

My ... My ... My minds

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My 1st mind

When I examine and observe with some care what goes on in my mind right now, I notice I am of 3 minds. Right now, my mind is beautifully stimulated, inspired, to write this reflection. Yet, this same reflection is likely to irritate or at least hold your mind for a moment. I thrive in this irritability or attention.

This is one of the first things we learn in secondary school science: that irritability is a sign of life. To that, we must now add: my (your) ability to keep my attention to this very moment of learning is what makes me grow beyond my mere human body. I am cultivating the human mind, humanity.

Furthermore, I notice, too, that I tire and languish when I am not mentally stimulated. It's like the body lacking proper exercise: it feels tired and uneasy. This mental stimulation arises when I've tapped or touched something really beautiful or profound, usually both, inside me. When I am not doing that, I notice my mind would survey the world outside, especially what is right before me: people and situations; or what is in the distance: the plants and the space around me.

Working with the 4 elements

The best connection I feel between the inner me and the world outside, I notice, is when am doing my regular exercise of senior yoga, a set of simple but warming stretches I do for about 50 minutes a day, each stage or move synchronized with a recitation of Namō tassa.

When I move my body, I notice that, as I sit on a stool, my feet planted on the ground, I feel the earth. After a few rounds of the yoga postures (āsana), I feel light warm sweat forming all over my body: this is the water element. The warmth is, of course, the fire element: it also means that from the moment I am born, I started to decay, burning with the fire of life.

My breathing pattern follows my body movements. I take in some air as I bend my upstretched arms backwards; then, I breathe out all the air as I bend down double like a jackknife and touch the floor with my finger-tips.

I time myself by reciting Namō tassa thrice at each stage, and so on, mindful of the 4 elements as I do so, and saying "Dutiyam pi" and "Tatīyam pi" to keep up with the moves. This way, I also know if I had missed any step, and corrected it at once.

The 2nd mind

This is my "2nd mind," so to speak. It is a sense of being present with everything else around me: at times, I'm aware of Ratna resting from her daily chores, my daughter working in the kitchen, and my son proof-reading the sutta translations at his computer. Often my 2 cats

would be resting soundly nearby, or Tikki the tabby would be watching me intently, with some interest.

Sometimes, I recall the people and things that are in a distant reality, as if working out at the same time with me. It is as if, all the other folks, young and old, are all earthing, watering, firing, winding and spacing with me all at once. The old folks try to earth themselves; the middle-aged flow in and out of their bull session of verbal jaunt; the lusty youths fire up some 24 or more pull-ups; the children wind around, up and down, slides, swings and everywhere. Everything in place and at peace.

The 3rd mind: Inner space

My “third” mind is the most rewarding; but it, too, seems to play 3 roles. I can only write this (if it is of any use, or pleasing to you, that is, of truth and beauty) when there is mental focus and a joyful heart (like now). When it is finished, there is a settled sense of peace and fulfillment. Then, I go back to watching the breath, rising in, falling out, and the spaces growing stiller in between. The best part is when there is only that when earth, water, fire and wind are all at rest. There is only inner space.

This inner space, the place of the inner smile, is where nothing else matters. It is the space of the Buddha, arhats and streamwinners; of suttas, joy, light and peace. But that is putting it all into words for your benefit. This is how I communicate with you with what arises in me, through me, right from the mind and feeling of the Buddha, the teaching, the noble path of the saints.

This is the inner space that holds joy, light and peace: I try to put these into words of truth and beauty, the two wings that have never failed to help me fly into the heaven of Buddha Dhamma as I translated the suttas with a sense of profound timeless wonder, that we can all awaken just as the Buddha himself has done.

This joyful heart looks on through discerning eyes in deep concern for the world, rejoicing in others who have seen, are seeing, this very same truth and beauty since the Buddha’s time. We feel the flow of Dhamma within us: our life is that bright lamp lit up by this ancient power source.

Within I am but a chrysalis, a growing caterpillar, joyfully waiting to break out of its cocoon. These words, thoughts and feelings are that cocoon: they transform into the colours of the fully bloomed butterfly flitting freely in nature’s open space. You have come this far: you, too, can feel what I feel, or at least notice the peace within you. You only need to look there, within yourself. Just to know this is liberating: it frees you from views, social engagements and distancing, views and viruses.

As you do this, you are ever nearer to see your own cocoon transforming into the space, light, life and joy you have now become. Even if you notice this for but a moment, it will remain with you as a good memory forever. This is the key to the vehicle that brings you to the path in this life itself—just as the Buddha and the arhats have done before us.

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