

2018-02-05 Mindfulness of Thinking

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SPEAKERS

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Good evening everyone and welcome time. See? Is this loud enough for you? The volume of this? Yeah. Okay.

So I've been thinking some about how much we think and, and how you know, thinking is important, for sure. But some of us think too much. And maybe some of us think too little but the fixation with thinking, preoccupation with thinking that's such a big part of what human life is certainly a fascinating topic too. Get familiar with, it's a fascinating thing to bring your attention to and understand better how it works for you all this and to talk about a little bit today, I would like to tell it a little fable or at all. Similarly for this, if you will, willing to go along and that is there is this place, beautiful place in nature, but attacker the vast, beautiful natural setting and the middle of this natural, wonderful setting. There's a building. There's a very large building. We've never seen such a large building. And it's a one room building, which I'm very unusual but it's very, very big one room building is that all the walls, the four walls of the building are not conventional walls, but rather are a series of doors, doors and door frames, and the doorframes put up against each other one after the other all the way around. And all the doors are open. That's nice. But there's people who live inside. And it turns out that they only think about doorframes. They're fixated on the doorframes doorframes is what they live for. And so they spend their time focusing on the doorframes and some of them have their own personal ones. Some people share doorframes they like to decorate them put off, you know, beautiful lipstick and all kinds of wonderful paintings and tattoos on the doorframes and they like to or they put spikes on them. So keep people away. Some people like to protect their doorframes by putting doorframes in front of them, sometimes their series of doorframes and when they talk about things, they talk about the doorframes with each other and, and they just, you know, that's all they ever focus on and think about this doorframes and, and after a while they decide to have a religion, about doorframes and right in the middle of this big room, they build a special doorframe and they circumambulate the door for him and worship I think about to it and be held up in high esteem. And because doorframes are so important, some people make miniature doorframes and they put around their, their of their heads or in their neck and walk around with them, and some of them are considered very precious. So then they use they've also make doorframes into weapons. And they go around, banging each other on the head with door frames. So then they also then because to protect themselves, they get more doorframes. And, and they build forts to, you know, and run around them is doorframes and protect themselves and they just, they're just amazed by how much you can do with doorframes. It's like they're in awe. And then a genius will come along and be born into their society and they'll figure out a new thing to do a doorframes. It's a really wonderful, wonderful time, all kinds of doorframes and there used to be all these forests inside the building, but don't know long since been cut down for the sake of doorframes. And then one day, someone was decided to meditate. sat down, no one meditated there for centuries, sat down and got very calm and peaceful. And in getting up out of the meditation for a little while, wasn't fixated on a thing. Wasn't preoccupied, wasn't particularly

thinking about doorframes. And, and so kind of just walked around, looked around and noticed that between the doorframe to these open spaces, no one had ever seen that before. Because it's all about the doorframes it turns out there's more open space in the wall, because the doors are all open. Then there are doorframes. So the person you know, without thinking about it too much, just walked out and found that there was a whole world outside the building. Came back in, said, Hey, everyone, there's more to life than doorframes.

