

Overview of Workshop 5: Citta

- Review of the fourth week
- Citta: thoughts, emotions and impulses
- Cultivating awareness of citta – the need for “foundations”
- Don’t believe everything you think! “Cognitive Defusion”
- Practice for the fifth week

Review of the Fourth Week

Step 1: What were the key points we covered in the fourth workshop?

Step 2: What worked well for you in the fourth week? What did you learn?



We have luxury...but do we have happiness?

Relative to other times in history and other places in the world, we are incredibly fortunate, we have incredible luxury.

Think of food and shelter: few of us in the west today have to worry about food or shelter. But for some people, that's their main concern.

Think of physical safety: few of us in the west today have personal experience of war. The story is very different in other parts of the world, and it was very different here only a few decades ago.

Think of food: In Tudor times, the Princess of Wales found it very hard to obtain a salad.

Think of music: before the 20th Century, to hear your choice of music you would have had to hire musicians to come and play, which would take the sort of time and money only available to the wealthiest citizens. But today, we can all hear whatever we want, whenever we want, wherever we go.

Think of communication: most of us can now communicate with anyone we want to, at any time, more-or-less instantly.

And yet....

Depression is growing. According to one study, the incidence of depression in pupils and students was 6 times higher in 2007 compared to 1938. The World Health Organisation predicts that it will be the 2nd largest disease burden in the world by 2020.

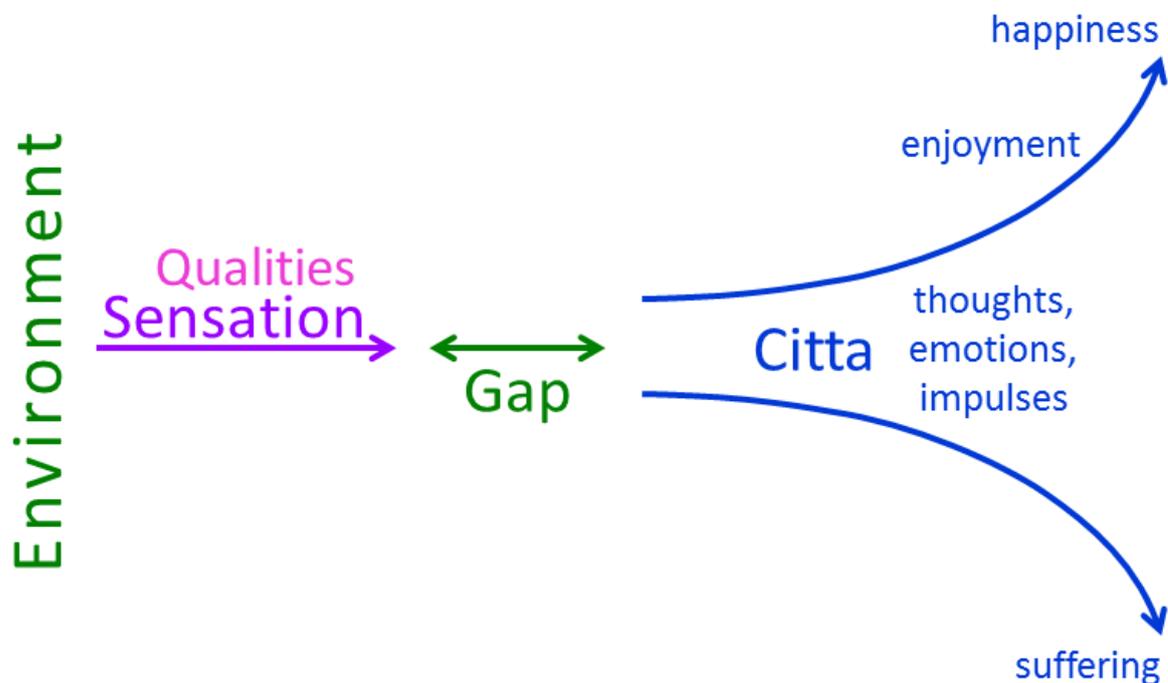
There seems to be an increase in interpersonal conflict and disharmony – polls suggest 80% of road users in the UK witness road rage (the highest rate in the world), 64% of office workers have experience office rage, 71% of internet users suffer "internet rage," and 25% of families have frequent and heated rows about who controls the TV.

We seem to be suffering from "Affluenza" – a term coined by Oliver James and defined as "a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety, and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more." There's certainly evidence that as people become more materialistic, their well-being decreases.

Looking at this whole picture, it's never been clearer that suffering is being generated by our own minds.



Cultivating Awareness of Citta



So, if the mind creates suffering, what can we do about that?

