

# 2002-01-31 Introduction to Meditation: Thoughts (Week 4)

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

thinking, thoughts, meditation, breathing, people, breath, thought, emotion, relax, feel, mindfulness, body sensations, bit, happening, compulsive, stay, helpful, present moment, easygoing, world

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Um, so today's the doctory course. So, before we start with a meditation, I thought, to open it up a little bit if there's any questions you might have or anything you want to raise from the last week's instructions or the week before, or from your own experience of trying to meditation at home and anything you want to ask about. It said in Buddhism, you make very good karma when you ask questions. It's hard for me sometimes to distinguish between thoughts, and emotion. Hmm. Oh, good. I don't think that they're so separated from each other. Emotions are a composite, where they're made up of different elements. They're not like a unitary, single essential thing. And one of the things that makes up an emotion at times is our our thoughts and our thinking. And another thing and mix it up is our physical sensations in our body. And other thing and mix it up is our intention. We want to Don't want kind of a reaction for against something. There's many different things that make it up. And one of the things that happens is you start paying careful attention, we begin teasing apart those different elements. And then we start seeing how they relate to each other. How sometimes a thought arises and a thought is a condition for more of an emotion in the sense, and sometimes an emotion arises and you see how that's is a condition for certain kinds of thoughts or attitudes to arise and, and how they relate.

I always try to think of what to do with my hands. I notice you've got your fingers. And I like to copy the statute. And I've been told thumbs just touching leftover right? she asked, you know, what do you do with your hands when you meditate? And generally I tell people to do anything that's symmetrical and comfortable with the hands. So they both hands are doing the same. thing, the classic way of meditating and Buddhism kind of in many different Buddhists, a number of different Buddhist traditions, is to have the hands together, one on top of the other with just the fingers overlapping, so that your fingers don't overlap on to the palm, just two fingers overlap. And then in one tradition, you have the right hand underneath the left hand on top, and then you put your thumbs together, and you

make kind of an oval shape. It's called the cosmic mudra. In Japanese Buddhism, and with a thumb tips very lightly touching. And it's very interesting in zen, that's the way they sit. And what happens is that this becomes an antenna or for what's going on internally as you meditate. If you get tense, sometimes you push your thumb together, and that's indication that you're tense and so you kind of have to relax that. Or if you're really kind of getting complacent or sleeping, your meditation, your thumbs fall open. And that means you kind of you've lost it a little bit. So by always keeping your thumb tips very lightly touching, it helps create some balance between relaxation and tension sitting. And so it can be quite helpful. In this Buddha, he has his right hand on top. But in the Zen tradition when I was trained in you only do that when you become fully enlightened until you become fully enlightened with your left hand on top. So and but mostly for the last years, I've been sitting the hands either together, or more often than not, I'd actually have them on my, my thighs, just, you know, resting on my thighs with the palms facing down. I feel quite comfortable with that I feel very stable and it seems to work quite well. So you know, you can as you as you see fit. It'd be one more question the many people like to bow at the end of the city. or different times. And the this this gesture expresses that various can express various things. It's in Asia, it's often from the greeting. And it's very nice. It's kind of like you put this Lotus in front of your heart and kind of offer your gratitude of your respect to the heart of someone else. Some people like to do at the end of the sitting to do it. And there's no requirement to do it. Well, you know, stuff like, it's not like you have to come here and do that. And in that spirit, you can do it whatever way that suits you, whatever kind of move how you move to do it. Some people like to do it in front of the hearts a little bit. Some people like to bring it up to the forehead. You know, some people like to kind of touch their heart and their forehead is a very good way of doing it. And often at the end of a sitting, I'll do it sometimes. And for me, it's simply an expression of gratitude and appreciation. Often when i when i when i, often when I sit at the end of a sitting, I feel a certain kind of gratitude. Not really necessarily towards anything. So I'm like an object for the gratitude. Object list gratitude is one of the marvelous things about meditation, it's one of the ways we can have access to certain emotions of states of being, which in normal life generally

have an object for their for, you know, the reason for being there. And meditation, they can be there for no reason at all. And it's quite nice to realize you can have these wonderful senses of well being without a reason. Because otherwise we're always looking for a reason to and a condition and an object for feeling good. And, and you realize you can just kind of bubble up for no reason as a as a, you know, in the letting go process of meditation is can give a lot of confidence and a lot of delight in life and, and a lot more graciousness and ease as we go about life because you didn't realize your inner well being it's not not Absolutely dependent on the conditions of the world being a certain way. And many of us are always adjusting the conditions of the world. The quality of life issues, you know, our relationships or jobs or money or comfort or recreation opportunities, and you know, all these things that we're kind of adjusting if I if only if only those were just the right way, if only if only if only, then I'll be happy. And sometimes we are happy for a short while when we line everything up. But you can't line everything up to work just the right forever. And so it's nice to know that there's a capacity within us to feel happy, peaceful, delighted, love without any of the conditions in the world causing it to be that way. And in fact, you can feel some of these things when the conditions in the world are quite