No one people thought he was crazy that she was crazy. You know, how can that be me? doorframes movements. All there is that's where you live for and that's what it's all about, then. I don't know if it's safe not to think about doorframes you know? How can you be responsible? How can you protect yourself? How can you build up a good life without thinking about doorframes? No, no idea. And they thought about locking that person up. Because it seems so strange. You know, there was the strange concept of open space like space between it offered no one ever thought about it or no even noticed. took a few centuries more. And then someone else could have meditated and got up the meditation. It wasn't particularly thinking about anything, to certainly have doorframes look at that to space. Wow, that's fascinating. And that person stepped over. So we live, often preoccupied with thoughts And it's very hard to imagine for some people, there's anything else. Thinking is kind of so big it is. So kind of the place where we working things out, where we're figuring out our lives, where we're figuring out who we are, where we're planning, whatever, we're in a plan where we're remembering whenever we need to remember, we're kind of trying to solve all our problems. And, and its own kind of almost so natural are so frequent are so common, that sometimes people don't even realize how much they're doing. And, and any idea that maybe you don't have to always be thinking sometimes is met with surprise or disinterest, or even sometimes with a sense of horror that How could I do that my responsibility, how can I take care of my responsibilities in life? Unless I think can plan and build and worry or how Am I going to get what I want? Because I have to kind of figure out how to acquire or how am I going to fix the past. If I don't review it, then review it and review it. And so thinking one way or the other, for some people is almost like the, the water the fish swims through is like the medium in which their whole life is negotiate and understood. And when we encounter other people, we get to know them, but too big, this big extent, sometimes we get to know them through the way we think about them, our thoughts, our ideas, our projections and all that. When we get to know ourselves, it's often through the medium of our thoughts, if it's really kind of obsessive and just thinking a lot. If it's the world around us, we look at the world through the filter of what I want, what I can get from it, what I can do for me and In an attempt at some ways in the modern world is past, possibly we've improved on this tendency, because now and not just thoughts, but it's also devices. And sometimes the addiction to devices is almost, you know, strongest thinking or is comparable or you kind of check all the time and be that's where the world is. And this two dimensional world that's that's it and, and so it's possible to discover that there are doors to walk through their space, there's something else besides all the thinking. And no, what is that? Well, certainly there are simple things like there is possible to feel instead of to think all the time it's possible to see instead of to think, and to have one's eyes clear to really see what's there. First time this happened for me was about 20.

It didn't happen through meditation, but it happened through being alone for a week, I was living on a small farm. And there was left there to take care of the cows, the cows and just me and the cows. And of course, those seven days, my vision got clear and clear. And, and everything I looked at by the fifth or sixth day, everything I was looking at was sparkling. And I was like, wow, this is pretty cool. And, and it was, the time spent alone was kind of like being on retreat. That my preoccupation with thoughts, social concerns with the people I usually live with the stimulation, I got my social life that we lived with. All these things settle down, in my mind became calm and peaceful. And in that calm and peace, you know, my senses started working much more acutely. Some people report that they hear much better

when they stop things. Caught up in their thoughts. But also there's there is a kind of space that's possible to walk into or to see. And I love it when my mind is quiet enough for calming up slow down enough that there's actually space between my thoughts. And it's we're not always thinking. And there might be the space might be brief, a moment or so. But that moment it shows me that there's something more and something more interesting for me sometimes than what I'm thinking about. And because in that space, sometimes I can feel a sense of vastness, a sense of peacefulness, a sense of freedom, that I'm not kind of at a place where I'm not caught by anything or involved with things or incessantly simply trying to accomplish something through my thoughts or fix something through my thoughts or plans. Something or just fantasize or whatever it might be. And there's a question that I've really fond of asking myself sometimes, and I like to ask it sometimes here, if your thoughts are good or not, you know, rushing, so you kind of go from one thought to the next without any gap, if you slow down enough, and so there's, you know, kind of a, you have a thought, hopefully it's a good one. And then there's a pause and then you stick another one. Even if it's just a paragraph break, that's enough, then and then in between the end of one thought and the beginning of the next when you have no thoughts in that gap. Who are you? What that means is Who are you when you're when you don't use thoughts to tell you and I find that kind of mind stopping you know, sorry, stop, but to go like, I feel more expensive when I asked that question. Because then there's no definition. I'm not saying is as soon as I can't answer it with a word or an idea or even my name, there's something that kind of opens up space opens up or it's like taking off a coat that's been heavy here backpack that's heavy, and suddenly I feel kind of lighter. The and then from that space that sometimes then I can have a sense that not only even when I'm thinking, there's a bigger space in the mind. When I'm thinking a lot, it can feel claustrophobic. But when I, when I'm calm enough and centered enough and not fixated on my thoughts, I have a sense sometimes of the space around thoughts. You know, the, you know, thoughts don't have any shape, I don't think they have no weight. But sometimes the way people relate to a thought they're like the most substantial serious thing in the universe. Whereas in fact, there Pretty insubstantial, I don't think they have any way to shape or, you know, these things. But but sometimes I have a sense that I don't have a sense of thinking have a shape Exactly. But I do sometimes have a sense that they kind of have a diffused kind of boundary, how big they are. And there's this vast space, beyond the thoughts. You know, the universe is not made up totally, by your thought that, you know, we're not that or thoughts are not that powerful or that big or that they're kind of local.

