

Thinking (4 of 5) Healthy Thinking

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

restoration, restore

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We'll continue with the topic of mindfulness of thinking. Today, the topic is restoration, meaning the restoring of a healthy way of being. Clinging, attachment, fear, and resistance inhibit the natural, healthy functioning of our psychophysical being. With restoration, we are no longer carrying the burden of our attachments and responsibilities. We still have responsibilities but are not weighed down by them. When we are able to shed a lot of the attachments and preoccupations that we have, this allows for healthy functioning.

For some people, meditation operates a little bit like taking a shower when you're dirty and getting clean. Meditation is a way of cleansing the mind, the spirit, the heart. How does this relate to thinking? There can be a restoration of healthy thinking or thinking that is beneficial, light, clear, and easy. One of the steps towards that is to respect thinking.

One way of looking at this is that everything that we are is made up of parts, so thinking is made up of parts. It's partly emotions, partly physical tensions, partly motivations, and partly memories and their associations. Sometimes thoughts are motivational – they're trying to get something done. Sometimes they're simply very relaxed memories or relaxed pleasant anticipations. There are all kinds of relaxed reflections.

As we begin respecting the different component parts of the complex of thinking, it is possible to recognize there is tension, heaviness, tightness, or contraction. That is our contribution – the way in which we're involved or identified. Tension represents some attachment we have.

Regardless of whether it's appropriate to be thinking of whatever you're thinking about, the weight, the contraction, or the tightness is not necessary. In fact, we usually think much more creatively and efficiently if there is no tension, tightness, heaviness, or preoccupation.

Letting go, and allowing thinking to be free of our reactivity to thoughts and our caughtness in them allows thinking to operate and to be restored to a kind of healthiness. We can think without fear, hate, desire, or wanting something. This might be unimaginable because those things are so much part and parcel of our thinking.

We can let thinking occur, but not have it be glued to our sense of self – me, myself, and mine – my opinions, my stories. It is really remarkable how much some of us are somehow a central character in our thoughts, one way or the other. As we become lighter and freer, we think, but thoughts don't have us at the center of them anymore. Thoughts just float up.

One of the remarkable things that can happen in meditation, if you meditate long enough or deep enough, is that over time, thinking becomes less heavy and thick. It is not as solid. Sometimes when we're really caught up in something, thinking can be the most solid thing in the universe. It's so dense, serious, and important, and has so much energy behind it. When the content of the thoughts is negative about ourselves or the world, the heaviness and contraction around thoughts can be quite debilitating.

They say that one of the leading causes of depression is rumination – just churning away with the same kind of thoughts over and over again, all of which are negative self-talk. We begin to put rumination to rest. We do not identify with that or get involved in it. There might still be unfortunate kinds of thinking going on. But we are not latched onto it, reactive to it, or taking it so seriously. We are just sitting on the boulder in the river and letting the water run by without identifying with it.

Over time, the thinking becomes thinner and thinner, lighter and lighter. It's a remarkable process in which thinking gets a lightness to it. It's like a thin, thin veil, or like clouds drifting across an open sky. Clouds have almost no weight. Thoughts have no weight. In and of themselves, they are very, very light. They don't interfere

with anything, much like a cloud doesn't interfere with anything. When you put your hand in a cloud, your hand goes right through it.

So thoughts feel like they're getting thinner and thinner, lighter and lighter, and more and more relaxed. We feel them floating through, floating by. At this point, some people find that their thinking becomes creative. When I meditate a fair amount, I certainly find that outside of meditation my thinking is usually very easy, relaxed, and creative. I am more likely to write poetry when I have this very light, thin thinking going on.

I am also more likely to think about things more clearly. I often find that after I've meditated in the morning, when I go back to something I'm trying to figure out, do, or write, there is much more clarity and ease. It is almost as if forcefulness and trying really hard to think or do something interferes with the natural creativity and intelligence that exists within us.

One possibility with mindfulness of thinking is to understand the territory of thinking, the ecology of thinking – to recognize the different component parts, and understand which parts we don't have to be involved in and can let go of. This might not mean letting go of thoughts themselves. It might mean letting go of all the tension associated with thoughts. Or maybe there are certain motivations connected to those thoughts that we can let go of when we realize what the motivations are – what we are trying to do with our thoughts.

There can be a lot of physical tension connected to thinking, so you let go of and relax that. Maybe the emotions that are connected to the thoughts need real attention. They are what need your love, care, and presence.

By recognizing the component parts, we start separating them out, and it becomes easier to look thinking right in the eye and just see it. It is fascinating to do that. Sometimes when we do that, thinking just fades away. This is partly because thinking continues through time when we feed it. When we are just watching it, we're not feeding it, and it dissipates.

What is interesting is that when thinking dissipates and we are relaxed, at some point, maybe after meditation – if you stay relaxed and don't rush back into thoughts and concerns of the day – there is a restoration of a healthy, wholesome, useful way of thinking. When we are deeply relaxed and at peace, we have a reference point for what health is.

It is not healthy to get caught again in the preoccupations and concerns of the day. We do have concerns and things we have to take care of. But it is wonderful to discover that we can take care of them better when we are not tight, rushing, pushing, or barreling ahead. We sometimes get up out of meditation and say, "Okay, got to get to work." That attitude is a kind of leaning into thinking and getting involved in thinking, and the thinking gets revved up.

Maybe that is not necessary. Maybe there's a way of trusting that healthy way of being with thoughts where they are light, soft, and gentle, not weighty or pushing us around. Here we have the sense: "Oh, that is healthy. That's what is useful." Here, restoration means restoration of healthy thinking and having the ability to know what that is. The more easeful, peaceful, and relaxed you can become in meditation, the more you will discover this reference point for a peaceful, healthy way to be with the world of thinking.

We don't have to only let go of thoughts. There are times when it's completely appropriate to be thinking, even wonderful. Thinking can be a gift. You can be friends with your thoughts. You can be friends by relating to the thoughts in a very healthy way. The thoughts themselves can feel healthy. It is actually possible to have thoughts that feel nourishing, supportive, and onward leading to greater peace. Today may you discover something new about healthy thinking. Thank you.