# **Potentialities of the Developed Mind**

By Venerable Aggacitta Bhikkhu

#### What is Mind?

The English term "mind" can be defined as "that which is responsible for one's thoughts and feelings". Most people would regard "thoughts" as the faculty of reason, the cognitive aspect of the mind—what is happening up in the 'head'; while "feelings" would be associated with non-rational emotions and intuition that are felt in the 'heart' or 'guts'.

From the Buddhist perspective, development of the mind ( $cittabh\bar{a}van\bar{a}$ ) is not so much concerned with sharpening its speculative, intellectual or emotive prowess for worldly advancement, such as in arts, science and technology. Although in some suttas addressed to the laity the Buddha did advise on how to identify and thereafter abandon mental and ethical obstacles to worldly success,<sup>2</sup> the vast majority of his discourses were aimed at cittabhāvanā for the ultimate purpose of purification of the mind leading to liberation from  $sams\bar{a}ra$  (round of birth and death). Often he would summarise his teachings into the threefold training of  $s\bar{\imath}la$  (ethical discipline),  $sam\bar{a}dhi$  (mental concentration) and  $pa\tilde{n}n\bar{a}$  (wisdom)<sup>3</sup>. While these three elements require some degree of rational thinking initially, they culminate in the complete development of the non-rational aspect of the mind.

### Limitations of the Intellect

In his teachings on mental development, the Buddha used simple rational arguments so as to inspire his audience to strive on heedfully. Speculative reasoning and grasping at any views were discouraged and even condemned<sup>4</sup>. As rational thinking is based on concepts formed by language and sensory perceptions, it cannot directly comprehend any reality beyond the range of the five senses. On the contrary, it is trapped by the limits of sensory perception and related concepts built upon past experiences and future projections.

The phenomenal pace of scientific and technological developments within the past few decades bears testimony to what the highly developed intellect can achieve. At the same time, the unprecedented violence wreaked on fellow humans, the irresponsible exploitation of the natural environment and the consequential sufferings borne by all victims clearly indicate that there is a gross imbalance in such a kind of developed mind. In giving priority to the development of the intellect, humanity has unfortunately neglected to nurture the non-rational—emotive, intuitive—aspect of the mind. If only the highly developed intellect was tempered with the sensitivity of positive emotions—such as considerateness, goodwill, benevolence, magnanimity, compassion and understanding; and the sensitivity of intuition—such as empathy, conscience and contentment... Planet Earth would now be a veritable paradise.

<sup>1</sup> WordWeb 5.00 © Anthony Lewis 2007.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Pattakamma Sutta (AN 4:61), Byagghapajja (or Dīghajāņu) Sutta (AN 8:54).

<sup>3</sup> E.g., AN 3:81 – 90.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Paramaṭṭhaka Sutta (Sn 4.5), Māgaṇḍiya Sutta (Sn 4.9).

## **Beyond the Intellect: Powers of the Non-rational Mind**

Meditation traditions throughout the ages in all civilisations have long recognised the need to go beyond sensual pleasures and the intellect in order to access higher levels of truth and more profound aspects of reality. Various systems of spiritual practice have been developed to achieve this goal with varying degrees of success. In the process of pursuing these spiritual practices, aspirants have discovered and realised different powers of the non-rational mind, which can be broadly categorised into three aspects: supernormal, emotive and intuitive.

#### Supernormal Aspect

The Pāli suttas<sup>5</sup> mention a standard list of supernormal powers that can be achieved through the development of mental concentration. After having transcended sensual desires and the intellect, the *yogi* (spiritual practitioner) continues to steady, settle, unify and focus his mind until it becomes refined, malleable and naturally under control. When there is the opportunity, he can direct and train the mind to achieve the following feats:

- •Manifold supernormal powers. He creates multiple replicas of himself. He appears and vanishes. He goes unimpeded through solid masses as if through space. He dives in and out of the earth as if it were water. He walks on water as if it were dry land. Sitting cross-legged he flies through the air. With his hand he touches and strokes even the sun and moon. He exercises influence with his body even as far as the Brahma worlds.
- •Divine ear. He hears both kinds of sounds: divine and human, whether near or far.
- •Mind reading. He knows the minds of other beings.
- •Recollection of past lives. He recollects his manifold past lives in every detail; even through many aeons.
- •Divine eye. He sees beings passing away and re-appearing, and he discerns how they are inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate in accordance with their *kamma* (moral action).

