

# 2016-10-01 Heartwood And Branches Finding Well Being Within Thinking

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

thinking, imagining, branches, thoughts, proliferation, leaf blower, world, trunk, papañcha, conceiving, life, conceptual, fueled, people, feel, imaginings, emotions, fantasy, scenarios, shoes

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Oh, thank you for being here and practicing today. I appreciate it very much that you're here and engaged in this practice throughout the day engaged with yourself and also contributing to the community to practice together. Thank you. What I'd like to talk about is thinking, and I would like to do it by introducing you to, for those who don't know it, a very important ancient Buddhist word Pali word that's related to thinking. And this is the word papañcha and papañcha, my funny little mind, kind of similar to Britannia. And so then I've sung to myself a punch up a punch of a punch or rules the world.

And I hope I didn't offend anybody from Britain. But papañcha is one translation for it is conceptual proliferation. So the proliferation of dots. And if you think of a tree, really strong, firm, big, maybe an oak tree with a big strong base, and then you go up, and there's maybe it splits in two and branches go out, and then it goes out some more, and you keeps having the splitting of branches, and the branches gets smaller and thinner and thinner. And finally, you get to the far end, and there's all these leaves there, and just little thin little twigs. And it's not even strong enough to hold a squirrel anymore, because they're just so you know, then. And papañcha are the thoughts that are, that are the far end of those leaves the leaves to the far end of those branches, where there's no support, every wind storm that goes through, they get tossed around, blow around, and you know, there's no, you can't hang on to them, you can't stand on them, because they just, you know, there's no strength in them. And if we live our lives at the tippy tip end of those little teeny final branches, we live a very unstable life. And, but there's other kinds of thoughts other ways, and one of them is in the trunk. You know, in the big solid trunk of these big oak trees, it's really stable. And it's, you know, the hurricane can go through and blow all the leaves off. But the trunk of the tree will kind of stand there and be unmoved and strong and stable. And even stronger and more stable than the trunk itself is the heartwood, the hard, strong wood at the center of it. And so in a sense, if we live our lives in conceptual proliferation at the end of all these branched Street, you know, branching branches, we live a very different life than we live kind of based in the core of who we are at the center of balance here. And so there's a movement in practice to this core to finding the core discovering what it is. And that path involves a lot of understanding the nature of our thinking, to get wise about thinking, and to understand the different kinds of thinking that we have. We don't want to make thinking our enemy or a problem. But there are different kinds of thinking layers of thinking, perhaps, that very capable of doing and some of them are like these leaves at the end of the branches. They'll blow off at the first storm that comes through the so this word punja. The word Some people say the word comes from the prefix pa which can mean out and punch Ah, which means five. And it's kind of like this splitting into five, maybe maybe someone lifted up their hand, like a you know, spread out their fingers wide in and up those thoughts that you kind of proliferate and spread out

in all directions. And it's understood to be the thoughts that build upon thoughts or thoughts or generalizations that are far removed from our direct experience. So I had a little bit of conceptual proliferation around those leaf blowers that were going on here. And I want to tell you the details of some of them. But you know, started off with a very simple Oh, there's the leaf blowers, you know, there they are, again, And then it was those poor leaf blower people, I mean, what a dropped after listen to that, you know all day long and that must be hard and I kind of felt for them and, and but then it went into the leaf blowers went on and on and on and then I had all kinds of other thoughts my imagination started going and scenarios and imagining that you know nothing to do anymore with the sound or the leaf blower but that was off in some other universe of for a minute or so. You know, I consider proliferated, thoughts, ideas, imaginings a whole new world worlds were born in a minute or two.

