

2014-01-12 Mindfulness of Thinking

Sat, 9/12 12:10PM • 41:37

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

thinking, thought, people, images, hear, happening, discursive, step, location, stories, words, quiet, mind, person, thinker, aware, amazingly complex, absorbed, nice, world

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

For this morning's Dharma talk to introduce it. I would like to begin with a short guided meditation. It probably four or five minutes and so that you could experience something about what I'm going to talk about.

So arrange yourself in a comfortable, upright posture.

Softly Close your eyes and gently turn your attention inward. To experience your body from the inside. And from within your body. It might take a few long slow deep breaths. Kind of like being massaged from the inside out. stretching the ribcage, the shoulders lift. And as you exhale, relaxing settling in for a few minutes here and then letting yourself breathe normally.

Perhaps tuning in to some inner sense of quiet or stillness, if it's available in that the inner stillness or quiet breathing Breathing mindfully.

So in this, what this guidance guide is going to be about is a simple exploration of your thinking.

So perhaps you'll be thinking as part of this. And the first question for you is do you think more in words or more in images? Are you a visual thinker or verbal thinker?

Some people are more one than the other. Some people do both. Which is your strongest tendency?

If you think in words, do you hear those words? Or do you in your head someplace? Or do you see them as texts?

If you're able to identify what kind of thinking you have, can you notice the location of that thinking? So if you're thinking words, and you hear the inner inner voice speak, is there a location in your body where that where you hear those words where the words are spoken? Or if you think in images, is there a place that those images appear in the mind's eye where they're projected where people trouble finding a location where thinking occurs. I sometimes will ask is it happening in your in your foot or your kneecap on your little finger. Sometimes that's simple questions. helps kind of narrow the area. And if you do experience it in your head or your heart is it in the front of your head, the back are the sides.

Does it feel like it's deep in your torso or in the front or the back if you're able to find More or less a location we're thinking is experienced. spend the next few moments being aware of thinking happening in that location. Kind of like if you have been absorbed and absorbed in a movie, watching a movie, and

maybe the person near you choose the popcorn loudly, yours gets up to move, leave. And you wake up and you realize, wait, I'm standing in a movie theater and you no longer absorbed in the story. And you can kind of look around and you see that lights flashing on the screen and you realize there's no real people up there. It's just a light flashing. The same way, can you step back? Can you wake up from the story, the content You're thinking and realize that it's just a particular way in which your neurons are firing.

Just an image, it's just some words. Step back from your thinking, not be absorbed in it or involved in the content. Step back and just from, notice where it's happening and step back from it. See if there's just something happening there.

One more thing, there may be the usual place usual way you have of thinking discursive thinking. And perhaps you can be aware that that which knows the way that you know that you're thinking that knowing is a quieter kind of knowing, acquired or kind of thinking

or still their way of thinking then the images or the inner voice.

So then to end this little exercise, you can take a couple of deep breaths when you're ready. You can open your Nice.

So then I want to follow that by saying something provocative. If think, if thinking is optional. Why think? If thinking is optional, Why think. So, that's provocative maybe in a few different ways. One is maybe it's never occurred to you that thinking is optional. And then or maybe even more, so it's inconceivable. You cannot think there's no way you can conceive of the idea that you could not think.

And because it's inconceivable not to think it's inconceivable that you would ask why think maybe I should have maybe I'm not supposed to bother thinking as was just turned it off and do something else. What What else is there to do? For the mind? But the mind does mean it's just like a constant companion thinking it just that's what the mind does. It thinks that's what I do. I am my thinking. If I don't think then who am I? If I don't think I'm not here? I got to think how would I know anything if I don't think how would I fix my life problems if I don't think and since I have always have a problem. I better always be Thinking. Meditation begins putting a question mark around the whole topic, the whole experience of being a thinker. And one of the ways it does it is occasionally in meditation, the mind gets really quiet. Thinking might not stop, but you're no longer so interested in their thoughts. And you realize there's a difference between thinking with interest with involvement with engagement. And thinking without particularly interest is more interesting things to do. So for example, in analogy for this would be to go into a very crowded room with a lot of people. And mostly maybe what you are aware of is the people in the crowd and figuring out how to get through the crowd. But if you go into a very, very big vaulted Cathedral vaulted you know, grotto big cave was made really majestic and beautiful and big. And there are people there but they're spread out and widely spaced, then you can become aware of the space, the spaciousness, the vastness, the scope of it. And it might actually be more interesting to look at the big open space than it is to fixate on the people. Whereas if you have to get through this crowd, a little place, a lot of people, you know, you focus on the people, you don't notice a space so much. So the same way with thinking, we can get claustrophobic with our thoughts and so involved with our thoughts. That's all we focus on just what we're thinking what we're seeing. But as the mind gets quieter as the mind gets quieter. We start becoming aware of their space in the mind, there's stillness in the mind. There's experiences of sensory pleasure that can well up in the body, there's experiences of different emotions that can be there. And there's other things going on to picture than just what we're thinking about. And it's a remarkable thing for some people to step back from the discursive thinking, and not be