In addition to this standard list, there are also many other supernormal feats mentioned in the Pāli scriptures and in contemporary reports from various traditions—spiritual, contemplative or mystical. To mention just a few...

Sai Baba is famous for appearing simultaneously in different places doing different things; answering devotees' wishes which are not outwardly expressed; making *vibhuti* (sweet powder) appear on his images in posters, photographs, statues, etc.; miraculously curing the sick and so forth.

Swami Rama, in his book *Living with the Himalayan Masters*, relates many instances of supernormal feats he witnessed in the Indian subcontinent.

Seventy-five-year-old Pandita Hambo Lama Dashi-Dorzho Itigilov XII assumed the lotus posture, meditated and ceased to breath in 1927. Before he died, he left a testament asking to be buried as he was, sitting in lotus pose in the cedar box. It was done. The

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Pamsudhovaka Sutta (AN 3:100), from which an abridged, edited extract based on Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu's translation <www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.100.01-10.than.html> follows.

testament also asked other monks to exhume him after several years. This was done in 1955 and in 1973 by Buddhist monks privately.

In 2002 the body was finally exhumed and transferred to Ivolginsky Datsan (a residence of today's Hambo Lama) where it was closely examined by monks, scientists and pathologists. The head of the department of personal identification at the Russian Health Ministry's forensic medicine centre, Professor Viktor Zvyagin, said Hambo Lama's body was no different from the body of a person who had died 12 hours before.

Zvyagin and his colleagues studied tissue samples from the "incorruptible body": hairs fallen from the lama's head, skin flakes, and a sliver of nail. They were compared to the samples of living persons, including those of Professor Zvyagin, and led researchers to the conclusion that the protein structure had not changed and matched that of a living person. The chemical analysis of the body produced stunning results. Scientists could not explain why Itigilov's body contained no or an infinitesimally small amount of chemical elements.

Although this is a unique case, he is not the only "incorruptible" Buddhist. The mummified body of a monk, Vuc Khac Minh, has been sitting in lotus posture in the temple at Duc, 23 kilometres from Hanoi, for 300 years.

Unlike Vuc Khac Minh, however, Itigilov's body has not shrunk and has suffered practically no changes at all. Moreover when the lama's skin was accidentally punctured, a red jelly-like stuff, which had once been his blood, oozed out of the puncture.

This is the *only known and confirmed case of imperishable body* throughout the whole world.

### **Emotive Aspect**

One of the central themes in the Buddhist tradition of mental development is the four divine abodes (*brahmavihārā*): *mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy) and *upekkhā* (equanimity). When these emotive aspects of the mind are fully developed, they bring about great benefits not only to the yogi but to others as well. In particular, their full development can produce rebirth in exalted celestial realms with lifespans up till 500 aeons.<sup>6</sup>

In Mettā Sutta (AN 11:16) the Buddha listed eleven benefits of developing mettā.

One sleeps comfortably (1), wakes up in comfort (2), sees no bad dreams (3), and is dear to human beings (4) and non-human beings (5). Deities protect one (6) and fire, poison and weapons do not affect one (7). One's mind becomes easily concentrated (8). One's facial complexion is serene (9). One dies without confusion (10). If one does not penetrate higher, after death one is bound for the Brahma world (11).

There are numerous cases of miraculous things that happened to people who practised mettā, even though they did not attain very deep states of meditative concentration called *jhānas*. Here is one interesting story.

An account is found in the Vinaya Piṭaka (Mv 6:36) about a prominent personage called Roja, who was Venerable Ānanda's good friend. He was in the crowd that welcomed the Buddha upon his arrival in Kusināra, but he did not do so out of faith;

<sup>6</sup> According to PaṭhamaMettā Sutta (AN 4:125): one aeon for mettā, two for karuṇā, four for muditā and 500 aeons for upekkhā.

rather, he was there because he wanted to avoid a fine of 500 *kahāpaṇas* for failing to do so. When Venerable Ānanda learnt that, he was displeased and reported the matter to the Buddha, beseeching him to make Roja have faith in the DhammaVinaya (Doctrine and Discipline). "That's not hard for the Tathāgata to do," said the Buddha, who then mentally radiated mettā to him, got up and entered his dwelling.