And it's possible to live out there in the end of those branches prosper live in the world of thoughts. And I used to do that. I used to live in my thinking a lot. And one of the advantages that one of the lessons I got from meditation. Initially, my first early years of practice, was I didn't learn anything about how to be mindful of thinking and practice mindfulness with it. I just learned to kind of live in it. see it so clearly, that I thought I got sick of it. You know, I got tired of it tonight. Oh, my God, here we go again. Oh, you know, I'm not going to get off this bandwagon for a while. I was like, Oh, here we go. And, and, and I, you know, saw the fantasies how much was living in my imagination, and, and how distant it was from anything. Real and concrete here. And how inaccurate my imaginations were about imaginary futures, the plans I had, and the ideas I've had was supposed to happen and how much was fantasy and how much was wishful thinking. So just kind of saw how empty it or saw how pointless some of this was, how it wasn't useful, how, in a sense, there was a disconnect from life through them. And it took a while to see that clearly. Because sometimes it was very enlivening. You know, sometimes Fantasy Life is much more rich and promising and delightful and rewarding. And then real life, you know, you can because you can dream up all kinds of great scenarios for yourself. And it can be you know, that delusions of grandeur can play themselves out with great excitement and wow, you know, you can do all these wonderful things are happening to you, and, and your sex life can be a lot better in fantasy, so why not spend time there, you know, and it gets all this stuff. And so there's kind of the energy goes there, even emotions, good emotions come along, and it feels more alive and great. The pendulum can swing. When we get caught in the trap of conceptual proliferation, these imaginings and thoughts that we live in scenarios we make up. And we get to kind of that's where we start living. The pendulum can swing the other side, and we can make hell for ourselves. We can make horrible scenarios and we can't, can't get away, we can't stop that, because we have all these terrible ideas and doom and dread. And that comes along imagining all the possible things that could happen to us. And so you know, it's a setup, you know, even though some people get rewarding, happy, good feelings from it, to set up for it to swing around the other direction, and just really drag us down. Also, even though there's a lot of can be when there's when it's nice, there can be a lot of sometimes happy feeling good feelings that come along pleasure that comes along. It's kind of two dimensional. It's not, it's kind of not really grounded in the core and the trunk of who we are. It's kind of like I think of it as the image I have is a cat that's chasing his tail will keep them that's chasing his tail. And somehow I got the message that it's really important to catch that tail. And so it chases and chases, and doesn't even notice that it's tired, because it's really important to catch that tail. But it's never going to catch the tail because it tails always it's going to be head of it. And but it keeps trying and trying and trying. And so the promise of catching the tail. And so conceptual proliferation can have its own momentum, its own power, because the system inside thinks that there's a solution there, there's something to get there to have there. And so it chases and chases, and sometimes what is chasing you know can seem very promising and alluring that can be great sense of happiness, you know, you can sit there and have a wonderful set fantasy about winning the California Lottery. And that's nice, you think you can, then you start thinking about what you can do with the money from the California Lottery and the mega lottery and, and then you go off, and

this is great than you can imagine, you kind of get yourself a nice car, a nice vacation, a nice house, a nice spouse, or two or three, or, you know, it's just like he's wearing all your, you know, you're just like, this is gonna be so great.

