

2019-11-10 Thinking That Quiets Thinking

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SPEAKERS

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Good morning. And it's possible that that title of this talk could be thinking, that quiet thinking, to the use of thinking to help the mind become quieter. And thinking there's a story of a expert, high skilled painter, who painted a tiger, who's busy painting it close up, at some point step back to look at the work and was so frightened. It was so realistic that Ray ran away. Recently, there's a story of Gil needing to plan ahead on some for something and something a little bit dangerous, I guess. And so kind of thinking out the scenarios that needed He planned for, and then at some point got pulled into a hypothetical scenario around this kind of danger and, and got pulled into it like a fantasy, as opposed to just, you know, methodically planning ahead. I wasn't in there very long. But after a minute or so I kind of recognized that I've been pulled into this fantasy of danger. But what was interesting was not that I was caught up in that fantasy. But what was interesting was, it wasn't just an image, it wasn't just words, that there was a little bit of trepidation involved because of this wonderfully realistic Tiger I painted in my mind kind of, and that could feel that it affected my body, I felt a bit of fear and tightness a little bit, kind of something more, more, a little bit more vulnerable, just for like one minute little thing. It wasn't very dramatic. And so you know, I caught it. You know? I kind of realized that I'd gotten off the planning mode and when I needed take care of and got lost in little fantasy, so I changed gears I was easy enough. But it made me reflect on how not everyone can catch themselves so early. And I didn't, I wasn't able to when I was younger, and the idea of just being lost in these thoughts are caught up in these kinds of ideas chronically, for some people, the past and the future, for some people, fantasies about the past or the future ideas are more real than the present. They have greater and the reason I think for that, is that the way in which we can internalize it to our fantasies or images or our emotions, all this stuff gets, gets our expectations, our hopes, our sense of self, all these things can kind of kind of come up together as a complex Sometimes more more so with fantasy or imagination or being in our thoughts than they can sometimes in regular life. And if those kinds of thoughts are not to use a word of the Buddha's not beautiful thoughts, but harmful thoughts, then they harm us. And so the chronic and chronic rumination they say, is a leading cause for depression, for example. And if those limitations are hinged or filled with fear, then it's no wonder that people are chronically anxious because of these kinds of thoughts that are kind of feeding us or conditioning us or affecting us. And so one of the important aspects of mindfulness practice is to get wise about thinking and not only wise but also intelligent about it. It took me a long time, you know, I've been doing this practice since I was 20. When I started it, I kind of No one said this explicitly. But I kind of got the message that you weren't supposed to use your intelligence. You were just supposed to show up and be present. And in fact, showing up and be present was quite powerful for me. So it worked. And it developed, you know, I did a lot of meditation, it was really great. But at some point, it occurred to me, wait a minute.

Here, here, we're trying to be present for everything, allow for everything except everything in a certain way. But check my intelligence at the door. Why not include that as part of it? Why not use certain