And it's, you know, you'd want my thoughts to stay local, some of them and so, but I get the sense of this vastness or is openness beyond that peacefulness, quiet beyond it, and I find it very nurturing to tune in to this quiet. That's beyond Odds are this other dimension that's going on is calm places, beyond thoughts. Some people will. So for me, I like the idea of kind of the larger place some people will talk about the stillness and quiet, that's below thoughts or inside where they're not thinking and just feels like a safe and still and quiet place. And what's kind of beginning to change what it does is begin to change our relationship to thinking. And I think that's one of the really wise things to do in this practice. You don't necessarily want to live and abide in some vast silence space. Don't get old soon, I guess if that's all there is. But to have that openness of that peacefulness or calm, be a reference point or support to help us take a better look at what goes on when we're thinking. So we can see the pull of attachment The glue that keeps us kind of stuck onto our thoughts. The You know, there's one thing there's you, whatever that is, and there's your thoughts, whatever they are. And then there's the connection between them. So for example, there can be interest in the thinking that can be leaning towards the thought that can be more than interest, there can be desperation, there can be horror, there can be granting, we don't think do this do this consciously. But this is a granting of our thoughts, a lot of authority because we can invest a lot of importance in what we're thinking. And so you know, we just there's a glue, I think of it as glue that keeps us there. And you can feel that glue you can feel the connection or the bungee cord or the rubber band or I don't know what it is the pull towards it. So rather

than focusing on what you're thinking about, and, you know, focus on that connection, you have to the fascination, the interest, the fear that might be involved or fueling the thinking. And that's an interesting place to hang out and be mindful of, if we don't see what's fueling it, or the interest we have in it, that interest will keep pulling us pulling us into the thinking. It'll still operate. But it operates unconsciously. But if we see it, then it doesn't have the same power over us doesn't operate as freely. And you might find there's more space in the mind, you might find you have more choice about how you relate to your your thoughts. It might also help you to start seeing the thoughts much more clearly for what they are. And there's many answers to the question here. What are they there's many dimensions to thoughts or many perspectives in which to look at them.

I think one of the things to consider is once we start getting tuning into how much we think is how much do we see the world through the thoughts, how much are the thoughts projections onto the world. It is an everyone does this, everyone has thoughts and conceptions in their mind that they project on the world. It can be kind of neat to to be efficient and get around here, but we seldom recognize how much we do. And but if we start recognizing that we do it, then we can start taking more responsibility when we do it too much. And do it in ways which are actually harmful for each other. So, you know, so for example, we call this a meditation center. You know, if you live in Redwood cities here, maybe someone says, Oh, I'm going out to a local meditation center and people remember city networks, IMC maybe. So it's the meditation center. The idea that this is a meditation center, if that's the way you're talking, is a projection is a thought that you have that you're projecting on this building. There's nothing inherent about this building being a meditation center. This used to be a church. When they went in to sell the church around the time they sold it to us. They were thinking of selling it to people to grow, to have it as a nursery, nursery school. So imagine what this would be today, if this was a nursery school, and this room would be quite something and probably a different color. And people would say the nursery school down the street, but just saying building right. So earthly we call things by their function.

So this is a Meditation Center who called by that function. But that's a projection that's an idea concept. And some things shift and change what they are. And, and so it's a meditation hall, meditation room now, what it was in a little over an hour, an hour and a half ago, this was a yoga room. And or we say they were doing yoga in the meditation room, what are we doing meditation in the yoga room? These things are all kind of arbitrary how exactly we call it, but it's a thought that we overlay on top of it. Then the second issue here is that the room and the building is pretty mild. But what about when we do this to other people? Whatever when you do it to your friends, or strangers or your enemies, what do you put what do you project onto them? Do you see them for who they are? You see them through filter of your thoughts and ideas that you have. That when you see them you're thinking about what the conversation you had last time. When you see them you're thinking about the person is belonging to A group a category of people. And so we don't just see, you know, an individual, you see a person who belongs to a race. And, and so, you know, race is relatively arbitrary. It's a human construct the idea of race. But once we put people into a category of perceiving that way, then there's all kinds of other things that follow. It's sometimes quite painful for the whole society. And so to watch and see how thoughts operate, and see how a thought and idea arises, and how we see through that thought, that's a dangerous person. That's a desirable person. That's a person who's going to get help me go further in life at work and I better that's a person who is not going to do anything for me. You know, and so we kind of ignore them or something or pay attention, all these kind of, you know, sometimes quite terrible weddings, ways. We think Sometimes it comes through some idea that's arisen in their head, sometimes fairly subconscious. So we don't even see all the doorframes that we're relating to all the time. So part of the function of meditation is to quiet down enough so that we can start noticing what goes on in our minds. And one of the things to notice is the role of thinking how thinking works. And whether you're thinking words or you think in images. People, some people can be just as fixated on so