unpleasant. And why am I talking about this question? He brought up No Why do I say I have babbling Oh, so at the end End of sitting, sometimes I feel this gratitude. And there's no particular reason for the gratitude, you know, just just like a good book and give a reason but, but it's nice when you feel these things sometimes to give an expression. And this is one way, you know, rather than kind of hold it in within yourself. So, I find it's nice to give an expression like this. And some people will like to some Buddhists like a chant. And one of the reasons to chant is to give expression to some of these feelings that are coming up. So, let's start

to think of it think about a little bit nothing obvious, not like a manual that says, you know, you know, but there are there are a certain chance of for loving kindness, certain chance for gratitude. And, you know, so there are a particular chance to kind of evoke or relate to certain ways of feeling, but I've never seen you know, hard and fast You know, so so let's meditate. So take a comfortable but alert posture. Take an alert with comfortable posture. Gently Close your eyes. And then begin the sitting by taking a few long slow deep breaths. Deep down into your abdomen. And as you exhale, like relax into your body

and then let your breathing returned to normal. And it's helpful at the beginning of a sittings, especially after the end of the day, to scan through your body, to see if there's any obvious places of tension that you can relax It can be nice to do this systematically. Starting at the top of the head forehead and feeling that part of your body. And then maybe as you exhale, let there be a softening, forehead, the eyebrows, scalp.

Perhaps there can be a little relaxation in the eyes, corner of the eyes, letting the eyeballs rest in their sockets. If there's tension in the eyes or in the eye eyelids, it's not easy to relax the at ease with that and if you feel any tension in your jaws, there, your mouth cheeks. You might soften that relax

The area where many people hold tension isn't the shoulders you might first just feel the shoulders. Allow yourself to feel them as they are without doing anything about it. And then the next few exhalations, see if there can be a softening of the shoulders letting go.

Also, it can be helpful to soften the belly. Probably more important than any other place in your body to relax meditation is too important to relax the stomach. Let the abdomen hang forward, be relaxed. And often, even if it's possible to relax the belly. If we're habituated to tends to belly it'll tend stuff again, right away. few times two or three or four times in the course of a sitting the beginning. Other times, it can be helpful to relax that belly. soften it

and that can help the breathing a little bit deeper and fuller.

So the foundation the usual foundation of mindfulness meditation, is your breathing. If you have trouble finding your breath or noticing where in your body that breathing is felt, you can take and

breathe a little bit more deeply, just teeny bit more. For a few rounds. Some people will feel the breath project primarily in their belly, the rising and falling of the belly. Some people will feel it more in their chest, lifting and falling of the chest. Some people might feel it more in the nostrils the air going in and out. Some people are more inclined to feel the whole breath body. Whichever ways the breath your breathing is most accessible to you most easiest to be. Pay attention to let that be your home base for breathing.

There's a kind of a rhythm of breathing in and breathing out breathing in. See if you can establish yourself in that rhythm. See if you can sustain the attention. With your breathing over time. You get a sense of that rhythm that alternate

Inevitably the mind will wander off into thoughts and when you notice that simply noted, give recognition that's happening. Gentle accepting recognition that your mind is caught up in thoughts and then begin again with your breathing. Begin Again with some devotion or firmness. Some clear resolve as you're starting again with the breath. See if you can enter into the world of breathing. One breath after the other

You might find it helpful to very gently softly in the back of the mind, whisper in the mind to label each inhalation and exhalation the in and out or can be rising and falling if you're staying present for the rising and falling of the abdomen or the chest. If the labeling is soft enough, but direct enough, it can help keep you on course, you really sustain the attention and the succession of breaths, one after the other.

It's very helpful in meditation, to not be by By your thinking if you find yourself wandering off into thought, No need to judge that or be harsh about that or no need to jerk the mind back to the breathing. find yourself thinking, acknowledge that that's happening and an easy way easygoing way. Begin Again with your breathing with some dedication or some firmness with a breath, some we'll resolve Okay, I'm going to stay here with this breathing. Kind of resolve that helps you relax with each breath relax into the breathing

relaxing the thinking mind in favor of sensing the breathing. Just sensing how your breathing affects your body, sensing the body's own experience of breathing.

If you have thoughts in the background, but in the foreground of attention, you can stay with your breathing. That's fine, be relaxed about those background thoughts and stay with a breathing the best you can. highlighting it surrendering to your breathing.

And then as you're sitting here, if you find it difficult to be with a group Because something else is more pronounced or predominant. Let go of the breathing now and let your awareness hold or embrace or look carefully at this thing that's happening, whether it's body sensations or feelings, or

even very compulsive tendency to think, be very accepting of it. Let this accepting awareness, see it clearly for what it is.

