

2020-04-06 Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation (6 of 9)

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SPEAKERS

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So welcome back to the intro to mindfulness meditation course. This is the sixth day six class of nine. And last week, the idea was to lay down, always laying down a foundation for practice. And it's nice to think of that that's all we do is to put down the foundation. And the idea behind this idea that we're all we're doing is putting down the foundation for practice is that we're creating the conditions by which what the Dharma, what's healthy, can unfold. Like we're making space for a natural movement towards health and natural movement towards becoming more peaceful or less in conflict with things less fragmented in our lives. Less cut up and are our inner difficulties. So we can see everything more clearly. And so rather than the practice being, that we're responsible to make something happen, and we're in the forefront of kind of figuring out and trying to get concentrated, trying to be more mindful, and if we're responsible for the practice, we are responsible, but we're responsible not so much for the outcome of practice. We're responsible for offering to the practice, the foundation. And so, in this idea of that practice is like a pyramid or a mountain. The first foundation is the body, to connect to your body. Breathe with your body. And this is just being being grounded in your body, being centered in your body, familiar what's going in your body, relax in your body creates a basis of foundation upon which we can begin to be more aware and see more clearly what's here. With that foundation, we also then opened up to the experience of our emotional life to important part of life. And we want to see it to know it and make room for it in a meditative way, which means that we want to be present for it, but not entangled with it with it, not wrapped up in it, not reactive to it, not actively feeding it or participating it, but to kind of see it clearly feel it clearly the emotional life so that it can be a foundation so it can be a support or allow the deeper support of meditation to support us rather than we being the one who's doing it. And this support of the body and in our emotions, to know how to rest in it and be aware of it is a foundation for becoming aware of thinking. Thinking is an important part of human life. And meditation is not supposed to not meant to be in conflict or thinking or to be an enemy, you know, see thinking as an enemy or as a problem. But thinking is certainly something that gets us into trouble.

When we get pulled into its world or if we believe every thought we have, and we follow it along and the so the idea is not to make thinking, be in conflict with thinking, but we want to bring a meditative awareness to our thinking, to hold it in this deeper foundation. So if we're learn how to be in touch with our body and regularly checking in with our body, with our breathing, in touch with our emotional life, then on top of this pyramid, or this mountain of practice, comes the smaller part on top, which is thinking and this proportionality of a mountain or a pyramid or thinking is you know, near The top is just a small segment of the whole mass gives thinking a certain important place. So it feels like it's important, it's on top. But it's not, you know, the majority of who we are as a human being. Thinking is a small part of who we are two important part. But there's a lot more of who we are, that's left out when we get caught up or lost in our thoughts and rumination and all these things. So too. So that's why I like to teach this course, beginning with breathing, beginning with the body and then emotions. And then now it's time to talk about thinking. And to begin this, I'd like to do a very short meditation together. So short, you might not want to change your posture, just be the way you are. And start with something that we've already done together. So we just close your eyes. Maybe take one deep breath and relax as you exhale. And then breathe normally. And take the three breaths Gertie to stay with three breaths and count 123 as you go through those three breaths, feeling them experiencing your breathing. And then with your eyes still closed, do the same with your thinking. count three distinct thoughts that you have. Just, you know, count them and then wait for the next one to come and Count to the wait for the next one to come and count three. But clearly step back and count three thoughts in a row. And then you can open your eyes. So the three thought exercise I call the three thought journey. And sometimes not always, but sometimes to step back and, and watch or observe your thinking in the way that is needed in order to count three distinct thoughts that you have or it's one basic theme of what you're thinking maybe three different parts of it. There are Three different, you know, little paragraphs of it or sentences or something. But oh, there's that 123. And this can create very quickly, a little bit more space a little bit more distance or a little bit more freedom from being pulled into the world of thinking or being