

# 2015-08-16 Thinking

Thu, 9/17 11:03PM • 40:56

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

thinking, thoughts, thought, mind, people, boredom, meditating, life, arise, caught, themes, common themes, question, wise, important, stop, discursive, emotion, mindfulness, activity

## SPEAKERS

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Good morning. Last week I talked about relaxation as a foundational, useful thing to do. Relaxing creates a very good foundation for being able to have insight to be able to see clearly what's going on. And one of the areas of our life that are really helpful to become lot wise about to really see well, is to see the whole process nature of thinking. And the nature would have thought this. And in a very kind of powerful statement around thinking that I'll kind of start off with and let it kind of linger in your mind maybe get your attention on this topic is that it's more important, what you think about significant life events, then event itself. That's quite something. I mean, all kinds of things can happen wonderful things tragic things can happen. And it's more important how you think about it, than the event itself. So you might not agree 100% you might be ready to protest. But it's true, maybe 95% of the time. And anyway, it's a very important idea. This is how we think about things, and our relationship to our thoughts. how we relate to them, how thoughts relate to ourselves, is probably one of the leading indicators of stress, the causes of stress. And we sometimes attribute stress to a lot of things in the world how things are, our schedule is full of all these demands and things and but at the heart, it's how we think and how we engage in our thinking. That is a source of a lot of stress. What image that sometimes I thought that represent how thinking goes sometimes is a cat that's chasing his tail and you know little kitten and you know it just goes circles never catches its tail it's always running and running and running. Or another image is a very complicated freeway intersections of freeways where there's a four leaf clover of on ramps on ramps and off ramps but they just kind of feed into each other forever and so you're on this you know freeway and getting off and on you can't snow way off out. Maybe unless you stop your car on the side and jump over you know, sometimes thoughts can be that way just like this and sometimes they get they become a traffic jam, you know, the thoughts. So the idea of becoming wise to start looking at thoughts understand them, and part of the advantage of really beginning to stop and looking at the way you Think how does your thinking work for you as a person and getting wise stepping back in a sense and the beginning of track and know what happens when you think or how do you think is that you then can begin you know using your thoughts in wiser ways you can relate to them in wiser ways. Maybe kind of like you have a friend who needs to use a computer but has never used a computer before doesn't know anything about the note mouse's doesn't know where you know how to turn it on, doesn't know you know anything about the computer. And he maybe doesn't even know how to use a keyboard, imagine that. And but they have to use a computer so they're always having you over. So you could do it for them. You know, you're like standing over your back. It's like we need to do this, do that and you're like doing it, you know, and you could do that's very helpful for them. Maybe it's great. Or you could teach them how to use Computer. This is how you turn on just how a mouse works. This is where the, you know, whatever, right? And then they there they can take care of it themselves. So it's kind of like that we have this software, this whole operating system inside of us that very few people have really learned about what what's going on into how it works and how to actually operate and work, the whole realm of our thinking and thoughts. One of the classic

stories around thinking and the Buddhist tradition is a story about two Chinese monks who were wandering around China with custom of monks often to wander around cooking temple, a temple monastery to monastery and visit teachers.