And perhaps having directly acknowledged was making it difficult to be the breathing. Maybe then you can begin again with your breathing. Maybe this time, it's a little bit easier. Or if it's not, you can let you're accepting awareness. You're open awareness. You're watching Continue to be present for what else is predominant besides the breath.

And now in the last couple of minutes of this sitting last few minutes, if you'd like to if it makes you more comfortable, so you can pay more careful attention. You can shift your posture like adjust your posture if you'd like.

And now the instructions is a little bit different. You can continue with a breathing as kind of an anchor to the present moment as you wish. But when you notice yourself thinking, whether it's very article you start thinking or you're thinking all the time that's your attention. Notice the event of thinking See, what you're thinking about right now has no importance to this exercise. But rather notice something about the quality of that inner voice that does your thinking. The tone of that inner voice is it hesitant or harsh? Is it fast or slow, energized or depressed, judgemental or accepting, insistent or easygoing?

As if you're listening to someone else's conversation and you're listening To the tone in which they're speaking, the quality, the emotional sense of the voice that you hear or the energy level. So the exercise is to notice something about how you think, as opposed to what you're thinking about.

And then take a couple of long slow, deep breaths

and when you're ready, you can open your eyes.

are two parts basically to that last sitting? One was meditation that was focusing predominantly on breathing and being with your breath. And then the very end we switched to ask you to look a little bit to investigate in a sense, you can discover something about how you think as opposed to what you're thinking about. Many of us are seemingly addicted to what we're thinking about, and to thoughts. And, but many of us have never taken the time to discover something about how we think the nature of the thinking itself. So I was wondering, someone be willing to talk a little bit about what you discovered what these last mistakes last. Meditation was like for you. When you found out about your thinking or didn't find out a little bit louder, please. Yeah.

Okay, mirror of experiences a nice, it's not experienced itself it's a mirror of it and some people live in the mirror get lost in the mirror. Yes. Very future oriented production and planning a decentralized mode Great. Thank you Y

could you notice a little bit the tone of that chatter is it is gentle and loving and relaxed and easygoing and

compulsive.

So easygoing is not how it is used. Going it's not how the chatter is

somebody else, yes.

Approximate relatively coherent picture. And when I open my eyes

and my eyes close

you can experiment with both ways. Maybe do do a week of meditation each way each way and see what seems to help you the best. Some people think more in images they do in words. That just the way their mind works and when we when we talk about mindfulness of thoughts, if a person is primarily visually oriented images is translated to kind of seeing or images. And it's possible, it's interesting sometimes to experiment with keeping your eyes closed, and let the stream of images come because it's possible. Sometimes it's possible that it's a little bit coming from a little bit deeper place inside of us subconscious place, then, then the conscious level of thinking, which is often when we controller, it's very logical and you know, ordered. Sometimes it's very controlled. And it's often the surface over life that, you know, that kind of keeping things under control and keeping things understood. And the deeper wellsprings of our life sometimes don't belong to the same logic of things that are well controlled and well understood. And so that something maybe the way you're describing it makes me wonder whether the images or pictures are bubbling up with something deeper. So it could be interesting to go with it tonight Thinking as an excuse to be mindful. And I found myself at one point, falling asleep, starting to fall on my body starting to turn on my ears so watch.

So you're commenting and commenting and analyzing your practice as you go along as we

I'm the one who doesn't want to stay with my call attention to that tells me Yes, you don't have to meet your breath doesn't have to be the focus of meditation, even though you kind of generically like a familiar Most people, it's very useful to be with a breath. But there are plenty of people for whom the breathing is not the right thing to pay attention to meditation, and other things to be the anchor in the present moment besides the breath. A couple of more anybody get a sense of the tone of that voice? inner voice that makes sense as instructions to look at? How many of you had a really yeah. Please go ahead. Great, very nice. Someone hear you speak a little louder.

we internalize these things sometimes. How many of you recognize other people's voices in there? So thinking is fascinating. It's important part of who we are in our life and in many ways thinking helps us



