

## Dharmette

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So one of the important potentials of living a mindful life is that you might start noticing the patterns of how you think, the general ways in which you think about things, think about yourself, think about what's happening. Then the perspective that you, general perspectives you bring to your experience. And you might notice that there's a pattern. You might notice, if you know to be very that there are some that you tend to be more negative or more positive, the higher percentage of your thoughts are negative in nature, or a higher percentage are of positive nature. You might notice that that's your way of thinking, how you think that a higher percentage of them are pleasant, enjoyable, and a higher percentage are unpleasant, not enjoyable. You might notice that you tend to think from the perspective that there's something wrong, something wrong with me, something wrong with the world.

There's always something wrong. Or you might tend to think in the perspective that there's something right. There's something really right with me. And you might be in the perspective that there's always something dangerous going on. There's always something to be worried about. And that's kind of like the constant stream of thoughts.

Or it might be that it's the opposite. Every moment is a new possibility, and the world's open, and I can't wait to wake up, because there's nothing to be afraid of. So there are different ways, very general ways in which people can sort or really see the pattern. I think for a lot of people, as it was for me, it was really being on retreat, meditation retreats, to do that, because there you're really left to your own mind in a way that in daily life you get interrupted a lot, you know, and you don't really follow. You always see the stream as well. You don't see with so much clarity.

And on retreat, you kind of, Wow, you know, over and over again and again. But still, in daily life and in ordinary practice of mindfulness, also, you can see it after a while, there's patterns.

So what are the interesting things to do? If you start noticing a pattern of how you think, take a little bit of time for a while as a practice to think in the opposite way. Try a trial, you know. Just see if you can reflect on things opposite.

So if you're always kind of negative about things, critical, then you might want to think, You know, what's positive about this? What's good about this? What part? And most of it's bad, but what part of it is good? You know, just think, you know, just reflect that way. Or if you're always thinking about, you know, things are so wonderful and great and spiritual, you might want to spend a little time thinking, What's wrong here? What's a little bit off?

If you are always feeling unsafe, you might ask, What is safe right now? Where's the safety right now? And is there safety around here? There's a little trick that I've been told that therapists use when people are in the therapy office feeling really afraid, maybe having a panic. They'll ask the client to look around and notice if there's any danger in the office, in the corners and the walls, and look around, Is there danger here and now? And they realize, No, right now, it's not dangerous.

And just realizing that here and now in this office is not dangerous can make a big difference for people. So anyway, so, you know, feeling a lot of fear. What is safe right now? If a person feels safe. And sometimes the feeling of safety can be almost unconscious. Some people just have a lot of, you know, comfort in society, and they walk around. But you might also then reflect, What is not safe here? Where is the danger?

Oh, so what is right? If that's your thing, then ask what is wrong. If what is wrong, ask what is right. If you're oriented towards pleasure and you only want, please ask yourself what is unpleasant here and then pretend. Find your peace with that. If you're only orientated toward what's unpleasant, maybe look and see what's pleasant, then find your peace with that.

And it isn't that I'm not saying that one or the other is right or wrong, but the suggestion here is that many of us are biased thinkers. We are predisposed to think and orient and see and interpret the world in particular ways that can be quite invisible to us, and we just assume that's the way it is now without question. But if you can notice the pattern of your thinking, or if you have a really good friend, you might ask them, What is it, do you even notice any pattern in the way that I think about things? Oh yes, I've been waiting for you to ask me. And then try the opposite. Not like you're pretending, not that you're, you know, just whitewashing or color coating whatever is going on, but you kind of get a fuller picture of it all, and the bigger picture of what's happening.

And chances are you're missing something. And if you're missing something, what happens if you fill in the picture and see more of it? And how does that change your orientation? How does it change even your relationship to yourself? So you can ask yourself, you know, how do you normally think about yourself? What's the perspective with which you hold yourself? Are you like your own best friend, or you wouldn't want anyone to talk to someone else the way that you talk to yourself, it gets so harsh?

And so what is the perspective here? You see yourself negatively. You see yourself positively. You mostly see yourself through the filter of what's wrong with you, or the filter of what's really right that everyone else should know or something. And you know, switch to what can you, and you can just try on the different perspective. Try it out. If you're mostly looking at what's wrong about you, what happens if you start thinking about what's right with me and thinking about that?

And it's possible you'll discover something if you don't keep looking, because there's definitely something right about everybody. There's no question about it. And some people are so locked in, you know, on this idea that something is wrong. And if you're really locked in about how absolutely wonderful you are, you're probably an annoyance for other people, and that's all you do. So then it might be useful to see where am I a little bit off, just a little bit, where am I a little bit maybe impatient, or maybe where am I a little bit conceited, something, and a bother might, you know, to fill out the picture and see what's going on.

And now, the goal of this kind of exercise where we kind of take on the perspective that's opposite from how our usual perspective is, is certainly to get a better view of what's happening, maybe a more realistic view of what's happening. But from a Buddhist point of view, it's also to discover how to be more efficient about it all, to not be so easily reactive or caught or under the sway of these different thoughts and ideas. We have to kind of see them more in perspective: Oh, there's that perspective of mine. There's my pattern. And to be able to hold it lightly, and not sincerely believe it, or have it push us around. And this idea of mindfulness developing in such a way that we have the capacity to see all the tendencies of the mind—the good, the bad, and the ugly—and hold it lightly, and not take it so personally, and have some kindness for it all.

Then openness to it all and hold it with equanimity is really a fantastic way for us to continue to grow in the practice, grow personally, mature, because that kind of ability to step back and take the bigger picture and hold it with more equanimity is kind of like giving ourselves breathing room for something to grow and develop that can't really grow and develop if we're kind of locked in a particular perspective and have to be committed to it in some deep way.

So if you haven't done this before, you might spend some time this week trying to do a little bit of an inventory of how you think, and see if there's any pattern that you tend to be on one side of some divide and not the other side. And then run the exercise and see if you can try on intentionally the other side of the divide, and see what that does for you. And if you are the person whose tendency is to think that everything is just work, everything is a challenge and difficult, then take on this exercise as a kind of play, fun. So thank you.