swept up in it, then involved in it. To have this very different relationship to our thinking, that comes with just counting it three times. So, if you find yourself caught up in thought, and sitting down to meditate, you might try doing first two three breaths journey just to come maybe that settles you a little bit then kind of changes the inner atmosphere, little inner ecology just enough that then you're in a better place to do the three thought journey just to count not to condemn any thought or criticize Or, or validate any thought just to see clearly Oh, it's thinking. So one of the things that begins to change with mindfulness is how we relate to our thinking. how we think about thinking, how we our attitude about thinking. Some people are so in meshed in their thinking, that it's almost like I think therefore I am. I am my thinking. Every thought with some people have is believable has a comes with authority seems important. And very strongly identify where it can be very strongly identified with it, caught in it involved in it. And, and with meditation. As I said earlier, we're not condemning thinking, we're changing our relationship to it, so that rather than believing it or thinking those thoughts out who I am, which is stepping back. And observing oh here is thinking, this is thinking, wow, I'm thinking and, and too, you can use mental notes. Some people who normally don't use the mental noting that I've been teaching here, we'll reserve it for thinking because there's something about naming a thought that somehow takes some little bit the power away from it or a little

bit the way that we're invested in it. Oh, that's thinking. This is thinking or that I like that. I like the phrase that that is thinking because it's a little bit more stepping back and observing it, and rather than being in it and, and then just, you know, just allow it to be there. Let it go by one of the really wonderful instructions I got around thinking I might have mentioned this the other day. Is Zen teaching not inherent in zen, but that's where I learned it. Don't be bothered by your thinking and the meditative awareness of thinking, can you know you're there, when you have that kind of meditative mindful awareness of thinking, if you're not bothered by it, you're not in conflict with it. It doesn't agitate you, no matter how often you go off in thought, Oh, I'm just thinking, I'm thinking. So. So let's do a meditation together. And I'll include in this a little bit of guidance around mindfulness of thinking. So now, if you would take a meditative posture, In a certain posture that you consider, which support you for being present, with your experience, your present moment experience. And then taking this posture, you might take a few moments to adjust a posture a little bit, small adjustments, both to make the body a little bit more comfortable and alert but also as a mindfulness exercise in itself, that you're beginning to direct your attention to your body as you make these small adjustments. And then that in your body, Beast Still, perhaps there's a way of making the body feel the stillness or quietude of just being here in gently taking a few long slow deep breaths, breathing in and then exhaling a little bit longer than you normally would, just to complete the sense of letting go. A little longer exhale that comes not from forcing the breath out. But relaxing or releasing a little bit at the end of the Exhale. So then and then your breathing returned to normal and with the idea that the body is a foundation to allow the body to be the foundation for you to be aware, you might take a few moments to relax your body. Relax some of the major muscle And holding patterns in the body. Maybe a softening of the face. Maybe really relaxing of the shoulders. Maybe as you exhale a softening of the rib cage. In perhaps a softening of the belly especially if you're sitting cross legged with a body takes roughly the shape of a mountain or a triangle. But anyway that you are, see if you can feel a sense of stability or groundedness in your body. Any way in which the substance and weight of your body helps you to feel rooted, connected here and now and then within your body as part of your bodily experience become aware of how the body experiences breathing. In perhaps each time you exhale, you can let go of your thinking or if you can't let go of it each time you exhale let the thinking mind become quiet softer as you exhale and let go of your thinking, soften your thinking. Let go into the breathing that go into the quietness or the quiet or state so that you're quiet as you're aware of the inhale letting go during the exhale and having a Quiet awareness of the inhale. Not trying too hard. It was gentle. important part of meditation is to avoid any idea that you're not doing it right. It's possible to also avoid any idea you're doing it. Wrong. No wrong. No. Right. Just here And while you're here with your breathing, if there are body sensations that are more compelling in meditative awareness to that part of your body a mindful awareness that recognizes what's happening. Maybe has uses a mental note where what's emphasized is a simple recognition, awareness rather than thinking and reacting to the body sensations And then after doing that for a little while you, you can either continue focusing on the body sensations or you can always try to come back again to your breathing And then, with a little exercise, you can now let go of focusing on your breathing and instead, allow yourself to be completely mindful of thinking. For this exercise, you're allowed to think whatever your mind thinks. While you're thinking to clearly recognize that you're thinking You might want to use a simple mental note that supports that recognition. And it could be as