so involved in it. And for some people, it's a revolutionary, revolutionary kind of revolution in their mind. It's a revolution in the mind, if kind of the only thing a person really kind of knew to do was to be involved and think and figure out and be involved in that. And sort of step away from it. So there are other things to do besides think, and views in the gaps between thinking when your thinking comes with discursive thinking becomes quiet, you don't die, you don't disappear. In fact, one of the nice things to discover is that they, the quieting down and discursive thoughts tends to make us happier. Because discursive thinking has a lot to do with the stories we tell ourselves those stories and those ideas and those commentary we make is often the source of our stress. Many of us are not really the best storytellers. You know, we don't Haven't we didn't learn the best stories to tell ourselves. And so we you know, we tell ourselves stories about who I am and we tell ourselves stories about who other people are we tell ourselves stories, what's happening or what needs to happen or what did happen. And sometimes those stories come with value judgments about ourselves, what do we need, what has to happen, what our problems are and all that. There is. There was someone I don't know who it was, it's a famous person who made this remarkable statement. I've had many problems in my life, many troubles in my life. Most of which never happened. Mark Twain said that.

And you know, because we have this tremendous capacity to think. And one of the functions of thinking is to project into the future is to think in imaginary, you know, we have to predict the future predict what's happening, and to some degree to kind of get around in life. And that predictive aspect of the mind has ability to predict all kinds of dire possible futures. And, you know, if this is terrible, things are gonna happen, you're waiting and there can be an underlying anxiety that fuels the thinking. And it kind of kind of colors it as something as if something unknown dire, terrible is gonna happen. And so we plan and think the future and those stories about the future of imagination then feed back on us and create more anxiety and becomes a scoring point for loop. And discursive thinking has a sometimes a tendency to create these wonderful loops of stressful ways of thinking and they can Come with great authority, the discursive mind that thinks a lot can seem extremely important. It's where we you know, we solve our life we understand our life it's where we understand ourselves who we are. It's a you know, so it can we give it a lot of authority, but that thority sometimes is is misplaced. Certainly thinking is important part of human life I wouldn't I have a lot of respect for it I do a lot with, with with delight, I enjoy my thinking. But the thinking mind isn't necessarily the wisest part of you. And so if you completely get invest authority into whatever you think your chances are, most of you'll get in trouble. Because you're thinking your thoughts, sometimes our assumptions and guesses and judgments that might not be true to what goes on. And so it's interesting to study our thinking, to be aware of thoughts step up, I mean, this idea of stepping away and Looking back at them, kind of like you did any of them being in a movie theater and stepping away and realizing that you're, you know, you no longer kind of absorb, absorb, absorb and the story was so important what's happening and, you know, will they get away? Will they get caught? Will she he kissed each other, you know what's going to happen? You know, they're like, and, and then, you know, the person next to you decides to get up and leave the theater and he would just stand up and let the person go by and you realize, you know, you know, where am I I'm in a movie theater. You know, it's like this lights in this people around me and it's kind of curious and you hear the popcorn chewing and we know if you think about it, most of us know i think that there's absolutely no movement happening on the movie screen. What it is, is a continuous flashing of still photos. Still shots on the screen, one after the other very rapidly. And we have the human the human mind is has a constructive process. And it constructs these individual images into movement for us. And so we see movement that's not there. So you're not even seeing accurately. And so to kind of sit in the movie and kind of think about that, then you no longer you know, you're no longer, you know, with the chase scene, you're no longer with the drama because you know, like, there's something isn't other perspective in which to look at it. So the drama of our thinking, the stories we tell ourselves to step out of it gives us a chance then to look back and see it in different ways. See it

