

THE CLEAR SKY OF BEING

CHAPTER 11

The problem most of us encounter when we attempt to bring more happiness into our lives is that we often change our minds about the source of that contentment. In the moment we believe we know what will make us happy. Generally we are quite sure it isn't what is happening right now in our lives, whatever that may be. We seem to change our minds about what brings us peace and satisfaction. Therefore we seem to spend a great deal of our time in discontent. We may notice brief experiences of feeling happy or lighthearted. In moments of content, we rarely pay attention to the reasons these feelings are surfacing. In fact, some feelings of happiness occur when we think about something we want or the absence of situations we find uncomfortable or stressful.

*one of the keys to awareness is to
ask yourself
"is it happening now?"*

Sometimes we may find ourselves thinking, "if only I had a better paying job, or a home of my own, or a supportive partner, I would feel happy." Our sense of happiness is framed by desire and loss in the same moment. We don't have what we want, so we are unhappy. We are living in the gap between desire and aversion. Many people I have counseled believe they are depressed because when they achieve their desires, it doesn't appear to bring them the lasting happiness for which they longed. For example, a better paying job might be accompanied by a toxic work environment. We might purchase the home of our dreams and discover we are still quite unhappy. We may become involved in a relationship, then discover someone else cannot create happiness for us. We can only share the happiness we have already cultivated within ourselves. If we have not invested time in knowing our own minds deeply, we won't know which actions and attitudes will bring us authentic happiness and well-being.

If you find yourself vacillating back and forth, struggling with happiness and longing, you are living in the gap between what you have and what you want. This gap can be the seat of great suffering. Illness, financial distress, loss, trauma, or oppression are forms of emotional and physical pain. Our beliefs and perceptions about these situations contribute to our experience of suffering. We may not believe there is much we can do to change the conditions of our pain and suffering.

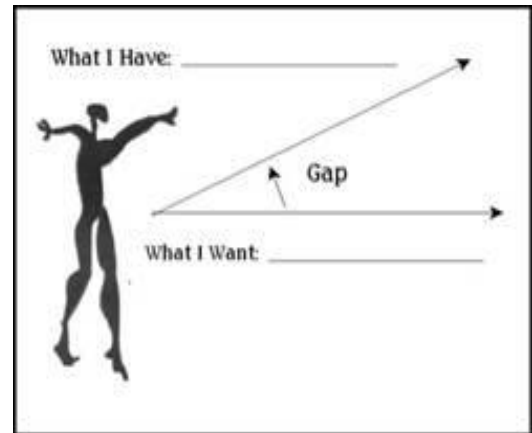
Our life experiences color our assessments of what we believe is possible or not possible for us to achieve, thereby potentially preventing us from taking necessary actions to change painful situations. There is a major difference between pain and suffering. Symptoms of emotional or physical pain are sensations held within the body. Suffering is the mind's interpretation of that pain. This is a very big distinction.

Developing conscious awareness of the distinctions between pain and suffering prevents needless distress. This can be better understood using a psychological model of the mind. What thoughts and assessments actually make their way into our conscious minds, according to this model, is dependent on our life experiences, automatic reactions to those events over time, and memories, drives and interests beneath our conscious awareness.

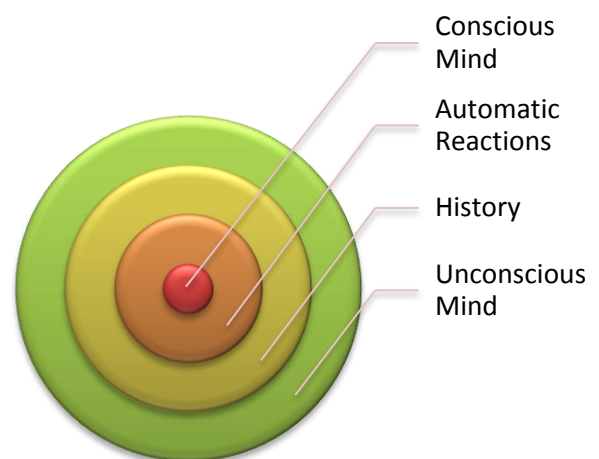
For example, a person who has experienced wealth and privilege may come to believe they are entitled to a certain standard of living. A different person whose life experience includes a great amount of struggle and disappointment, may come to believe they need to work extremely hard to earn their standard of living. Faced with loss, they may both express anger and frustration, yet the types of thoughts they experience could be quite different. Both people would probably say they are suffering. Physical and emotional pain can be measured but degrees of suffering are relative to the person who is encountering it.

