

2019-06-10 Web of Thoughts

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SPEAKERS

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So Good evening and I take it to you or not football fans best basketball fans or I shouldn't have asked if it's said anything. I guess there's a lot of people normally here who watch basketball or something, championship games. So this is nice. I like it when this smaller group gives us in different opportunity. And what I'd like to do is to speak a little bit about thinking in a particular way and then have some time for discussion about these ideas I'm going to present.

So, to do this, I'd like to begin with something that

maybe is trying to be a poem. like spiders. We spin threads of silk. like spiders, we weave elaborate webs. Unlike spiders, we get caught in the webs we make thoughts or fine silk threads. Thinking is what weaves our webs. This the stickiest webs are pleas and plots, fears and rats. Me versus You, Me want you. Fascinating thoughts to our webs is how we get caught and how we become both predator and prey for ourself. Each thread of thought is thin and weak, dissolving as it appears 10,000 thoughts wrapped around each other, make steel chains, chains knotted together, impossible to untie. here to stay. But let them next thin weightless insubstantial thought fly by, like you would allow a bird to fly through the sky. This is the painless, bloodless sword that cuts your Gordian knot. So, being mindful of thinking is a very useful part of meditation practice or Buddhist practice. And beginning to observe or see thoughts and have a different relationship to thoughts is central to becoming free. The path of Buddhist freedom in Buddhism has a lot to do with our relationships with thinking. And it's how we relate to thoughts how we get involved in thoughts, the webs we spend with our thoughts, the ideas that concept We create. And then we inhabit worlds of our thinking is a lot to do with how we get caught how we get imprisoned in prisons of thoughts and ideas and concepts and to begin to get different relationship to thinking, to not invest in thinking as being the square that we solve all the issues of our life. To be able to recognize that there's also can be places of silence, silence in the mind. That can create a a wonderful spaciousness around our thoughts. Instead of our thinking, being claustrophobic in a tight little space of the knots of thoughts that we create and spin them make happen. So we get caught in our webs. I like the idea that individual thoughts by itself are like fine silk threads like they call. I've never touched it, you know, really felt carefully, I think a spider web thread, but they call it silk. So I imagine it's, you know, I guess it'd be sticky too but must be really smooth or something. And then the spiders have the glands on their stomach, where they exude what's called exude, spin out these threads. And so it's almost like we have moved glands in our brains and their jobs are to spin out, you know, to exude thoughts. And it's just what the brain does. So individual thoughts are just, you know, fine, very thin silk threads no problem. And one of the really fascinating things to become aware of,

is if you're, rather than if you're not in meshed in thoughts in the world of the web at all. But if you're able to step back enough and have enough stillness or calm or mindfulness of the mind to watch thoughts appear when they appear effortlessly. When thoughts occur, and they come unbidden, there was no planning of them. There was no designed for them to appear wasn't like you to set yourself up to think about something. You're just minding your own business and suddenly, the door opens up and you your mind has a thought, well, that's a door. I wonder if I left my door at home open. You know, just it's that thought though I thought just kind of wax through effortlessly. Then that might be the thought. And then well if I left the door open, it's really hot. The neighborhood records might come in, they're clever, they probably find their way to their refrigerator i think that you know, not only will be the kitchen BMS, but they might rip up you know, the inside of the refrigerator trying to get that wonderful chocolate cake I had back and that's going to be a lot of work to clean up and I might have to get a new refrigerator and that's, you know, and that's going to cost a lot of money and I don't have a lot of money and I better figure out how to make more money and And maybe I should get a new job. And so we start spinning first a web of this imaginary world of the door being open and what that means. And then we're involved and we're stuck in it. We're caught up and tied up in what it means. What are we going to do when and you spend the whole meditation session to solving your work problems and finding a better job and the end of meditation, you know, you're going on Craigslist or someplace, you know, looking for work. And you go home, and you find out the doors closed. And you What was I doing? That was like a whole trip I took I once took a trip like that, and it wasn't continuous. But I think it was probably about seven months that I was spinning this web and caught up in it. And it has to do with being the head cook at the monastery. I'd spent a year working in the monastery kitchen. And I was probably at that point the most skilled cook in the whole monastery and poised to be the next head cook the next season No, it wasn't it wasn't the head cook was a guest cook. So the people who make when they have a guest season, the people who are going to cook for the guests. And so it's kind of built with a wonderful job and so I thought, of course they're going to choose me when they when the guest season starts in April. And so I spent the winter every time there was a meal, thinking about the recipe and thinking about menus and thinking about what's going to do and planning ahead and you're sitting me having meals in the monastery in your meditation posture. So you can meditate kind of around the meal and you finish eating waiting for the food to be taken away and things like that waiting for food to come in. But I didn't meditate. I was thinking thoughts about the wonderful from next season when I was going to be this cook. And so this went along barely until it was time to announce. And they had a formal, almost ritual kind of way where they announced what everyone was in the meditation hall standing there, and someone reads out the names and where you're being assigned. And lo and behold, I was not assigned to the kitchen. And when I didn't hear my name, I was flying someplace else. I thought, what was I doing all those months? What a waste of time. It was like a powerful lesson because like, I look back, wow, every meal I was, I was caught in that web and repeating it and all that and, you know, I could have been doing something useful with my time. That's something that you know, I could have been meditating and And so I was caught in that way. And so but that individual thought