a lot in our life. You We wouldn't negotiate our life very well without our thinking. On the other hand, our thinking also causes us tremendous amount of grief. And it could be argued that maybe the majority of our suffering and grief is directly related to our thoughts and how we relate to them and what they are. Some people get into meditation, will then have an adversarial relationship to their thinking, and they think the point of meditation is to have no thoughts at all to have a committee silent, empty mind. And the point of mindfulness meditation is not necessarily to have that, but rather to have a friendly relationship and open accepting silent relationship to whatever arises. And not to be aversive, not before or against anything, not before. Our thoughts are against our thoughts, but simply learn how to be awake, in the midst of what our experiences and kind of the, the epitome of what Buddhist practice is focusing on his experience of being awake in the middle of our experience, and being awake doesn't require Our experience to be different. It doesn't require us to stop thinking when you're awake to the fact that you're thinking. And as we're, we're awake to it. Our opportunity is there to shift our identity to the wakefulness as opposed to having our identity tied into what we're thinking about, or we're feeling. One of the interesting things to explore around thoughts in our thinking, is, is there a unexamined assumption that you can believe your thoughts? That your thoughts are all believable in true unreflective life sometimes people just believe every thought they have, this must be this is the way it is. And I know sometimes still, me, I should know better through these all these years of mindfulness. Sometimes I can see that I have these certain kinds of thoughts, and then certain mood filters, how I see things and think about things. And I'll think this is how things really are. You know, I'll think that someone, you know, some some somebody my family, you know, They're, they're really being awful today. And they might have been awful I'm in an awful mood. And I had this thought about them. And I believe that thought sometimes our thoughts are actually, you know, reflect actually, you know, actually, you know, actual kind of real perception of what's going on out there. But sometimes they're not. Sometimes they're pure fantasy I've had I've had complete fantasy about what's going on. My favorite little story like this. I tell a lot is Sylvia Borstein to be passionate teacher was called up the San Francisco Zen Center many years ago to show that she wanted to go out there and be a guest for a few days. So she called the office and asked Can I you know, be a guest and they said we have to talk to the guest manager but he's not in he'll call you back. So later, he called her but she wasn't in so you left a message into this is Robert that guest manager at Zen center and Call me when you get in. So when she got in, she called him back, called back to the office and asked to speak to Robert, the guest master. And they said, Oh, he's not in now. And so then Sylvia said, Oh, I guess this means that I wasn't, wasn't I wasn't, it wasn't, it wasn't meant for me to be Zen center goes in center. And the office person said, No, I think this was I think what this means is that Roberts not in. And she was so quick to want to add a layer of interpretation, meaning on top of the situation. And she was going to believe that meaning as if this really was what was really going on. And in good Zen form. The Zen center person said, No, it just means he's not in. You know, you have to you have to believe your meaning. So, how do we relate to our thinking? Do we kind of automatically assume that what we're thinking is true and accurate? recept reflection of the world Some people see opposite. They're afraid of their thoughts. They're plagued by their thoughts and, you know, please, you know anything to drown out my thought or thoughts and people turn on their radio or television or anything. So they can be, they don't have to be with our thinking because thinking is so anguished and painful.

But then also, there's a kind of, sometimes a kind of belief in the thoughts. Running away from thinking that way is actually in the long term kind of productive. It's fascinating to track your thinking a little bit to track kind of things you think about whether it's mostly memory or planning or fantasy, or commentary or judgments. You know, a lot of things if some people have real patterns, follow that follow through them, you know,

day after day or year after year, lifetime after lifetime, you know, just certain ways in which tracks are really well laid down, we tend to fall into those grooves over and over again. It's interesting to know that to see that become aware of that so that you know how those grooves influence how you see life and how you see yourself. It's also interesting to notice when you're paying attention to notice how often it's self reflective, how often it has to do with me myself in mind, how what's happening in the world relates to me. A lot of comparative thought goes on about me and myself and how I compare myself to others and different situations. And it's very interesting to see. As I like to like to point out if someone followed me around and spoke into my ear as much as I speak to myself, as constantly as I speak to myself, and as repetitively as I speak to myself, I would ask them to be quiet, I would beg them to be quiet, I bribe them to be quiet, I threaten them to be quiet. I'd call the psychiatrists and say, this person, you know, should probably be institutionalized. I mean, this is how many times can one person say the same thing, you know? And, you know, and what's interesting is That. So I can do it if someone's talking to me this way. But if it's inside my head, I'm talking to myself. What's interesting is how interesting it always is. And I can think the same thing 500 times. And it's still just as interesting as the first time. And why is that? And I suspect a lot of it is because it's self referential. And that's very interesting for us. Few of us are tired of me, myself and mine. So it's interesting to kind of track and find out what's going on with our thinking. And it's a helpful part of Buddhist practice of mindfulness practice. And so we're not so influenced by our thoughts and the content of them to their necessarily shape or view of what's going on in the world so drastically. And also, so we can start waking up in the midst of them and kind of be clear about what's going on, not be caught to be awake and not to be caught by anything, and be caught by those thoughts. So one of the descriptions in Buddhism of how to be mindful of Thoughts is to imagine thoughts as clouds drifting through an empty sky. You know, it's sometimes it's our thoughts are far from that sometimes they're like, they're like the bullet train, you know that just kind of racing by you know, and, and you're on it. But, you know, the clouds drifting in endless empty sky just kind of just, there's no problem with all just there. You don't have to pick it up, you don't have to grab on to it, you don't have to engage in it. You don't have to follow through on it. You don't have to, you know, analyze it just just a thought. Right. So I like to differentiate between thought and thinking and thinking we all know about right. But fighting is just what the mind does mind fighting machine, just create produce thoughts. What we do is we get involved in those thoughts. Oh, that was a great idea. I had, you know, I can't believe I was thinking that my god or Yeah, she said that and then the next time I see her, I'm going to tell her that and she'll probably tell me that in return, and then I'll tell her this You know, we're going on and on. And we're so involved. And so the chain of associated thinking, you know, free association kind of thing where they're all kind of build on each other and follow each other. There's no need to stop our thoughts. But what's interesting is how we get involved with our thoughts. We react to it, we buy into it, we get interested in it, we, you know, that's