Foundations

Everything we've done on the course so far will help:

- **Environment:** Fine-tuning our environment so it's tidier and more aesthetic, we're getting better quality input, in a more appropriate quantity, and with our tasks and responsibilities well-managed.
- **Sensations and their Qualities:** Paying attention to sensations and their qualities helps to open up a gap – so we have more chance of choosing our response.
- **Appreciative awareness,** raising the “happiness set-point.”

Noticing Citta

What else can we do? Can we influence the direction of our minds, so we head less towards suffering and more towards enjoyment, freedom and happiness?

Yes, we can influence the direction – but it's not easy and takes careful setting up of conditions.

Before we can start to influence the direction of our mind, we need to become more fully aware of what's happening already. We need to become aware of our citta: thoughts, emotions and impulses.

(Next week's topic is making intelligent choices about which cittas to encourage and which to allow to fade away. But for now, it's a big enough challenge enough to notice what's happening.)

The Challenge of Paying Attention to Citta

Noticing what's happening in the mind is harder than it sounds. The mind is very quick to make links and associations – as soon as a thought arises about dinner, a whole flood of further thoughts rush in, about what you might have, who's going to make it, what might happen



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afterwards, and so on. This is all natural – as is the tendency to get caught up in the train of thought. So we need ways to make it easier to notice the contents of mind - we'll consider two:

1. Making sure your awareness is stronger than the citta, and
2. A technique called “Cognitive Defusion,” summarised as “Don’t Believe Everything You Think”

1. Awareness that’s Stronger than Citta

If you have good strong awareness of sensations and their qualities, this will help. Body awareness is particularly helpful. This awareness creates a context, which gives you more chance of becoming aware of citta before getting caught up with it. You’ll probably also get more magic moments: you’ll “wake up to experience” more often, and so have more opportunities to return to awareness.

2. Don’t Believe Everything You Think!

Julio came to me for coaching because he was getting extremely stressed about his MBA projects. He’d often get completely stuck, making no progress for days on end even as the deadline loomed.

As he described what was happening, he told me about the thoughts in his mind at the time:

- “I’m never going to get this done in time”
- “I can’t do this”
- “I’m no good at this subject”
- “I’ll never get my MBA”

With thoughts like that in his head, no wonder he was stressed! But what was worse – he was believing those thoughts. When he believed these thoughts, it seemed hopeless to even try, and he felt he had to look elsewhere to get satisfaction and feel OK about himself.

But he also told me about a set of presentations he and his fellow students had given to their tutors. He told me how the other students had all got very critical feedback, “been ripped to shreds” as he put it. He told me how almost all the feedback he’d been given was encouraging. He couldn’t think of a single fellow student who’d got better feedback than him.

So was it true that he was no good at his subject, that he couldn’t do the assignments, etc etc? Of course not! (In fact, Julio has extremely high standards, and wasn’t relating to those standards in the best way – he needed a dose of appreciative awareness. But that’s a slightly different story).

So Julio was believing thoughts that simply didn’t hold up in the clear light of day. His example is extreme – but we all have thoughts arising in our minds, and they’re not all true.

Even if they are true, are they helpful? “I’m never going to get this done in time” might well have been true for Julio, given his frame of mind at the time – but it wasn’t the most helpful thought to focus on. He would have been better off just letting it go and focusing on making



progress. (Or even to ask himself “How can I get this done in time?” or “What do I have to do differently?” Questions like this can have a very powerful effect, re-orienting the mind towards a more constructive response).

The main learning here is that we don't have to believe every thought that arises in our minds. They may not be helpful, they may not be true.

Observing Mind vs. Thinking Mind

“Don't believe everything you think” is a great slogan – but how do you do it? For this to make sense we need to step back and consider the “Observing Mind” and “Thinking Mind.”

All through this course we have been building up the skill of noticing our experience – noticing what we can see, hear, taste, touch and smell through our senses. We've been learning to observe our experience rather than think about it. Or to put it another way, we've been learning to dwell in the “Observing Mind” rather than the “Thinking Mind.”

We tend to perceive things differently from these two Minds. In the Thinking Mind, when we look around a room we perceive “table”, “chair”, “John”, window, lamp etc – in other words, we perceive labels. Those labels come from our Thinking Mind, and they're very useful to help us navigate the world in an everyday way.

From the “Observing Mind” we perceive things differently. When we look around the room from the Observing Mind, we do so without interpretation and labelling – we simply notice what's there, sensations and qualities. We notice shape, colour, light, shade, texture, so on.

Cognitive Defusion

Now here's the trick.

You might be surprised to learn that you can dwell in the Observing Mind and pay attention to the Thinking Mind. You can observe thoughts, emotions and impulses as they arise, hang around and fade away.

This skill is called “Cognitive Defusion.” Normally the Observing Mind and the Thinking Mind are “fused” together – we're not observing our thoughts, we're identifying with them, thinking that “I am thinking this thought.” But when we observe our Thinking Mind from our Observing Mind we have “defused” the two minds, and this gives us a tremendous boost in flexibility.