concerned with it, going on incessantly, thinking, thinking, thinking, and it's possible to ask oneself as we slow down and look at it more carefully. Why do we think not just what we think, but why are we thinking some people are doing it for entertainment. Some people are trying to avoid being bored. Some people are doing it in order to solve their problems to make themselves safe. Some people are doing it for. You know, all kinds of things. It's important to think for sure.

They what I'd like to propose is that you think a lot better. If you're not addicted to thinking. You think a lot better if you know how to be calm, and you don't, you're not glued to your thoughts. There isn't this kind of drive or this strong instinct to think and think and think and think. But if you slow down, learn how to have a calm mind at times. learn not to be so dependent on thinking is the vehicle through which to understand understand your life and yourself. The thoughts can operate in a simpler way. Simple thoughts or relaxed thinking, not driven thoughts, not desperate thoughts, not fast thoughts, slow thoughts, lots of space. My impression is thoughts work much more effectively and efficiently. I'm surprised sometimes how much intelligence my thoughts have when I'm not trying to think it seems like they work better and somehow understand things more intuitively and all kinds of things can operate.

So one of the things we do in mindfulness practice is we become mindful of thinking. And mindfulness of thinking does not mean we think about our thoughts. It means more of it means closer to we're silent. in relationship to our thoughts. We've been kind of silent observations silent presence, silence attention to the fact that we're thinking. And maybe as we do this, we can also focus on our breathing and meditation. Breathing is a way of shifting our attention from thoughts into something else. And the rhythm of breathing is often very good place to go. And then we stop sending so much energy into the world of thinking. This energy of attention is one of the most precious resources we have. And where it gets directed it kind of like it's like food that feeds something. So if you're constantly directing to your thoughts, you're constantly directing it to fearful thoughts, or greedy thoughts or hateful thoughts, you kind of reinforcing it. But if you can take this wonderful tool, the wonderful resource of attention and directed away from thoughts to something as simple as being grounded in your body, as Breathe, then we're not going to be feeding those thoughts so much. And the thoughts tend to calm down. It's considered one of the great psychological techniques to calm down. anxious thoughts, is to breathe consciously. So in meditation, we do quite a bit of that. And hopefully the mind comes down enough that we're not caught up in the web of thinking anymore. And then we see that once we're not caught up in the web, we see that actually, the web is made up of more empty space than it is of all the, you know, cross twine, just like the doorframes right as much more space in the open door than there is doorframes. And then there's a different world we live in, and perhaps the doorframes of our lives, or the webs of our life, the gaps are much bigger than we thought. And we're not actually trapped. They're so big, we can walk right through but I have to kind of take your eyes off the doorframe a little bit doorframes won't mind. So I hope that that analogy. You could go along with it and make it interesting for you relevant somehow. Do you have any comments or questions about this that you'd like to ask or protests?

Finally, some people with thoughts

One thing I noticed I think about a lot is planning for the future. And then sometimes I catch myself at it. And I realized that what I'm doing is expressing mistrust in future me. And it can be very freeing to just trust that guy. And just trust him and just let go in that trust.

How does he do usually when he shows up?

Future me?

Yeah, just in the present on his track record, and the present is relatively good.

I was great. Yeah.

So why don't you stick with what you know how to do.