simple as saying to yourself in King allow yourself to think. But clearly recognize it. Like you're looking thinking right in the eye and saying, I see you. This is thinking and if the thinking becomes quiet this way, then return to your breathing until thinking starts again and then call calmly. began recognizing thinking and as you're looking at your thinking, recognizing yourself thinking you might notice Do you think more in words or more in images in the future In words, is there a location for the loudspeaker that says the words? If there feel like more like being spoken, or something if they're more like words on a page? Isn't there a place where that page is? And if you think more in images, is there a place where those images are projected? So as you recognize yourself thinking, see if you can recognize also as part of that If there is a location, general location, it might help you to see it more clearly. If you see it in that location. If there's a location for your thinking, then it can also be clear that thinking is only a particular part of the whole. Not everything. It might be helpful to be more specific with your mental note. If it's words, say words, instead of thinking. If it's images, it might be images And then as you're being mindful of thinking, continuing to allow yourself to think if you are quiet, you can go back to your breathing in when thinking returns intent and happy that now you can do the exercise to just look upon your thinking. And notice what is your relationship to thinking? Do you have an attitude about it? Do you have a more positive attitude and more negative. worth? Are you more me meaning into your thoughts or pulling away or your thoughts your friend or your friendly towards your thoughts or you see them as the enemy And then what changes and how you relate to thinking? If you add the word just in front of the label thinking as you observe and aware of yourself thinking, call it just thinking is just a thought As you say just thinking is there any way you can become aware also have a tendency to be involved in thinking to react or participate in your thinking get involved. A new thought comes up and you can feel you lean into it or get pulled into it. You pick it up. And then to return to your breathing now, you can let go of focusing on thinking and let yourself settle onto your breathing again. Maybe every exhale letting go into breathing Perhaps thinking of breathing and the body as a foundation upon which to rest awareness And then to end this sitting to take a few deep breaths. Letting go more fully as you exhale, feeling your body feeling your body against your cushion your chair, the floor, remembering that you're where you are. And then when you hear the bell, three bells at the end of the third Bell Open your eye. So that meditation session was an exercise with may for some of you may be a lot of new information or new kind of exploration of your inner landscape in exploration of your mind and your thinking. So If that stirred you up, or that gave you a lot to think about, or that's quite understandable, if it's all new and, and it can be quite useful to start understanding aspects of thinking our relationship to it. It kind of creates what begins to create some more capacity to see and be mindful, the more we see that's there rather than generalizing or being abstract about it or vague about what's happening. So if some of what came up was news to you, and just now maybe you have to adjust it or be with it and maybe go for a walk or do something just to kind of kind of digest what, what happened. But I want to follow up this with making a distinction between the activity of thinking and a word that I've coined, it's not In normal English word, but in contrast to thinking, there is thought during the activity of the mind having a thought. The mind is a thought machine, it kind of that's what it does, it will often refer to the time or produce thoughts, ideas, imageries, memories, perceptions of things, ideas of what's there. It produces all kinds of cognitive movements of the mind of knowing something. And with our involvement with it, we then create