to watch how the first thought sometimes comes effortlessly. The first thought just appears if you're able to see a thought arise and appear by itself and you don't get involved you don't pick it up you don't add to it, you don't just watch it then it has the nature of dissolving quickly. And, and there is a can be a feeling of freedom in relationship to it. And there can either be a sense of Ah, wow, this mind just does something. When I was in the same monastery, there was a pro while I was kind of like the altar boy or something I was. I was the person who was ringing all these bells during chanting that they do and they had a special ceremony. They organize a kind of special ceremony was a kind of a show, they had visiting Japanese and master dignitaries coming to the monastery. So they wanted to show the western students you know, chanting and ringing bells and all that. So I was just I was supposed to ring the bells and for the ceremony and there is a particular sequence in which the chanting is done. And no one told

me that that sequence had been changed. So suddenly started chanting. And I wasn't ready to do that. bells and gongs and drums and stuff that had to be done because I was taken by surprise, I was ready for something else. So I was slow to start. So you know, eventually I started rapping. And then later the abbot came and talked to me about this, because it was, you know, in his place, right and he was showing off that Visiting priests. And so I explained to him, all I got out of my mouth was, well, I didn't, I wasn't thinking that you were going to end he said, Don't think. And I was little bit perplexed by that. But I think his idea was that if I hadn't been thinking, I would have kind of spontaneously kind of joined along or I would have picked up the change and just kind of just done it without, in an effortless way. But I've see that often in my mind, that there's a lot of wisdom, there's a lot of understanding and a lot of a lot of wonderful things can happen in that part of the mind, where the thoughts arise effortlessly. Are there they are, well, that just happened. And, and but to go around the day like that and trusting that mind is It's a quieter mind than than many active discursive minds. But it's still an intelligent mind, your intelligence is still there, you're you remember things and can figure out what to do. And, you know, you've kind of, it tends to be a mind that's very much in the present moment. Because if you watch, they're just there to let the thought arise and then dissolve, you just left here. Whereas, you know, if you're caught in a web of thoughts, then you know, the web could be about the past the future and preoccupation and you're kind of in that world as opposed to the two but in to see how you can solve so much of our life in some conventional way can be taken care of, in this place where the thoughts arise effortlessly. And, and so you know, there's probably all kinds of places you can experiment with this. The I was putting the dishes in the dishwashing machine this evening and there there were there were those thoughts you know, if I do Oh, if you if you put it there and that side of the rack you can get more that's you know, that's that's the efficient place and then you can put those over there very simple, innocent thoughts. I wasn't thinking them act thinking I wasn't thinking them in terms of I was the one actively thinking and planning and if i thought you know, my family was watching and i was going to show them and I'm the best, you know,