what's interesting in mindfulness to be awake is to no longer buy into it or latch on to the thought. Just let it be there. So okay. If imagine, you know, no one's ever actually seen a thought, have you ever seen a thought? I mean, they're so central to your lives, right? they've ever seen a thought to be, you know, you know, can you paint it? Could you read a picture? You know, have you picked? No, you have, they would have never seen what it looked like.

Oh, that's where you see little graphs a little kind of how do you know it's a But

also lights up when you have a thought. So Jerry has seen his thoughts. You see or thought you thought you started. Now, is it your is it that you've seen your thoughts to 13? Or is it that you see you've seen you've seen the, the influence your thought had on a system?

Oh, I see. Let's come back then. The many ways so that story I was gonna say is, you know, it's like, I don't think anybody's really seen the thought to kind of like, and, but imagine, you know, NASA sends out a probe deep into the galaxy. And lo and behold, there's a thought that Those floating in the sky, you know, in a space, and no one's ever seen them. They're finally after all of these millennia, you can see what their look like. And it's so fascinating No one's ever seen when they get really excited back in NASA and there can't wait to let everyone know everyone in the world is excited to see what the first photograph is about real thought, you know. And people see this first thought just fascinating. I no idea had that shape and that contour and that font. And wow, you know, and it'd be so much more, you know, and the fact that it was a beautiful thought and evil thought to be almost secondary to the amazement of a thought, or like, the thought that you're having in your belly about to have or you haven't you know, about to have now, whatever is going to be in a moment when I ring the bell, right. The next thought you have to ring this bell. You can reflect and think that that's the combination of 5 billion years of evolution.

5 billion years of evolution, I'm thinking about pizza. Or you know, it's just amazing. It's just the most amazing thing. And we're so caught up in the drama of it and just like we're in the middle of it, we don't how often are you amazed by this thinking, you know, it's I don't use evolution, it comes down to this moment. We take our thoughts so seriously so heavy and so as a final arbitrator of meaning and who we are and everything. So people define themselves as who they are as human being and what they think. We think we are what we think. If you are what you think what happens those moments was no thoughts. There's a joke you probably probably don't you probably, I tell you the joke you leave because you've heard it too many times. But the characters you know, I think therefore I am. And also, he goes to the bar right? If you heard all this, say this terrible joke. So the cart goes to the bar and he orders orders a drink and get drinks. And then the bartender says, Do you want one more? And he says, I think not, and then disappears.

Sorry. So thoughts are important part of our life and there's a lot we can become aware of in our thinking. The trick with mindfulness of thinking is not to get caught up in more thinking about it. But