One's interpretation of suffering and what would alleviate that suffering is conditional upon one's history, mood states, beliefs and thought patterns. Therapeutic interventions are based on finding ways to alter these apparent contortions of the mind. This can keep one quite busy in therapy. It is difficult to alter the contents of our unconscious

minds and we cannot change our histories. Mind body medicine can help us change our automatic reactions to those life experiences and cognitive behavioral therapy can help us reframe negative thoughts. We may consciously understand what bothers us, yet we may lack awareness into the



A Psychological Model of the Mind



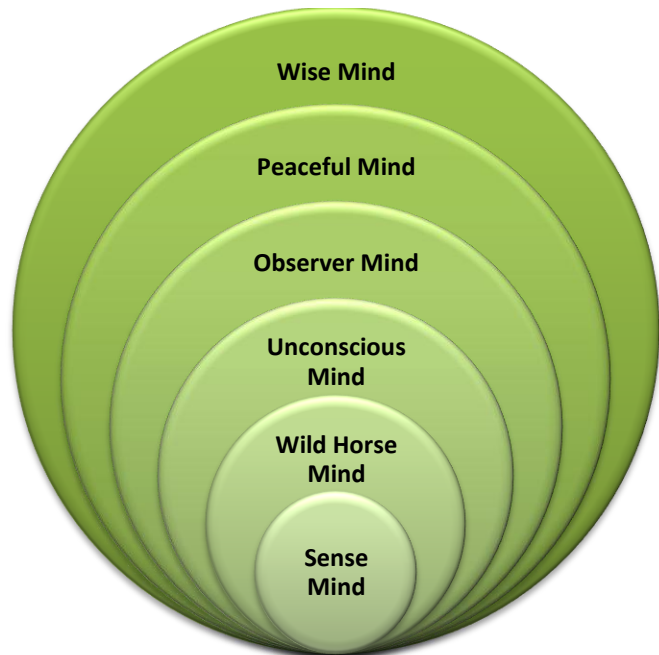
actual nature of our suffering. You can see from the psychological model, the greater part of one's "mind" is not available for change.

My experience with psychotherapy, biofeedback and meditation has shown me that we actually have many minds. I don't mean that we have the same mind that changes from moment to moment as many of us have been led to believe. We have many minds and we keep swapping them out from moment to moment. We are not skilled in keeping them straight. In fact, we're not really sure which one we are thinking with most of the time. This can contribute to our experience of suffering and distress.

A meditation model of the mind helps us understand this aspect of human nature. Our consciousness receives information from our senses in the forms of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch. The sense mind records these pure sensory experiences as they occur. The Sense Mind is completely immersed in the present moment. It does not analyze, label or compare. Unless we are deeply asleep, it continually reports sensory experiences. It does not tune anything out and it does not value one sense experience over another. The Sense Mind is involved entirely on what is happening right now.

Thoughts have the ability to cloud our capacity to have a clear mind. Our untrained minds focus our attention on these thoughts as they arise. We would like to have clarity, peace, and calmness in our lives, but our minds are like untamed, wild horses leaping at the bit, dashing down the road and running away with us. When your thoughts seem to chatter incessantly, you have "Wild Horse Mind." Your mind, like a wild and unruly horse is untamed and unwilling to be focused on awareness. Your runaway thoughts can take you to a state of anxiety, confusion, fear, agitation, frustration and even aggression. You may feel unhappy and be quite unaware it is your very own thoughts that are promoting your suffering.