degree of thinking of understanding of exploration to help with the meditation practice. Now it's easy to when we hear use your intelligence and meditation to drift off and just think even more, and spin out even more. But the art of this is to use your thinking you Use your intelligence for the purposes of quieting the mind, not not numbing it, but quieting it quieting the mind. So it's sharper, clear. And you can see what's happening in the present moment. In a very clear, present engaged way, without the filter of a lot of thoughts, projections, expectations, hopes, all these things we add on top of them. So you have that you have that it's kind of like the guy don't just use your intelligence to, you know, to be an engineer of meditation and think more and more. Use it to see what what would be helpful for you, so that you're more able to be disentangled. from your experience. How do you be present so you're not so caught and lost in your thoughts? And really here in presence? How do you use thinking to quiet your thinking? How do you use thinking so think so thinking doesn't obscure The present moment for you. So that's a little bit the task of this talk is to try to talk about that. The so I think it's helpful to understand that there are many forms of thinking. And without appreciating all the different types of thinking there are. I think sometimes meditation instructions can be understood to simplistically in the most simplistic and maybe a harmful way of understanding it is, you're not supposed to think in meditation, that somehow thinking is wrong or bad. And I've gotten that message even from some of my teachers. I had one teacher who, I had a question about something or other. And I started the my question with with the phrase, what do you think? You know, it isn't enough. What do you think about and if you know, I don't think I finished the rest of the sentence. The teacher shot back and said Try not to think, Oh, okay. So that was kind of the end of the conversation. And now it's a story in a Dharma talk. But, you know, you know, I think there was some wisdom to what the teacher was saying. And I think also it can give the wrong message that you're not supposed to think at all. And so there are certain kinds of thinking, which are not helpful for meditation, and to be able to recognize that kind of thinking and then be wise about how to engage it or free yourself from it is good. And then there's certain kinds of thinking which is helpful. And to be able to recognize how it's helpful and to use what's helpful for meditation is a good thing. So you know, they have this thing like one policy about thoughts is not very helpful. I think of thinking as a many species of thought. And so we have to kind of differentiate the different species. So thinking, the one that is, I think, and I like I like to think of think of thoughts as having different intensities, different amount of energy and agitation as part of them. And so the most kind of energetic or the most coarsest, the most agitating tend to be the ones that are called discursive thinking. And that's where we're having a discourse with someone, either it's a monologue and you're holding fourth or a you're having a dialogue with something and you're you're feeling in both sides of the conversation maybe, and which is not very fair for the other person. But you're going back and forth and you having a conversation or you're explaining something or you're telling yourself a story. Like when I was caught caught my little dangerous story. You know, I was telling myself a story spinning a tale that was going on and on for a little bit. And so the

so this usually has nothing to do with what's happening, the present moment, most often has to do maybe with the past with a future, or something which is not present here now. And it could even be fantasy. It's not even anywhere in the world. It's just, you know, fantasy. And, and that uses tends to use a lot of imagination, imaginary conversation, imaginary people who are listening to us, and imaginary scenarios of what goes on and what's being talked about. And, and it can be quite captivating. It can be quite interesting and involved. And one of the reasons why these things can be very interesting is sometimes they're very entertaining. And sometimes what we fantasize is more entertaining than the present moment so might as well go off in I think another reason why they're quite captivating is that what we're thinking about is consequential like they we fantasize or envision stories and ideas about things that are dangerous. And some people specializes in that a lot of people's who spend a lot of time planning are often planning around something that's connected to the world of fear and anxiety and worried about what's going to happen tomorrow or the next day. And so, you know, our survival is at

stake. And so with the, you know, we get pulled in and sucked into those fantasies because it seems so consequential. The also one of the reasons we get sucked into them is that we're often the primary character and the discourse somehow reflects back on reflects on that on us. If we're having a conversation with someone I've been involved in, you know, in my mind, rehearsing conversations rehearsing wasn't going to have in order to be make a good impression, already be right. to rehearse with conversations I had in order to be write better. You know, I should, he should have said that, you know, or, you know, or, you know, there were been times in my life on church, unfortunately, when I was trying to think of the right cutting word to kind of get back at someone if I had only said that, you know, so you know, I'm a character, it's my kind of ego, my idea of who I how I want to be seen, and I want to present myself how I was seeing how I was hurt, you know, how I can be better, how I can be improved. I'm kind of like, you know, a major character in it. And for better or for worse, that's very attractive to the mind. Because, you know, we're like an interesting person for ourselves one way or the other. And so that's the glue that keeps us there. But to be caught up in discursive thought, is not very helpful for the quieting the calming the stilling of the mind. It's not so helpful to be able to see clearly what's going on. And something I've said often is that I noticed at some point in my life that when I had a grudge with someone I was quite capable of again thinking about the grudge, thinking about what I'm going to say, thinking about who that person is. And I was operating with assumptions that were not very accurate. I had to kind of character of the person in my mind personally can become kind of a character and I was reacting and talking to them as if they were that character. And so I could learn learned at some point that I did not have a very good track record of viewing a person realistically, whom I had a graduate. So I have another practice within reason it's not too difficult to go find the person and be in the presence of the person because then my character kind of breaks up. And especially if I can engage in a conversation with a person, and especially even more so if i Could be a little bit kind to the person give them I don't know the benefit of doubts that right word expression, but just you know, treat them decently with some kinds, how are you and what's happening with you or something. And it helps me to do that. Because it breaks me out of the mold of seeing the person through the filter of a character or my grudge or something. And then if there's a, you know, valid grudge that needs to be talked about, then I talk about it with a person. Because as long as I'm talking to the person talking to the person about it, only in my fantasy, it's really not realistic. It's kind of a waste of time, actually. And, and so