associations to the thoughts that come up. We tie up individual thought into the next thought, or we get involved with that thought, or we think about that we act we react to that thought we pick up that thought. And so if I say the word lunch, then some of you will start thinking thoughts about lunch. You've kind of You might hear the word lunch and the thought lunch appears in your mind. And then that's it. That's a thought. And then you start planning your menu for lunch. And now you're thinking, and this distinction helps us to see that thought is just what the mind does. So just the thoughts can be created. But thinking is our involvement with them. And the involvement with thinking can be multifaceted, and, and can create all kinds of different, we can experience our thinking very differently. If we're involved. Some thoughts can be very strong and very substantial. Because we're really invested in it. And some thoughts that arise. There's no investment, we're just kind of very relaxed and they just float up and float away. and everything in between. No, no, none of there's no none of this is wrong. But what we're doing and mindfulness practice is trying to see what is To be mindful of what's actually happening. And getting a little bit more sense of the landscape, the ecology of thinking can help us to observe thinking rather than getting lost in it and continent. So this idea of getting caught in thoughts or being picking them up or entering into the world of a thought, I'd like to exemplify with an analogy, which I might have used last week. So please forgive me if I did. So imagine that you've gone on a nice hike in the countryside and it's been a wonderful day and and, and you come to a nice tree on the edge of a beautiful little river going by, and you have a lunch, maybe you take a little nap, you wake up so refreshed and so content and so feeling like everything is good right now and for these minutes that you're there, nothing is needed and it yourself A nice thing to just be present in a very alive clear, relaxed way. And just watch the river go by the wave is the current flows by and you find yourself kind of a little bit happily absorbed and just watching the ripples of the water as it goes by and everything is good. And then there comes down the river, a big New Orleans Showboat big boat with banners and bands and dancing and, and all kinds of wonderful music coming off the boat. And you watch this boat coming down to pass you by on the river. And the next thing you're aware of, you're on the boat and you're involved with all the activity of the boat. But the next thing you're aware you're on the boat, but you're aware Two weeks later. You just got so absorbed in the boat you found your good even notice That you climbed onto the boat that you were in the boat and involved in the boat. You're so involved. And then two weeks later you say, wait a minute, how did I get on the boat? You get off the boat, you make your way back up the river and eventually get to that tree. And you're sitting there again and everything's going well you're happy to sit there. And the next boat that comes down is a big war boat fighting the Great War that just wars, guns blasting. And, and the next thing you know you're on the boat fighting the Great War, fighting for justice, fighting for whatever. And it takes you even longer to understand Wait a minute, why don't I get on the boat. I was out the tree. So you get off the boat to get back to your tree. The next boat that goes down is a very old, decrepit Raph that's almost barely floating on the water and it You feel so sorry for it. It's like, Oh, it's about to sink in. And, and you're watching it go by the next thing you know, you're on that boat. Poor me. And so it's hard. And you spend, you know, a long time on that boat until you realize you're on the boat. And then you get off and you come back and you go to the tree and sit there rest and watch the river. So in the same way, our thoughts that arise can be like boats. And it's possible just to watch the boats go by, and just see it as a boat. It's a boat, it's a thought thinking. Or we can get on the boat. And we can be involved in that

boat and lost and not really present not really clearly cognizant of what's happening, because we're so involved in the ins and outs of our thoughts and the fantasies and the memories and the images of the future or whatever it might be that that we're You know, we're kind of on the boat. This analogy is not supposed to say that it's wrong to think and wrong to have the boats go by. But it's a whole different thing if we can just stay grounded and ourselves, stay cognizant of what's happening, and then watch the boats go by. It doesn't mean that we never get on a boat, or never get involved in some thoughts. But we have a much more choice about what we do. If we have the ability to step back and just notice it and see if we see it. Oh, just a thought. Just a thought is happening. This is especially useful in meditation. And meditation, there's not very little you actually need to think about 99% probably of what you're thinking about meditation, for the purpose of meditation is not really needed. And so it's fine to let go of it. You can pick it up later, after the meditation. It's okay just to let the boats go by and develop that capacity just to observe Just to watch, this is thinking, this is thinking. And I thought about maybe of redoing the analogy and think and using it for you're sitting and watching your screen on your device, and then kind of scrolling through websites. And then soon enough, you could find a website and you don't know how long you spent in the website, you are lost in that website until you pulled