dish, you know, the dish washing machine filler in the world. And then I really involved then I'm caught in the web of something. But nobody was in the kitchen. So it was no showing off. And we just just do something like do record leave put it in there and, and I could watch that there was very simple thoughts. Some thoughts were so distant and quiet. If I was involved to other thoughts, I wouldn't have been recognized that I was thinking to come on, I would say I was an automatic pilot putting the dishes. And because I was somewhat quiet, I could see this very subtle of quiet thought just arise and pass. I wasn't doing them. But they were a little bit useful. They helped me line up the plates and stuff in a more efficient way. So what I'm trying to say is that there is a functioning of the mind, that can happen. That doesn't require your self conscious involvement in thinking. If we're caught in thought, in the web of thoughts that we create, chances are very high is that we're self consciously involved. We have desires and aversions, we want something we're trying to get away from something we're trying to make something happen. We're concerned about something. And a major player in all those concerns is me, myself and Matt on mine. And so it gets really sticky. And that stickiness makes it sometimes very hard to pull ourselves away from thinking. It's possible with a quiet enough mindful mind, to, to feel the stickiness or to feel the gravitational pull into thoughts, or to feel the push or the drive, or the energy, to be in thoughts to be concerned with thoughts to go to thoughts. And you see, it's a meditator see it, because you know, you let go of your thoughts that already go back to your breathing or be in the present moment. And then you Next thing you know, you're back in your thoughts to try again. And after a while you can feel the energy of being pulled into it. Or maybe it takes us with a lot of effort to try to stay on the breath. And you could feel the pool or the attraction or even the interest, or the lawyers of the mind coming along to debate things is really important. You have to think this And so you can feel that tug. That's there, the stickiness that's there, you can feel how hard it is to pull away and the glue that might be there. I don't know if those metaphors of stickiness and glue work for you. But some of

you can feel a little bit that relationship that you have, with the thoughts that keep you engaged, keep your content. And I think for people who haven't done some kind of meditation or really kind of studied their mind carefully, it can be very compelling to think, because that's all we have is the only kind of tool we kind of maybe have to figure things out and to solve problems and to get ahead and to, you know, get pleasure or distract ourselves from our difficulties or whatever, all kinds of reasons we think. And, and so it's serving a purpose. And we had that he had this purpose is really important. It's really important to do these things to do with the promise of thought, I think it through. I bet fair A number of you have had have ruminating around the same kind of concern over and over and over again. And you only do it because some part of you believes that somehow, if you do it, you'll get a solution. Somehow something will happen. And, you know, if I just think about menus and recipes for six months, I, you know, somehow end up being the cook and, and so it's gonna go on and on. And so some of these kind of webs of thoughts that we get caught in our labyrinths, or that Labyrinth elaborates, or I guess, mazes, their maze, we go into the maze, and it's very hard to find our way out, especially if we're trying to think our way out. Because we're still in the maze. If we're thinking we're still in the web, if we're thinking And so and so sometimes it can feel impossible to get out by ourselves. And that's why some people will do dramatic things or not so dramatic things to distract themselves because their thinking mind is so painful and so insistent and incessant. And so some people will, you know, do alcohol and drugs to come help break the cycle of those kinds of difficult thinking. Some people will do