A Meditation Model of the Mind



The Wild Horse Mind is continually analyzing and labeling experiences and it does not differentiate between what is occurring presently, what has happened in the past and what might happen in the future. We hear a sound and our Wild Horse Mind immediately compares this sound to its storehouse of previous experiences; motorcycle backfire, bird, car horn, familiar voice. It is continually labeling our experiences. It drifts away from the present moment and can overshadow the sense mind by “tuning out” what is presently occurring. It is continually being triggered by both by sensory information and any thoughts or emotions emerging from the Unconscious Mind.

Our thoughts can cause us nearly as much stress as actual events and circumstances. So, just how do we let go of these troublesome thoughts? How does one actually stop participating with thoughts? These concerns seem to plague most people’s attempts to meditate. In fact we are even more disturbed by our thoughts of being disturbed!

Several years ago, my niece traveled to Southeast Asia. She traveled with a backpack, a cell phone and a good friend. While taking a boat ride on a river in Cambodia, she snapped beautiful photographs. She felt this was in one the loveliest and most serene places on earth. She casually mentioned her world view to a woman standing next to her by the riverboat railing.



The woman responded, “Oh, you wouldn’t have said that last week. There were river boat pirates hiding behind that rock and attacked this very boat, stealing everyone’s money and jewelry!” My niece spent the rest of the boat trip terrified that river boat pirates would attack, stealing her money and credit cards. On that day the river boat pirates were elsewhere, but my niece was unable to enjoy any part of a beautiful world she now viewed as dangerous and unpredictable.

When our histories or assessments cause us to view the world as jagged, broken, disturbing or annoying we are influencing what actions we will or will not take. In fact we cannot see it in any other way but broken and disturbing. We tend to live in a state of perpetual “*what if.*” The first step in alleviating this distress is to be willing to be present to the experiences that you are actually having and observing “*what is.*” Then you can begin to tame your Wild Horse Mind.

The Unconscious Mind is a grand storehouse of our histories, beliefs, experiences, likes and dislikes. It randomly releases thoughts and feelings, the majority of which are habitual and repetitive. The Unconscious Mind also retains experiences it does not release, thereby influencing

one's motivations and actions behind the scenes. The mere occurrence of a thought or emotion is not an indication of its accuracy, yet our Wild Horse Minds may keep spinning them around until we believe them to be worth our focused attention.

A great deal of stress and suffering in our lives is due to the strong habit of paying attention to thoughts and mood states that are reoccurring, without ever questioning the ways in which our minds keep overplaying these disturbances. Our conscious mind is being continually bombarded by sensory information, labeling, the appearance of random thoughts, and pervasive familiar moods, over and over again. We may complain of chattering thoughts and uncomfortable emotions, such as anxiety or sadness, while remaining completely unaware of our contribution to our own suffering.

The Unconscious Mind greatly influences our ability to assess situations and to determine courses of action or inaction. We are continually being triggered to habitual thoughts and moods that may be

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quite irrelevant to our current circumstances. For example, during moments of duress we may find we are not being able to think strategically. We may experience indecisiveness or find ourselves quick to react believing we are being quite logical and organized only to regret our reactions later. What you are thinking about at any given moment is usually a blend of your many minds. You may think these disturbing or anxious thoughts are the product of awareness simply because you are noticing them. As you learned in a previous chapter, from the viewpoint of meditation, conscious thoughts are not awareness. Awareness is the part of you (another one of those minds) that is noticing you are "having thoughts." We call this part of you, your "Observer Mind."

The Observer Mind helps us cultivate awareness, cutting through unreliable influences from the Unconscious Mind. The Observer Mind notices the thoughts that are rising in your consciousness and labels them as simply "thoughts." This inner part of you is quite aware that thoughts are merely concepts or beliefs and are not necessarily an accurate assessment of what is really happening in the moment.

For example, if you are a passenger riding in a car, staring out the window at the scenery flowing by while having thoughts, you aren't paying attention to the view. You may begin participating with those thoughts and become quite worked up over some event that recently occurred in your workplace or personal life. Your body is paying attention to those thoughts and

your shoulder muscles may begin to tense up. Before you know it your heart rate is climbing and you may begin to feel annoyed or encounter some other sensation that is quite uncomfortable.

