

Satipaṭṭhāna (41) Knowing the Expanded Mind

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

third foundation, journey, shift, greed, hatred, delusion, spiritual, mind state, scattered, contracted, limit, awareness, desire, aversion, black hole, transition, confused, caffeine, shrunken, sloth, torpor, deflated, restless, *mahā-citta*, non-expanded, big mind, inclusive, claustrophobia, vista, dharmic, holistic, pleasant, open, wide

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We are continuing to talk about the third foundation of mindfulness. I would like to point out that as the description of the practice unfolds, there is a shift in the second, third, and fourth foundations. I think that each of these foundations describes a journey the meditator takes.

In the second foundation, we begin by becoming aware of the feeling tone of experience – pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. As we settle in and become more familiar and sensitive to the feeling tones, we can distinguish

between pleasant things of the flesh and those that are not of the flesh. We are making a shift from the sensual world of mind and body to that which is more spiritual. We are journeying from one into the other as we deepen the practice.

The third foundation has eight exercises or practices. We begin by becoming aware of a mind accompanied by greed, hatred, and delusion. Then there is a journey into the more meditative or spiritual mind states of the last four exercises. This journey from the mind states characterized by greed, hatred, and delusion has an intermediate stepping stone: the fourth exercise.

The fourth exercise refers to a scattered mind or a contracted mind. When the mind is not caught up in greed, hatred, and delusion, it is sometimes a bit lost. Greed, hatred, and delusion always have some focus of attention – a concern, something we want or do not want, something we are confused about. The degree to which we focus on this object limits the mind. In the language of the Buddha, it is a limitation of awareness for the mind. The mind becomes smaller and contracted. Its scope becomes very narrow. We can feel the mind get tight, narrow, and preoccupied with this one thing.

It can even feel pleasant. There can be a lot of good energy or compelling, habitual energy around desires,

aversions, and delusion. It is like the strong gravitational pull of a black hole; the mind just goes into it. This energy can feel so natural and normal that we do not realize its impact on us. We do not realize that there is another option.

When the mind is no longer focused on objects in a narrow, constricted, or forceful way, it can go through a transition. The mind becomes a bit confused, not quite sure what to focus on or what to do. Desires, aversions, and delusions are like caffeine – they keep us energized. When we stop taking that caffeine, the mind goes through a period of adjustment. In that period of adjustment, the mind does not have a particular object to be concerned with. But, the mind has not developed its capacity for settled, concentrated presence.

The mind can then get scattered. It jumps around, looking for something to be concerned with, but there is not enough focus to settle on anything. Or the mind becomes shrunken and sinks in on itself. Sloth and torpor can set in with a feeling of giving up or deflation. Without greed, hate, and delusion, sometimes deflation, scatteredness, or restlessness of the mind can happen.

We keep practicing. It can feel like things are going backward because our mind is scattered, jumping around, deflated, or shrunken. This can actually be a time of transition. We have to go through it – to be

patient with it, willing to breathe with it, and be aware of it.

At some point, some of the fruits of practice come into play. The first of these fruits in the third foundation is:

One knows an expanded mind as an expanded mind. And one knows a non-expanded mind as a non-expanded mind.

Mahā-citta could also mean “big mind.” One knows a big mind.

In the earlier exercises of the third foundation, we know a mind accompanied by desire as a mind accompanied by desire, and a mind accompanied by aversion as a mind accompanied by aversion. The mindfulness creates a wider context for the mind to be aware of desires and aversions. Desire and aversion do not fully take over. Desire and aversion have a big influence, but they are just part of the mind. In this transition, after the contracted or restless mind, there comes a time when the mind starts feeling expansive, open, wide, and large. The mind and awareness become more closely linked rather than overlapping or coterminous.

Now we can almost talk as if the mind and awareness are synonyms – they become almost the same.

Awareness becomes broad and expansive; it can include everything. The mind is open, with an open set of perceptions. Everything that happens is allowed to

appear in its own time in the field of perception – in the world of what we perceive. We are not for or against our experience.

There is no preference for the object of attention (the thing we are aware of) nor for one thing over another. Instead, the preference is to rest in the wide, calm awareness. It is an awareness that can receive, know and perceive things in a relaxed way.

In the language of the Buddha, when we are too concerned with some purpose, then the mind is limited by that purpose. If we are not constricted by a purpose – or if the purpose, in a sense, is to relax and open up – then the mind is not limited anymore. It is not bounded. It is not contracted. It is not tight and narrow. It becomes broader and wider.

It may be similar to the feeling of claustrophobia you get from being cooped up in a small cabin for a long time. Then you go out into a wide, open field or high in the mountains where there is a great vista. An expansive feeling arises. Certainly, the vista is expansive, but something opens up in the mind, the heart, that makes it like a breath of fresh air. The mind takes on a kind of expansiveness.

You do not have to go out to a great vista point for the mind to become expansive. Even with your eyes closed,

the mind can become expansive and large because that is the nature of the mind. This is how awareness is when it is not contracted, not channeled in a particular direction, or focused on a particular concern. So, to be able to drop the limitations and contractions of the mind. And for many people, in a calm meditative state, the mind begins to feel expansive, large, peaceful, and broad.

We begin a journey now into the more spiritual or dharma states – whereas the mind states of greed, hate, and delusion are not dharmic.

The awareness that can be broad enough to include everything is dharmic. Paradoxically or ironically, this awareness can also include the presence of greed, hate, and delusion. Nothing is outside. The difference is that the mind is not contracted or focused on greed, hate, or delusion. The mind knows when it is there. In this wide field, it is just one thing among many. We are not identified with it. We are not prioritizing it. We are not bothered by it or caught in its grip.

The idea is that the mind is not caught by anything. It does not stop for anything, get involved with anything, or get entangled with anything. The mind is able to allow things to arise and pass – to be there when they are there, but without being for or against. This begins a feeling of a mind that is whole – a holistic mind.

One of the great delights and pleasures of meditation is when we start to feel more and more whole. Our whole sense of being feels more holistic. We come into our wholeness rather than the contractedness or the narrowness of particular preoccupations and concerns.

How do we make that transition from desire and aversion to this expanded state? It really helps if our minds are no longer convinced that pursuing desires and aversions are what is important. We feel how we are limited when we are constantly preoccupied with our delusions, thoughts, or confusion about things. So, we begin relaxing, softening, and opening until we feel like everything is included. All of who we are has a place. All of who we are has a respected place in awareness and consciousness.

This is a game changer for people who do meditation. Over time we begin realizing we are much better off in this peaceful state than in a state of wanting or aversion.

If you have a common desire that pulls you in, perhaps meditate or go for a walk. Do something that allows you to tap into this expanded state. You might find that it is much more pleasant and satisfying in the long run.

Tomorrow we will continue with this third foundation, with these dharma states that open up in the last four exercises.