all kinds of recreational things, sometimes sex, sometimes exercise, sometimes watching movies or something just to get out of their own mind. And because it's so difficult in their, in the path of mindfulness, we're learning to look at that directly. And learn to relax and relax the mind relax the tension, relax that pool or that drive that investment we make in the world of thoughts. So we can have a very different relationship. We're thinking And, and not have it so sticky not to be so pulled into their webs and caught in those webs, we spin our own webs that we get caught in. And it can seem as if palm says, Oh, we get a lot of these thoughts, you know, coming together and they don't feel like then weak little threads. But when all these thoughts go fast and furious, so come all together been building for, you know, years and kind of what weaving is fantastic web. They feel like they're hard, solid steel chains and they tie themselves in knots. And it can seem impossible to break them people don't even know how to get into them or find their way in them. And so the poem has this very simple way. The sword that cuts the Gordian knot the painless bloodless sword Nice and that's it that has to do if you're able to discover how to see thoughts arise effortlessly and not get involved. And just like you watch a bird go through the sky, you allow it to go through the sky, you don't stop it, you know, put your hand up and say stop, you don't hold on to it, you know, throw sticky glue at long threads, a sticky glue on them or something, you just kind of, they just go through when you're in terms of your mind. The birds go through the mind, kind of through this through this sky of the mind, sky of awareness. There's you don't, they just go through and there's no effort, nothing for you in there. And so to let the thoughts go through the sky of the mind, and just fly away, disappear. Don't be involved. Don't pick it up. Don't add thoughts to them. Just watch. There they go. To watch those effortless thoughts appear and glide through and dissolve, just to really observe that, that cuts the knot that puts you on the other side, or that puts you apart from this whole complex web and knots. That thinking creates. And then trust. really trust that mind that was able to watch the thoughts arise effortlessly. It's the mind the awareness that can watch that happen. That's where freedom begins to be found. Right there. It's not very dramatic. It's not very promising, or it's doesn't seem very seem it might seem out of scale with a tremendous importance of these webs of thoughts that we have to think and the important things our life have to do. It's just very, it's very humble. It's very simple. It's very speedy, soft. To just the mind that's able to watch the mind. It's like the sky that the bird goes through the mind, it gets out there to thought. It arises and it dissolves. To trust that awareness. And then if you can go through your days, trusting that awareness,

you you might be able to discover the joy and the amusement and the wisdom and the specialness, of having a hole watching all these effortless thoughts arise, that take care of you and help you find your way. And there might be sometimes we have to intentionally think and get engaged since it's not a crime. They think, you know, It's okay. But but to be able to kind of have this effortless quality support you guide you be a source of understanding and you and you know and just wow there's something else operating here that's supporting me.

That is not me. In terms of the usual me that I identify when I hold myself as being me. It's still coming out of you. But it's not to you that we kind of have created this wonderful we've we've ensnare ensnared in our webs and perhaps the self that the Buddha's it that Buddhism is talking about. unwinding dissolving is just a complicated web spider web that we've spun for ourselves. And so to take pull out the threads, let it all unravel is freedom so that's maybe long more than I wanted to say, a longer one that I wanted to say, I don't know if this makes sense to you, some of all of yours. I think that to be able to really see and track thoughts and see what's going on. There is a foreign thing for some people that they don't have, they haven't learned it. But that's something that comes over time. As you do mindfulness practice and keep meditating and start looking at this and start seeing there's actually a very radical different way of living, that for some people, you know, revolution in their minds, life that's not rooted or centered and thinking, you can still think, but it's not centered on it. But centered more in this awareness, they can see the arising and dissolving of thoughts and make lots of room for this effortless place of thinking to occur. One of the advantages of this is that if we're caught up in the web of thinking a lot, there's not a lot of room For other other forms of thoughts to arise, if you have quiet in the mind and so you have enough to this watch track, the effortless thoughts arise, all kinds of things can appear. You'll be surprised what arises in what shows itself and what informs you. It's actually a richer a bigger world to live in, in that in that world. So we spin the webs that we ourselves get caught in and to step back and watch the next thought arise effortlessly, is maybe how we dissolve the web. Do you have anything in your life you have any experience any history with thinking? Were you recognized for yourself? Yes, that time 20 years ago Last week, this afternoon I spent I spun a web of thoughts and ideas and all that. And then I lived in it that was caught in and I was trapped in it. I couldn't pull myself out. Do you have any experience of that? And what was that like? And how did you get out? And do you have any experience of what I'm talking about? About having an effortless thought arise? It did didn't really seem like it was you. But you weren't, you know, you weren't channeling anybody either. It was it was you it was clearly you know your mind. But it was a quieter voice maybe or a quieter projector or something and it just came and there. You have anything in your experience that you can relate to what I've been trying to say today. So what I'd like to ask you to do is to maybe form little groups of three or four people and you're not to show share. Anything that's too personal, but why don't you share if anything that you have any any personal experience what I'm talking about