



Strive for Wholesome States of Mind to Arise

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1/16/2019

We have addressed dealing with preventing the arising of unwholesome states of mind and overcoming unwholesome states which have arisen. How do we deal with wholesome states of mind?

Bhante Gunaratana notes: "Most people have a tremendous amount of work to do before they can hope to achieve enlightenment. Overcoming the hindrances and suppressing the fetters (other hindrances) is a necessary first step. But even when your efforts at temporarily overcoming negative states of mind have been successful, the mind remains vulnerable. It may sink back down into painful, obstructive states, like an airplane descending into clouds. Once you have temporarily cleared the mind of all unwholesome states, you must use Skillful Effort to gladden, uplift, and energize the mind in order to make progress.

When an unwholesome state has been overcome, the mind goes into a neutral state. But it does not stay neutral for long. It's much like the transmission on a car. You've got reverse gear, neutral, and drive. You cannot go directly from reverse to drive without passing through neutral. From the neutral position, the gears can shift in either direction. Similarly, the mind cannot shift directly from wholesome to unwholesome states or back; it must go through a neutral state in between.

You can use this interval of neutrality to cultivate positive states of mind. Let's say you are sitting in meditation, and a negative state of mind arises. Your mindfulness clicks in, and you recognize the unwholesome state. You overcome it, perhaps by seeing the danger in it, and return to the breath. Since the breath is a neutral object, your mind remains neutral as you watch it. But soon your mindfulness lapses, and another painful state of mind arises. Again, mindfulness snaps to attention. You overcome the unwholesome state of mind and return to the breath with a neutral state of mind. This sequence happens again and again.

Finally, you say to yourself, "This is ridiculous!" Mindfulness makes you aware that you need to stop this pattern of repetitive negativity. As you pay attention, you begin to see the sequence of your mental activity. You realize that rather than allowing negativity an opening in which it can take hold, you must take advantage of the time when the mind is neutral to arouse a wholesome state of mind. You go back to the breath and relax. You take a few deep breaths and then begin to cultivate a wholesome state of mind."¹

What is a wholesome state of mind? According to Bhante G., It is a good mental environment set up by a skillful choice in this moment creates happiness in the next moment.² In other words, we can choose to set up wholesome states of mind. The happiness that results is not a result of unskillful clinging to

sensual pleasures; it is rather **uncaused** joy or the joy of **non-attachment** to any mundane thing. With practice, this feeling of happiness can grow. “With billions of fairly pure moments, we experience a second of happiness. With good mental habits developing, second by second, these seconds eventually add up to make longer moments of happiness. Our lives are created out of these tiny little choices, billions of them happening in just seconds.”³

There are many ways to set up wholesome states of mind:

- **Remembrance:** Remember any skillful act (good deeds) that you have done in the past and the pleasant (positive) states of mind that went with that action. Use that memory to encourage positive feeling to arise.
- **Past successes:** Recall your past successes in battling greed, hatred, or delusion. Remember how good you felt and how you became peaceful.
- **Loving-Kindness:** Figure out for yourself what actions you can apply to bring up wholesome states of mind that will give you peace and happiness. “For example, while washing dishes you can cultivate thoughts of loving-friendliness for those who will use the dishes.
- **Communication:** When starting a conversation, you can stay on your toes by being mindful of possible results of positive or negative speech. This is called a “well-started” conversation. By relaxing and bringing every ounce of patience, loving-friendliness, compassion, and insight into the conversation, you make it go more smoothly, benefiting yourself as well as others.”⁴
- **Intention:** Know your own unskillful tendencies and be mindful of the unskillful outcomes if you are not prepared. For example, “When a challenging situation arises, such as a visit from an irritating executive of your company, you can remind yourself of possible pleasant or unpleasant outcomes of your actions. Then you make a determination to remain relaxed and filled with loving-friendliness. If the executive says or does something annoying, you get to enjoy your pleasant state of mind instead of engaging in a painful display of anger.”⁵
- **Connection:** In Love 2.0, Barbara Fredrickson notes that making positive connections is good for you. This connection consists of three stages, all of which Fredrickson calls positivity resonance:
 - Sharing of one or more positive emotions between you and another living being
 - A synchrony between you and the other’s biochemistry and behaviors
 - A reflected motive to invest in each other’s well-being that brings mutual care.

Making these positive connections every day has positive benefits. “Everyday micro-moments of positivity resonance add up and ultimately transform your life for the better. You become healthier, happier, and more socially integrated. Your wisdom and resilience grow as well. Having more resources like these in turn equips you to experience micro-moments of love more readily and more often, with further broaden-and-build benefits. Your body, as biology has it, energizes and sustains this upward spiral. The unseen and heretofore unsung biology of love affects everything you feel, think, do, and become.”⁶

In summary, “It’s a self-taught skill. The more we deliberately bring up enjoyable states of mind, the more interesting it becomes, and the better we get at it. Every day, every moment, we can cultivate unbounded loving-friendliness, sympathetic joy, deep compassion, and profound equanimity. These four

wholesome qualities bring the mind into such a wonderful, high feeling that they are called “divine abidings.” Someone who knows how to bring them up can enjoy heaven on earth anytime.”⁷

¹ Gunaratana, Bhante, Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Buddha’s Path p. 178-9

² Gunaratana, Bhante, Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Buddha’s Path p. 149

³ Gunaratana, Bhante, Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Buddha’s Path p. 149

⁴ Gunaratana, Bhante, Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Buddha’s Path p. 181

⁵ Gunaratana, Bhante, Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Buddha’s Path p. 181

⁶ Fredrickson, Barbara. Love 2.0: Finding Love and Happiness in Moments of Connection p. 60

⁷ Gunaratana, Bhante, Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Buddha’s Path p. 180-181