

Week 6: Cultivating Happiness

- How did you get on with Cittas?
 - Noticing?
 - Defusing?
- Which Cittas lead to Happiness?
- Meditation on positive Cittas
- Outstanding Questions
- Reflection and feedback

Review of Practice with Cittas

How did you get on with awareness of Citta? And how about “defusing”?



What Creates Happiness?

Happiness is a universal desire – yet it's surprisingly elusive. There are lots of views around about what creates happiness. Let's check out a few common ones.

Pleasure?

Does pleasure create happiness? We commonly think that pleasure *is* happiness, but a close examination reveals considerable differences. For example, drug addicts get a lot of pleasure...but they don't seem to be very happy. In fact they seem to spend most of their time simply looking for the next fix.

Basically, pleasure is a transient sensation, dependent on externals; it's not very reliable, and we quickly get used to particular pleasures and need stronger ones. In other words, it's addictive.

Happiness, on the other hand, is a much more dependable state, less dependent on circumstance. But enjoyment, well-being and happiness do take some investment. It's easy to switch on the TV and find a stimulating or mildly entertaining programme – but it takes more effort to seek out something genuinely satisfying. We may even have to get into a quite different frame of mind. For example, when visiting an art gallery I find that if I start with a relaxed half hour in the café, I find it much easier to appreciate the beauty afterwards.

Possessions?

We often seek happiness through possessions. Yet I'm sure you can think of things that once brought you real pleasure, yet now seem quaint, antiquated (and probably broken!). Yesterday's luxury is today's necessity - and tomorrow's relic.

Property does bring refuge and happiness – in the short term. But it comes with anxiety (about losing it), and it won't last forever.

Money?

So does money bring happiness? Yes, and no. It depends and how much and how you use it.

There's a correlation between low GNP and low happiness. There's also a correlation between low salary and low happiness. But once basic needs are met, there's very little subsequent rise in happiness.

One study compared lottery winners to a control group. No significant difference in happiness was found. The only difference found was that the control group derived significantly more pleasure from the simple things in life.

But how money is spent does make a difference to happiness. People who spend more of their money on activities (vs. possessions) are happier. As are people who spend more of their money on others (vs. themselves).



Altruism?

So is altruism the key?

In his book “Before Happiness”, Shawn Achor quotes research about altruistic behaviour at work and its effects:

	Work Isolators People who give least at work	Work Altruists People who give most at work
Get along extremely well with colleagues	20%	>50%
Extremely engaged	5%	50%
Received promotion in the last year	7%	40%

So it seems that even at work, traditionally an environment of great competition, altruists get along better. How much more so in the sphere of human relations?



Try for Yourself

So let's try an experiment – let's evaluate altruism in our own experience.

Remember a time when you acted in a mean or unkind way to someone

- How does that make you feel physically?
Stay with this experience for 45 seconds, then write 3 or 4 words to describe your feelings
- How does that make you feel about yourself?
Stay with this experience for 45 seconds, then write 3 or 4 words to describe your feelings
- How does that make you feel in relation to the world?
Stay with this experience for 45 seconds, then write 3 or 4 words to describe your feelings

Remember a time when you acted in a generous or kind way to someone

- How does that make you feel physically?
Stay with this experience for 45 seconds, then write 3 or 4 words to describe your feelings
- How does that make you feel about yourself?
Stay with this experience for 45 seconds, then write 3 or 4 words to describe your feelings
- How does that make you feel in relation to the world?
Stay with this experience for 45 seconds, then write 3 or 4 words to describe your feelings

What differences do you notice between the effects on you of being mean/unkind vs. generous/kind?

What does that mean for you? Do you want to act on that?



Cultivating the Cittas that lead to Happiness

How to cultivate the cittas that lead to happiness?

Many different cittas are arising in our minds all the time - thoughts, emotions and impulses. Some lead towards happiness, while others lead towards suffering. How can we cultivate the ones that lead towards happiness?

The soundbite is: "Water the flowers, not the weeds!"