differently than just focusing on the content. And one of the things to notice is things like how interested we are in the earth thinking, how involved are we? Are we glued to it? Or is there a lot of space and openness to it? Are we living in it? Do we live not only in it do we live in it and through it is the way that we experience the world around Does it happen through the filter through the frame that our thoughts give us? Or are we aware that if there's a thought, like you're looking at a person, you're where there's a thought about the person, and you were there seeing that person and seeing the person's separate from the thought, or seeing the person through the thoughts themselves. And if there's no mindfulness, clear awareness of the thinking process, then our perception of the world gets confused with the things we have. And so then we see sometimes erroneously, because we see through what our interpretations are of the event, the stories we were telling us so on the event so to step back and be aware of that just doing some induce mindfulness awareness, practice, mindfulness of thinking process, practice is very helpful, a very significant support for people who go around the world thinking, which I assume is What human beings do, we're not human beings, we're human thinkers more than anything else for many times.

And so to step back, step out of its, its allure, to see for what it is. And this is not supposed to be, you know, it can be, you know, some people are so addicted to thinking it's kind of inconceivable to pull back, or it's very disorienting to pull back. And sometimes the side instruction to step back and look at your thinking, don't be involved in it. Some people will take as being dismissive of thoughts, wait a minute, these Buddhists are always kind of, you know, you know, saying things so you don't want us to reject something. But in fact, the ability to step back and observe the process of thinking while it happens. So for example, if you're thinking about the past, to step back and no thinking about it clearly fully, be aware thinking about the past. is happening the present right here. Now, I'm thinking about the past, as opposed to being in the past because you're kind of so absorbed in the story. So if you have that kind of clarity, you really see yourself. See the thinking, the thoughts occurring. It's kind of like observing a miracle. It's kind of awesome. It's an amazing thing that this universe has these bipedal beings that can have these amazingly complex processing systems that result in having thoughts and having images. It's, uh, you know, I don't think they have computers that are sophisticated enough yet to do what our minds do, to produce a thought to produce a memory. A lot of processing power goes into that we ever did. Taking a tremendous amount of data, organizing it and regurgitating it, bringing it up into the active memory where we can kind of see or hear the image and ideas and, and relate it to the world around us in the past in the future. It's a pretty amazingly complex thing. Even something as simple as you know, if I, if I have a thought this is a glass of water and be nice to drink it, it's a pretty innocent simple thought. It's a pretty awesome thing to have happen. So to step back, and not to reject thoughts, but to be amazed by them. And even if you have the most in the world's certified most awful thought, No one's ever had more awful thought than you've managed to produce. It's pretty amazing and to sit down In common Oh, wow, as opposed to Oh, you know, how could I not have thought that instead of kind of being caught up in the story and the meaning of, wow, isn't this amazing that even such things exist, that thought like this. So this kind of sense of awe can also be a great help from again, being locked into thoughts and believing them, and being under their sway and under their authority. And so to look at the thoughts to be present for them, and so some people find it helpful to to explore this question, where's the location of thinking? So people have never never occurred to them to go look at that. And it's kind of like little I have a what there's a place and then if I look at it and recognize what's happening in that place, kind of in that location. So is that true for some of you? It's some were some of you able to find the location for where you're tend to think? See some heads nodding? Would anybody like to share the location? Maybe we can hear some of the variations varieties. Use the mic, please.

So you thought you first you thought you were thinking around your jaw, and then you felt the nose not thinking is not there? They're just tension there. Then you did your Did you relax your attention? Every time you had a thought you're contracting your jaw. Sometimes I was feeling that thinking has these tentacles that spreads out into the body and depending on what we're thinking, And who knows all the different factors. It kind of pulls in the muscles in different places in our body, jaws or one place, shoulders, belly, you know, eyes, different places tentacles, because you can feel you know, pulling in that goes on. Great. Thank you. Someone else.

Um, I noticed that I sort of some text was just kind of flying up from behind my eye lids texts. I was even looking at like, Okay, so what font is that?

Great. So I think that's kind of what the combination of words and images right some people can some people see more in text. So they float away. It's kind of like is that like, you know, Star Wars where those texts kind of those words kind of

you can pass the other mic somewhere near that the other mic want to pick it up so we can be ready for the next one. You're welcome.

So for me, it depends. on what it is that I am writing, but I was realizing the other day that I have a movie about two feet in front of my face. And I look at the movie, I watch it and then I write it down.

