

## CLASS 1: **Getting to know the Small Mind**

This class, our focus was to take a detailed look at the small mind: what it feels like, the ways it operates, and what keeps pulling us back into it.

In response to Sentil's comment not making this the enemy, let's define small mind: it is the activity of the mind when it's true nature is veiled under the delusion of the seemingly separate, ego identified self. It is the seat of suffering.

Looking closely can feel a bit daunting. But to free ourselves from delusion - as well as ill will and greed (the three poisons or the three defilements from the dharma) - we have to see how it causes suffering in a detailed and moment to moment way.

### CONTINUING PRACTICE GUIDELINES:

- 1) **clearer seeing** – like an onion, as we see and peel back the larger most obvious layer, another layer appears below. We see the underlying patterns, triggers and beliefs that drive our thoughts and emotions. Clearer seeing leads to:
- 2) **less identification - we stop identifying with the objects arising and notice a clear, silent center of awareness that experiences them.** We begin to understand we are not our thoughts, emotions, and reactions. The observer gives a space that can see these conditioned objects with spaciousness. When we understand they are not who we are, we are more dispassionate about the content level and the reaction to fix things softens.
- 3) **stability** - as focus becomes steady, we can move away from a primary focus, and simply be present with the flow of arising from object to object. Stability is a combination of concentration along with less and less identification with the pull of mind.
- 4) **kindness and acceptance** - we allow more and more to happen with loving kindness towards ourselves, seeing the lack of a self in control of our life experience and our reaction patterns. This allows us to see others around us with more compassion.

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### **What do we mean by small mind?**

We all shared during our introductory check in about how it feels:

- trouble finding the present moment
- out of touch with the body

- avoiding difficult issues arising in life
- critical of self and others
- “should” beliefs
- issues that seems to always trigger us
- wanting ego needs to be met, wanting to be seen in a certain way
- phoning in spiritual practice
- ‘blackout’ period, not sure where I’ve been, tuning out
- self doubt and questioning
- consuming emotional reactions
- overwhelm in general
- unskillful actions then self judgement
- role pattern expectations feel burdensome
- identification with thoughts and beliefs
- hive mind - no clarity
- small mind is tenacious, does not give up or yield easily

### **What are some of the ways it functions?**

Here we are looking at specific refractions of experience that can alert us that small mind is in action. We will all have different ones that are more prominent for us.

**Spend some time over the next two weeks and notice which of these are most often active for you.**

**1) Ego identified, or separated and isolated:** Adyanshanti calls this the “Ego-Identified Mind”. This is the default state of humanity. It is the unending activity in the mind from that place of separateness, of “me” against the world, the seemingly separate self. It feels like ‘me’ in here separated from everything else out there, and the separation brings a constant struggling based on fear.

### **2) Resisting or controlling:**

The separated ‘self’ tries to constantly control the exterior level of life to have things come out its way. It does not want to feel unpleasant feelings or experiences, wants to be comfortable and in control. This is problematic because we cannot control life.

**3) Efforting:** Most of what we think we need to do in the small mind feels like an effort. The small mind feels obligated to act from a base of control and fixing: If I weren’t here running my life, how would things be done? “Who” would do what I need to do? Doing things from the small mind often feels like needing to ‘push’ through, which feeds burnout. It has the sense of being weighted down by duties or ‘shoulds’.

**4) Disconnection:** the small mind can feel disconnected from body and emotions, numbed out and not wanting to be present.

**5) Judging:** One of the ways the small mind feels it needs to defend itself is by judging, which can be directed towards others or oneself, as it feels like we are not measuring up to the ego ideal.

**6) Aversion:** This is closely related to judging, the following impulse to push away unpleasant things.

**7) Desiring:** The feeling of being driven by wanting, wanting.

**8) Stressful beliefs:** when stress arises, there is an underlying belief that is untrue because it fights how things actually are. Another way 'should' creates suffering.

**9) Fearing:** is part of all of the above, can sometimes be free floating sense of not trusting the universe.

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**Two mistaken beliefs that tend to keep us shackled to the small mind:**

**1) Belief 1: Small mind is dependent on outer circumstance (content level of life)**

a) We believe that the peace and happiness of big mind can only come with pleasant circumstance. This is part of the delusion of living at the content level of life, the deep seated belief that in order to be in expansive mind, things needs to be 'good' externally.

**corollary:**

b) that if things are unpleasant, we are then necessarily doomed to small mind. That we cannot find peace and happiness in the midst of crises, stress, or afflictive emotion.

**The truth is that your true nature (big mind) is independent of outer circumstance. What it is dependent on is your relationship to outer circumstance.**

**2) Belief 2: That the way we escape small mind is by fixing.** We must 'do' something to make it change. This is the response based on resistance and aversion, of not wanting our experience. This is deeply wired. Think about your own history with fixing, and ask yourself: does it work? While there might be a temporary release, the underlying tensions have not gone

anywhere and will return. If fixing worked, we would probably not be cultivating a meditation practice. **The answer to suffering is not found in the small mind.**

Fixing re-empowers the identification with small mind. It is impossible for small mind to transcend itself.

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**This is a radical understanding.** It fights much of what we've been conditioned to think and believe about ourselves.

The third Noble Truth of Cessation, means it is possible to move out of small mind irregardless of circumstance. Both in moments, and permanently.

In the next two weeks start examining this understanding: not looking to the outside to determine how you are feeling on the inside, and not fixing.

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So where do we start? A general guideline:

**IT IS PRESENCE, or being with, that brings us out of small mind.** As the quote from Eugene Gendlin:

*"The irony is that all the things we do to ourselves, all the things that feel like more than just being with, are actually counterproductive and impede the process of change."*

**1) Acknowledgment. For many things this is the only step required. We simply need to see what is there.** If we know our shadow side as all the things we don't want to look at in ourselves, then this is embracing the shadow. We hold our shadow selves - with gentleness and compassion. We invite it to sit next to us. We hold our suffering, as we would hold a small child.

It is simple presence and staying with. This is a great act of love.

**2) Don't fix.** It's hard to give up our belief in fixing. We simply make room for and stay, and let awareness do all the heavy lifting for us. Anything that arises is conditioned and impermanent, like clouds crossing the clear open sky. We think fixing will relieve the inner pressure we feel. I gotta do something!!! But it is an activity of the small mind within the small mind, and keeps you mired in place.

This may feel hard in the fulcrum of stress. But noticing you are there is what opens up the next step.

If you are in presence with, even if you are experiencing worry, stress, irritation, or whatever, the seeing itself moves you into a different relationship with your experience.

**3) Attend to.** Some things may require active response.

An attending response comes from the basis of loving compassion.

Fixing comes from not wanting to feel or experience this - from aversion. When we are in this space of acceptance from step one, wisdom arises to let us know what any response needed might be.

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## **HOMEWORK**

In the next two weeks start examining this understanding: not looking to the outside to determine how you are feeling on the inside, and not fixing. Explore these radical ideas. See if they are effective.

**In formal meditation,** review the four guidelines of deepening practice:

- 1) deeper, clearer seeing
- 2) less identification
- 3) stability
- 4) increasing kindness and compassion

**In life,** heighten your awareness when you feel stressed or in the tight space of small mind and:

**1) Acknowledge (stay with).** Let it be as big as it needs to be and take as much space as it needs. You are bigger than any conditioned object that can arise.

**2) Don't fix**

**3) Attend to**