Your Observer Mind, of which you are now no longer aware, is noticing “here we go again.” Instead of focusing on “what is” so you can participate with the beautiful scenery of the mountains (or bay or forests) you are focusing on “what if’s” and things that are not actually happening. Your Wild Horse Mind has taken over again.

From the perspective of meditation, your mind actually has two natures. Mind in motion and mind in stillness. Thoughts only occur in a mind that is in motion and no thoughts can occur in a mind in stillness. In order to find that stillness, it appears a lot of motion needs to be churned up. In order to notice stillness, there must be a contrast with motion. It turns out we have a lot of thoughts in our minds, an infinity of thoughts it seems. Some of these thoughts are so repetitive they appear to fill up a big reservoir in our minds. When they show up, and there is nothing actually happening at the moment, they are actually “on their way out.” You are clearing out the reservoir so you can become quite still. So very still that you could actually participate with what is really going on. In the case of the car ride you would be able to enjoy the beauty of the day without a care in your mind, because nothing disturbing is actually happening.

When you have a trained mind, you are able to become aware of your “many minds.” You can harness your awareness and can shift more purposely into whichever mind you want and generally when you choose. Meditation helps develop awareness of the capabilities of your Observer Mind. When we notice our thoughts as simply thoughts, we begin to understand we do not have to participate with them. The more we practice meditation, the more mindful we can become and the more focus we can bring to what is actually happening right now. Your Observer Mind helps close the gap in the experience of your suffering.

When you are compassionate toward yourself and toward others and are focused on tranquility you have a Peaceful Mind. A peaceful mind is able to compassionately experience one’s own distress and the distress of others compassionately by not taking projections, demands and expectations as a personal judgment against oneself. Our peacefulness is continually being

Just as the vapor that, arising from earth, becomes clouds and dissolves into the expanse of space, not going anywhere else and yet not continuing to abide anywhere, in the same way the agitation of the thoughts that arise from the mind and within the mind is calmed the instant you see the mind’s nature.

Tilopa,

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challenged with all sorts of disturbances. From time to time we think we are doing quite well letting go of our extraneous wild horse thoughts, then another opportunity shows up to hone our skills. The clue is this: we are bound to lose our awareness when we find ourselves participating with our thoughts. Our reality check is to ask ourselves in the moment “is it happening now?” If it is, participate, if not: it’s time to hone your awareness skills again.

What would it be like to let thoughts pass through our minds as they surface? How much serenity and peace would we have if our awareness was not distracted by meaningless thoughts? Most of us would not prefer to be thoughtless, in the sense of behaving in an inconsiderate manner. Yet allowing thoughts to pass through our minds without feeling attached to their content, without participating with them, can be a form of beneficial thoughtlessness.

When we allow ourselves to dwell in these thoughtless moments, our minds become quite still. In fact all of those minds of ours quiet down and we enter a pristine awareness. This awareness is framed by sensations in our bodies from which feelings of peacefulness and tranquility begin to emerge. We can now see tranquility in a different way.

*The intrinsic nature of the
human mind is wisdom*

As you develop the capacity to enter stillness and silence in your meditation practice, you begin to notice more possibilities and opportunities in your day to day life. It’s as if you are becoming more present and aware of your daily experiences. You can begin to bring more energy, purpose, and attention to all the facets of your life. This clarity in your mind helps you feel more vibrant, open, energetic, resourceful and happy. We do not have to find clarity for it is continually present in the backdrop of our mind. Cultivating awareness enables you to notice its presence.

The intrinsic nature of the human mind is wisdom. This perennial wisdom is embedded in the DNA structure of every human being. It is an inherent wisdom that is not dependent on intellectual knowledge. Clarity is the inner vision that emerges from this Wise Mind. When we have access to this inner wisdom we find we already know the right actions to take, the right way to behave, and the right relationships to sustain. Compassion begins to direct all of our motivations, regardless of the circumstances in which one finds oneself.