And, you know, and, but it's fueled by conceptual thinking and imagination, which in itself is not very deep. And it's not a very satisfying form of happiness, not sort of have a satisfying form of, of pleasure, because it's not rooted in our trunk, it's not rooted deep down inside. And some people don't know that they have a trunk don't know there's a core inside, where there could, that's where three dimensional happiness and well being can be. And so they think that the solution to their lives is somehow up there, it's gonna be found up there on the end end of the branches, it's going to be found in the just thinking and figuring and planning and avoiding and all the thinking that we have to do. And so to live in the world of pro papañcha is to live in two dimensional one dimensional world is really to shortchange us, the three dimensional fullness, substance, the immediacy of our life, and the depth of what comes inside of us from our side of us. One of the consequences, one of the one of the motivations for a lot of proliferation of thoughts, living, a lot of thinking is that it's fueled by our emotions. And so planning, for example, can be fueled by anxiety, desire, you know, ambition and accurate thoughts of acquisition we can get can be fueled by conceit, you know, I'm gonna be so great. It's so great for me when I'm this way. There's a lot of reviewing in the past, can be fueled by anger and resentment, just what am I gonna say, and just go over and over, and over and over again. And so I like to think of, because this kind of proliferation of thinking as a signpost that's pointing back to what's more primary. So it might be this emotion, the emotions that are underlying it. And sometimes if we stay in the edges of the branches, if we stay in the sun, in the sign, it's been all the time kind of analyzing the sign, we don't follow the sign the direction the sign is pointing to. So rather than feeling of getting caught up in the thoughts, the thoughts are saying, hey, over here, look at look at what's fueling it, what's underneath it, where's the energy coming from? What's driving it. And then we're starting to walk back from the edges of the branches, and coming back to the stronger branches that are closer to the trunk. And then you start feeling the emotions that are maybe fueling it. The emotions themselves might be fueled by certain things, some intention, something we're trying to accomplish, something we're trying to do, trying to make ourselves safe, trying to make our life happier, trying to avoid something terrible, trying to build up a sense of self operating and conceit. And so then it's important to go back on let's take it further back down towards the trunk of the tree. Let's look at those deeper motivations, intentions that seems to be driving, maybe in fueling the emotions that I have. And in those driving the thoughts I have, what's what's down there, what's more primary. And then to sit and breathe with that. The emotions we have, the motivations we have that are driving our thinking. Those are in the present moment. Those are starting to be connected to ourselves, we feel those. And that's where the more I don't know if the solution is the right word. But that's where the unfolding that's where our life really can has a chance to source of our life much more than being there at the edge. And so, we're coming down to then we feel what's going on and deeper way. It's been time breathing with it, opening to it being present for what's here. And what's full But wants to come out, but wants to surface and move through us.

And then as some of this backlog of unresolved unprocessed material has a chance to show itself is begin getting a handle of what's going on, and developing some wisdom and understanding about what's important. What's really important for us where it's worth worth worthwhile pursuing, what's worthwhile being motivated for what inner drives are valuable for us to pursue, then we can find what brings us even closer to the trunk. Because it can be motivated, we can get a sense and be motivated to move into the heart of who we are, to become free to be whole. So what is it that helps us become whole helps us be complete, complete, as opposed to what moves us out and branches have weaker, weaker branches? Where it's our life is so tentative, Where is it? Where is there a solid ground, where is their strength, where there's Where's their stability, that we can find within. So that can be the

motivation is to find that answer, to come in and come back into the dark torso, come back into our trunk come back into our heart, what is here what's really deep inside. And part of the purpose of becoming quiet and meditation, to let go of conceptual proliferation of thoughts, is so that we can listen to what's quiet inside. So we can hear or sense or feel what tends to get covered over, if we're always running after our tails always kind of out there, trying to balance on these thin branches that can't really support us. So to come in back here and be quiet, let this discover what's here, discover what's really going on deep inside. And then learn to how to add a sense of rest in there or be at peace in there to come from there to let that be the wellspring or where life comes from. If we are, if we're motivated, motivates our life is papañcha then we're not going to be much different than a cat chasing its tail, around and around and around. But if we come from the depth of who we are, our relationship to thinking is very different, then our thoughts become a support for us, rather than the slave master. Rather than the thinking being in charge, and driving us, the thoughts become kind of a helper or supporter they, we pick them up when they're useful, we engage with them when they're useful. When they're not useful, we're able to put them down, we're able to redirect them, we're able to kind of get back to what's deeper and more intimate, more connected. We can recognize when our thinking distances from reality, when our thinking distances us from ourselves, because we're often kind of, you know, in this fantasy world, or imaginary world of papañcha. And then to feel that our thinking is connected to, you know, through our thinking, we get connected to ourselves, not disconnected. Through our thinking, our thinking becomes holistic in the sense that all of us is included as part of the thinking world. Because we feel, you know, connected to ourselves as a whole. So the process of becoming wise with thinking involves partly understanding what thoughts are the consequence of thinking? What is the impact thinking has on us? Does the thinking keep us disconnected from our world, disconnected from ourselves to keep us in a magic fairy world, which is tiring, it's kind of exhausting to think and think and think and wonder and, and imagine and come over and over again. And sometimes it's really helpful to feel the cost of punch. What goes on? What does it feel physically, to spend a lot of time thinking, one of the consequences of being lost in thought is we don't feel the physical cost of thinking, you're the tension, the pressure that we're carrying with us in our, in our eyes, and our forehead and our jaws and our shoulders and our stomachs.