out and until the next interesting website came along, and you got pulled into that universe. But I think it's like prefer the imagery of just sitting back on a tree and just watching things go by. So the so the basic idea, the instructions around thinking for mindfulness meditation is, is to stay as the default mindfulness of breathing It's like the anchor or the home base, where we're training ourselves to be centered here, to be focused to be mindful of something that's recurring and simple and always in the present moment. At the moment that, but if thinking becomes predominant, and we keep getting pulled away over and over again, then the instructions are to just be mindful of thinking. Take a few moments to recognize your thinking. Sometimes it's enough to just name it a few times thinking thinking, and then come back to the breathing. Sometimes it needs more attention than just a few moments. And it's fine to keep a lot of attention to exploring and being mindful and just keep saying, just thinking, thinking. Sometimes it's useful to be a little bit more specific about the label the name, because it's clear recognition if we say if we recognize a planning thoughts as planning, planning or Memory thoughts as remembering, remembering, or fantasy as fantasy, sometimes as a note is more specific and to the point, it's easier to get a little bit of freedom from the thinking and just to watch it go by not be so involved. And, and then to come back to the breathing, and like go into the breathing again. If the thinking is really compelling, or you keep getting pulled into your thinking, then the idea is to spend a little bit more time focusing on thinking and just noticing what's going on. And one of the most useful things to notice with there's a lot of thinking is what emotion is associated with that thinking. What emotion is seems to support it or is feeding it or its underlying and chances are the stronger the thinking the more involved we are. We are thinking there will be some Emotional emotion that underlies it, that's part of it. And, and I think of sometimes to the emotion, and that's underlying a thought to be like the factory that keeps producing it. And if all you do is let go of the thought, but don't attend to the factory, the factory will keep pumping out more and more thoughts. And, but if you can attend to the emotion, that's really what you know, probably needs more attention. It's kind of what needs you is to be recognized and, and be felt and cared for. It's almost like the emotion is, you know, so is the, you know, is created, it has a flag it says, Hey, you over here, pay attention over here. But

then we pay attention to the flag, not what's holding the flag. So not to give so much credence and importance to the thoughts but rather to given what's happening in a deeper level here, when we're having this, so for example, if there's a lot of planning thoughts, the chances are that more often than not, that there is some kind of fear, anxiety, apprehension around those planning thoughts. Sometimes it's more of a delightful anticipation that's underneath it. But whatever it is underneath it, or the energy or the emotion behind it, if you can bring your attention to that, and not let that be subconscious or not noticed, then something begins more freedom can happen. We're less likely to get involved in the thinking and just stay in the present moment of what's going on. If there's a lot of memory, there can be a lot of emotions behind memories and thinking about the past of but for example, it could be anger or resentment, that what happened before and what needs our attention is the anger or the resentment, not necessarily Repeating and reviewing the story of what happened and coming up with a better response to what was said in the conversation yesterday. But to just really feel the anger and so in this way, this is one of the reasons why mindfulness of emotions is important to teach first before mindfulness of thinking, because sometimes to really find our freedom with thinking, we have to kind of drop down to this deeper foundation from which thinking is emerging and coming. So to so if thoughts are relatively light, and we get pulled off and it kind of lightwei with thinking and they don't really have a big pool, it's fine. Just let go of them and come back from the breathing to keep cultivating stability with the breathing. If the thoughts are stronger, then turn towards them. just recognize that they're there, give them permission to be there in the sense that, don't try to let go them too quickly anymore. But take your time to recognize thinking that's what's happening now. maybe be a little bit specific, in terms of calling it planning, remembering fantasy, something like that. Just whatever is obvious. And then, if that's enough to settle, settle them, so you're not pulled into their orbit so strongly anymore, and you can stay with your breathing, then go back to your breathing. If thinking is really compelling, and you really can't, you know, let go of it, are you keeping pulled into it or you're let go of it and you immediately go back to it over and over again. Then you want to take your time with thinking, mindfulness of