

Thank you for your presence and sharing in the circle.

Sharing what it was like to become more aware of the small mind, what causes it to feel so real and sticky, and how it expresses, is not easy but vital in finding awakening beyond it.

In a sense, moving from small mind is the whole of the spiritual path. The first stretch of practice is establishing a bigger inner container that allows a space to see more clearly and be able to hold steady with the stress of the small mind reactivity. We begin to realize we are not the contents of the ego identified state. As we move forward out of the illusion of separateness, we see that the small mind comes from this illusion and falls away with deeper realization.

At all stages, the essential step is noticing small mind is present, and allowing it to be as it is, while resting in awareness. One of the small mind characteristics is a need to 'do' and to 'fix'. During sharing, several of us noticed a shift into peace when they stopped fixing and doing and just stayed present with. Fixing is another way we empower the small mind and let it be in charge. Fixing, or doing, is rooted in small mind and thus cannot transcend it. We cannot 'fix' our way out of it. The open window is an allowing, a surrendering, a deep presence with. This presence, awareness, is the door - the only door - to something bigger.

Moving out of the small mind is a cessation of doing, releasing from the small seemingly separate person in charge. We are used to being in small mind, the default in life, not sure there is any other possibility. Small mind sees meditation as something we 'do', and ourself as the 'doer', or 'meditator'. Meditation is actually the surrendering of 'doing', or 'being the meditator'. In time, meditation stops being something 'we' 'do' and is what we are.

The importance of knowing the small mind clearly

Questions have arisen about what exactly we mean by 'small mind'. I left it rather open, as it will mean different things at different points.

At times, it means being caught in a reactive place, or identified in an argument, or caught in afflictive emotion, where the mind goes round and round without resolution. It can also mean seeing ourselves identified with the content level of life, when our observing awareness gets obscured by the demand of objects arising. It can also be the heart when it feels closed. The times we feel separate, where it feels like 'I' am in here and the rest of the world is out there. This

subject-object consciousness is the definition of duality, the separated illusion of self.

In all cases, liberation from it is a process of disentanglement: from emotional reactivity, from grasping and aversion, from delusion and other defilements.

First, we see the entanglement of small mind.

Seeing itself begins the disentanglement process.

The role of underlying beliefs

When caught in the stickiness of small mind, there's an underlying, unseen belief that is not in tune with reality. It's this unconscious belief that triggers stress and suffering. When these beliefs can be seen clearly, an opening is created for something new to open.

Worksheet: situation, circumstance, perception/story

We explored a worksheet to help see this more clearly. This process is worth doing in writing until you begin to see it happening in real time.

The first column is SITUATION. We filled in examples of how we have experienced small mind/stress in the last week or so.

The second column has two parts:

CIRCUMSTANCE: what a group of disinterested people would agree is happening.

PERCEPTION: your interpretation of it, your story about it.

Here are couple of examples:

Situation: a family visit, coffee cups are left on the end table and socks on the floor.

Circumstance: There is a coffee cup on the end table and a pair of socks on the floor. (Notice- there is no suffering here. If I had lost the pair of socks, it might be delightful to discover where they are.)

Perception: The place is messy, I have to pick things up. Why don't they pick up after themselves? Another chore to do.

Situation: I am at the stable and a couple of people are watching me ride my horse. I feel self conscious and perhaps judged.

Circumstance: I am on a horse. Some people are standing nearby. (Again, no suffering inherent in this.)

Perception: This is uncomfortable, if they weren't here I'd feel freer and more able to just focus on my training.

Situation: I forgot to bring the cleaning supplies on my trip to the meditation center.

Circumstance: I am in the car. the cleaning supplies are not in the car. (No suffering here. Most of the time I drive around quite happily without cleaning supplies in the car.)

Perception: I forgot them again! I keep forgetting them.

A NOTE ABOUT IDENTIFICATION WITH SUFFERING

Generally, we to start with the small, everyday things that crop up. This process can fail if we start with major issues or traumas.

An analogy might be this: you go to the gym for the first time. You want to be strong and buff, so start by attempting to deadlift a 250 pound weight. You injure your back, need surgical repair and rehab afterwards. You might draw the conclusion that exercise is dangerous and does not work. The situation would have been completely different starting at the level of what the body could absorb and working up.

