

# Conditioned Consciousness (5 of 5) Aware Without Clinging

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## **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

uncling, letting go

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We have come to the last talk on the topic of conditioned consciousness. Our connection to being aware or conscious is quite variable. Sometimes we have no connection at all. We can be so caught up in something, so preoccupied, that we are beside ourselves, and we lose ourselves in what we're doing. We can end up saying: "I don't know what I was thinking or what I was doing. I didn't even know what I was saying when I said it." We can be so wrapped up in something that the very idea that we can be aware and conscious is far from the mind, far from what we're preoccupied with.

But it is also possible to be in states where it is very obvious that we are conscious, where the main game in town is being aware and conscious. For example, you could be relaxing on a wonderful day off, lying under a

tree in the park, and looking up at the clouds and sky. There is not much to see, but there is a clear sense of awareness: “Wow, I’m aware, I’m present, I’m conscious, I’m alive. This is quite something.” The sense of consciousness is very strong.

But while lying there in the park looking at the sky, you can get caught in something and lose some of that openness, lightness, and awe. Maybe an ice cream truck goes by, and that is enough to bring up all kinds of memories from childhood, and you get absorbed in them. The fact that there are clouds and sky disappears, and the fact that you have the capacity for consciousness disappears. Awareness is taken over by memories or the idea of wanting ice cream.

Maybe someone gets up on a soapbox not far away and starts pontificating loudly about political views that are abhorrent to you, and you feel irritation and a contraction of the heart and mind. If you try to notice what happened to consciousness, you might notice that the conscious self feels contracted or tight. There might even be a resistance in the mind to noticing that you are aware and conscious, because of the strong pull into the world of irritation, anger, or fear – whatever the contraction might be connected to. So our connection to consciousness and being aware is quite variable.

But I think that describing it that way is a little bit off, or

very off. It implies that consciousness is a stationary, static thing, and then we touch it or know it. But rather, what consciousness is, is shaped by the state of the mind. So, in the park looking at the sky, what we experience as consciousness has been expanded. It has been created, imagined, and constructed to be broad. When we get preoccupied and tight, then that sense of what awareness is has also become tight and constricted. There is not a broad and spacious awareness that somehow exists offline or outside. Consciousness has become that way.

This is only a theory, but it is just as valid as the theory that there is a thing called consciousness which is always broad, and we lose touch with it. My suggestion is that we are still in touch with it, maybe, but now we're in touch with a consciousness that is contracted, tight, and narrow.

So I will continue with the idea that our sense of what consciousness is, is variable, and it is influenced by all kinds of things. It is influenced by the degree of agitation and the degree of peace or calm we have. It is influenced by how much clinging we have and by how much freedom we have. We contribute to the creation of consciousness by the state of our mind.

If particular states of mind are valuable and useful, then we want to create the conditions for them to be there.

An open, expansive, free consciousness is invaluable because it is a protection from clinging. It is a protection from greed, hate, and delusion, and often a protection from fear. It is a space within which some of the best qualities of who we are have a chance to surface. Love can arise, for example, rather than anger or blame. It is as if the more broad and open and receptive consciousness is, the more space there is for some of the deeper, more beautiful workings of our hearts and minds.

We begin to appreciate our contribution to how we experience consciousness. We use the awareness that is lighter, more open, and more non-reactive to be aware of how we cling, how we tighten up, and how we resist. This is a fascinating alternative to collapsing into our clinging and getting sucked into it. Rather, we can learn to know it. We can cling, and we can know clinging.

I like the image of a tight fist that doesn't want to release itself, then a hand comes underneath it and just holds it gently, giving it support and taking its weight. As the fist feels the support, then it begins to relax.

Awareness can know attachment, can know clinging. It is there to offer support, to hold the clinging, to be its friend, and to accompany it, so the clinging is not condemned, fought with, denied, or pushed away, but

has a chance to uncling. The way that we are entangled can be unentangled, or disentangle itself.

One of the great powers of Buddhist practice is the way in which this broader, more equanimous knowing that is independent of what is known – not entangled with what is known – can meet the clinging. Awareness meets clinging. If you are patient, you can discover that you do not have to do the unclinging, the letting go. To know with non-clinging allows our clinging (our attachments) to slowly thaw, slowly unwind, and release.

This lesson becomes more and more important the further we go in Dharma practice. As we get more concentrated, more still, and as the mindfulness gets stronger, it becomes more and more important not to be the one who lets go, not to be the one who unclings, but rather, to just allow the knowing to be the tenderizer, the dissolving agent. Just know, just know, without any reactivity.

Meeting clinging with nonreactive awareness becomes more and more important as we keep practicing. But early in practice, like at the beginning of a sitting, please by all means relax your body, and let go of whatever is easy to let go of. But hopefully, over time you will discover how wonderful and how smile-producing it is to know without attachment, without being caught in or glued to what is being known. What is being known is

allowed to be as it is, and you can settle back and know. Maybe that knowing will be smile-producing for you. How lucky we are to be able to know this way. How delightful to know this way, how wonderful to know in a way that can bring forth all kinds of gifts for the world. May you discover something about liberated awareness that allows you to be a gift – the fullest gift you can be for this world.

Thank you very much.