thinking, just really turn towards it. And as if you're in here for the long term, just really, it's not a problem. You're not bothered by it. But this becomes now the object of mindfulness, mindfulness practice. If you're going to meditate, the object of meditation will be you yourself thinking and then you might do some of the things I did an exercise you might notice if there's a location for your thinking, for the voice that speaks or for the projector that's projecting with a screen in which it appears, sometimes having a specific location makes it a little bit more. I don't know if tangible is the right word, but a little bit more clear, or this is thinking as opposed to kind of a morphus Lee being involved with it and, and having it kind of, you know, spread and suffused into ourselves. And then you might also look at what's the emotion underlying it, the stronger the thinking, the more likely there's an emotion underlying it. And you might consider it to the emotion, the emotion that needs you more than the thoughts and one of the reasons so one of the things to be careful for with this relationship between thinking and acting Emotions is that if we keep staying involved and spinning the thoughts or the stories or reviewing, ruminating, it tends to feed the emotion. an emotion which is not paid attention, not attended to, tends to feed more thinking. And there's a wonderful and a wonderful but to kind of reciprocal feeding of each other between stories and thinking. And they say that psychologists say one of the leading causes of depression is random and Reman rumination

thinking and thinking over and over and over the same thoughts. And if those thoughts are depressing thoughts, you know, in that query critical of ourselves all the time non stop, then that supports the you know, depression. And so as mindfulness of thinking is beginning to separate out the emotions from the thoughts beginning to create space, beginning to not have the thoughts that we have be the primary influence on our mood and how we are beginning to see thinking is just thinking. That's a thought. That's a thought there. And I'm here, whatever thoughts you're having is only a small piece. So the big picture of who you are. And to begin to getting a sense, there's much more here beyond the edges of your thoughts. And chances are, if you do this for a while, you'll discover that not only is there much more here than what's beyond the edges of your thoughts, if you no longer defined by your thoughts, chances are you'll discover there's a lot more goodness here, that you're you have much more goodness, that there's actually beauty inside of you and something of value and importance here. That can't be seen sometimes if we're really on the boat of thinking thinking all the time. We have we are good people at that. At the center at the core, and sometimes we just have to kind of get a little handle and separation from our constant thinking, to feel this goodness that's within us. So for now, I would encourage you to sometime before our session tomorrow to spend 20 minutes or if you are comfortable enough now to expand it a little bit longer to try 25 or 30 minutes of meditation, and to begin to be mindful of thinking as well whenever that becomes compelling or strong. And as you go through your daily life over the next day, you might look for opportunities to check in to notice your thinking. Notice your thinking to recognize what's happening, the quality of your thinking, the character of your thinking, your relationship to thinking and you might try the Three thoughts journey a few times through the day, maybe every hour on the hour, and just, you know, count three thoughts and see what happens. And see if this kind of little bit study and curiosity about how thinking works in your life through this next 24 hours, maybe begins shifting your relationship to thoughts and the relationship of thinking to you that it creates a little bit more health, little bit more peace, a little bit more independence and freedom. May you become free of the influence of your thinking. So that you can think more wisely and, and better. So I hope that this is helpful. And tomorrow we'll continue a little bit more with exploration of thinking. If anything I said today seemed complicated in two months. Then don't worry about it. Maybe forget that and drop that or listen to this recording again, if it's helpful for you. There's a very important principle about mindfulness. And that is, if it's not simple, it's not mindfulness. So if it seems like what I said today was too much to remember, and you're trying to figure it out, you know, it's really enough just to go back to your breathing and make that the primary focus of attention. And then as it becomes really obvious, that something else is needed attention, then maybe you'll remember some of the things I said, and you can just bring, you know, some mindfulness to it then. So I hope you enjoy your thinking I hope that you're have a friendly relationships to your thoughts and, and learn to offer kindness to whatever you're to yourself as you think. That this next 24 hours is a useful, nice time for you and I look forward to our time tomorrow. So thank you very much