And so to turn away from the content of our thoughts, to the subjective experience of what it's like to think is a very important movement in practice. And I call it a movement of turning your attention around 300 180 degrees. Because you're spending a lot of time thinking, it's usually about something. It's usually something kind of, you know, just kind of like you're objectifying something you're thinking about, it's out there. And if you turn your attention 180 degrees around, so you're looking at what it's like to be thinking. So you no longer concerned with what you're thinking about. But what does it feel like to be involved in thought? Is it does it feel agitating? Does it feel energizing? Does it feel settling? Does it feel like you feel like you're getting closer to yourself and more intimate? Does it feel like it takes you away from yourself? Does it feel like, like, there's a rather big kind of reservoir of emotions that are just kind of just under the surface of what you're thinking? Sometimes a lot of thinking is a way of protecting ourselves from having to feel what's really going on. And so if you turn around really take a look, we begin to notice what we're avoiding what's happening, what's really going on here. So this movement to turn around, and not so good, is what's nice about this movement is you don't have to let go of your thinking. But you let go of being interested in what you're thinking about. So you can really get the bigger picture of what's actually happening. And physically, emotionally, intentionally, what's going on. The, the movement in Buddhism, Buddhist practice, is to move from imagining, to knowing directly. And the word that's translated as imagining sometimes can also be translated as conceiving. And conceiving is a very interesting word in English. Because it also means to give birth to something. conception, and, and so there's a way in which our thinking, does give birth to something. And one of the things that often gives birth to his projections, and we project onto the world, our idea, ideas or fears or concerns, our values, all kinds of things, we project onto it. So we don't really see it accurately. We



project onto ourselves, and kind of hold realities or whole imagine imaginary worlds get created. Through this conceiving, conceptualizing capacity of the mind. And the movement in classic Buddhism is to go from this imagining conceiving, role of thinking, to directly knowing to really kind of feel and know and direct directly, unmediated by imaginings of what it is directly knowing may involve thinking or what I call thoughting. You know, if the leaf blowers, we can directly know that there's that loud drone hum of the leaf blowers. We know what that is, when we pair all the flowers, that's an innocent kind of thought to have seems like reasonable and recognize that's where it is by just kind of pumps it out, like naturally leaf blower, if you know what leaf blower leaf blower is, but if but then to go off into an imaginary world of, you know, what I'm gonna do to those leaf blowers. You know, you might want to get the letters I'm going to write to City Hall and the laws I'm going to get passed and the inventions I'm going to come up with. But certainly there's a brilliant invention that can make quietly flowers and an ear off, I go into this other kind of distant world. I'm conceiving New World imagining new worlds. There's a whole, you know. So instead of imagining, instead of conceiving, we stay closer to the direct experience on the floor. That's all it is. Just that.

