

Mindfulness, vipassana  
and the hypnotic force of dissociation

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# 1.1 Mind-states

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Determine our **well-being** and **suffering**, but also our actions being very important for our life and what happens in the world

Can be defined as 'action-tendency' (more precise mathematical definition possible)

The notion 'mind-state' is a *higher-order* concept. May be implemented by sustained neural firing or volume transmission (Veening-Barendregt et al)

A mind-state has three aspects

Aspect	may cause encounter with	may lead to
phenomenological	psychologist/psychiatrist	creativity
physiological	physician	performing arts
behavioral	police	noble deeds

Science approximates mind-states with neurophysiological variables

~> 'definition': a mind-state is a vector of (valued) variables

A (*mind-*)*substate* is a subvector (being in love; restlessness)

[Abhidhamma: 89 mind-states being mixtures of 52 sub-states]

Mind-states with **mindfulness**  $\mapsto$  **wholesome**

Mind-states with **greed, hatred, delusion**  $\mapsto$  **suffering**

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## 1.2 Mental development (meditation)

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With discipline, concentration, and insight (in a recursive way)  
practice aims at

developing **wholesome states** (notably using concentration)

diminishing and eliminating **unwholesome states** (notably using insight)

discipline 1            reduce physical input and output

discipline 2            reduce mental input and output  
(by focusing attention on meditation object)

discipline 3            gently continue, even if one doesn't feel well

concentration 1        remain with meditation object  
as soon as one notices one doesn't do this, return

concentration 2        paying attention to most prominent object  
'momentary'            hindrances (greed, hatred) temporarily gone

concentration 3a       stream of consciousness becomes less variable  
'access'                (temporary)

concentration 3b       stream of consciousness stabilizes  
'jhana'                equanimity (+ compassion (+bliss)) (temporary)

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# 1.3 Increasing insight

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Phase I. Seeing mind-states as (resulting from) coalitions

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- between mind and body
  - between sub-states (eg separating pain and impatience)
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Phase II. Seeing the 3 fundamental characteristics of consciousness (3FC); consequences

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- 3FC { discretely fractured  
selflessness, no control, determinism  
suffering
  - disappearing objects in consciousness
  - fear
  - imagined danger
  - disenchantment
- } 'dark night of the soul'
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Phase III. Starts with wish for emancipation

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- equanimity
  - equanimity + calmness + joy
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Phase IV. Surrender and determination

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- (permanent) cessation (of part of suffering)  
fundamental change of view: ego as process  
eliminated doubt, increased mental flexibility
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## 1.4 Deconstruction/dissociation

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The brain/mind consists of collaborating modules

Sometimes the collaborating may be insufficient

Then there may occur a

- depersonalization
- derealization, dereification
- desomatization
- demotivation
- delusion

This may happen after tiredness, stress, or trauma

But also after sharp insight

Apparently our survival instincts are so strong that we must

'reconstruct', repersonalize, reify, etcetera

even if there are strong side effects

Observation (JT Barendregt): phobias are forms of repersonalizing

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## 1.5 Hypnosis

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Hypnosis consists of 1. *hypnotic induction*, 2. *posthypnotic suggestion*

The induction often is performed via a calming voice

When the subject is under hypnosis a posthypnotic order may be given

After the subject wakes up it is hard not to obey the order

Raffone-Barendregt (submitted)

Hypnosis Hypothesis 1. The induction is an induced dissociation  
within the Default Mode Network activity<sup>(1)</sup>

Hypnosis Hypothesis 2. The posthypnotic order acts as a reorganization  
via a mental program<sup>(2)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup>A Demertzi et al. (2011). Hypnotic modulation of resting state fMRI default mode and extrinsic network connectivity. *Progress in Brain Research*, 19, 309-322.

<sup>(1)</sup>S Lipari et al. (2011). Altered and asymmetric default mode network activity in a 'hypnotic virtuoso': An fMRI and EEG study, *Consciousness and Cognition*, 21(1), 393-400.

<sup>(1)</sup>WJ McGeown et al. (2009) Hypnotic induction decreases anterior default mode activity.

*Consciousness and Cognition*, 18, 848-855.

<sup>(2)</sup>HP Barendregt (1988). Buddhist Phenomenology, *Proceedings of the Conference on Topics and Perspectives of Contemporary Logic and Philosophy of Science*, Ed. M dalla Chiara, Clueb, Bologna, 37-55.