have this silent, non discursive awareness who sees it can be awake, there's something non discursive, something silent about wakefulness, that doesn't require us to get sucked in and thinking about it just allows it to be as it is. So when we're meditating, we usually have something as the anchor to the present moment to help because it's very hard to stay anchored in the present moment. We generally use in our tradition, the breath some people find the breath doesn't Work. An alternative is to stick body sensations to be in your body. And just vary globally with the body speed with your body, staying the body. Some people another alternative some people like is sounds, sounds, you're always having that present moment. So you open to the sounds, you stay with a sound, the mind drifts off, you come back to sounds and listening. We use something as an anchor. And just most of you really try with the breath until you have good evidence that you should do something else. And the breath is very helpful to develop concentration and stillness, relaxation. help you be in the present moment. But at some point, if it's really difficult to stay with a breathing and you want to let go the breath and let this non discursive awareness of meditation really acknowledge will be present for what it is it's making it difficult for you to be with a breath. Mighty body sensations might be emotions, but it could also be thought so they just kind of surface chatter of the mind. You can just kind of let go of it and come back to your breathing. But sometimes thinking is really compulsive. And really, it's really hard to let go of it. As they're kind of churning away, and you really want to then turn your attention and really kind of look at it head on, they acknowledge it fully. And there is a silent phase you can awake as you observe a silent observer noticing this, this thinking that's happening, because we have this wonderful capacity of knowing what's going on being aware of what's going on, while it's happening. can be aware of thinking what's happening and the awareness of thinking, there's not another kind of thinking it's kind of silent. Sensing in a sense. So you want to just acknowledge and you can move very gently the whisper in the mind, save yourself thinking, thinking, planning, planning, remembering and then And somehow, the more clearly you can acknowledge what it is kind of thinking sometimes the freezer says little bit premise, we're not so entangled with it then. And sometimes if you look at a thought head on, just fully acknowledge it. Sometimes it just vanishes, it goes away by itself. It isn't that you want it to go away. But that's often what happens. What you want to do is just be to be learn how to be awake in the midst of what's happening. Sometimes thoughts are more compelling. They're really compulsive, they stay for a long time. Then you stay there very gently, very friendly and loving way you can with your stinking thinking, thinking just being sensitive and begin exploring it. What is it like this thinking? What or what about how you think it's different than the content? Is it does it feel like very energized very powerful, very forceful? Do they feel hesitant or fearful? Does it feel when there's food does it feel like energetically in the body? Really compulsive you're thinking, you might feel tension in your forehead or your eyebrows and your eyes or your shoulders, your neck, your stomach, sometimes even, there's often a physical aspect to compulsive thinking. And you can bring your attention and ground yourself in the physicality of what it likes to be thinking this way. Because then you're really with the process of thinking you were the physical part of it, which helps us not get caught up by the story. And that's part of the trick in meditation not be caught by the story when you're thinking about, but you really, really separate yourself from the story. Just be with what's happening in the present moment in and of itself. So ground yourself in your body and I find sometimes, if I have a lot of anxious thinking, to find out where the anxiousness is felt in the body, then it helps settle that

anxiety. The marvelous thing about this meditation I find one of the marvelous things is there are times I find myself anxious, upset, thinking about something, some problem And it's like this closed loop. Someone who has described thinking as a chunk should give trunk by describe thinking as a period. The epitome of the human condition is

a traffic jam of discursive thought. And then someone told me, oh, it's like a, like a freeway off ramp, like a figure eight, that puts you right back on the freeway, and it goes around and around, you're always on kind of closed loop systems come back. And what I find is sometimes that my solutions to my problems and what I'm trying to figure out, doesn't come from thinking about it and solving it through thoughts. It comes from learning to relax and step outside of the stream of thinking and relaxing outside of it. That makes sense at it. And so, to know that that's the case really helps me a lot because then I until I knew that I was always kind of staying in my thoughts attached addicted to them. And now I know there's another way. And my whole perception of the situation can change radically. If I can relax behind that kind of traffic jam of thoughts that I can be caught in sometimes. So energetically, what does it feel like to be there and sometimes that's very helpful. Sometimes it's helpful to be mindful of the emotional quality of the thinking. It's also very compulsive and very predominant, and really making it difficult for you to be with the breathing. Chances are fairly good, there's an emotional aspect to it, that's fueling it. And so you can open up and be aware of that emotional aspect of it. If there's a lot of a lot of people we will plan a lot in meditation 90% of the time is because there's some anxiety or some fear, that's part of that event. And if you can ground yourself in the fear, there's no need anymore to produce those planning thoughts. It's almost like a like, the thoughts Are camouflage for the fear. If you really want to connect to what's really real, you want to connect to the emotion that's the emotion of the thinking, not the thoughts themselves. So, memories sometimes also seem to be a particular emotion that can be connected to it. Fantasy, the same thing, sometimes fantasy, it could be really what's kind of kind of the emotional tone that's kind of behind it. Besides the excitement and delight of particular fantasy sometimes can sometimes be a sense of loneliness, or emptiness. Or the task of meditation that is to ground the attention or to awake this awake, full attention, to feel what the emotion is like. If you do that, then sometimes that pulls off pulls out the fuel for being lost in our thoughts over and over again, it helps to help set on it and relax it. Sometimes our thinking is quite compulsive and painful and a lot of judgments and doesn't want to stop and, and you can be as mindful as you kind of try to be And in the end, what you really need to do is to learn to love it. You know, bring a friendliness to it, it's you after all. Imagine that there's, you know, you know, a four year old girl or a boy who is really tired and hasn't eaten for a while, and is really acting out and he's really getting kind of angry and hitting and throwing things. What do you do for that child? There's different strategies different people do but if you go kind of yell at the kid and block him in the room, and, you know, say you're terrible and awful, just kind of makes the kids feel worse. If you kind of say, oh, come here, and you hold the kid and make a feed you and let me help you get a nap. It's okay, you're okay. The kid feels much more welcoming, and nice. So a little bit that analogy is same with the mind. If you have these things you really hate about yourself. You're really plagued by the way you're thinking all the time or certain emotions or certain tendencies and you Be mindful of it. And just and it's still kind of plaguing you and troubling you. Maybe more than

mindfulness, what you need is, is to be friendly to it and loving of it or accepting of it. And to bring kind of a gentle tenderness to it, like it would to a four year old child that, you know, would feel awful if you feel rejected and hated. He's awful if it was told you're the problem. And if only I got rid of you, then my life would be great. I haven't heard I've known of kids who grew up that way with that attitude from their parents and it's just really terrible thing to weigh going up. And, and sometimes we internalize things sooner, internalize these things in our voice in our voice. So sometimes long is really the right thing to do. is these things all making sense? Do you have any questions? Yes.