So it's two feet in front of your face. And how many of you How many of you have movies or images that appear in front of you? Okay, and so some of you, how close are they to you? Are they two feet away? Or how far are they different kinds of that you say loudly. So like three inches away, four inches away, a foot away. All your images are inside really close. Okay, are they kind of just behind your forehead or in the back of the head, behind your eyes. But between the ears even further back You have to pay more for that those seats.

I was actually writing something the other day and I was so absorbed in what I was doing and I was writing a scene that took place at night. And when I looked up, I was actually shocked to see that it was daylight out.

I hope I hope you're in her movie sometimes.

I see images predominantly on the in front of me about two three feet of me on the top left hand side here. And actually it's so predominant that I have noticed that so I have consciously try to shift it to the right hand side. And because I don't want Sorry, my brain to be dominating the other side. So I've been trying to do that later. Very interesting what that means very interesting. How many

of you who saw images so a little bit more on one side than the other side? So a few of you and which side was it? Either there was a right side for you and left. Left, right for you.

And the black on the right

looks different than the black.

Interesting. So what about we most of you who think in words, is there where's that locate those that those locations at different ones of you. So Mike, yeah, that might cover.

You put them on paper. Nice.

Up here. But like, you know, there's a leaning in sort of like when you're having an intense conversation, there's a feeling of being leaned in and it's like, oh, you know this.

So you have in your words, those conversations happen a little bit on your left side of your forehead pulled in to this, and you're involved. you're leaning into it. There's pressure there. This part of it. That's great to know. Heather. Yes.

Oh, it's fascinating. I think it's quite enjoyable. That quiet.

Pass it to your left.

I had the curious experience of when I would, I would hear I do hear equally out of both years to the best of my knowledge. But in this exercise, if the thought was more evaluative and perhaps with a tinge of, of judgment, I heard it on the left side exclusively. And if the thought was open, expansive, I saw image but on equally on both sides, just interior to the forehead.

Interesting, thank you. So, maybe hit a couple of words. Just quickly, please. Um,

when I get hooked to a thought, especially like, a wary or fear, my thoughts usually are mostly our images. And then when I when I see that hook, I see that hook Their words explaining then the script of the image and everything happens in the back.

Hmm. Great. That's nice to hear, please.

It's sound it but it feels like it's around right on the very top of the head. Hmm. And it could be influenced by what I've heard lately, and it'll pick up an accent.

And I seem to lately have an addiction to Mrs. Hughes from Downton Abbey.

So, there's one more please Jim.

Can you hear me?

I experienced the vision part or the visible parts separately. Like behind my eyes. The P oral is more at the top of my throat behind my mouth, but the emotional impact of those is often different. Especially when I think of my late wife, the visual is, seems to somehow get hooked on the negative parts. And the aural, especially if I'm thinking and talking, that I'm talking about it or rehearsing, saying something about her or my loss that brings on the pain and the positive things that I've lost.

So there's a whole universe. So thinking is three dimensional, maybe multi dimensional, and many times we live in a two dimensional relationship to it, because we live in the interest, the content, the story, the ideas, the content of what we think or what we see, and use now now from this, you get a sense, there's more to discover in this world, so you can be aware of the location. Some of you probably never really looked at this before until Today Today, and so what happens to that one of the things that's available possible then if you have a location, they start noticing what are the sensations