# 1.6 Hypotheses

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Phase I. Seeing mind-states as (resulting from) coalitions	
between mind and body	} Defense mechanisms
between sub-states (eg separating pain and impatience)	
Phase II. Seeing the 3 fundamental characteristics of consciousness (3FC); consequences	
3FC { <u>discretely fractured</u> <u>selflessness, no control, determinism</u> <u>suffering</u>	} Hypothesis 1 Observing effects of dyscoordinated discrete modular brain functions
disappearing objects in consciousness	
fear imagined danger disenchantment	} 'dark night of the soul'
Phase III. Starts with wish for emancipation	
equanimity	} Hypothesis 3 Purification is possible <sup>1</sup>
equanimity + calmness + joy	
Phase IV. Surrender and determination	
(permanent) cessation (of part of suffering)	} Hypothesis 4 One may become 'weller than well' (Carl Menninger)
fundamental change of view: ego as process	
eliminated doubt, increased mental flexibility	

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Hypothesis 5. P Schoenberg & H Barendregt

Mindful deconstruction and pathological deconstruction share a common neural mechanism

(↓ N400 in Mooney face task) but differ in  $\beta$ -synchronization (work in progress)

<sup>1</sup>Christine Meier: change narrative 'patient with sick brain' → client who is drowning; family therapy

It seems worthwhile to investigate creative forms of help including acceptance and changing of narrative

It seems worthwhile to learn from the purification offered by vipassana

Is it worthwhile to investigate avoidance of prescribing medication with 24/7 surveillance?

Meier claims she can stabilize a person within 48h if no medication have been given. For every year of medication their method needs in the average 45d extra

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As this story is somewhat 'unexpected', some appendices (not presented in the talk):

A1 Citations from the Buddhist tradition

A2 Citations from Western Traditions

A3 Autobiographical stories published in (1988, 1996)

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## A1.1 More on the 3FC

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Buddhaghosa [1976], Ch XXI, 3-4, describes the three fundamental characteristics as uncovered in meditation, with some parenthetical remarks by me.

*The characteristic of impermanence does not become apparent because, when rise and fall are not given attention, it is concealed by continuity [due to reification]. The characteristic of suffering does not become apparent because, when continuous oppression [to sitting still; i.e. there is desire to move, scratch ones nose, etcetera] is not given attention, it is concealed by the [holding on to the meditation] postures. The characteristic of not-self [being beyond control] does not become apparent, because when resolution [dissolution] into the various elements is not given attention, it is concealed by compactness [the feeling of agency]. However, when continuity gets disrupted by discerning rise and fall, impermanence becomes apparent in its true nature. When the postures are exposed by attention to continuous oppression, the characteristic of pain becomes apparent in its true nature. When the resolution of the compact is effected by resolution into elements, the characteristic of no-self becomes apparent in its true nature.*

Buddhaghosa also gives an interesting definition of suffering and (un)wholesome:

<i>dukkha</i> (suffering)	nausea for emptiness
<i>kusala</i> (wholesome)	taking away [this] nausea
<i>akusala</i> (unwholesome)	not taking away [this] nausea

## A1.2 Mahayana view on the 3FC

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In Mahayana Buddhism the 3FC are

*impermanence, nirvana, non-self*

This is the view from the comfortable side of 'the other shore'

The same impermanence (flux, chaos) and non-self (determinism)

but no longer with Resistance and nausea

Dictionary

nirvana (Pali nibbana) [the nausea] extinguished

## A1.3 'Things that may happen' Ñana 5

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5) Knowledge of dissolution - bhanga-ñana.

What happens next? The meditator's awareness and concentration continues to develop. As a result, he now sees only the passing away of phenomena. It is as if his awareness is so fast, it is faster than the experiences he is examining, As soon as he places his attention on some aspect of his experience, it disappears. This is the knowledge of dissolution (bhanga-ñana). In a weak aspect, this can take the form of the meditator apparently losing his concentration. It seems like he can no longer focus on anything; his attention keeps sliding off whatever he tries to look at. It can be like trying to grasp something that slips out of your hand the moment you touch it. In a stronger aspect, it can be like falling into the black hole of Calcutta. Wherever you look, there is nothing - only blackness. The meditator is shocked, because he used to be able to focus on anything. Now, it seems, he can focus on nothing at all. All his good work has dissolved into nothing. // Another thing that meditators report at this stage is the disappearance of the form of the body. Before, the meditator saw experience break up into specific and discrete experiences, but he always knew that they were experiences of something. For example, the experience of the rising movement of the abdomen when breathing in breaks up into movement, pressure, tension. But there was always the sense, while examining these sensations, that they belonged together, as different aspect of the same thing. But now movement is just movement; pressure just pressure; tension just tension. There is no sense of what part of the body these sensations belong to. The sense of the body disappears; all that is left is a series of apparently disconnected individual sensations. There is no "body" as such.