Touched by the Buddha's mettā, Roja went around the monastery like a calf seeking its mother. When he finally found the Buddha, he paid respect to him and sat down at one side. Then the Buddha gave him a gradual discourse, at the end of which he was enlightened. He then said, "It will be good if the venerable ones will accept only *my* robes, alms, lodging and medicine, and not others'."

"Roja," replied the Buddha, "Like yourself, others who are *sekhā* (trainees, i.e. those who have attained any stage of enlightenment below that of an arahant) also have the same wish. So, the venerable ones will accept yours as well as others'."

#### Intuitive Aspect

"Intuition" can be defined as "instinctive knowing (without the use of rational processes)", and "instinct" as "inborn pattern of behaviour often responsive to specific stimuli". Our mind, according to the Buddha, is inherently luminous and pure but is only sullied by 'incoming' (visiting or foreign) defilements. When the defilements have been kept at bay for some time, the mind returns to its original state of luminosity whereby intuitive wisdom can arise if the opportunity is there. Then it can comprehend the true nature of sensory experience—which is the breeding ground of the defilements; transcend it and realise the Ultimate Truth that lies beyond the range of the five senses.

There are various depths of realising the Ultimate Truth, and each of them has the intrinsic power to liberate the mind from the influence of certain types of defilements. The Theravādin tradition classifies these levels of realisation into four and identifies three groups of defilements called "fetters" ( $sanyojan\bar{a}$ ) that are successively abandoned (in the sense that they can never influence the mind of the realised one any more).

Level	State of Realisation	Fetters Abandoned
1	Stream-entry	Egoic-view, grasping at rites and rituals, doubts
2	Once-returning	None, but attenuates sensual desire and ill-will
3	Non-returning	Sensual desire, ill-will
4	Worthy state	Restlessness, conceit, craving for existence in the fine- material realm, craving for existence in the immaterial realm, ignorance

The first fetter is *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*—the view (*diṭṭhi*) that identifies a self or ego in relation to any of the five aggregates (*sakkāya*). The second fetter is grasping at rites and rituals, thinking that by merely following precepts and observances one can become enlightened. A stream-enterer can perform rites and rituals as part of the culture that she

<sup>7</sup> WordWeb 5.00 © Anthony Lewis 2007.

<sup>8 &</sup>quot;Luminous, monks, is this mind (*citta*). It is defiled by 'incoming' (*āgantukehi*) defilements (*upakkilesehi*). This the uninformed (*assutavā*) worldling (*puthujjano*) does not know as it really is. Therefore I say, 'There is no mental development (*cittabhāvanā*) for the uninformed worldling.'" (AN 1:51)

belongs to but is aware that this is not the way to gain further stages of enlightenment. The third fetter is doubt in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha: doubt that the Buddha discovered the Dhamma (the Ultimate Truth and the path leading to its realisation); doubt in the authenticity of the Dhamma and that it can be realised by oneself; and doubt that there are fellow practitioners (members of the *ariya*<sup>9</sup> Saṅgha) who have entered the path as revealed by the Buddha or have also realised the Dhamma. A stream-enterer is freed from all such doubts because she herself has realised the Ultimate Truth through that very path.

She will no longer take rebirth in the lower realms because whatever evil kamma she had done prior to her attainment, that has the potential to cause rebirth in lower realms, becomes defunct<sup>10</sup> and she will not create any new evil kamma of such nature. Her destiny is fixed because she will henceforth take rebirth only in the human or higher realms. Several suttas<sup>11</sup> state that she will have a maximum of seven more lifetimes to live in this sensual realm before she becomes an arahant.

A once-returner's realisation does not bring about the abandonment of any new fetter but only attenuates desire for pleasures of the senses and unpleasant mental states. In other words, he becomes more contented with what he has—and may even become more generous. Moreover he experiences a significant reduction in the frequency and intensity of unpleasant mental states, such as anger, resentment, hate, malice, disappointment and jealousy. If he does not become fully liberated from the remaining fetters in this life, he will be reborn in this world only once more to do so.

The third level of realisation results in the abandonment of the fetters that were attenuated at the second level. A non-returner becomes celibate and reclusive by nature, unaffected by the pleasures of the senses. Her saintly disposition is particularly apparent because she is never seen to be angry nor does she internally experience any displeasure. Having cut off all attachments to the world of the senses, she will never again be reborn in the sensual realm. If arahantship is not attained by the end of this life, she will either attain complete liberation in the intermediate state or in a future existence in the finematerial or immaterial realms.