One of the ways that the very important ways that the Buddha talked about conceiving in this imagining is to conceive or imagine who we are in relationship to what we're knowing. So I don't know if the leaf blower example It's a good one. But But you know, there's a few people in this country who identify where their cars and so you know, there's a car, but it's my car. I am my car. The car proves who I am. I hope people see me through my car. There are such people. Hilary's laughing so how could they do that? Should I use it should not you your car, okay? Should I should I try it, try another example. There's clothes. I am my clothes. You know, you want to be seen for my clothes, or whatever, there's all these things we identify with a religion. My this and that, you know, that I'm this I'm that my emotions, people identify with their emotions. And I my emotions, I'm in my emotions, my emotions are in me, any kind of idea of me, myself and I, in relationship to what's directly known. The Buddha said, Isn't imagining. That's kind of a powerful thing to say. It seems like such a thing that, you know, that seems ridiculous. to, you know, it's pretty innocent and obvious to say, you know, my car, my clothes, you know, but the Buddha called an imagining, because it's not inherent in the inherent that a car's your car, your shoes, or your shoes. It's a convention to imagining that we all share right now. But to see directly, is to learn to see what's prior to the conceptions. What is the direct experience? What is it? So in the shoes, you could see how just a shoe and then you recognize the shoe is, you know, conventionally is the one I tend to use? I think people want me to use it, especially given that I have fungus in my feet. No. Yes, it's yours, you keep it. And, you know, so it's a nice convention is useful. But that's kind of what we add on top of it. It's important to live in that world or convention. So you know, my mind my she was pretty, you know, useful concept. But then we add more imaginings on top of it. My shoes, well, I hope people notice how great my shoes are, I hope people noticed, don't notice my shoes, there's, you know, my old shoes that are all, you know, falling apart. And people are gonna think badly of me, if they see my shoes, or I got hot shoes, you know, the shoes makes the person. And so let's kind of like you know, stomp around, show off. So you see as as as a Bill's starts with just recognizing the issue, then it's imagining this conceiving my shoe. And then there's what it says about me and how I'm going to show people and not show them who I am. And then we have ideas or this is great, it looks like people are really looking up to me because of my shoes. So I this is doing great wonders for my social life. And I think I'm going to go to the store and buy a few more pairs of shoes. And I wonder what I should buy in. And then we could get him started entering into this world of conceptual proliferation that's gotten very far away from the direct experience. So part of the function of mindfulness practice is to help us come back, help us to see these different layers. So we recognize them for what they are. And as we recognize the different layers of thinking, then we can hopefully have more choice, where is the appropriate place to be, and any given time, and sometimes it's appropriate and more valuable, to be closer to the direct experience, to be resting in ourselves settled in ourselves. Where we're really kind

of grounded and present with no need for the to kind of crawl out in the branches of a tree. No need to kind of build up this imaginary world and live in it.

And it feels that's where there's gonna be a feeling of deeper sense of peace and well being a place where they are the inner energy is not kind of running after its tail. It just settled and present and content. It's not building scenarios and worlds for itself and have the ability to put down The world of thinking, not forever. But the ability to put it down is the is shows us where freedom can be found. Because as long as we're caught in the grip of thinking, and we're, we can't put it down, we're not really free. And to be able to come to a place where, where there's very little thinking, just direct experience of seeing for what it is. and feeling the deep sense of peace and an openness and relief that that can provide, then gives us a better vantage point, a better perspective, for seeing the nature of our thoughts when the thinking comes back. And at some point, the experience of not thinking is so clear, and so satisfying, and so freeing, that it's harder to be tricked into what our thoughts do in the future, we kind of know how the, the trick is played. And we'll still be thinking, but we know what thinking is about, we know how thin it is, or how, how, you know how it's not the place to find our happiness. And so we can still think, but we also invested in it is not the place where we find our deep sense of well being and our safety. The well being and safety can be found in the trunk, and the core of the heart and the heartwood of who we are. And if we really know that heartwood inside, then what happens to the branches, doesn't matter that much. The storms can come through the sun can come out, the branches are not where we identify with the leaves at the end. But we're identified with a stable the stability and, and core within. So, papañcha and in fact, for punch in a certain way does world the world. A tremendous amount of how people live their lives based on is imagining proliferation of thoughts and ideas and conceptions that and sometimes when people meet, what's really meeting hours per papañcha that they're sharing for punches, and, and sometimes they miss each other. But even if they don't miss each other, they're not really connected, even though they feel like they are it's all exciting and wonderful to talk about something but there's like so far removed from what's actually going on for them and what's really happening in the present moment. Super papañcha does many ways rules the world. And no, I don't know what's gonna how the world is going to change. But it's nice that that if poncha doesn't have to rule you. So may you become free of your conceptual proliferations. Okay, so thank you for today. It's the practice here at IMC that it's the people who practice in the center or the people who care for the practice center.