

Satipaṭṭhāna (39) Knowing the Mind Without Carry-on Luggage

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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We are continuing with the talks on the third foundation for awareness, which is mindfulness of the mind. We are building our capacity to be aware by knowing what is happening in the mind – recognizing the mind states. The primary location for our experience of suffering and happiness is the mind (our inner mental state) and the heart (our intellectual and emotional center).

We have physical pain and physical pleasure, but the mind is the location for that which is existentially much deeper, more impactful and important for us. The mind is that inner mental and emotional landscape where suffering occurs. You can call that place the mind, the heart, or some other name. You can define it for

yourself, but what is more important than some Buddhist idea of the mind is what you are experiencing.

The mind is also where we feel deep abiding happiness and peace. Even the experience of freedom belongs to the mind – *citta*.

Our task is to simply know the state of the mind – the way that it is. There is nothing in the text about judging it, making a commentary about it, wishing it would be otherwise, being aversive to it, trying to fix it, or trying to make it into something else. The task is to simply recognize the mind as it is.

This simple recognition begins to change the mind. It changes the mind in a wholesome direction because the clear mindfulness of the mind is no longer feeding unhealthy and unwholesome mind states. If we are not mindful, our mental energy can go into the stories, ideas, and resentments that support unwholesome states of mind.

Instead, the energy of the mind goes into being mindful – into a clear knowing: “Oh, *this* is what is happening. Now I see. I see the mind is desirous. The mind is full of wanting something strongly.” If this is what is going on in the mind, you can have that conversation with yourself, “Oh, this is what the mind is like.”

The mind may be full of aversion, resentment, hostility, or irritation. We know, “Right now, this is what the mind is like.” If the mind is confused, agitated, full of doubt, or full of delusion, we know: “This is what it is like. This is delusion.” The deluded mind is spinning stories and fantasies. We simply know it.

This knowing is the center of the third foundation. Can you simply know the mind state? It makes a huge difference to do this. Chances are if we are not knowing the mind, it is caught up in desires, aversions, confusion, or delusion. These come along as baggage or carry-on luggage as we do the mindfulness practice. The mindfulness itself – awareness – will be colored by that desire. It will lean forward into grasping and wanting, or it may be colored by the aversion of pushing away or being hostile. The mind may just be confused. The awareness is not very centered, clear, or calm because it is agitated and confused – not knowing which way to go.

The more we can let the knowing be very, very simple, the less baggage we carry with us. The practice becomes lighter and easier.

The Buddha gave the following instructions:

When the mind (or the citta) is with desire, one knows the mind is with desire. When the mind is

without desire, one knows the mind is without desire.

Sometimes translators have translated this as, “One knows that the *state of mind* is desirous.” It is a desiring or an aversive state of mind. But the Pali text literally says, “a mind *with* desire,” or “*with* aversion.” This is a very significant distinction. As mindfulness and clear awareness become stronger, the mind clearly recognizes desire and aversion are not the whole mind. They do not color, shape, or define the mind.

Clear awareness begins to expand the domain of the mind so that it is no longer wrapped into desire and aversion. With clear mindfulness, desire is just a part of the mind. It comes along with the mind, but it does not define the mind. It is not the whole mind. This is why the practice of mindfulness of the mind is so powerful. Mindfulness can see all this is in the mind.

The Buddha talks about the mind having visitors. The visitors confuse, defile, and obstruct the mind. It is a lovely idea that greed, hatred, delusion, and the hindrances are visitors to the mind. They are not inherent to the mind. When mindfulness becomes strong enough, we start prying ourselves loose from these difficult mind states. We start seeing there is more going on.

The Buddha talks about not just seeing a mind with desire, but also seeing a mind that is without desire. This means we also see positive states of mind. For example, generosity is a state without desire, and greed. We are asked to notice when desire is in the mind, and when it is not there – when the mind is colored and shaped by desire, and when it is not.

According to the Buddha, there are three fundamental roots or forces of the mind that underlie all unhealthy states of mind: greed, hatred, and delusion. One knows a mind with greed, as such. One knows a mind without greed, as such. One knows a mind with aversion, hatred, or hostility as such. One knows a mind without it as such. One knows a deluded or a confused mind as such. One knows a mind without that as such.

We become more and more familiar with these states. We become familiar with how they feel. It is not just about knowing them, but also knowing the felt sense – the experience of them. There is clear recognition: “Oh, when the mind is full of desire, it is leaning forward – it is searching. When the mind has aversion, it is stabbing, attacking, blaming, or pulling away.” The mind gets narrower and more contracted. It gets restless. It may have frenetic energy.

The mind may be more in the head than in the heart or the body. The location of the mind shifts and changes

depending on what the mind is caught up in at the moment. When it is caught in greed, hate, or delusion, chances are there is some kind of locus or center in the mind, where we feel it is located. That location might be different when the mind is filled with compassion, love, peace, and wisdom.

We can look around and explore: What does it feel like in the body? What does it feel like in the mind itself? What impact do these different states of mind have on our clarity of mind, and our ability to stay focused and balanced?

We begin to familiarize ourselves with this third foundation of mindfulness. If we tried to do this at the beginning of this practice, we might get more confused, reactive, or caught up. It could lend itself to a lot more thinking.

We can think of the third foundation of mindfulness as having the first two foundations as support. The mind is now able to get somewhat calm and stable in the present moment. The mind is starting to become strong in its mindfulness.

With the ability to be calm, centered, and not easily distracted, we know something about nonreactive awareness. The mind just knows very simply. When this is all in place, it is a good time to start becoming aware

of the mind states. If the ability to be calm and centered is not in place, then it is good to go back to the beginning – back to just breathing. Return to the beginning of the whole *Satipaṭṭhāna*, until the mind settles in again. Then we can begin opening to the mind states.

The mind state can color mindfulness. It can color how we are mindful. It is like the carry-on luggage that we bring with us. As the mind state becomes clearer and clearer, we have less and less of this luggage. The mind becomes clearer, brighter, and freer.

In a couple of days, we are going to look at the second half of the third foundation. This looks at how the mind can grow and develop when it is no longer in the grip of greed, hate, and delusion – or fear, agitation, or contraction. The discussion then goes from talking about what the mind is with, to talking about the state of the mind itself.

When the beautiful states arise, they coexist with mindfulness – with awareness. It is almost as if they *are* awareness. But that is for a couple of days from now.

In the next 24 hours or so, start doing an inventory of your mind states. Is it a mind that is with desire? Is it a mind with hostility, hatred, ill will, or aversion? Is it a mind that is confused or deluded?

Just notice. These states will float through. They will arise and pass in different circumstances. When you are hungry for dinner, you might feel the desire mind is predominant. When you have eaten too much, an aversive mind is predominant. When you wonder how to do the dishes – when the dishwashing machine is completely packed – you might notice the confused mind. Just notice that the mind state comes and goes like a kaleidoscope – in subtle and big ways.

Start tracking all this. When there is no desire, notice what that is like; no ill will – notice what that is like. Just explore, and get to know. Become familiar with the texture, smell, and feel of these mind states. See what happens when you recognize them more and more.

I look forward to introducing the next talk. Thank you.