And they came to a creek through a river, and they had to afford across the river. However, there was a woman on their side of the river had trouble getting across couldn't quite get across by herself. And so one of the monks picked her up and carried her across. Now, Buddhist monks apparently back in those times, in generally are not supposed to actually touch women. So this was breaking the monastic rules. But he picked her up and put her on the other side helped her over helped her out that his companion is marked there was walking with Him that they put two of them walked the rest of the day to the next monastery. And when they got the next monastery later that day, the second monk kind of couldn't contain himself anymore. And he said, you know, how could you have done that? How could you have picked up that woman? And the first monk said, I put her down at the river. Why are you still carrying her? So why are you still carrying x? Probably all You have something you're still carrying? Why are you still carrying it? What are you trying to do by ruminating and thinking and repeating and, and, you know, certain themes, certain ideas of memories, certain plans, you know why you're doing it? You know, the benefits you're getting from the ruminations that you do the car. Do you know what the top themes are? Is your thoughts or your thoughts completely random? And, you know, just, you know, it could be anything at all. And so random that give it enough time, you'll compose. You know, Romeo and Juliet, great plays, you know, it's like monkeys your keyboard right? Or are there particular themes that keep reoccurring for you? And you know, what the top three themes are, for the week for the day for the lifetime that you have, some people have particular themes that just keep revisiting over and over and over again and And where are you in those themes? Where do you fit into it? Are you mostly thinking about will the Giants have a chance this year? You know, you know, and you're, you're thinking about that, because you really have a lot of care and compassion for the residents of San Francisco. And, you know, and you really kind of, you know, you're, you know, that's important to think about those people and their support those fans and, you know, so it's got nothing to do with you it has to do with those fans and supporting them and or is there a lot of thoughts that you have? What are the common themes? Are you a central character? Does it have some important role in your life impact for you, and what is that role that you have? What is the way are you thinking about yourself? What kind of ideations as are their delusions of grandeur that go along with it? Are there delusions of what's the opposite or grander, delusions of misery of delusions of unworthiness. dilute of blame delusions of terrible. You know, so what what, you know what goes along with the self referencing aspect of the thoughts that you have? Have you stopped in thinking look at look at this. One of the things about discursive thinking and discursive thinking is really the major one of the major problems for people who tried to be mindful thinking is not a problem necessarily. In fact, it's possible to have a very friendly relationship with thoughts. We certainly don't want to tweet thoughts thinking as an enemy when we practice. They're important part of human life. And we should, you know, hopefully develop a very nice working friendly relationship to thoughts. But one of the aspects of discursive thinking which is having a conversation, kind of ruminating, thinking about something over and over again, analyzing something, planning something kind of, kind of like having a conversation In your head or creating a whole scene, in front of you an image of what you, you know, if you think in words and images is that then the thinking is turned around and focused on itself. The energy that goes, energy of attention in the mind has been somehow pulled into the black hole of thinking. And it kind of feeds it and keeps it going. And what we're trying to do in mindfulness is not have this, like, you know, chase the cat chasing the tail, or this energy of the mind, you know, caught up in the swirl and ongoing kind of feeding of discursive thoughts, without having some ability to choose where our thinking goes and how we think. Nothing lost in it.

And so what we're trying to do in mindfulness is to step back and be able to know that we're thinking when we think and that's the kind of the simplest way of Getting becoming wiser I'm thinking is to know. Oh, so much. So it's kind of like you know if something if you hear someone speaking, maybe outside your window and you can't maybe hear their words. You know, someone's sticking out there. Isn't that interesting? I was up. It's middle of the night gluttonous tonight that it meant criminal, maybe four o'clock in the morning, went to the bathroom and their bathroom window was open and someone was talking out there. What are they doing talking out there four o'clock in the morning? You know, what's it like, but I couldn't hear what they were saying. You know, it was kind of allowed. It wasn't an angry conversation. It was angry. I would have made some sense. It's, you know, I don't know. But it just was just like a loud conversation. So I knew I could hear someone talking. So in the same way, can you know that you're thinking some people have a very hard time with this. It's very foreign. The whole idea like what how what Some people, I think it's kind of like they swim. Like they say that swim fish can't see this ocean, the water they swim in. So some people can't see the, the thoughts that they swim in, and they're constantly involved in, going on. And so that's why one of the functions of meditation practice is to, in fact, slow the mind down, calm the mind, and strengthen the attention so that we begin catching and seeing what goes on. And one of the great insights, the really important insights of insight practice is to see the arising of a thought and the passing of a thought. You know, you have thoughts come and go all the time. The mind is kind of like a thought machine. It just kind of pumps out thoughts. And it's not like a personal failure that you should be thinking. It's just what the mind does is it's important part of the mind you put up Without thinking very hard to kind of negotiate our life and live our life, but to be able to see that a thought comes along, and there it is, and then to see it pass. It could be something so simple as you're kind of minding your own business, and you start, you saw the thought arise, what should you have for lunch? You weren't thinking about lunch beforehand. And now the mind is thinking about lunch. Why are you thinking about lunch? When I just had lunch? You know, you know, why should you know? So there we are thinking about lunch. And then and then first, you know, realize, well, you know, better things to think about or, you know, or you get distracted by something and you recognize, oh, I'm no longer thinking about lunch. That's, that's past. To see that a thought arises and passes, takes away some of the authority of our thoughts. Some of the kind of the conch To wait over them in the middle of thinking sometimes they can just seem like this is how things should be or this is the truth. Or this is kind of like we don't, we don't know the rethinking, we just think that we're facing the truth. You know, the truth is facing us hitting us over the head head or something just just there. But if you can watch a thought arise and pass, then it just kind of just one more thing. The clouds arise and pass, just like the clouds might come and go. thoughts come and go. Just like, you know, a bird might appear, and then fly past and disappear, a thought appears and then disappears. The mind doesn't have to get any more involved with a thought, than it gets involved with a thought that goes by. So to be able to be to learn to be mindful of things To the point that we can watch the arising and passing of a thought, gives a lot of freedom. Because it gives it gives us it gets us close to that place where we can know that we're thinking and then evaluate. Should I keep thinking this? Is this a useful way of thinking? Is my thinking productive? is it accurate? Should I be thinking about something else? Should Should I kind of Should I maybe reconsider how I'm thinking? Now maybe the way I'm thinking is not very useful. And maybe there's a better way of looking at this.

