

Mindfulness of Mind (5 of 5) Awareness Releases Itself

November 12, 2021

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

self-forgetting, self-concern, self-preoccupation, dropping away, ceasing, basketball player

Gil Fronsda

This series is on mindfulness of mind or mindfulness of awareness. In its simplicity, awareness has no weight, no color, and no shape. Awareness in itself has no history and no future. One of the great possibilities in the practice of mindfulness is to free awareness from all the ways that we burden it with our desires, our wishes, our fears, and our projections so that awareness becomes simple.

Then awareness is released. Awareness is set free, even from ourselves. One of the more radical things about this practice is the way that it can free us from ourselves.

If we engage in mindfulness practice and can really give ourselves over to just being here, just being mindful in

the current of the present moment – the current of breathing, sensing, and feeling – at some point, we will get absorbed. This becomes all we're doing. All we're doing in absorption is just being present.

Self-concern and self-preoccupation fall away. We're still here in a full way. For some reason, I like to compare this to basketball players. When someone is playing professional basketball, there's no time to wonder: "What is that fan thinking about me? Is my shirt tucked in properly? Did I do well? Did I snap my fingers right at that last shot?"

There is no time for preoccupations and thoughts about playing. They completely lose themselves and give themselves over to what they're doing. Most of us are not basketball players, but it is the same way with cooking, playing music, or reading a book – activities we do where we forget ourselves. We lose ourselves in a healthy way in the activity. Some people say that time stops when we lose ourselves in the activity. We don't really lose ourselves, but there is a wonderful self-forgetting, or stepping out of the clothes of self that we wear.

This wonderful getting out of our own way and being free from self-concern and self-preoccupation, where we reference everything to self, also begins to free awareness. It frees our presence – our ability to attend

to what is here. There is a freedom, a lightness, and an ease in that.

As we continue the practice, there is more and more self-forgetting and shedding of anything that is extra. A kind of sensitivity to what's extra arises.

For example, you might be sitting quietly, being with the breath, or with something, and then you have the thought, "That breath wasn't as good as the previous breath." But rather than believing it or getting involved in that thought, it is so clear that the thought is extra. The goodness of the moment doesn't need it, so we don't get involved in that thought. We don't pick it up. We just stay with the flow, the activity of "here, and here."

Then awareness gets simpler and simpler. We get simpler and simpler. Or maybe we don't get simpler anymore. We have receded from the picture, and awareness gets simpler and simpler. At some point, awareness releases itself. Just like there is a self-forgetting, there is awareness-forgetting. Awareness forgets itself.

What is that like? When it gets that simple, that free, that safe, that settled, just being alive is enough – we are just here – even awareness doesn't have to do anything or accomplish anything. Awareness is not directed anywhere. There is a self-forgetting in the

awareness too. Awareness is so smooth and operating so simply, that it just kind of forgets itself.

Sometimes this is called a “dropping away.” Sometimes it’s called a “ceasing,” the ending of something. And then it comes back. But that experience of awareness forgetting itself and getting out of its own way teaches us something very profound about clinging and the possibility of non-clinging.

So the final step for this week about awareness is both the release in awareness and the release of awareness itself. We begin by relaxing; that was the first day’s topic. Then there is recognition – a huge part of awareness is its capacity to recognize. We build on that capacity so the recognition becomes simpler and simpler, with less baggage and fewer associations. What remains is just the simple knowing of just an in-breath, just a thought, just hearing, just being.

Next, there is a deep respect for the whole process of being aware and being present, and respect for ourselves. I think the Dharma practice is founded on a very deep respect that borders on, or is, a kind of reverence for all of this. So of course, we want to be present and attentive, and find a way to be with everything, where the being with is simple – we are just there with it. We don’t interfere with anything.

Next, there is a restoration of a wonderful freedom of mind that can just know whatever is happening freely and openly. There are no barriers and no boundaries to anything. Something is just known. It is free. Everything is known simply. Nothing sticks.

As we continue the process of deepening awareness and getting into the flow of awareness, just relaxing in the simplicity of being, there is a greater and greater process of simplification. That might be an easier word for some people to hear, rather than “letting go” or “releasing.” Because letting go can seem as if we are dismissing things or abandoning things, or as if we are going to be left without anything.

But simplification means simplifying into the part of life that is most reverent, most respectful, the deepest, and most sacred. We trust it so deeply and so well that there is a self-forgetting and an awareness-forgetting. Then we will know something new and different about this life. We will probably never again believe that clinging is important. We probably will still cling, but we will no longer believe in it.

The Buddha talked about “awareness liberated through non-clinging.” He used the word *citta*, so maybe he meant “mind.” You find yourself, in the simplest, most beautiful, and profound way that you can be, and one that paradoxically and wonderfully also involves a self-

forgetting. So it might seem as if you are not going to be there to appreciate this wonder. Maybe part of you is not there – the part that's extra.

Thank you for this opportunity to teach you this. I appreciate our time together.