There are three stages to this process:

1. Awareness ("What's growing?")
2. Investigation ("Which are flowers?")
3. Energy ("Water them!")

Let's consider each stage in turn

Awareness

This includes pretty much everything we've covered on the course so far!

- Fine tuning our environment
- Paying attention to Sensations (especially in the body) and their Qualities
- Being aware of Cittas as they arise and pass away

This helps open the gap, making it easier to choose between helpful and unhelpful cittas.

Investigation

Sometimes it's obvious what's a flower and what's a weed. If you feel like saying thank you when someone buys you a drink, that's obviously a flower. If you feel like thumping someone, that's obviously a weed.

But sometimes it's not so obvious. I'd like another drink – is it a flower, or is it a weed? I want to give £5000 to charity – flower or weed?

Energy

Having decided which are flowers and which are weeds, we need to "water the flowers, not the weeds." What does that mean in practice?

Essentially, it means giving your attention and energy to the "flowers." Help them to develop and grow, carry them forward into action.

And the weeds? You might be tempted to try to get rid of them. Unfortunately, when you try to argue with thoughts and emotions in your mind, that tends to actually feed them with energy. They fight back! So it's much better just to acknowledge their presence, and let them be. Let them fade away in their own time.



Tips on Distinguishing “Flowers” and “Weeds”

Here are a couple more tips to help you decide if a particular citta (or action) will lead to suffering or happiness:

Engage with Purpose

If you want the deep sense of satisfaction that comes from living your life well, you'll need to engage in activities that you find meaningful. Remember that different people have different values, so don't worry about recognition from others – it's what you value that makes the difference here.

So if a thought is connected with what really matters to you in life, then it's more likely to be a flower (or at least a bud). But if it's concerned only with trivia, or with gaining the approval of others, then it may well be a weed.

This adds to the previous point about distinguishing pleasure and happiness. If you're doing something that's worthwhile, it's going to get difficult at times. So if you really want happiness, you have to be willing to experience some discomfort. I've heard it said that Psychological health comes from stepping outside your comfort zone 7 times a day! (But it's also important to step back in...)

Fortunately, having a sense of purpose and meaning helps with this. If you're going through a difficult time for no reason, it's hard to bear. But it's much easier when it's connected to an important sense of purpose.

Be patient with yourself

Having said all of that, remember that it won't feel natural. What actually creates happiness goes against so much of our conditioning and the culture around us. Most adverts, for example, are essentially saying “if you buy product X you'll be happier.” They're encouraging you to (a) seek out pleasure, (b) without considering what you find most meaningful in life, (c) in a selfish way. Precisely the opposite of what brings happiness!

As a result, most of us are in the habit of believing that selfish pleasure-seeking will bring us happiness. It takes a time and gently persistent effort to change this sort of habitual belief. So be patient with yourself, don't expect to make radical changes overnight.

There are some neat tricks to kick-start the process though. For example, spending money on experiences brings more happiness than spending it on possessions. (Perhaps this is because experiences tend to put us into relationship with others, rather than exciting their envy.)

Deliberate acts of kindness also help. Bizarrely, one act of kindness per day only seems to make a slight difference, whereas 5 acts of kindness on one day per week brings a 40% increase in happiness!



Kindness Meditation

Choose Four Living People, roughly your age

1. Yourself
2. Someone you like (but don't desire)
3. Someone neutral
4. Someone you have a *mild* dislike for

This meditation is in 5 stages – one stage for each of the people above, then a 5th stage for *all* beings!

In each stage, the focus is kindness - imagining that the particular person is happy and well, and feeling what that feels like.

When you have a magic moment, after appreciating the magic, return to this focus of kindness (imagining them happy, and feeling what that feels like).

Please note that there's a lot more to this meditation – it's only possible to get a brief introduction within this course.



Concluding the course

I'd be very grateful if you could leave me some feedback – there's a form at <http://www.briefmindfulness.com/on-line/feedback/>

You might also like to take some notes for yourself and to share with others in the group:

What difference has this course made for you?

What have you been learning and putting into practice that's made that difference?

What 1 thing are you definitely going to keep doing?



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