Sometimes our thinking is not very clever. And, for example, there can be a lot of critical judgments that go on about ourselves and other people, some of them three quite mean. So there can be like a catastrophe thinking. It can be, you know, fear based thinking where we're thinking a lot about the worst possible thing that can happen to us and so is it really useful? To keep going with those thoughts, are they true thoughts? Are they're more productive and useful ways of thinking. So to step back and know that we're thinking and then see their their thoughts don't have any weight to themselves. There's no concreteness and the thoughts are just kind of like what are thoughts? you've ever thought about what

a thought is. You know, where does it live and how heavy is a thought? Does it have a weight? Which shape is your are your thoughts? Do they have a shape? Where is the thought located? Some people point to their heads some people point to their hearts different places. Some people don't have a clue where their thoughts are located. Online localized thinking

So then to become aware of the thoughts, and then to have some choice about what how we relate to it. One of the great choices, powerful choice is not to automatically believe the thoughts. And I want you said, any years ago I gave a teaching about not believing your thoughts. I thought it was a really good idea because I know I don't know about your thoughts, but some of the things I think shouldn't be believed. And in and someone said came to me and said, Gil, this is what they teach in cults. Don't believe your thoughts, because you know, don't believe that, you know, don't believe that. Don't think for yourself because just go along with it. We're telling you. But I'd like to believe that as we become more mindful of our thinking, we do have more choice. And we can start using our thinking, to think more critically, think better. You're allowed to think. But think better, if you're going to think. And if you're not kind of embedded in your thoughts are caught in the grip of your thoughts. Then there's more space and room to kind of begin thinking more and thinking more wisely. And as one of the ways to become a wiser thinker is to ask questions. Just two simple questions. That can be a question like, Is this true? Is this useful? Is this kind is this what I want to be doing? Is there an alternative? Where is this coming from? All kinds of things just to kind of begin exploring the thoughts

I would suggest that for most of us most of the time that our thinking is kind of like the narrow neck of the hourglass that most of our experiences go through. And if you can watch what happens in that hourglass in that neck of the hourglass, you can become very wise about a lot of different things. But if you let your thinking just go unobserved and just kind of like you're thinking have the primary power role or authority or you know and just what you just think away kind of unchecked you miss you missed missed a great opportunity to be a little bit more in control or much more self directed or a little bit more independent of your own mind.

