

Comment on Daniel Goleman's *The Meditative Mind*

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On many accounts, this book is recommended to meditators of various traditions. As pointed out in other reviews, the description of the contrast between concentration and mindfulness, mainly based on Visuddhimagga (Buddhist commentary, the fifth century A.D.), must be helpful. The discussion of various different types of meditation must be helpful as well. Although the summary of meditation-related research is by now dated, it is still quite interesting. However, as this little book oversimplifies certain points, I would like to comment on them below.

First, following Visuddhimagga, Goleman points out that the state of full absorption (“jhana”) and mindfulness cannot coexist. But the situation is more complicated. In fact, understanding of the interaction between concentration and mindfulness seems to be a key to deepening our meditation practice. Contrary to Goleman, some teachers argue that jhana involves mindfulness. Catherine is one of them, although she too respects Visuddhimagga (*Wisdom Wide and Deep: A Practical Handbook for Mastering Jhana and Vipassana*). Gunaratana's position is stronger; he writes deep concentration without mindfulness is even dangerous (*Beyond Mindfulness in Plain English: An Introductory guide to Deeper States of Meditation*). Shankman points out that the notion of jhana differs between Visuddhimagga and the Pali Canon (oral compilation of the Buddha's words, the fifth century BCE) and among modern meditation teachers (*The Experience of Samadhi: An In-depth Exploration of Buddhist Meditation*). Thus, it would be good to begin with Goleman's simplified account of concentration and mindfulness, but it would be better to proceed to a more refined understanding of the topic. As hinted in the above-mentioned books and pointed out more explicitly by Analayo, it would be helpful to recognize the “concentration” and “mindfulness” ASPECTS in both the so-called “concentration” and “mindfulness” PRACTICES (*Satipatthana: The Direct Path to Realization*, p. 89).

Second, Goleman's description of different traditions of meditation is oversimplified too. For example, while Yoga traditions are presented as purely concentration meditation, the situation is more complicated. Although the goal of Yoga meditation (practice) may well be considered more concentration-oriented (e.g., the unity of self and God as in *Theravada Meditation: The Buddhist Transformation of Yoga*), the aspect of mindfulness seems to be present. This is the case especially for those who follow the Yoga Sutra, written well after the Buddha's life and influenced by Buddhists' mindfulness. Some modern Yoga teachers explicitly discuss that mindfulness is present (relevant discussion in *Freeing the Body, Freeing the Mind: Writings on the Connections between Yoga and Buddhism*, esp. Ch. 1, Ch. 9). Goleman's classification of

Krishnamurti's meditation purely as mindfulness is, again, oversimplified. While Krishnamurti's goal may well be mindfulness, his practice appears to involve the concentration aspect as well (*Total Freedom: The Essential Krishnamurti*, e.g., p. 287). So, Goleman's brief descriptions are helpful as a first approximation, but we should not stop there.

Added 8/14/14: The above focuses on the contrast between concentration and mindfulness. We can learn more about the integration of these two aspects in, e.g., "Right Mindfulness" by Thanissaro Bikkhu (PDF file available on-line, free copy available from *Metta Forest Monastery*).