

Mindfulness of Breathing (41) Seeing Openness of Mind

February 25, 2021

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

mind, *citta*, mindfulness, emotional, preoccupation, awareness, awakening, mind states, equanimity, clarity, hindrances, Five Hindrances, Seven Factors of Awakening, heart, tranquility, Ouch, Ahh, conative, hijack, open, closed

Gil Fronsda

Mindfulness of mind:

Breathing in, experiencing the mind. Breathing out, experiencing the mind.

While we can't really know what the Buddha had in mind when he referred to *citta* (mind), I want to read to you part of the definition from the Pali Text Society Dictionary. This is more or less a standard Pali-English dictionary written over 100 years ago. It is still an excellent resource for understanding Pali. It has a wonderful entry for *citta* – the word that we usually translate as mind. It says:

The meaning of 'citta' is best understood, when explaining it, by expressions familiar to us, as: with all my heart; heart and soul; I have no heart to do it; blessed are the pure in heart; singleness of heart; all of which emphasize the emotional and conative side, more than its mental and rational side. It may therefore be rendered as mood, disposition, state of mind.

Some people prefer to translate *citta* as heart or heart-mind. This touches into the emotional side. The word mind might feel a bit unemotional – not so connected to our emotional life. As we get into deeper meditation, people like me sometimes treat mind and awareness as almost synonymous. This can lend itself to the idea that we are a bit removed from our embodied emotional life. This may be a little unfortunate. Whatever *citta*, the mind, and awareness is – it may be a rich world that includes our emotionality in important ways.

In steps seven and eight of mindfulness of breathing, we are looking at the mental activities, recognizing the mental activities in the mind and then relaxing them – tranquilizing or calming them – letting the mind become open, not contracted.

As I said earlier, a mind that is preoccupied gets hijacked. Attention gets hijacked by our desires,

aversions, doubts, restlessness, or anxiety. It's like attention falls into a black hole and doesn't really come out. We do not step back and see the big picture. We get swept into an inner world of preoccupations, thoughts, fantasies, stories, and resentments. These are all mental activities that hijack awareness. There are other mental activities that enable awareness or open the mind. They don't hijack awareness, but rather enhance the quality of the mind.

The Buddha made the distinction between mental factors that close the mind and those that open the mind. The distinction is between the Five Hindrances and the Seven Factors of Awakening.

The Five Hindrances are: strong sensual desire, lust, and craving; aversion, ill will, and hostility; sloth, torpor, lethargy, and resistance; agitation, restlessness, anxiety, regrets, and agitated states of preoccupation; confusion, uncertainty, and doubt. We can get lost in the rabbit hole of doubt and confusion.

The hindrances can have a very strong gravitational pull. We get pulled into them. They can come with a lot of authority, like: "This is really important. I have to be involved in this." The consequence is that attention gets hijacked. The Buddha calls the attention getting hijacked: a loss of wisdom, blindness, obstruction in the

mind, covering over the mind, making the mind fragile, brittle, and hard.

The other pull opens the Seven Factors of Awakening. These are: awareness (mindfulness itself), clarity of mind (investigation), effort, joy, tranquility, *samādhi* (concentration), and equanimity. All of these factors can work together as a whole or singularly to open up the mind and the quality of our inner life. The emotional side really comes into play here.

Equanimity is one of the most sublime, beautiful emotions. It is hard for people who haven't experienced it to appreciate it. It is a beautiful feeling.

Tranquility has an emotional quality: strong, embodied, and broad – with warmth, clarity, stillness, and peacefulness.

Joy, of course, seems emotional.

Samādhi is an integration bringing together all aspects of our life, including the emotional.

The Seven Factors of Awakening are characteristics or supports for awareness – for mindfulness itself. The more they operate together with awareness, the more they tend to open and strengthen awareness. They

create vision and support wisdom. They remove obstructions. They remove the coverings that keep us from seeing things clearly. These seven factors make the mind malleable, soft, workable, ready, and receptive to do the work.

We're talking about mental activities that represent this divide between becoming more closed or more open. It is possible to cultivate each of the Seven Factors of Awakening by themselves – to be attuned to them, and learn to recognize and support them. They tend to grow in the wake of emphasizing mindfulness and attention. But mindfulness – whatever way we practice it – in and of itself, is not a closing activity. There isn't some other mental activity that comes along with mindfulness – like striving, expectation, pushing, or contracting around the mindfulness – that begins moving it in the direction of the hindrances or closing down.

This ability to track the mind state allows us to protect mindfulness from being hijacked. We can focus on mindfulness. If the mind gets more closed as I try hard, maybe I can find a way to be more open – more relaxed.

Yesterday, I used the Gil Fronsdal technical terms, “Ouch” and “Ahh.” Ouch is what involves more stress, suffering, and discomfort – and Ahh is what goes in the

opposite direction. One of the primary characteristics of the second factor of awakening, which is usually called investigation, is to be able to see that simple divide. It is a clarity of mind that sees this valence – the distinction between the Ouch and the Ahh – being closed or being open. Becoming blind or lost in our preoccupations – or opening up and having vision and clarity for what's happening.

This is one of the great advantages of tuning into the mind state. As I said in the meditation, it's fascinating because it's so valuable and even healing. Just being attentive to that simple movement of the mind can free us from getting caught up in whether it's right or wrong, or whether I'm a good or bad person.

You can have the worst preoccupation that anybody's ever had in the history of humanity – and in being with that mind state, it doesn't really matter. It just matters that you recognize that you closed down and got tight. There is an opportunity to allow yourself to open. Let it go, let it recede, and move towards the openness of mind. That simple movement – that's the direction to go – can make the practice much simpler. It's very forgiving.

The mind state is what we're doing today. We will continue with this tomorrow. As we linger in this area of

the mind state, starting on Monday, we will go through the Seven Factors of Awakening. It's such an important topic. We'll go on from there.

Thank you very much, and I look forward to our time together tomorrow.