In a Buddhist meditation circles, you'll find many different attitudes that are somehow conveyed or picked up about thinking. And I remember once I asked one of my teachers It was not not on retreat or anything I just did the more informally as I started my question to him, it wasn't practical question about just something at the retreat center and I don't know being on retreat or something. But I said, start off by saying, what do you think about I'm gonna say something before I could finish it. He said, I try not to think and, and I kind of thought, Well, you know, that's strange. Maybe he meant when he's on retreat, he starts meditating, but to completely kind of wipe for yourself free from thinking is, you know, I think, I think it diminishes us as a human being thinking is great. But at the same time, to be able to put our thoughts down and have the ability to put them down and not think is a fascinating thing to do. Even if you stop thinking just for a moment cannot let go of your thoughts for a moment, nothing. It can be a relief, but can also be very frightening, or very challenging little space after we let go of our thoughts. Because sometimes we are what's behind our thinking is fear is strong desire, ambition, a lot of strong messages about what we're supposed to be doing. And our thoughts are the vehicle to try to accomplish what we think we're supposed to be doing and the very strong kind drive that we have that we around what we have to do, can be right there in can be noticed right there when we let go of our thoughts because there's the pressure is there to pick up the next thought, I can't stop thinking I'm supposed to be supposed to be. But it's one of the great things in life to sit quietly without having any thoughts or any, you know, have a little space or gap or, or have a sense of connectedness to being just being present where thoughts don't predominate. You know, the famous the card said, You know, I think before I am, I think, I think a better way of saying it is, I am and sometimes I think and so the sense of I Am, takes precedence feels much richer and more valuable than whatever I'm thinking about.



Sometimes we are involved in thoughts because it's entertaining. And some people use a lot of thinking to avoid being bored. But being bored is also a way of not really being in the fullness and the lightness of emptiness of I am just here. And it's sad, I think the sad life to avoid boredom. By engaging and doing, it's much better to face the boredom and work through it and find out what's underneath it, to really go deep into it, and not have boredom, be a, you know, direct your life and force you to kind of avoid, because boredom is always going to keep you a little bit separate from life. Boredom is a kind of sign of separation of holding a distance from our experience in our life. And there's no experience whatsoever that's inherently Boring. Boring is an evaluation of the mind. There's an boredom is an activity that's generated by the mind. And are you going to just, you know, accept that activity as being as being an accurate representation of the situation you're in. And if you do, then you're you're kind of under their control the sway of your mental activity, your thoughts and your judgments and evaluation.

So to kind of turn around and not like boredom, prompt you to kind of entertain yourself with fantasies and ideas when you but to you know, but to kind of be willing to stop and face that not have fear, force you to think constantly, but turn around and be with a fear and face it and work through it. to not have ambition, desire, whatever it is, the message is we have so one of the things to look at, if you start kind of in, I'd recommend you know that you maybe go around with a little notebook And or maybe just with your smartphone with you can speak into it right? The smartphones have notes capacity. So maybe that's what people do who knows how to write anymore? And so, you know, just track your, the things you're thinking about. And first kind of get a sense of what the common themes are. And then try to have some kind of careful analysis of what are what are you trying to do when you think about those things? Or what's your mind trying to do? Not not so much, you know, the surface reason you're doing it, but what's the underlying impulse and what are you trying to accomplish by thinking about those common things? And then think about, is there a better way to accomplish what you think you need. So if you're are being very down on yourself, Often critical of yourself, but that's one of the common themes. Why? What's the impulse? What's that coming from there? And in what way? What are you trying to do for yourself? And what are we trying to benefit yourself to think thinking that way always criticize, criticizing and being feeling bad about yourself? And is there a better way to benefit yourself than criticizing yourself? Is there a better way to kind of become a better person rather than kind of being worn down by the self criticism? Self criticism is another activity of the mind, just like boredom. And as we begin to add more and better sense of thinking, and judgments and criticism, these things are activities of the mind. A very special insight can arise at some point. And that's the insight is that these are optional. that these are not inherent to what is required to be alive. And breathing at this moment that is possible to be alive. Breathing present in a very simple, relaxed way. Content happy at ease, not needing to pursue a thought not needing to solve a problem, not needing to think about the future. That doesn't have to be any needs associated with our thoughts whatsoever. It's okay just to be and if there arises a strong impulse, no, no, I, you know, I can't do that or I'm not able to do that. That's a great place to turn the mindful attention and look at that. And be present for look at what's what is really going on for me, how's this operating? Maybe you want to learn how the computer works. Want to learn how you operate, as opposed to just going along? Don't just go along with what your mind is, is producing for you and saying and insisting and how it goes. Be curious, what is this? What's going on? And I think as you do this, I'd encourage you to assume working assumption just because with this assumption, I think you can sometimes if you have like a reference point you can understand something better. So the reference point for studying your own mind is to assume that the natural state of the mind that is always available is to be at peace. The natural state of the mind is to be at peace. So if that's the case, what about all the other stuff that's going on where you're not at peace? Don't use that to criticize yourself even more. But rather use it to have that assumption, the natural state of the mind is to be at peace as a way to put a question mark next to everything else that goes on in the mind. This really so how does this work? What's going on here? And it's very powerful if you can ask those questions, but a question mark, what is this? Is this really? So? Do I need to do this is this inherent?