Our deepest attachment is to our suffering; the memories and stories of how we have experienced pain in life. It is a fundamental level of identification with our sense of the egoic self, one of the deepest levels of who we imagine we are. This seems insane, but important to acknowledge this in ourselves.

Gurdjieff once remarked that people will give up many things for a spiritual path. They will fast, will become celibate, will travel to far places, and give up all sorts of comforts. But ask them to give up their identity with their suffering and they will kill you.

Thich Nat Hanh also remarked along the lines that people will die before they give up suffering, "People have a hard time letting go of their suffering. Out of a fear of the unknown, they prefer suffering that is familiar."

While we can find liberation from even the deepest levels of pain, it takes a while for it to be possible for the mind to even contemplate or admit the identification with suffering that involve the wounds we carry. The small mind feels like it will

die if it lets go of these stories. In a sense, it does. It's a process to come to the place where we are even willing to see.

So start with small things, where there is the willingness to give up the identity and story around suffering. This is probably the hardest place in the path: To both feel your pain and not sidestep it, and to be able to give up the identity around it and not fall into small mind.

If the first step is to see the small mind clearly,
the second step is to be willing to give up the story of your suffering.

Finding the Underlying Beliefs

There's one more step that is helpful to see this clearly and move from egoic mind.

The reason we did this inquiry with the worksheet (and please continue it on your own) is to see that small mind/stress arises not from circumstances, but from our thinking and perception.

This is another way of stating the first and second Noble Truths: That life is inherently problematical, and dukka is one of its innate characteristics. But it does not innately contain suffering. Suffering comes from our resistance: our wanting it under our control and in our comfort zone. If this were not true, then the third Noble Truth, of cessation, would not be possible.

Unseen, underlying belief, based in the small mind, fuels stress. This belief is experienced as stress because it is fighting reality, or what is actually true. These beliefs often have a statement of what we think 'should' or 'ought' to be true, not what is actually reality. These beliefs can also be about who we think we 'should' be.

Some examples:

- This is what they should do or not do
- I know the right way
- I should be different
- they should be different
- this situation needs to be a certain way

Byron Katie's list of Universal Beliefs is a helpful guide here to erroneous beliefs that come from delusion and are rooted in small mind.

These beliefs are the cause of our distress. As the title of a book a friend shared with me says: “Without thinking, is there a problem?”

We then went back to the worksheets to see what the underlying beliefs were that make them seem so ‘real’. Note that this process IS spiritual inquiry. It takes becoming very quiet and waiting for the core belief to become clear; it takes time. While you may have many belief statements around a situation, one will be the core, the bottom line.

Going back to the examples: socks lying around. Beliefs might include;

- people should pick up after themselves
- I have to do this all the time, this is stressful
- I can’t think when the house is a mess
- This is rude

For me, the underlying belief is: I am not loved.

With the stable, the bottom line: I am not good enough

With the cleaning supplies: I keep making mistakes

Sometimes you will find the bottom line belief, but it seems true. Yes! I keep making mistakes!

It may be helpful to refer to Byron Catie's Four Questions to ask of yourself. Some of these challenge our deepest assumptions about ourselves and life. Again, it takes time, to find the answers. This is spiritual inquiry, of finding what is not obvious on the surface.

Question 1: Is it true?

Question 2: Do you absolutely know, beyond any doubt, that it is true?

Question 3: What is your experience, who are you when you have that belief?

Question 4: What would happen, who would you be, if you were able to give up that belief?

HOMEWORK

Print out some copies of the worksheet.

Take some time from your meditation practice and fill them in. Allow yourself the time to become quiet and ask deeply within to find the underlying beliefs that drive the stress.

Note: Don't fix. You cannot 'give up', or 'let go of' your beliefs. That's simply another mechanism of small mind.

What does occur is seeing them clearly and their relationship to suffering. When you do this, you are allowing something bigger than small mind to be in charge. In time, you will find the beliefs have let go of you. No small mind efforting. It is grace and comes with a return of peace and happiness.

After you get in the habit of this inquiry, you will find it begins to come up automatically when you feel the tightness of stress of small mind. You will find yourself asking yourself what the perception and belief is, and situations begin to self liberate.