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## A1.4 Ñanas 6 and 7

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### 6) Knowledge of fear - bhaya-ñana

This gives way to the knowledge of fear, (bhaya-ñana). In the disappearance of everything examined, the mind at some level begins to realize: there is nothing beneath this parade of changes. There is no foundation. At a fundamental level, there is nothing at all. The result is existential anxiety. In its strong form this can manifest as panic. In its weak form, it can be merely a sense of existential unease, a sense of nothing going right, a sense of helplessness, a sense of loss of control. At this stage of the practice, the meditator's insight into anatta, not self, usually takes the form of a sense of loss of control. The realization that "I am not in control of my life".

### 7) Knowledge of danger - adinava-ñana

Next comes the knowledge of danger, (adinava-ñana). The meditator realizes there is no rest, no security, in anything. Notice that the emphasis here is on anything. The meditator by this time is fantasizing about escape from, the meditation center. He is wondering why he is not in some comfortable job making a comfortable, secure living. But the power of the insight-knowledge is such that he knows there is no escape. He knows that this danger, this disadvantage, remains. Because he knows this is the nature of experience as such.

## A1.5 Ñana 8

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### 8) Knowledge of disenchantment - nibbida-ñana

Hence the knowledge of disenchantment, (nibbida-ñana). Nibbida, or disenchantment, is simply the opposite of enchantment. Normally we are enchanted by experience. A man sees a beautiful woman and instinctively is drawn into her circle of charm. He is “charmed”, enchanted. He feels there is real satisfaction to be gained by possessing her, and so pursues her to gain that satisfaction. This whole movement is based on the notion: if only I possess that, then all my problems will be solved. The essence of the knowledge of disenchantment is that, even in the very fantasy itself, the meditator knows that the object of his desire will not solve his problem. He knows that even if he leaves the meditation center and attains his most heart-felt desire, this too is unsatisfactory. There is no situation that he can imagine which is satisfactory. All his desires and fantasies are like ashes in his mouth.

These descriptions of ñanas (stages of insight) 5-8 come from

[www.buddhanet.net/knowledg.htm](http://www.buddhanet.net/knowledg.htm), by the Australian monk Patrick Kearney

Another version of the stages is here [www.vipassanadhura.com/sixteen.html](http://www.vipassanadhura.com/sixteen.html),

by the late Thai monk Phra Dhamma Mahamuni

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# A2 Experiences in the West

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## Existential knowledge in the West

John of the Cross     Dark night of the soul

Rilke                     *Dass Große*

Sartre                    La nausée

John of the Cross and Sartre probably have domesticated the beast

Rilke not. This author stated:

*Just one step, and my deep misery would be holiness. But I cannot make this step. ...*

*Courage is required of us, ... to face the most inexplicable experiences, ...*

*Es fehlte mir courage de luxe.* [I had a lack of luxury courage.]

**Brown text:** Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge Ch. 18 & 24

**Blue text:** Letters to a young poet, 8.

Description of difficulties occurring during meditation

<[www.psychologytomorrowmagazine.com/enlightenments-evil-twin/](http://www.psychologytomorrowmagazine.com/enlightenments-evil-twin/)>

The Zen teacher Shinzen Young has a beautiful paper on taming the disappearing experience <[shinzen.org/Articles/PowerofGone.pdf](http://shinzen.org/Articles/PowerofGone.pdf)>.

2.7 Disgust. The student is now continuing to meditate having a consciousness that is neither pleasant nor unpleasant, but is nevertheless very exalted. There is almost nothing to do. The hindrances are gone and being mindful on for example breathing is effortless.

At one moment the student notices that it becomes difficult to keep his super consciousness. More and more pressure is growing on his mind (or is it the head?). Even if it does not bother him, it is a threatening omen.

At any price the student wants to keep his exalted consciousness. But most unfortunately he cannot keep his strong concentration any longer and he falls back on what used to be his old consciousness. It turns out that this consciousness is totally neglected. It looks like a giant abyss. Desperately the student tries to regain his exalted consciousness. It does not work. Then suddenly the student loses all grip and falls in the abyss. The experience is indescribable. The following symptoms are some indications of what happens.

Chaos: perception is completely confused; everything is turning. Anxiety: there is an 'infinitely' strong anxiety; all other anxieties seem to be derived from this basic one. Disgust: one is extremely sick; the stomach turns and one has to vomit. Crazy: it feels as if one is crazy; the mind and the body are present, but there is no ego anymore that controls everything. The experience is more terrible than death, at least that is how it feels like. Nevertheless thinking operates as usual. Panic stricken the student goes to the teacher, who is available 24 hours a day during the intensive meditation retreat, precisely for these cases of depersonalization. The student hopes that the teacher can perform some miracle.

## A3.2 Autobiographical continued

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But that is not what happens.