that are there in that location. So that one person said he leans in that direction, some pressure there. Sometimes it's not uncommon to in that location where thinking occurs to actually feel pressure or a lot of energy or agitation or tension or tightness. Sometimes, it's also possible to, to then become aware of things like the tone of the voice, you know, apparently the accent. And some, some, sometimes people report that you asked whose voices that even they'll say, Oh, you know, it's that strict teacher I had in third grade. I didn't know I into our parents voices because we tell them to internalize these voices that we hear and some voices have more authority or power, are they more stick more than other voices and The end so and then what comes along with a voice is the tone of voice or the and so it comes along with certain emotion motional qualities and biases. Even some of you pointed out that certain kinds of ways of thinking or seeing come with different kinds of emotionality or different evaluations of the situation. And so it begins to kind of fill out the picture of what's going on. And you start having a much wiser relationship to yourself as a thinker, if you see the multi dimensional aspect of what thinking is involved. And as we begin to see more and more what's going on, that seeing or that awareness of it helps us to be a little bit freer from being glued to the content. And when we're glued to the content, thinking can be self perpetuating, where especially like if you have some anxiety or upset about something sometimes it's very hard To get out of the loop, we can just going around and around the circles. The image I like to think of is that of a little kitten chasing its own tail, you know, just kind of going around and around and you just can't stop thinking about we're thinking about what kind of cotton and so sometimes we need to do something if we need to, but it's um, it's helpful to do something that we step out of the loop. And so some people do things like exercise or take a shower or you know, read a book or watch a movie or do something, do something to distract you from what you're thinking about. So to break the self perpetuating cycles, meditation can also be used for that, where you calm down, you step away, you start being mindful of it rather than being it and it's their way of stepping away from the loop. One of the things that seems one of the things interesting things to notice about thinking is a thinking. It's not maybe obvious when I say it, thinking is an activity of Mind. And it's a particular process mental processes going on. And it probably is a series of different kinds of processes going on. And that's why some people are sometimes we've seen images sometimes in words, because different processes are being activated. It's I don't know much about this, but it's possible that verbal thinking tends more to come from the left hemisphere. And that verbal thinking tends come more from the right hemisphere. It says there are differences in how these left and right hemispheres process our world. It might have impact the kind of way in which we relate to the world depending on which side gets predominant. It's nothing wrong with having one predominant the other I would say, but it just, it's really important to see and to know what we're doing so we can have some, we can monitor it and be wise about it. And so there are mental prop mental processes going on their activities of mine going on and so if someone Let's say someone is pacing in circles. They're pacing and pacing and pacing and pacing, and you're standing there them and they're pacing and pacing, pacing, and they say to you, Boy, am I ever tired, I'm exhausted. This is tiring, and they go on and on and on and off. And finally, you kind of, you've heard it enough, you know, you say, you say, Excuse me. You know, maybe you'd be okay if there's a chair there. dkv sat down.

And so they sit down and they're happy to sit there for a long time and they sit there for a long time, but then they get really really tired and sleepy and it's a lot of work to sit up straight in the chair. And right next to them is a bed and they complain all you know, it's tough, tired, it's so hard to sit up. And you said well, you know, you could go lay down there's a bed right there. I know this is much better laying down. So the same thing with the mind. Our mind paces and paces in cases, we don't have to do it, it's okay to let the mind Sit down. And then even sitting down, take some effort feels pretty good at first, it's okay to let the mind lay down. This analogy I'm going to try to say is that it's okay to quiet, these activities of thinking are not necessary to do all the time. We don't have to do it as actively and fully, we can quiet it, we can quiet it, we can put it to rest. There are different layers of kinds of thinking that we

do. There's very kind of coarse discursive thinking. There's a very simple kind of commentary of just kind of recognizing what's happening in the present moment. And kind of, you know, the bigger picture of the present moment, and just more and more simple, simple kind of thinking that goes on. And some of them were simpler, deeper kind of thinking we do is very smooth, very quiet, very kind of effortless to do. Whereas Some of the big discursive thinking can seem effortless until you step back and look at it. And when you realize you're exhausted, you know, one of the things to discover by finding location of thinking is that that place is exhausted. It's been doing it for a long time. So weary of going on and on and so to learn to put out to rest. So, if the provocative statement now at the beginning was if thinking is optional, Why think?

So that's your question for the week. Carry that question with you. And think about it.

And more than Think about it, think those thoughts if they as optional, Why think? And then kind of feel your way or sense your way or for an answer just beyond that, is there an answer to that question that comes to you? That's not a thought itself? What would that be? So, and then, I think it's a good topic. So, if this if you find this interesting or provocative during this coming week, I see if you can find friends, family and total strangers that you can that you can engage in a conversation about thinking, the process of thinking what they know about it, or you know, you heard this crazy thought talk on Sunday morning and, and you know, can you say can you tell tell your friend stranger a little bit about it? What do you think of this? And the guy said, thinking is optional. Many has, why, why think? And they'll look at you and say, I bet it's part of a cult. Be careful with that guy. So then you'll have to deal with that. So I hope that was nice. Nope that was opens a new VISTA of exploration for you. And since we do have our tea Today, I would like to ask you to turn to the person next to you introduce yourself for a moment. And especially if the person is new find out they're new here, please and you're not new. You even if you came last time, welcome the new person. Thank you.