and so to learn. This isn't so useful, not helpful doesn't help me to see clear in the situation. And, and so then to learn how to step out of that, to wake up from it. Now, certainly some people who have practiced mindfulness enough to clear mindful the recognition that what We're doing out that's what's happening is enough to kind of break the spell. That's what's happening. It's kind of like we wake up, some people have woken up from their the spell of their fantasy, oh, wait a minute, here I am. And I was thinking about something. So to be mindful, sometimes it's enough. But sometimes that's not enough. Or sometimes there's other options of what to do. Anyway, so there's this, you know, very coarse this what I call discursive thinking, with a discourse and all that. The more subtle kind of thinking is to be thinking about what's happening in the present moment, kind of subtle is the right word. But you're connected to the present moment. It's here now. And so the thoughts are much simpler. They're not involved fantasies, ideas. They're actually recognizing what's happening here. And now. Like yesterday, I was teaching here, and I was thinking some of the lights were on and some of the lights were not on. And so I was wondering, you know, I turn the lights, the other set of lights on stage. Okay, maybe it's nice to have a little bit dark we're meditating for the day, what's the right way of the light should be? So, you know, I was having thoughts like that. And, you know, it stretched out over the day. It wasn't as fast as I wasn't as fast as I gave it to you now, but it was like, you know, what should I do? How should we be here and with the lights, and that was that they didn't have a lot of power to those thoughts. They didn't have a lot of me in those thoughts. I wasn't thinking about, you know, I hope people see me as the best light Turner honor. So it was relatively settled and calm. There wasn't a lot of agitation and it

was just having two simple thoughts, what was going on here. And then there can be even simpler thoughts that are quieter, which are simple recognition, thoughts of what's actually happening, with no concern or thoughts about what's supposed to happen, what can happen. And so I can sit here and feel that as I'm sitting here, my hands are warm, my hands are cold, cool. I can sit here and feel like my breath is a little bit tight. And as I do that, there's a thought, Oh, the hands warm, the hands cool. It's tight in there. So I can sit here and have a thought, you know, I'm spending a lot of time at fantasy. This is not useful. That those thoughts that say this is not useful when I'm trying to meditate to have thoughts about fantasy is actually a wise thought. It's actually part of the solution to being caught up in fantasy. If you create a bat away every thought that you have, and don't allow yourself that thought, then you don't benefit from the wisdom of that thought. So you're already this you know, being 11 photos is not so useful here. Wonder if there's something more useful to think about. And then you can fold into the fantasy again, even before you answer the question. And then you after a while you wake up and say, wait a minute, caught up again. And that happens a few times you say, you know, I need to do something different here. I can't even figure out what to do. Why don't I create a different fantasy? Why not to fight fire with fire? Why don't I do imagination? Use my imagination come up with a different scenario. that engages my mind. And they get that connects me to the meditation I'm doing. Let me imagine I want to stay focused on my breath. Let's imagine that I'm coming up against my last breath before I die. And in two or three breaths from now, I'm going to fantasize that I'm laying on my deathbed. And this is going to be my very last breath. How do I want to be with that breath? Well, that's fantasy. Might, gee, why don't I waste my time having a fantasy about you know, some abstract thing, crazy thing. This is actually important this meditation. It's an it's this existentially important issue we're up against, you know, the issues of life and death. we meditate through it. That's really what we're trying to address in meditation, how to find a deep sense of peace that sustains us, even in the moments of dying. And that last breath, though, I better be there for that. Somehow that that might be galvanizes. us. Okay, wow, I better be here now. It's kind of like