Yeah. So for example, you can feel the emotion in your body, the fear in your body. Because the, the body's fear is often not in the present moment. The body is always in the present moment. So the fear is often not in the present moment in the story what might happen. And so often 90% of time it's about fear, which is, you know, far away, you know, possibility and so, to ground ourselves in the body and the emotions to feel in the body. And then to be with it, don't push it away, don't try to fix it, just feel it in your body. And the word emotion, means, in Latin, emotion, the emotion means motion, movement, in the E in Latin means out. So emotion has the meaning of to be moving out. Emotions are always in process always moving unless we freeze them as we hold them through our attachments or thoughts or resistance or clinging. So for example, resentment is frozen anger if you feel so if you're resentful for example and you get tight, if you're holding anger, you're probably tight, go back somewhere. If you feel that tightness or your fist is tight, if you feel it very lovingly and gently, the natural tendency of that tightness is the one relax and you'll begin to relax, we'll move out. So if you ground your emotions in your body and feel the emotion, they're often the emotion will move itself out and change and transform. If you steep keep engaging the emotion in the thoughts and the story and all that sometimes we just kind of wind ourselves up more and more. So grounding ourselves in emotions to grounded in the physical body. You just feel and be with that there. And then you're then you're there in the present moment, which is really the ones we're trying to do the most here. We're not trying to process our emotions. We're just trying to be what's in the present. And you're in the present in your body, but it's much more difficult to do that in the story. Makes sense? She's been lovely because it's just how would you recognize it immediately thought? Well, I think I think I would just rely on NASA telling me that they found it. I mean, I'm I know that I'm thinking there's a weird there's kind of an inner sense Oregon that knows what I'm thinking. So I know I know pretty well when I'm thinking and, you know, so I don't know more than that What to say?

Well, if it's, if it's if it's a sentence, if it's words or if it's or if it's pictures. If you Enter words, were you speaking to yourself or talking to yourself or their images inside your mind that you can relating to? Those are thoughts that make sense. One of the great times to change it, I was on retreat once 10 day retreat, Silent Retreat. And I was doing walking meditation back and forth and really walking meditation in the same place, kind of kind of a walkway that's about 30 feet long, we simply walked back and forth. And, and that was you know, walking along, minding my own business. And, and I came and I was actually lost in my thoughts. But I came to near the end of the pass, pass. And then what you do is you turn around, and then you cover the same ground again going the opposite direction. So I came to the last few steps, turned around and took a couple of steps near the direction

and I really realized that now I was in exactly the same place. I had been two seconds earlier. Same place in the earth. Just two seconds later, I was facing the direction. And I thought, What happened to that thought I had two seconds ago. I kind of looked around. Where did it go? Two seconds ago, it was so important. It was like the most substantial thing in the world, like I was so engaged and so important. And two seconds later, where to go. We relate to our thoughts. Sometimes it is the most solid and important thing in the whole world. And in fact, of the most insubstantial thing in the whole world. Isn't that amazing? We take the most insubstantial thing to be really the central organizing kind of ground for our life. And she wears it. Also fascinating. I love them. I mean, I have a very friendly relationship to my thoughts and But you know, that caused a lot of trouble to like, you know, being in a committed relationship. You know, you love the person, but you know, sometimes you have your problems just like that with my thoughts too, you know, but basically, you know, it's friendly, the best, one of the best instructions around thoughts, in terms of meditation came from Suzuki Roshi, the Zen master in San Francisco who said, don't be bothered by them. That's really helpful. Don't be bothered by them. So you just kind of don't get caught by them let go then just stay with your breath. So I hope this makes sense. The idea of meditation is a very simple wakefulness is a very simple quality of the mind is kind of like wakefulness is kind of like the spotlight of light that you shine whatever is going on. So sometimes your room is dark, you shine it on your breath. Sometimes, if something really loud sounds coming over there, you shine it on there and what you see There's a body sensation, sometimes some loud emotions happening over here and you shine the light on your emotions, sometimes all these thoughts going on and you shine a light there. And after a while, you get a sense that you have this light, this wonderful light that you can shine on different aspects. And the light itself is independent of your breath of your feelings of your thoughts or what's happening in the world around you. And you start appreciating this light. Wow, this light is actually this is always kind of peaceful or always kind of kind of free. The light itself becomes really important part of our life. So part of what we're doing in mindfulness is developing that light that awareness that wakefulness take notice and be aware and be aware. It is to keep it simple. So stay with a breath and something else becomes predominant. Let this silent discursive awareness take that in the accepting other law have just be awake to it. Oh, this is what's happening now. Right now, just this much is happening now. And then when thoughts are happening you and do the same thing with that just oh thinking is happening. For some beginners in meditation, it's very hard to include mindfulness of thinking as part of your meditation because it's hard to understand what it means it sounds like we're getting very busy thinking about what's going on. If you're a relatively beginner in meditation, you might these instructions might have been helpful might be helpful. Or if it's not so helpful now, kind of put it on the shelf for a few months. And just be very simple with a breath in the body and just kind of stay grounded enough for a while and develop that go really far just doing that. And then, you know, sometime in the future, you can pick up this thing around thoughts. That make sense. Because think about it.

