



The Committee of the Mind, by Thanissaro Bhikku

There are many different ideas of “you” in your mind, each with its own agenda. Each of these “you’s” is a member of the committee

of the mind. This is why the mind is less like a single mind and more like an unruly throng of people: lots of different voices, with lots of different opinions about what you should do. Some members of the committee are open and honest about the assumptions underlying their central desires. Others are more obscure and devious. This is because each committee member is like a politician, with its own supporters and strategies for satisfying their desires. [...]

One of the purposes of meditation is to bring these dealings out into the open, so that you can bring more order to the committee—so that your desires for happiness work less at cross purposes, and more in harmony as you realize that they don’t always have to be in conflict. Thinking of these desires as a committee also helps you realize that when the practice of meditation goes against some of your desires, it doesn’t go against all of your desires. You’re not being starved. You don’t have to identify with the desires being thwarted through meditation, because you have other, more skillful desires to identify with. The choice is yours. You can also use the more skillful members of the committee to train the less skillful ones so that they stop sabotaging your efforts to find a genuine happiness. Always remember that genuine happiness is possible, and the mind can train itself to find that happiness. [!]

There are many dimensions to the mind, dimensions often obscured by the squabbling of the committee members and their fixation with fleeting forms of happiness. One of those dimensions is totally unconditioned. In other words, it’s not dependent on conditions at all. It’s not affected by space or time. It’s an experience of total, unalloyed freedom and happiness. This is because it’s free from hunger and from the need to feed. But even though this dimension is unconditioned, it can be attained by changing the conditions in the mind: developing the skillful members of the committee so that your choices become more and more conducive to genuine happiness. [!]

You can think of the unconditioned dimension as like the fresh water in salt water. The ordinary mind is like salt water, which makes you sick when you drink it. If you simply let the salt water sit still, the fresh water won’t separate out on its own. You have to make an effort to distil it. The act of distilling doesn’t create fresh water. It simply brings out the fresh water already there, providing you with all the nourishment you need to quench your thirst.

-- Thanissaro Bhikku

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