Defusion enables us stop believing everything we think, unquestioningly. It enables us to step back from thoughts and evaluate them. We can decide if they are helpful or unhelpful. If we decide they're helpful, we can follow them through. If we decide they are unhelpful, we can allow them to pass away in their own time, no harm done.

Let's try it out...



Defusing from Thoughts

Write down 3 thoughts.

1. The first thought will be of the form "I appreciate X". e.g. "I appreciate the lovely lunch I had today", "I appreciate Sandra giving me plenty of notice about the need to reschedule the meeting" etc etc
2. The second thought is of the form "Y shouldn't Z." e.g. "He shouldn't have spoken to me like that", "People shouldn't drive in the outside lane when they're not overtaking", "They shouldn't leave the kitchen in such a mess" etc etc.
3. The third thought is the same as the second, except it starts with "I'm having the thought that....". For example, "I'm having the thought that people shouldn't drive in the outside lane when they're not overtaking."

Write your thoughts here:

1. I appreciate _____

2. _____ shouldn't _____

3. I'm having the thought that _____ shouldn't _____

When you've written down your three thoughts, start cultivating a general sense of body awareness, especially in your chest and belly.

When I say so,

- Notice how you're feeling.
- Think thought #1 (clearly vocalise it in your own mind)
- Notice any subtle, or not so subtle, changes in how you're feeling.

Repeat with thoughts #2 and #3. (At the end, you might like to think thought #1 again!)

What did you notice about the different effects of the different types of thought?



Citta Grid

The word “Citta” comes from Sanskrit, and doesn’t really have an equivalent in English. It includes pretty much anything that arises in your heart or mind – in particular thoughts, emotions, and impulses.

It’s a particularly valuable word because it acknowledges the fact that our thoughts, emotions and actions are intimately connected.

For example, anxiety is created by worrying about the future – and an anxious mood will promote more anxious thoughts, reinforcing the state of mind. It’s hard to be angry with someone if you can’t remember what they did that upset you! And it’s easier to forgive if you learn that they did what they did with the best of intentions, and they didn’t mean to cause harm.

Cittas, whether they are thoughts, emotions or impulses, all have an effect on the mind and on the future – especially when they are carried through into action. So it’s really important to be aware of them – notice them arising, changing and passing away. The more clearly we observe them, the less power they have over us, the more we can take control of our own destinies.

Thoughts can be in the form of words “spoken” in your mind, for example,

“I wonder what I’ll do after this”

“It’s quiet in here”

“What’s that noise out there?”

Etc etc

Thoughts also include images coming up in your mind. For example, if I ask you what colour your front door is, you’ll probably have some kind of image of your front door come to mind, so you can see the colour and answer the question. (For some people this happens so quickly they don’t see the image, but they know the answer to the question).

Emotions includes anything you would normally call an emotion! Happiness, sadness, anger, love, rage, contentment,..... and so on.

Moods can also be included in this category. They’re like emotions that hang around – sometimes for so long that they get taken for granted, but they’re still colouring experience, having an effect on how we perceive the world and how we respond to it.

Urges or impulses form another category – any desire to act. These come into particularly sharp relief when we try to sit still to meditate!

Exercise – the Citta Grid

On the following page you’ll find a grid, with columns for Thoughts, Emotions and Impulses. Take 5 minutes and note down the different Cittas that come into your mind, putting them in the relevant column. (By the way, you’ll find a lot of Cittas fit in more than one column – that’s OK, it’s in their nature. You can either write them in the column that seems most applicable, or split them up into different aspects in different columns).



Citta Grid

Thoughts	Emotions	Impulses



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This Week's Brief Mindfulness Activities

Mindful Walk – focus on Citta

As you do your mindful “walk” this week, paying particular attention to your responses to things – noticing the thoughts, emotions and impulses that arise in relation to what you encounter on your walk.

3 Gratitudes

How valuable are you finding this? Do you want to continue with it?

Mindful Activity

How is the mindful activity going? What are you noticing? To keep your mind interested, what other sorts of details could you be noticing?

Body Scan – 20 minutes

When is working best for you? Any fine-tuning needed?

Reconnect

Are your “early signs of stress” reminding you to Reconnect? Any fine-tuning needed?

Remember to savour your MAGIC MOMENTS!



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Week 5 Diary

What citta did you notice....?	impulses				
	Emotions				
	Thoughts				
Gratitudes					
Mindful Walk					
Mindful Activity					
Reconnect					
20 minute Body Scan	✓				
	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	



Week 5 Diary

What citta did you notice....?	impulses				
	Emotions				
	Thoughts				
Gratitudes					
Mindful Walk					
Mindful Activity					
Reconnect					
20 minute Body Scan					
	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	