a friend of mine, used to sleep a lot in meditation. And he was in Thailand and his teacher told him to go, meditate on the wall, the edge of the well facing the well. That galvanized me to sleep anymore. So you, no matter If you're like that fantasy fantasy about, you know, this is my, this is my last breath. But that's, you know, it's using a fantasy to help you show up, collect yourself, okay? It'd be here suddenly got your attention, my death, you know? Or that fantasy about, you know, your last breath might just really spit you out. So you have to use your intelligence to know that didn't work or shouldn't I know better than that? Let's do something simpler. Maybe simply, let me just imagine. Say you're meditating at IMC. Let me imagine that I'm meditating at IMC. You are meditating IMC, but imagine it. Imagine the room at the top, the ceiling, the big window. Imagine yourself with an equipment remember what color cushion or chair you're sitting on. Just kind of start kind of using your imagination to imagine what's actually happening with your eyes closed. It's not exactly meditation. But it's begin gathering your attention drawing you in Be here. So to use your imagination to overcome being lost in imagination, is there some ways you can use your imagination to connect here I've used imagine I've talked about this recently, if I use my imagination, I sometimes I use my imagination around the breathing. I love water, I love waves. And sometimes I've imagined that my in breath and out breath are the waves going up and down. And so I kind of imagined I've kind of floating on the waves of my rising and passing up my in breaths. And you know, it's an imagination to do that. However, it's sometimes a better thing to do in meditation than the alternative that's happening if I'm kind of spinning off a lot. And, and so then I'll do that imagination and feels very nice to have connected to the rhythm of my breathing is flowing along, moving along nicely. And then at some point who has gathered me in in getting interested, it's nice. And it works as a as an as a counter it for us to the mind that wants to spin off with something that's, for me more, more interesting, but it's interesting and hopefully more interesting than the fantasy that was spinning me out. So then I used my physical to be there to be present, then at some point, I know what

I'm doing. That's part of the intelligent usage of this. I know what I'm doing. I'm using it doing it strategically. And so I'm going to do it to help me calm the mind, quiet the mind, get it connected to the present moment. So I watch as I'm doing this, I'm using this fantasy isn't in fact supporting me to let the thinking mind quiet down to become calmer. Or is there a way that I could use that fantasy to calm my mind? Maybe make it slow. calmer, a calm fantasy. And then there's this simple recognition of what's happening here. And so we can, you know, so I recognized yesterday the lights were on and off, I recognize that my, my hand is hot Nicole recognize my breathing as tight or loose a record, you know, and there's little thought to me that says that how I tell myself you know, explain to myself what is happening with my thoughts can be done at different mental intensities and speeds. You know, if I can, I can do it kind of fast. I can be in a hurry, kind of, or I could slow it down. Or I could speak in a normal thinking voice. Or I could use a whispering, thinking voice. You can change adjust the tone The quality, the intensity, the loudness of how you're thinking, if you think in words, if you think in images, maybe you can change some of the images. So there may be a little bit more diffuse, sort of more quieter, less in them, or something. But to make an adjustment, and one of the adjustments, I'd like to give an executive I like lately, I like siblings sometimes. Talk to yourself. Like you talk to a librarian in a very quiet library, leaned over the desk and saying, I'm looking for my prep.

