

## States of Mind: A Brief Comment

David Center

There is a continuum of states of mind on which you can usually find yourself. Often, if you're present with your current experience, you become aware of your state of mind. However, it is not unusual to become aware of a state of mind only in retrospect. Meditators are more commonly present with their state of mind and aware of it, especially during meditation. For beginning meditators this is often the first time they have actually monitored their state of mind and usually find it more chaotic and distressing than focused and relaxed.

I will use four markers for points along the continuum. However, there are many points along a continuum, so these four markers are by no means exhaustive. They should, at least, make the nature of the continuum clear.

In a discussion of meditation in Part I on InnerEgo.com, I use four descriptors for states of mind during meditation that I will now elaborate on using a weather metaphor.

### *1. Monkey Mind*

Monkey mind is analogous to a rain storm with black clouds illuminated by lightning and punctuated by thunder. The black clouds represent thoughts and, as in a thunderstorm, fill the sky (mind), obscuring everything else in the sky. The lightning symbolizes emotional content and thunder the arousal of powerful impulses.

### *2. Hummingbird Mind*

Hummingbird mind is more like a day in which the sky is overcast with gray clouds in which there is an occasional break. Again the clouds represent thoughts and while they still obscure nearly everything else in the sky, they do allow some light to filter through. Scattered showers may also appear, but these do not represent the kind of emotional arousal represented by lightning, nor are powerful impulses released as symbolized earlier by thunder.

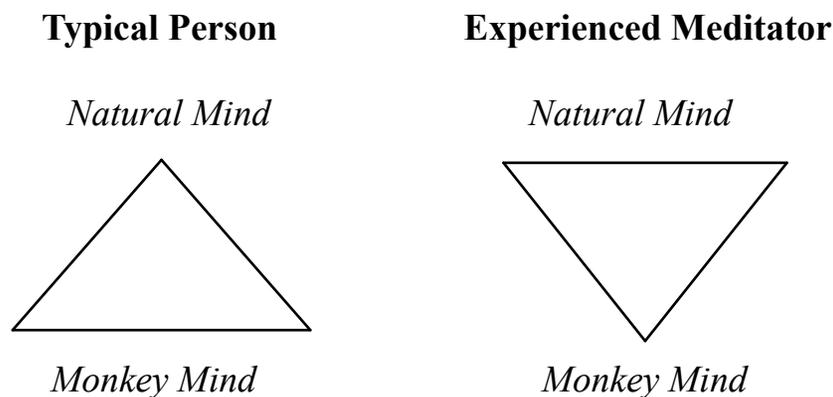
### *3. Teflon Mind*

Teflon mind is like a clear day with a bright blue sky punctuated by white clouds drifting slowly across the sky. They may briefly hide the sun, which symbolizes your true Self. The clouds represent thoughts that gently arise into untroubled awareness, symbolized by the blue sky, and then recede out of the field of awareness.

#### 4. *Natural Mind*

The natural mind is like a pristine blue sky acting as a background for the sun. There is hardly a cloud in sight, but wisps of thin, white clouds (fleeting thoughts) appear from time to time and are all but obscured by the brilliant sun filled, blue sky (focused awareness). (See the essay “The Natural Mind” at [innerego.com](http://innerego.com) or at: <http://davidcenter.com/Brink.php> for further discussion)

Practically everyone has experienced all the points on the above continuum. The difference between the typical person and experienced meditators is the relative amount of time spent at different points. This is illustrated below.



The typical person is predisposed to become absorbed in the clouds (thoughts). Meditators wait patiently for the mind to clear and offer a break in the clouds. They then focus their awareness, not on the clouds but on the clear sky. Their goal is to spend as much time as possible in or near the Natural Mind end of the continuum.

The typical person who is absorbed in his or her thoughts almost always believes that the thoughts represent the self. That is, typically one identifies with the flow of thoughts and believe that they are their thoughts. Meditators, however, come to realize that, unless directed at some specific task, their thoughts arise and subside on their own schedule and with no specific purpose. They just are. Thus, experienced meditators have learned to become absorbed in awareness of the present moment and to merely observe the parade of thoughts arising and subsiding in their conscious awareness.

The critical question for anyone who has experienced being simply an observer of their thoughts is, *Who is doing the observing?* It clearly can't be the thoughts observing themselves. This recognition negates the belief that one is one's thoughts. So, *Who or what are you?*