

Mindfulness of Breathing (39) Luminous Mind

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One of the inspiring topics in the teachings of the Buddha is that around *citta*. It's often translated into English as 'mind.' Depending upon the context, *citta* is sometimes translated as "state of mind." There may be no difference between 'mind' and "state of mind." As I said yesterday, the mind is not a thing. It's not as if we can see the mind in some clear way, like using a microscope in the brain to discover where the mind is.

The mind is more a gestalt. It's the sum total of our mentality – how the mind works. It's not a thing. Because of that, perhaps, the Buddha never talks about letting go of the mind. He talks about letting go of form, feelings, perceptions, and mental activities.

He also talks about letting go of something that we've come to understand in the West as 'consciousness.' The Pali word for 'consciousness' is *viññāṇa*. It's possible that *viññāṇa* should not be translated as 'consciousness.' The word 'consciousness' has been used in the West for about three hundred to four hundred years. It was coined in relatively recent times. Both the word 'consciousness' and the idea of it entered our language in a deeper way in the last one hundred years or so.

Many of us now take consciousness as second nature. It's obvious what it is. It's often held up in religious, spiritual, and meditation circles as something ultimate. There are ideas of cosmic consciousness, ultimate consciousness, different states of consciousness, and altered consciousness.

There are a lot of associations, power, and projections around the word 'consciousness.' There are expectations and hopes around it also. Many people feel that a broad state of consciousness is somehow ultimate and profound. I certainly don't want to diminish the ultimate feeling of it – the profundity of states of consciousness and states of awareness.

What's fascinating is that whatever it is, if it's *viññāṇa* – the word we translate as 'consciousness' – the Buddha says: "Let go of that. Let go of that." Sometimes he even treats it as a problem. *Viññāṇa*, which we translate as 'consciousness,' is clearly problematic. He never says that about *citta* (mind). Maybe 'mind' should be translated as 'consciousness.' But 'consciousness' also has a sense of something that knows.

I'm not sure if the state of mind is something that knows, but it's a broad tone, mood, or feeling – a sense of the mind. Sometimes the state of mind can feel fragile, sluggish, agitated, or contracted. Certainly, our state of mind sometimes doesn't feel good. In fact, some of the suffering – the *dukkha* that Buddhist practice is meant to alleviate – is experienced as a vise-like grip on the mind or the heart. It's really tight and irritated. The mind is like rough sandpaper perhaps. Or the mind just feels so miserable and oppressed. Sometimes the mind can feel that way.

But the mind can also feel the opposite of that in experience. *Citta*, which is translated as 'mind,' is a fascinating word. *Citta* has many other meanings or homonyms – same-sounding words that we spell the same way.

The dictionary uses the word 'brightness' as a definition of *citta*. It also uses 'wondrous' or 'wonderful.' There may be an idea that the mind is something wondrous and bright. In the teachings of the Buddha, sometimes the mind is called 'luminous,' 'clear,' or 'clean.' The mind becomes clean.

The mind is not inherently any of these things. The mind is not a thing that can be inherent in anything. It may be more like a hologram – something that doesn't quite exist by itself. You could put your hand right through the mind if you could see it. It's not quite there. But it's still a mood, a feeling, a sense that can be very powerful and

significant for us. As I've often said, it can be so significant that when the mind is suffering, it's really oppressive. When the mind is happy, peaceful, or clear, it feels quite wondrous, bright, and open.

Much of the Buddhist path of practice is done in terms of the mind – instead of in personal terms. Instead of saying: "I'm training myself" – it's, "We're training the mind." We're developing the mind, liberating the mind. It's fascinating that the Buddha doesn't say a person gets liberated, but rather the mind gets liberated.

Some of you might find it a bit disappointing that you'll never get liberated! That is not the name of the game. But your mind will get liberated. Your job – whatever you are, whatever the 'you' is – is to help the mind experience liberation, to be free. Bring the mind to some kind of beauty. This idea that the mind has the potential for beauty, luminosity, brightness, and cleanliness is phenomenally inspiring.

But what's even more inspiring is that the mind is not a thing. Because it's not a thing, it's malleable and shapeable. We're never stuck with our mind. We might be stuck with our brain, and whatever way the brain works. But we're not stuck with the mind. It's the field within which our practice has its effect, its influence.

As we develop more concentration, mindfulness, letting go, equanimity, wisdom, and strength in the practice and in the mind, whatever we call the mind starts to have a wondrous feeling, a wonderful sense that we can experience.

One of the things I also find wonderful about the word *citta* – the way it seems to be used in the *suttas* – is that the experience of it is very personal. So, don't look at a Buddhist text or listen to a Buddhist teacher like myself for a definitive definition or description of how the mind is experienced. Don't try to make sure that you have that experience, or feel bad because you don't have it the way it's described.

You are shaping your mind. You're being constantly morphed, changed, and shifted. That's something that's arising within you, with all the causes and conditions of how your inner life and attention work – what you focus on, and how you're thinking or conceiving.

It's a dynamic thing, so it's very personal. It's a discovery of how you experience it. You don't have to be concerned about discovering the right way to experience the mind, what the right mind is, or how the mind's supposed to be.

But you *can*, as you feel the mind, become aware of a mind that has an 'Ouch' to it, and a mind that has an 'Ahhh.' These very technical terms (Gil language) – 'Ouch' and 'Ahhh' – are meant to give us lots of room to not get caught up in the details, or try to be right or wrong. It's very simple: "That's an 'Ouch.' The state of the mind doesn't feel good." Or, "This feels good."

The direction of Buddhist practice is in the direction of the 'Ahhh.' It's in the direction of a beautiful mind in whatever way that you define, experience, or receive beauty – luminous mind, clear mind, clean mind, spacious mind, peaceful mind.

This takes a while. You don't have to be in a hurry to experience some of the wondrous ways the mind can be experienced. But, as *ānāpānasati* develops, we become calmer and more settled going through the steps – especially after step eight, where we relax mental activity.

As mental activity relaxes, it means we're not so fixated on the 'whats' – what we're thinking about and wanting. We're beginning to rest back into the easy chair of the mind – resting back, allowing, feeling, and sensing the overall state of the mind, and breathing with that.

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

Thank you, and we'll continue tomorrow.