Where's my breath? Where's my breath, you know, so. And there so there is it in breath. There is an out breath. Oh, look at that. And the idea To kind of just recognize that there's a sound, there's, there's a thought, at some point when the mind is fairly quiet and still, that's a point where it's agree it can be really powerful to recognize a new thought that's arising a thought that not part not part of the practice. And recognize it and say to yourself, it's just a thought. It's just a thought. To say that with a fantasy is not quite so accurate, because the fantasy can create all these emotional feelings inside and all that and it's not it's more than just a thought. That's why they're so dangerous. But at some point, you're just a thought can pop the bubble or the authority of a simple thought. So for example, I'm sitting here meditating, and I recognize my breathing is tight, tight feels chest and it's kind of held as I breathe it every time I inhale I feel a push up against worth a little bit tight and held. And, and then I have this thought that and New Age California that's a bad breath. It's supposed to be relaxed and open and spacious and last thing you should do is admit it to everyone. And, and so that thought comes up in a silly thought like that. And I say that's just a thought. I don't give it any authority don't invest it in anything, just a thought. If I don't say just a thought I might kind of lean into it or am I kind of believe it and wonder or something caught in a little bit. But so when the mind is quiet enough and a new thought arises, sometimes you see it. The thought that says that just a thought can pop the bubble and keep us from getting caught up in it. Then at some point, as we get settled down and meditation calmer and more focused, and we're able to kind of cruise in the present moment, we're able to kind of ride in the present, we're staying in the present, we're in the groove of the present moment. At that point, thinking becomes more and more a adjunct to the practice, then something is more centrally supporting us. So for example, an adjunct thought would be as you're kind of staying with your breathing, you might, it's just to help you stay there and feel the breath be in the groove of just sensing and feeling the in breath and out breath in the body, is you have the very simple thought. Breathing in when you're breathing in, breathing out when you're breathing out. It's like having a little coach on the side. That's cheering you on. Like, stay there. It's okay. It's okay. Stay In, stay with the end, feel it. Stay in the groove, stay in the groove, stay in the present moment with a breath. And sometimes having a very light nudge like that, using a little word like in breath out breath can help you stay, stay. And that's especially helpful. If you're kind of there and you find yourself slipping off all the time slipping off, you're going to thought, okay, I keep slipping off so much into thinking. Let me use a thought to help me stay in the groove stay in the present moment. And so we use what's in mindfulness we call mental notes. So just noticing what's happening, the present moment, sound hearing, an itch, itching, breath, breathing, whatever it might be thought thinking. And it isn't so much that the word is so important for it in and of itself. It's a way of

using a thought to keep us in the groove of the present. Stay right here. As opposed to letting thinking, take, you know, anything can carry us away. So as the mind gets more more subtle, sometimes we can use that kind of one word thought to stay here, stay here. Occasionally, I've actually said something I'd like to myself, Gil, stay here, stay, stay. Come on, you can stay stay right here. Because I've kind of, I'm kind of there in the present moment kind of riding my breath riding those waves. And I don't feel completely settled yet. And so we just need a lightning stick, okay, go Stay, stay, you can do it. And that, at certain points, that way

