we are not looking at the body nor whether things are pleasant or unpleasant. We are looking at the state of the mind. The Pali word for mind is *citta*. The Buddha uses *citta* a lot, but he never defines exactly what it is. *Citta* comes from the Pali word for thinking, so it is related to the world of thinking – the world of mentality. But this inner life of the mind is not precisely defined because it is not meant to be reified or made into something.

The mind (*citta*) is a general, broad sense we have. It is very personal. You can't pinpoint exactly what the mind is. Maybe it is a gestalt of our mental functionings and the impression, feeling, or sense of how that whole is. The definition of that whole varies from day-to-day and from person to person. It is not as important to know exactly what it is but to know what it is for you. Perhaps, what you associate with the mind changes over time. But *citta* is an inner reference point for something to be

mindful and aware of. What are the qualities and characteristics of *your* mind or state of mind?

The state of mind is usually a little more enduring than the sensations of the body, although sensations of the body can sometimes be more enduring than some of the flickering of the mind. What is the overall state or mood of the mind – the inner mental life – like for you?

Whatever the mind is, it is colored or shaped by the activities of the mind. So it gets colored one way if there is a lot of intense desire or greed. When the mind gets shaped or colored by desire, one sees the world through a filter of desire – searching for or wanting something.

The mind can also be colored by aversion – pushing away, resistance, not wanting. It can be colored by confusion. It can be colored by generosity and by a sense of openness. It can be colored by love and by compassion. It can be colored by wisdom.

The mind itself is not a thing, but it is influenced very much by what we are doing. When we are preoccupied with thoughts and problems, the shape, feeling, or sense of the mind changes. The mind might seem very small and contracted. But when we are relaxed and at ease, the mind might feel very spacious and open. So the size of the mind – the feeling of the mind as open or

closed – might vary depending on how preoccupied or unpreoccupied we are.

In the third foundation, we are starting to become aware of the quality and the characteristics of this mind that we have. Becoming familiar with the mind prepares us for the fourth foundation of mindfulness. We learn about the operations, colors, and shapes of the mind. We get a sense of something that I like to refer to as the quality of our inner life.

As we get to know the quality of our inner life – the quality of our mind – then we can have some role in shaping it or seeing how it changes through simply knowing it. The power of knowing – of mindfulness and being present for something – is not a non-influential act. It is an act that, without trying to change anything, allows things to shift a little by being fully present for them. If we are fully present for a mind that is agitated with desires and wanting, when the knowing is clear enough, there is space to hold the agitation.

Then we see that the mind is not only desirous. There is also mindfulness, which is independent, wider, separate, and distinct – and which knows the quality of desire in the mind. It can be the same for aversion and delusion. The mind can know itself. And if the knowing is clear enough, then the mind is more than whatever desire, aversion, or confusion it might have.

Knowing our mind state creates space, a sense of openness, or some breathing room for how the mind is. We find we are not so contracted by or caught in the mind state. Then we can see that the contraction is a quality of the mind, but we do not have to identify or say, “This is who I am.”

Most people have a vague idea or feeling of “I am” – the “I-am-ness” – who I am, the fact that I am or I exist. For some people, this sense is closely connected to the mind. Buddhism does not emphasize that there is a self or the sense of “I am.” But whatever that is for you (if you have that), it is possible to bring attention and awareness and hold that quality. We can be aware of the texture and feeling tone of it and experience the sense of “am-ness” – the sense of just “being-ness” that resides someplace within. For me, this sense fits into the category of mindfulness of the mind.

We start getting familiar with how the mind changes and morphs and is different at different times. Over time, especially for meditators, we learn that the mind is flexible, fluid, and changeable. We learn that pausing, being present, and knowing – not barreling ahead with our concerns, but taking a good look to recognize what is there – begins to have a wonderful influence on the contracted or agitated mind.

Something begins to shift and change in that regard. We start becoming familiar with what it is like when the mind is not preoccupied. When it is not desirous, angry, or afraid, the mind is more open, generous, and loving. We can start feeling some other wonderful qualities of the mind.

In the Buddhist tradition, the wonderfulness of the mind is sometimes referred to as the beauty of the mind. The mind can be experienced as something amazingly beautiful. I have been to many beautiful places in the world and seen beautiful art. I would say the most beautiful thing I have ever seen is the purified mind – the bright, clear mind. We can start getting a glimpse of the beauty of the mind. It is not beautiful necessarily because we have done wonderful things in the world or because everyone loves us. The mind is beautiful in and of itself, independent of what is happening in the world around us.

We are cultivating a beautiful mind by discovering how not to get caught by the unwholesome mind – the mind challenged by desire, greed, fear, agitation, restlessness, dismay, sadness, and grief – all those things that catch the mind. Of course, those things are there, and we are not denying them.

The practice of the third foundation is to know: “This is how the mind is. This is what is going on in the mind.”

Just know it. It can be hard to do, but this is a radical – I would say revolutionary – movement of the mind.

Whatever state the mind is in, we can discover how to simply know, “This is how it is.” In that simple knowing – “this is how it is” – we are not wedded to it, not caught in it, and not reactive to it. It is as if we take a couple of steps back, turn around, and look to see what the mind has been up to.

For example, you might see that you have been enmeshed in the mind. So you pause and breathe. You step back, look, and see the mind in a whole new way. There is some spaciousness around it – some openness.

This spaciousness becomes part of the quality of the mind’s beauty. Some of the beauty of the mind has to do with its clarity. The clarity sometimes becomes a feeling of brightness in the mind. The mind becomes bright and luminous. The mind is no longer defined by our particular thoughts, concerns, and attitudes. As a result of that clarity, it is as if the fog has cleared. There is brightness and clarity in the mind, which can be beautiful.

So the topic this week is the third foundation for awareness: cultivating awareness and developing the aware mind. It is somewhat poignant that as awareness of the mind develops, the awareness and the mind do

not seem so separate at some point. Awareness seems to become the mind, or the mind becomes mostly a field of awareness.

At first, we might feel as if we are aware of the mind. Then the mind almost becomes the awareness and shifts. By the end of the week, we will see how that happens. Thank you.