Since you don't seem to know how to think about this I, I learned to I was a slow learner about not to give up thinking planning a lot, because I did a lot of it. Partly because I was nervous if it was coming in the meeting, I was coming to or something. But after a while, because I was kind of noticing what I was doing, I discovered that I had a very poor track record of success that, you know, I would plan something ahead, it was going to be this way I'd show up and it was different the whole event was canceled or, or different people were there or something else was going on are all kinds of things. And my idea to predict what the future was like was very poor. And so after a while, I kind of kind of got the got the message, you know, I'm wasting a lot of time for a future that doesn't ever comes.

Yeah, that's what I meant. present me. Yeah, doesn't plan the future as well as future me just takes care of it. So it's the future me who's doing great

Let's also leave it Leave him alone. Yeah. Great.

I have really put a lot of thought about thinking. And I finally come to realize that my biggest problem is my own mind and intellect, your own mind my own mind and intellect. Yes. If you could maybe talk to us a little bit more about our own mind, in how we can just separate from it, and maybe let these thoughts exist, but just walk away from Yeah, it's possible just to watch thoughts go by, and not kind of pick them up or be involved with them. There's this wonderful expression, sometimes of have thoughts be like, clouds drifting in an endless sky. So just as they come through and in meditation that when people especially happens on meditation retreats, but it could happen in daily meditation as well. Where the thoughts get quiet are still still there and still there. And they feel more wispy, they feel thinner. They feel they get some people talk about the thinner and thinner and lighter and lighter and because we're not involved anymore and they just float right through and you know, we're not caught in them. But you asked the question of what should you do with mine? Should you kind of pull away or? I don't know. I think the best thing to do with the mind rather than with thinking is probably just a love it. If you're kind and gracious and compassionate for your mind, I probably the mind will behave better. I find it it's going mad at me. I mean, it's really going mad. It's just like this thing wants to keep on going and going and like I can't you know it doesn't do that. It But it probably has some deep need but what what emotion is driving now that thinking typically it's either just like what this gentleman said it's usually fear or you're either looking at the future or the past and neither of them exist at that moment so maybe it maybe your fear needs you need you to pay attention to it then listen to it and to kind of be present. One of the great tasks run the fear that we feel is to help your fear feel safe What do you think what happened to your fear when I finally felt safe? If you're trying to get rid of it as poor fear, fears, I feel good then. So you might get they said you have a loving yet or have compassion and recognize the fear and, and kind of hold it there like maybe even imagine that you're I have your soft hands underneath the fears in front of you and just the carrots. Okay, now you can be afraid. I'm allowing you to To be here, and now, I'll care for you. What do you think of that? Wonderful, thank you.

I had a question about the guy in the beginning of your story. Where, like I was thinking, so say, there's a person who's in this community, and they go outside the community and then they come back and everybody says, You're crazy. You know, we're gonna lock you up, you know, you're a liar and

everybody gets all upset at him. And that's the only community that he knows he's very attached to them. So if you're in that situation where like or a few if the guy was in that situation like how would you know he go about like dealing with that situation and upset that everybody's calling him a liar and he's dividing communities. Some people even some people dog he's trying not to get locked up. But if

it's if it's that bad Probably the person shouldn't talk about the door, shouldn't talk about the doors. If people can't hear it, then it's dangerous to talk about it. And it's dividing the community in ways. Maybe there's no need to talk about it. There's no need to convert people to the door way, but just

just then how does he defend himself? How does he exist within that community?

Well, it's part of persons part of the community first, right then discovers the door goes outside and it comes back and make people get upset when the person says, there's this other world The other aspect, and they get upset, right? So just don't tell them

Yeah, but then they're sitting in his van he doesn't say anything and there's still

that person who's the person can still be peaceful. But they don't have to doesn't have to tell the people

make me private candidate. And they said after a while, people say, wow, that person is not if they're trying to lock him up. But they only lock me up because they're

not they're like screaming at him constantly. Yeah,

but I think I think we're we're talking about it, they're only locking you up because the person has told them about this other way of being.

And what if he already came back? What if he already said it? You kind of like once you open up the door, you can't go back.

Okay?

And how does he have metta for those people in that situation when you're being like screamed at?