of thinking, supports me, keeps me going, keeps me involved. Sometimes I have little thoughts of experimentation, what I should do. So for example, I might have Thought that Oh, you can kill your, your mind is drifting off a lot. Can I say What's going on here? Let me take a look at this. What's happening is the mind yourself a lot. And I see that actually, I'm planning a lot. And the planning is being fueled by anxiety. So I have the thought, skill. There's anxiety. Well, what happened now, if you brought your attention to the anxiety? Where's that anxiety? So, oh, it's a little thought, where's that anxiety? And so that's where it is. It's in my chest. Does it feel it feels like agitation? What would happen if I just held my attention there? And so I hold my attention there. So there's very, very subtle thoughts that go on, that are kind of pointing us in. Anything Oh, this is where you can pay attention. This is what you can do or have this with a breathing I might have a thought that this is good. I'm kind of with my breath. It's nice. But you know, I'd like to be a little more concentrated or can I be even more still with it. And I've learned that if I, at some point with my breathing, if I really stay present, for the exhale all the way to the very end of the exhale, that that I get Still get quieter. And so I had to start to kill. I wonder if this is the time to do that long, that long exhale thing and really stay there. Those are thoughts. For some people, those kinds of thoughts might be so subtle, that they don't really feel like thoughts. They're more like knowing kind of any kind of quiet knowing, but it's kind of a cognitive use, kind of use of cognition, a kind of use of thinking and so it gets quieter and quieter at some You might have thought might occur to you, maybe I don't need to think anymore. And thoughts, thoughts go away. And he's quite good, really quiet or seemingly very quiet. One of the real pleasures of meditation was many pleasures. But one of the pleasures is to have the small little investment, so many so little energy going into our thinking. So interest in or thinking that a thought arises or passes by. And it's just kind of like it's like cars or like a very thin veil or just like a, like that imagery that's used in Buddhism is like a cloud in an empty sky, like a little cloud. It has no more substance weight than a cloud. And it is, you know, as opposed to some of these thoughts are the heaviest things you could ever carry. You know, you really could be we talked about, you know, carrying a burden. I have a burden. Where where's that burden live? Probably lives very much in the thoughts we carry the thoughts is what gives weight to these big problems we have, how we relate to the thoughts. So the great pleasure just having thoughts drift by just ended to realize you're not relating to it, you know, identifying with it. And just like soft thought, and that can be very educational, because it who starts questioning, not just what we think. But what thinking is, what is thinking. Very few people ever ask themselves that people just think and they think they think they think what they think is important. And then And the important thing is to think what you're thinking, not to question what you're thinking or to look at the process of thinking or to question the authority of our thoughts, the question how much we invest in our thoughts and to have the thought Wonder what it's like? What is it in between my thoughts? What's it like to be alive? and present and aware? In between thoughts? If you have it in between some people thoughts are just a mile a minute, right? And just kind of like, one after the other of continuous. But as they quiet down meditation, their stuff starts to be gaps. Maybe not long gaps, but what is in that gap? What's that like to be alive? Who am I? When I don't use a thought, to answer the question. That's a wonderful question. Who are you

when you don't use thoughts to answer the question. Another interesting thought is how much space is there outside of your thinking? Or is your thinking localized? Or does your thinking feel the universe?

And if it doesn't feel the universe, how much space is there beyond it? And then that kind of like, can turn the mind a little bit what I mean, there's more going on in this universe and my thinking, what is that more? And so we in our body in our psychophysical being where much more than thoughts what is that more? And I'll end with another analogy that I'm fond of. The critical idea, and that is that the idea is that we can divide it's possible to divide to some degree The mind and the body. And, and in that division thinking belongs more to the mind than to the body and the intellect to seems more of a mental thing in mind thing. And you know you have intelligence the intellect works in all kinds of ways. And, and we have images and thoughts and words that we tell ourselves and figure things out and do planning and all these things. And we process our lives we try to process our lives through our thinking. Sometimes unsuccessfully. The body has intelligence as well. That the body understands things as well. The body can process our lives sometimes better than our mind can. Our body is intelligent. However, the body does In speak, the body is silent. The body doesn't have the words, or the images that the mind creates. So we tend to our attention, our attention tends to go to the place where it's loudest. And the mind is the loudest. How about starting to give more attention to that which it doesn't, can't that can't speak. But it's just as intelligent has just as much to teach you as the mind. What about thinking having the thought? Let's discover Let's pay attention. Let's listen to that in me, which is not thinking and see what it has to say, see what it has what what's what's there. And that's a way to support you to become quieter because many You have to let the mind become quiet in order to listen to the quiet of the body. Maybe your body is not the library that you'd become, let the mind become quiet for so it can listen nurse. Maybe the body is a temple that we contemplate with a quiet mind. The word contemplate comes from the word temple. Templates templates in Latin. So enter your temple of your body with the quietest, quiet mind, still mind. And if you're thinking in your temple, think quietly and reverently, lovingly caringly. So you so as you listen and sense and feel, what is not your thinking. As you think about that, contemplate it, think about it in sacred way. You enter the temple of your heart. So thank you. And so we're gonna have a tea in a few minutes. And what I'd like to ask you, if you'd be willing is to turn to two or one or two people next to you, and say hello and introduce yourself. And if there was one idea, hopefully one idea from this talk that somehow interested you or you found kind of interesting or perplexing or useful, why don't you share that one idea with your partners that you're talking to