The teacher reacts in an unexpected way. He says the following. “Remember the theory. Our existence has three characteristics: changeability, suffering and selflessness. Changeability means that no phenomenon is permanent. Even the visual image that we have of a solid object is not constant. If we look well, we will see many small fluctuations in the image as perceived. In this changing world we look for some hold, something that is constant. In our ignorance we consider our ego, our self, as a fixed remaining entity. But that is an illusion. Why would our ego feel the need to be consolidated, if it were really permanent? Well, the changeability causes the circumstances in which we live to be often in conflict with the ideas of the ego and friction results. That is suffering. Finally, selflessness means that the phenomena out of which our consciousness is built up, are essentially beyond our control. These three attributes of our existence, changeability, suffering and selflessness are in fact three aspects of one single truth. Now you have experienced yourself these three characteristics. This is important. Just continue your practice.”

But the student is not at all interested in meditation anymore. He just wants to stop his depersonalization. The teacher notices this and gives specific instructions. “Instead of prostrating for twenty minutes, you should do it from now on each time twenty minutes longer. That is, first twenty minutes, then forty, then sixty and so on. Work well on your mindfulness. Then the nausea will disappear by itself. However, if it comes back, do not name it as ‘nausea’ but as ‘knowing’. Do not feed it it.”

For the full story <[www.cs.ru.nl/~henk/BP/bp1.html](http://www.cs.ru.nl/~henk/BP/bp1.html)>

<[www.cs.ru.nl/~henk/BP/bp2.html](http://www.cs.ru.nl/~henk/BP/bp2.html)>

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## A3.3 The hypnotic force of dissociation

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From Buddhist Phenomenology, 3.6: conditions gluing one together

The exercises are going well. There are few disturbances and sublime consciousness results. Pain is not being formed. However, later pain arises again. When this pain is being melted away, consciousness starts breaking again. The student thinks “O, that is all right; I know how to depersonalize!” But he is wrong, it is going to be tough. The depersonalization is different this time and as this was unexpected, the student is getting restless again. Working hard makes consciousness stable. It becomes sublime again, even more so than before.

After continuing the work, the student falls again in a depersonalization. He becomes angry: “There is no end to this!” This emotion of anger has an unexpected effect. The broken consciousness is glued together instantaneously. But how ugly it is. Everything exhales malignity: the walls are angry, each footstep is angry, everything is angry.

Work is continued. Consciousness breaks and the anger in the walls suddenly disappears. The student tries whether consciousness can be glued together also with other feelings. First he tries lust. It works; when consciousness is glued together with lust everything becomes luscious. The student has no objection and keeps this type of consciousness. In the dining room he notices, however, that he is taking too much food. A habit he had overcome already at the beginning of the retreat. When the desert comes he promises to himself not to take too much. Nevertheless, he is taking more than he can eat comfortably. Apparently his hands took more than his mind wanted.

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## A3.4 The hypnotic force of dissociation (ii)

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Back in his room the student decides that a consciousness glued together with lust is undesirable and he gives it up. During the resulting depersonalization the student happens to feel insecure. This time, by accident, the broken consciousness is glued together with anxiety. Everything exhales this emotion. The student is walking around in the surrealistic world of a phobic.

After having made [developed] a more quiet consciousness, the student goes to the teacher for his daily interview. The teacher is dissatisfied about these experiments. “You have to continue the basic exercises. Feeling has to be substituted by mindfulness. Do not glue with feeling, but with mindfulness. The difference is that you are dependent on your feeling. Mindfulness on the other hand sets you free. Be not attached to particular forms of consciousness. Let them come and go by themselves. The final goal is freedom. When you will have it, sublime consciousness may arise as often as you want. However, if you make some type of consciousness now, then you want to do that. As a result there is hidden feeling in it and you will not be free. This means that for example your sublime consciousness will depend on something. Therefore it will be impossible to keep it. When finally you will be free, then you do not depend on anything, you have become ‘unconditioned’.”

## A3.5 What happened next

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Once the threat was domesticated the impressive method of purification made me consider to stop doing mathematics and devote my time to it completely. But then I realized that the public reaction could be: “Hm, even with a successful start of a career in mathematical logic, the effect of vipassana meditation is such that one abandons it.” Then I decided to keep working in logic for twenty years and to change career at an appropriate moment after that. After 22 years, getting the Spinoza prize, I did make the change.

There are a variety of models to treat mental suffering.

- The strict medical model that sees mental illness as a brain disease for which one needs to take pills for the rest of life.
- A more flexible interpretation that is carefully minimizing the dose of medicine and gives other forms of therapy.
- Social psychiatry that investigates the role of family members and talks also to them.
- MBCT and MBSR that emphasize the role of the body for one's balance and develops in the patient mindfulness, a friendly and mild form of meta-awareness.
- Vipassana meditation that is an extended form of mindfulness intervention, towards domesticating all forms of attachment. It is abstract: desire and aversion are considered as tendencies cut off from the object of desire or aversion. Dissociation is not seen as a problem, but one's reaction to it is. Attachment to (the image) of self is seen as the main problem.