Yeah, this is important. I appreciate the question, man, this is all too common that in some way or other that there are families and communities where there's all kinds of dysfunction going on. And someone is trying to grow up or someone's trying to become free or be more mature or be not caught in the web that's so sick. Then people who are left, feel, feel, you know, angry and upset or feel offended or feel threatened by this or something. And so, some people have to do some people will just make a decision because they want to stay connected to that community, to be quiet and an Ohio Something and not shared with because it's too dangerous. And the other end of the extreme there people says, Well, I'll be insincere, I lose my integrity, I lose, something's very powerful. It's very sad, but I can't stay in this community anymore. And some people will find tools such as interpersonal tools to learn how to have these difficult conversations or how to maneuver and move. So it's not to offend people or how to make you know, to talk about things in a way that I don't know how to exactly how to say it, but it seems worse. What No, that doesn't make things worse, right. And maybe even gigs makes things better by learning communication skills, and then it was it. Learning how to have difficult conversations learning how to do social Aikido learning, learning timing, you In learning the right time to speak up and say

something, and so if it's really a community, like a family where these dynamics are really strong, it might be important to spend some time with, with a therapist, and really understand for oneself what those social dynamics are, of the family dynamics, the community dynamics, because it might be hard, it's, you know, it's unless we understand that, well, it's also very hard for us to negotiate and find our way with it. And so take time learn to learn how these things work and, and, and then also to, to try to understand better what is it that's driving the people who are angry, you know, a lot of people who are angry and hateful, are in a lot of pain. And, and they don't want to stop being angry, because then they have to look at their sadness or their sorrow or their own pain that they are carrying. And so but it's possible sometimes to start noticing that and seeing that kind of lesson And then between the lines and what's going on, and maybe that you don't want to pointed out to them, that would be maybe terrible. But maybe when you speak to them, you speak to that part of them. Maybe when you go see them, you make sure you bring them a gift, you bring them chocolate cookies or something, you know, something that speaks to something beyond what they're reacting to, and as to try to meet some other part of them or bring some other part of them in there. There's all kinds of things to be done. But it's not easy at times. It's rare that I've heard it that extreme in terms of what we discovered through meditation, though, sometimes, families and friends get worried when people meditate because they're afraid they're afraid they're gonna lose their friend because they're growing. Maybe they're growing too much in ways that other people are not, is one one thing

like that distancing, you know, or trying to have a more mindful attachment is threatening,

it's threatening to people and so with people who are close to, then you're doing this practice here and people feel threatened by how you're growing or that you're meditating a lot and they feel like you're here, you know, they're afraid you're going to go off and be a monastic or do something. Or that is, I think it's really important to, to bring a lot of love and care to our relationships. So you want to reassure them or express your love or your commitment to the relationship I had when I was first started to be a Zen student. I first started doing meditation quite a bit. And I had a girlfriend and it was, I think it was a nice relationship. But she had this thing. She wanted a lot of things she she thinks she called them strokes, that she wanted to be reassured, told she was good. They have a boat stirred a lot. And being a new Zen student kind of was all in I was in there. I was kind of like little bit maybe over idealistic, I was just discovering how much people were playing social games and wanting to build up their ego and their sense of self. And so I wasn't going to have anything, any part of that. So I just ignored it. So that relationship ended. And, and, and years later, what I realized was that I had wisdom about the relationship was going on and, and it wasn't what it was maybe appropriate not to participate in the social games that she wanted. But what I didn't replace it with was compassion for her was care for her understanding of who she what was going on. And I could have met it with I could have met the her need with something else besides what she wanted. And so to recognize what is the deeper need that people have, I don't even know and try to meet that. And maybe you can disarm them. So if you get around to thinking this week, you might take a bite, stop and take a deeper look at what's going on for you and, and, and see if you can get a bird's eye view of, you know, step back and what is this thing, thinking as opposed to being kind of in the trenches with your thoughts. And I hope that in the process of doing, being mindful of thoughts, learning how they all work, learning how to be free of them, learning to sign the space between them, around them, that you become good friends with your thoughts, because it's wonderful to have a nice relationship with your thinking, and, and your thoughts to have a nice relationship with you. The two of you be friends. Thank you.