Our ability to see and acknowledge this aspect of our mind is often clouded. Lacking awareness, we wander in the confusion and distraction of our Wild Horse Minds. Yet, we do not need to search for our Wise Mind, for it is already there. We do not need to transcend our Wild

Horse Minds; we merely need to tap into the wisdom that is already present and allow that clarity to direct the path of our actions. We simply need to develop sufficient awareness to detect its enduring presence. The continued practice of meditation hones the quality of our awareness.

Our problem lies in our habitual pattern of bouncing back and forth between our Wild Horse and Unconscious Minds, constantly being retriggered to thoughts and emotions we have had before. Cultivating our Observer Mind breaks these habitual patterns and gives rise to seeing tranquility and experiencing clarity.

One's Wise Mind is like the perpetual clear sky illuminated by the clarity and brightness of the sun. The presence of clouds darkens our view, like our Wild Horse Minds, preventing us from seeing the clarity that is always there. This darkened, clouded view keeps us locked into a self-destructive pattern bolstered by an inaccurate perception. On a dark and cloudy day, all things appear darkened.

Meditation helps one see through the clouds long enough to observe the nature of this reality. It is like traveling in a jet through a wispy cloud bank and emerging into the startlingly clear, blue sky of the upper atmosphere. We are suddenly surrounded by a clear, blue sky and cannot even see the earth beneath us. There is nothing to disturb us.

Momentarily, in meditation, we see our true nature reflected in the clear sky of our mind. We are completely at peace, undisturbed, pristinely aware of awareness itself. This is the true ground of our being.

In order to become aware of deep abiding peace and the clarity of our wisdom, we need to learn how to tame our Wild Horse Mind. We must first cultivate the mindfulness, so we can see beyond the suffering we are creating in our own lives. We need to hone our awareness of what is happening "right now."

Begin with the following guided meditation entitled "Taming the Wild Horse Mind" that is described in the sidebar. This is best conducted when sitting in meditation by an open window or in an environment where there is some background noise. The background noise serves as intentional "mind chatter," enabling us to develop new tools of mindfulness. You may wish to listen to this meditation several times before beginning the Ten Minute Chime Meditation practice on your own.

The Ten Minute Chime Meditation begins and ends with chimes which serve as a fundamental sound to teach you the distinction between consciousness and awareness. When meditating on your own, notice any tendencies to label the sounds you are hearing or becoming

distracted by having thoughts about them. Notice if you become aware that some sounds feel pleasant and desirable while others feel undesirable or neutral. If you notice you are labeling the sounds or have an emotional attachment to them, gently bring your focused attention back to the sound that is presently occurring.

All sounds actually have “two elements” to them, the experience of the sound from the Sense Mind and the experience of the sound from the Wild Horse Mind. When you are “hearing the sound” and simultaneously “identifying and labeling,” you are in the Wild Horse Mind. When you simply hear the sound as sound, only noticing its beginning, endurance, and dissolving away, you are in the Sense Mind.

Pure experience originates in the ground of the Sense Mind. When you have achieved in taming your Wild Horse Mind, you only hear sound as sound and you have tapped into your Observer Mind. Soon you will notice the spaces, or silences, between sounds without the emergence of thoughts or habitual emotions. You will be honing your awareness of “what is happening right now.”

Taming the Wild Horse Mind

1. *Sit comfortably, upright in a chair.*
2. *Begin with diaphragmatic Breathing*
3. *Listen to the guided meditation*
4. *Begin to notice sounds in your environmental that are rising*
5. *Begin to notice sounds that persist*
6. *Begin to notice sounds as they dissolve away*
7. *Notice any tendencies to identify these sounds*
8. *Notice any tendencies to label these sounds as pleasurable, unpleasurable, or indifferent*

Ten Minute Meditation Practice

Practice listening to sounds on your own, pay attention to your tendencies to label or identify these sounds

Notice the sound of the chime beginning and ending the meditation

What do you notice about the chime sound?

Mindstream Practice Ten:

[*Taming the Wild Horse Mind*](#)

Mindstream Practice Eleven:

[*Ten Minute Chime Practice*](#)