So let's end with one more sitting. You've been sitting for a while. So if you'd like to stand up just for 30 seconds or so, and stretch, stretch, stretch and, you know, whatever you feel like you want to do to kind of loosen up your legs.



So one of the age to mindfulness, which not everyone, not all mindfulness students use, but it's very helpful for many people, is this very quiet, silent whisper of naming your experience as you're having it. Not to not to get lost in the name, but they say 95% of what you're doing is being with experience sensing the experience, and 5% is kind of nudging your mind encouraging you to stay present there by having this little name kind of in hardness, softness, tingling, hearing, hearing, sadness, sadness, happy, happy. thinking thinking and a very gentle kind of stream, constant kind of movement, gentle, easygoing stream, just naming what's going on can be very helpful to keep you in the present keep you in the presence because as long as your name and you're in the presence some people don't like to do this, think this naming labeling practice, because it sounds like it's more discursive thought more activity of the mind. But if you're really honest about how often you're in the present moment, you might find that actually, this keeps you more in the present. And it's in practice opens up and so, sit upright. Let your eyes eyelids closed, gently release your belly.

take too long, slow, deep breaths.

Let your breathing returned to normal.

And then ground yourself in your breathing. Breathing in and breathing out. And for this next loop short sitting, experiment with labeling your experience as you're having it. easygoing, relaxed is a quiet whisper in your mind you can don't get caught up in labeling, it'd be kind of in the background. So that helps you with the foreground. Stay present for your experience. Do it with a breathing and it's another extension becomes pronounced body sensations, emotions, thoughts. Let that easygoing stream of labeling help you to be awake to the presence of those things. If something stays predominant for a long time, just stay there for a long time with that. It was predominant changes, with your awareness, move with the changes. If you're not sure what to do, come back to your breathing. The breathing is in really invaluable for most of us. If all you do is mindfulness of breathing or mindfulness of body sensations or sound, it's just really great.

Oh, there's one more week to this class next week last week last class meeting for their five week class. And then the following Thursdays of March. We have a regular Thursday. Sitting group during the same time that the Thursday group is often oriented to lead more towards beginners. So some of you might want just kind of one more support to continue coming for the next week's series or the last week, I'd like to encourage you if you're new to all this and you've been following along at home is extend now you're sitting at home to 25 minutes each day, just for this week. After this week, you can go back, do whatever you want. But push yourself a little bit if this is all new to you and see, that's what happens if you you know, with the 25 minutes if you find that helpful or interesting or the other thing is next week, I won't be here though for like next week, the last class and I won't be teaching it because I'm leaving tomorrow to teach them month long retreat up at spirit rock in Marin County. And Carolyn Daly, who is, teaches this class in San Jose, and is one of our senior students, longtime



practitioner and lovely woman of the teacher will come and do the last week of this class. And then in March, we do another round of the five week intro class. I think maybe they're starting the first week in March 1 Thursday, we'll be switching it to Wednesday. So if you're interested in doing this again, I think it's the first Wednesday March we do another five week intro class. And this Saturday, we have a one day meditation retreat, taught by Howie Cohn, who's one of the Spirit rock teachers and you're welcome to come to that it's no registration required. Just come here at nine o'clock by nine o'clock. starts at nine. And if you're new to all this and just you could just come for you know for the morning if you'd like Just come for a while and when you've had enough you can just quietly go. So any questions before we end for the evening? The next topic next week, or next week is kind of a little bit of summary of all this but more importantly how to integrate this into daily life. how this applies to our life is very important. class and topic. So anyway, since this is my last day for this class, I want to thank you all very much and it's very nice and I do hope to hope this has served you and helped you in some way or other and, and are sitting here appears purpose of our center here is to support you all in your practice. And if there's ways to support you, please come in and participate here. Thank you.