THE NATURE OF THE MIND

The Third Foundation of Mindfulness is Cittanupassana, Mindfulness of the Mind. Here is the passage in the Satipatthana Sutta:

Contemplation of the Mind-State

“And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu abide contemplating mind as mind? Here a bhikkhu understands mind affected by lust as mind affected by lust, and mind unaffected by lust as mind unaffected by lust. He understands mind affected by hate as mind affected by hate, and mind unaffected by hate. He understands mind affected by delusion as mind affected by delusion, and mind unaffected by delusion as mind unaffected by delusion. He understands contracted mind as contracted mind, and distracted mind as distracted mind. He understands exalted mind as exalted mind and unexalted mind as unexalted mind. He understands surpassed mind as surpassed mind, and unsurpassed mind as unsurpassed mind. He understands concentrated mind as concentrated mind, and unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated mind. He understands liberated mind as liberated mind, and unliberated mind as unliberated mind.

“In this way he abides contemplating mind as mind internally, or he abides contemplating mind as mind externally, or he abides contemplating mind as mind both internally and externally. Or else he abides contemplating in mind its arising factors, or he abides contemplating in mind its vanishing factors, or he abides contemplating in mind both its arising and vanishing factors. Or else mindfulness that ‘there is a mind’ is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mindfulness. And he abides independent, not cling to anything in the world. That is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating mind as mind.

Citta is a complex concept. In the Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism, it is termed:

“…”mind,” “mentality,” or “thought”; used broadly to refer to general mentality, citta is the factor that is present during any type of conscious activity….citta corresponds to the last four of the five aggregates…i.e., sensation (vedana), perception (sanna), conditioning factors (sankhara) and consciousness (vinnana)… Citta in this broad sense is synonymous with both mentality (manas) and consciousness (vinnana): mind is designated as citta because it “builds up (cinoti) virtuous and nonvirtuous states; as manas, because it calculates and examines; and as vinnana, because it discriminates among sensory stimuli [and] refers to the six consciousnesses: the five sensory consciousnesses of the visual, auditory, gustatory, and tactile, along with the mental consciousness (manovinnana).”

Aside from this traditional Buddhist terminology, how can we benefit from practicing Cittanupassana? The purpose of persistent, mindful investigation of the sensations of breathing is to reduce the frequency and potency of intrusive thoughts. Each intrusive thought is affected by some degree of craving and clinging. The effect of the intrusive thoughts is cumulative, that is, the longer the thoughts remain in active attention, the stronger and more durable that flow of stimulation is, and this continuity creates a “coloration” of the otherwise neutrality of ongoing awareness. Metaphorically, let’s say that repeated angry thoughts create a “red” filter on awareness. We’ve all experienced being in an angry mood that distorts thoughts and behaviors.

Paying attention in an ongoing way to the neutral feeling of breath awareness tends to allow the “red” tone of anger to diminish, provided any angry thoughts remain in the periphery of attention. I’ve described this process as first experiencing the angry thoughts as a “demon” perched on my shoulder, screaming commands in my ear and controlling my actions. With sufficient attention to the breath for long enough time, the accumulated stability of attention/inner tranquility (samadhi/passadhi) moved the demon into another room with the door closed—I could hear the demon if I made the effort, and the ability to override the anger was minimal.

This ability to ignore the demon of anger (and by extension the other controlling demons of my history) builds over time and with regular mindfulness of breathing meditation practice. Samadhi/passadhi builds a “buffer” against impulsive reactivity and this “drains the red” from the mind more effectively.

The resulting processes of the mind are shaped by a quality of mind experiencing *viraga, (dispassion)*, which is synonymous with *upekkha, (equanimity)*. These qualities of mood are not flat or repressed. Rather, the experience of the urgency of lust and anger are so reduced in potency that there is little or no interest in acting out.

Regarding the attribution to the mind being without “…delusion….contraction….distraction”, the clarity of attention provided by *sati sampajanna* (see the posting of April 27 entitled “Understanding Clear Comprehension” for more information) overcomes delusion. Overcoming contraction relates to setting aside the hindrance of sloth and torpor, and overcoming distraction is the cultivation of samadhi/passadhi.

As my mood is less emotionally reactive, the other, more beneficial qualities of the mind mentioned in the above quote are enhanced: “…He understands exalted mind as exalted mind and unexalted mind as unexalted mind. He understands surpassed mind as surpassed mind, and unsurpassed mind as unsurpassed mind. He understands concentrated mind as concentrated mind, and unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated mind. He understands liberated mind as liberated mind, and unliberated mind as unliberated mind.”

Explicitly, an “exalted mind” is a mind unaffected by mundane processes. The traditional example of this would be the experience of jhana, which is a highly concentrated state of mind that is disinterested in external phenomena. An “unsurpassed mind” would be the experience of the fourth jhana, which is characterized by a strongly coherent and exclusive awareness that is perfectly integrated, dominated by stability of focus and equanimous indifference to any external stimulation. This also represents a “concentrated mind”. A “liberated mind” is free from any experience of craving and clinging, thereby providing a direct experience of non-duality and the absence of a discernable, separate self.

Regarding the section beginning with “In this way he abides contemplating mind as mind internally…”, there is an awareness of the transient nature of the mind, as different mental processes emerge into awareness and dissipate. This section is repeated during the Satipatthana Sutta to emphasize the conditional and impersonal nature of whatever function is explored in that part of the Sutta. The goal of the practice is to use the stability of attention provided by samadhi/passadhi to more readily observe this process.

The Third Foundation provides the platform for observing mindfully the elements of the Fourth Foundation, Dhammanupassana, Mindfulness of Mind-Objects, the topic of future talks.