asking those simple questions is a way of stepping back and not being caught by what's happening. Create a little bit more of an overview, a little more freedom and distance from it. And then someday, you might notice that a thought arises

and it passes and the moment after it passes. There's freedom. There's something very powerful, very meaningful at the moment after Thought passes. But if you're just caught in the traffic jam of thoughts, you won't see that moment because, you know, bumper to bumper. So thinking, I hope this thought this talk supports you to become friends with your thoughts. Good working partners. So we have a few minutes. Any questions, any thoughts about the talk?

Your talk really strikes home for me. I feel like in the years I've been meditating that I've made a lot of progress in a lot of parts of my life, but I still get caught in my thought loops. The progress I've made is now that I'm now I am aware When I'm caught in a thought loop,

it counts for a lot.

Okay, well, I'm still.

So what's happened whenever there's a strong event feeling, you know? And then the thoughts go, and then I go, I am ruminating about that, which may or may not be true. And I take a breath and it starts immediately. And again, and again. Any thoughts on that? To help break that? I mean, I got as far as noting the thought,

that helps me note it, but excuse me, it helps to note it.

Yes. That gets me aware that I'm having a thought but it doesn't make it stop. Well, it doesn't make it stop repeating. It gives me a tiny fraction of a second of space before it starts again. But yes,

but then you have to remember to do note again.

Oh, I do. Oh, I do. It's the worst. Just like if I'm driving along distance. Oh, man.

Yeah, so good. So some people find helpful. out. Some people find it helpful to like when you're meditating to come back to your breath. If you're not meditating, some people find it, it's coming back to your body in some way, something's physical. So like if you're, if you're cooking in the kitchen, come back to doing the chopping and really be there. It's good for your fingers anyway to be. And, but to come back to the concrete and physical, so this week, it's called an anchor. And not necessarily to kind of stop thinking, but not to be caught in it. And he have to do it over and over again. As you as you get build it better to see this, then sometimes what you want to see is underneath the thinking, What's the emotion that's fueling it? And generally, if there's very strong thought patterns going on that we can't free ourselves from easily. There's usually an emotion behind it. That's the kind of the driving force. And what's more important than then paying attention to the thoughts is that pay attention to the motion. So for you, we know the kind of thoughts you have when you're driving or other times, you might look onto the surface of them and see what are the emotions and see what that teaches you.

Thank you

till today I hadn't thought of

until you mentioned it the idea of watching them a thoughts go away. So I'm trying to notice, like you mentioned when they arise and the emotions behind them, but I don't know what that feels like I for them to fall away. Yes, I've noticed a space or I've noticed Oh, I'm on to something new. But is there a feeling or an emotion or what does that feel like? It falls away. Is it just empty? Or is it?

Well, I'm very reluctant to answer your question. Because I think everyone will have a little different experience. If I say something of words like for me than you might think you're supposed to be supposed to be that way. I think really a task is for you just discover what it's like for you. And, and, and then just keep looking because it probably it's a kaleidoscope. So at different times, you'll experience in different ways different things will be revealed in that space. Thank you. So one, one more, maybe on the stage up there. But he often has a chance to ask, I've never heard I've never heard from you.