Restlessness, conceit, <sup>12</sup> craving for existence in the fine-material realm, craving for existence in the immaterial realm and ignorance are the remaining five fetters abandoned at the fourth level of realisation. Thus the arahant is fully liberated from the influence of 'foreign' defilements. This means that his mind is always luminous as it will never be tarnished by any negative mental states, not even displeasure when assailed by intense bodily pain. Having abandoned craving for sense pleasures and for existence in subtle celestial realms, he will never take rebirth again.

<sup>9</sup> Noble; noble one, one who has transcended the plane of worldlings, has at least entered the fixed course leading to rightness.

<sup>10</sup> It loses the potential to *produce* rebirth in the lower realms, but can still cause sufferings in the course of any existence until the attainment of *parinibbāna* (the final passing away of an arahant).

<sup>11</sup> E.g., DutiyaUddesa (or DutiyaSikkhā) Sutta (AN 3:86); Sa-upādisesa Sutta (AN 9:12).

<sup>12</sup> It is interesting that conceit, which is related to the sense of "*I*-ness", is only abandoned at this stage, even though the first level of realisation has already abandoned the view that identifies a self or ego in relation to any of the five aggregates.

### The Balanced Mind

As shown earlier, the potentialities of a highly developed intellect without sufficient cultivation of the non-rational mind can be destructive. The reverse can also be true when, by transcending the intellect, one practises for the attainment of supernormal powers and neglects the cultivation of wholesome emotions and intuitive wisdom. This is because supernormal powers by themselves are amoral, although one has to transcend unwholesome mental states while striving to develop them. But once they are developed, the dormant defilements can influence the yogi to put them to unwholesome ends. Two classic examples can best testify to this.

In the Tibetan tradition, the story of Milarepa shows how he misused his supernormal powers to destroy a whole village because of some unresolved grudge. <sup>13</sup> Most Buddhists are also aware of how Devadatta misused his supernormal abilities to win the faith of Prince Ajātasattu and accrue much gain and honour. (Cv 7:2)

While full development of the emotive aspects of the mind promises rebirth in exalted celestial realms with incredibly long lifespans, it does not, by itself, have the power to liberate the mind from the influence of the defilements. However, the full development of the supernormal and emotive aspects of the mind *can* be used as a firm stepping stone for directing it towards understanding the true nature of things as they are.

For this reason, the Buddha often reiterates that the ultimate goal of his teachings is not one or the other, but a wholesome balanced development of all aspects of the mind culminating in "knowledge and vision of liberation". In the ultimate sense, both "knowledge" and "vision" here refer to the intuitive aspect of the mind. However, as the initial steps leading to their consummation starts off with rational thinking in the right direction, I venture to suggest that "knowledge" also alludes to both the rational and intuitive aspects of the mind and "vision" to its non-rational aspect, while "liberation" refers to the complete emancipation of the mind from the influence of all negativity.

The potentialities of the developed mind are many, and possibly limitless. What I have covered is probably only the tip of the iceberg. At the end of the day, what matters most is not how much one can influence the external world, but how well one can maintain composure through the vicissitudes it perpetually presents to one. And *that* must be the greatest potentiality of the developed mind: to continuously abide in its intrinsic luminosity, totally unaffected by all negativity.

#### Abbreviations

- AN Anguttara Nikāya (reference numbering as in Pāli Text Society's *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*)
- Cv Cūḷavagga (Vinaya Piṭaka; reference numbering as in Pāli Text Society's *The Book of Discipline Volume V*, translated by I. B. Horner)
- DN Dīgha Nikāya
- MN Majjhima Nikāya
- Mv Mahāvagga (Vinaya Piṭaka; reference numbering as in Pāli Text Society's *The Book of Discipline Volume IV*, translated by I. B. Horner)
- Sn Sutta Nipāta (reference numbering as in Access to Insight < <u>www.accesstoinsight.org</u>>)
- SN Samyutta Nikāya (reference numbering as in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi)

<sup>13</sup> Chang, Garma C. C., trans. *Sixty Songs of Milarepa*. 1962. Republished. Penang, Malaysia: Sukhi Hotu, 1997.