And and he can come up and talk to me afterwards. Yeah, see you later. And you might and you might be shy that come up. So um, so one of the things I really pride I've got myself as my creativity. Yeah. And I get a lot of that from a very undirected style of thinking, I daydream I drift off. Especially times maybe when I shouldn't be driving, cooking all these things. And I'm wondering how someone could be a Buddhist somehow someone could cultivate mindfulness and maintain this as some kind of creative life. Because I, the piece that I get from meditating is unquestionable, but I'm worried sometimes that I might be giving up something valuable about myself.

So when I was in the so I, you know, started doing regular Buddhist practice and living Buddhist monasteries, doing a lot of meditation. My creativity increased in a bit, because creativity doesn't require a lot of thinking. It requires certain kinds Have a very kind of relaxed at home, this concern kind of connectedness and, and kind of being really kind of centered and here and at ease if you're anxious, you can't be very creative when you're anxious. And so I found myself more and more, you know, creative and, and then at some point I remember, I had this. I noticed after some period of time, I wasn't being so creative. And when I was doing art and doing all kinds of things and doing poetry and stuff, and I wasn't being creative anymore. I said, Oh, no, something's wrong. I'm getting tense or something. No. So anyway, so I think practice can lead to greater creativity. And you're not supposed to. So I think what you can learn through mindfulness and thinking is very important. People who are busy all the time, and then they stopped being physically busy doing things. Sometimes time they have a backlog of things to think about. And then it seems like too much But we need to process stuff and thinking is one way that people process stuff. It's good to have, it's actually good to put aside quality time to think we need to have quality time with ourselves. And ideally you don't put aside and if you never do that, and you try to meditate, then meditation becomes a time where your brain is going to say I you better do some thinking. So ideally, a person who meditates also has some other time during the day where they give themselves over to quality thinking. So for me, I like going for walks, and I just like my mind gift, or when I exercise or something at the gym. I love just letting my mind get complete freedom to think whatever it wants. And sometimes issues catch up to me that I've been, you know, ignoring, sometimes surprised by what comes up. Sometimes what I've forgotten to do comes up and sometimes creative thoughts of all kinds comes up there. So if you know it That you like being creative. And you know the conditions that support that. create the conditions to support that, and then enjoy it, doing it, but keep not just have that kind of light monitoring of it. And maybe after you're finished, kind of look back at it and monitor and see what goes on. Did I do that? They do have the best possible way. Was that the right time? You know, or was that did I get tense when I did it? There was like ignoring whether responsibilities was too attached, have some overview of it. But I hope that all of us can be become wise thinkers and creative thinkers and have time for the richness of life that comes from that. And last thing, I'll say, because but the issue for most people is not your issue that you raised. But most most

people are have some kind of addiction issue with our thoughts. You know, and they're still in recovery. Maybe you know, they need Recovery First, and then once they kind of free if they get freed from their thoughts and not so much caught in the grip of them, then I think we'll find ourselves find that thinking is much more pleasant, enjoyable and can be turned into a beautiful part of life. So thank you. So that's what we need to stop. And, but what I brought along so I thought of your patients for a moment. I want to read you. These are meditation hints from the Colorado division of wildlife. Someone there was a sign what to do if you meet a thought. There are no definite rules about what to do if you meet a thought. Thought attacks are rare compared to the number of close encounters, however, if you do meet the thoughts before and it's time to leave an area, here are some suggestions reading Remember, every situation is different from the respect of respect to the thought the terrain the people and their activity. One, stay calm. If you see a thought, and it hasn't seen you calmly leave the area

to stop back away slowly, while facing the thought. Give the thought plenty of room to escape. Wild thoughts rarely attacked people, unless they feel threatened or provoked. Speak softly this may reassure the thought that no harm is meant to it. If a thought stands upright or moves closer, maybe trying to direct smells in the air, detect smells in the air. This is A sign of aggression. once thought identifies you, it may leave the area or try to intimidate you by charging within a few feet before it withdraws. Don't run or make any sudden movements. Running is likely to prompt the thought to give chase. And you can't outrun a thought.

Yes, yes. So yeah, that's one of the great things about thoughts. If you can be amused by the nonsense in your mind, your life can be a lot happier. So anyway, thank you all very much.