

Wise Thinking (3 of 5) Independent of Thoughts

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Hello and welcome to the third talk on wise thinking. One of the reasons the topic of mindfulness of thinking is so important is that the way that we relate to our thinking is also connected to how we relate to anything that comes from outside of us. This includes any information, ideas, or content.

What's been on my mind lately is specifically how we relate to media and to our screens. Everything that comes through a screen, one way or the other, represents someone else's thinking. Someone has produced it and designed it. In that sense, we're constantly living in the content of someone else's thoughts that they've created for us. Maybe it was clearer when we were reading something that someone had put their thoughts on paper.

But how do we relate to the content when we are watching screens and videos and consuming news? I would like to propose that the way many people relate to their own thinking is an unhealthy way of relating to online content. Here, as consumers of information and opinions, even if we don't like or approve of them, we take them in and react to them so often in our society as a whole.

For many people, their thoughts are the same way. There's no sense of distance from their thoughts, or questioning their thoughts, or mindfulness of thinking, asking what's really going on there. There's a way in which many people are just living in their thoughts, carried by their thoughts, influenced by their thoughts, without any reflection, without any awareness of how much they're being influenced by them.

We have an opinion, a bias, an advertisement, or a projection that we want to convey to the world, and it's just second nature. We don't even realize we're doing it. Much of our thinking carries our self-concept. Sometimes the way that we talk and think is like an advertisement for us, our desires, and what we want. We are strategizing. We have a whole marketing department in our mind that's trying to figure out what we want and how to get it.

We can learn a lot by becoming independent of our thinking, seeing our thinking clearly, and learning how to think from a place deep within us that has no attachment, no fears, that's free of stress, and free of wanting and not wanting. This place is the deepest wellspring of relaxed thinking we can have, where it's easy for us to be independent of the content of what's being thought.

Then we can be independent of the unusually odd things we might be thinking throughout the day. A few of us have odd things we think, but we don't think about that because we're living in it and it is so obvious. These can be unhealthy thoughts. We don't think they're unhealthy because it's second nature that we should be upset with ourselves or feel shame about ourselves and have thoughts like that. Or it's second nature to want to get what we want, to have what we want. There are a lot of strategies about that – of course, I should think about and try to figure out how to get what I want because that's natural. That's how it should be.

So we are not independent of our thoughts. We can learn how to step back and be independent of our thoughts so that when we do think we can think more wisely, more creatively, more objectively, and be more connected to the deepest wellsprings of compassion, care, and kindness. If we learn to do this with ourselves, then we can apply that to media, so we don't become consumers of news and whatever is on our screens.

We become independent of that, and we have a sense that we're not consumers taking things in. We are more the producers. We certainly hear and see what's being presented in the world and what happens around us. But we're rooted in a deeper place where we're the producer. We are in a deep place of creativity and responsivity that can be free of attachments, fear, and confusion.

So the application of mindfulness of thinking in daily life is huge for our society. There are people who are spending billions of dollars to try to take your attention hostage and hijack it, keep it for themselves, and keep you engaged from the surface mind, the mind of desires, the mind of fear, the mind of aversion. They want to keep that activated as we engage in the world out there.

We can discover the source of thinking inside of us. There are two general sources. There's that place where we think – a location or attitude with which we're thinking that comes along with some kind of attachment. This can be the attachment to self – a very strong sense of me, myself, and mine. This includes my needs – my need to prove myself, to get what I want, and my need to be safe. Of course, we should be safe, but if we're caught up in the need for that, then we are thinking in what I call a "surface way of thinking"

That surface thinking doesn't have access to the depths of who we are. That's one source of thinking. I often point to my head for this. It is a swirling of concepts and ideas that come from how we put words together into language and grammar. Surface thinking builds things, all the way until it builds wars between people.

The second source of thinking is thinking that arises out of being deeply relaxed and at ease with ourselves. This is the source of creativity. If we're tense, it's very hard to be creative. Creativity has to do with a holistic way of thinking where we're relaxed enough that nothing is constricted or narrowed down, as happens when we have any kind of tension or attachment. This kind of thinking occurs when we're deeply relaxed so that our senses are open and available. We are open to all the different capacities that we are, open to a broad range in a relaxed, settled way.

I associate that thinking with the belly. If not the belly, I associate it with a wonderful feeling of warmth and delight in the chest, where thinking is a pleasure to do, because of the creativity, the joy, the delight in just being alive. This is a wellspring of flowing, pleasant, creative, unattached thoughts that are not under the influence of anger, aversion, regrets, shame, and despair. This kind of thinking is not under the influence of our desires, our conceits, or under the influence of being confused or lost in our life. There are so many things that influence our thinking.

As we learn to be mindful of thinking, we can step back and say, "Oh, I'm thinking now." We do this clearly and consciously, with an act of awareness, and find ourselves independent of our thinking. The knowing that we're thinking might be a kind of thought, but it can come from that deep source. "Oh, boy, am I thinking a lot now. The control tower is going wild. People in the control tower are having a party and they're not watching the planes landing. There's going to be an accident soon."

We can have this thinking arise from the depths or the peace within, and we can recognize the other place of thinking non-judgmentally. "Non-judgmental" does not mean without evaluation, assessment, and understanding that surface thinking is not a useful place to be thinking from. Losing myself in the surface mind that's caught up in attachment is not useful. Being able to see and evaluate that is wisdom – wise thinking.

On the other hand, judging the surface mind means saying, "Oh, what a terrible person I am or how terrible is. What a bad thing that surface thinking is." Chances are, that kind of thinking, where we're putting a value like that on surface thinking, is just more surface thinking.

Thinking from the depths can understand, but it has no criticism and no attachment to anything that it sees. It's phenomenal to switch operating systems from the surface mind, which one way or another is being driven by something we're attached to, to the deep mind, which is free – or much freer – from any kind of attachment.

I hope that this idea of finding the location, the source from which you're thinking gives you access to a deeper understanding of your thinking, how to be mindful of it, and how to step away and be independent of it. Relax into the depth of your body and be at ease so that the creative thinking from the depths, which is so holistic, can animate your life and help you with this task of becoming independent of your thoughts. That's only a step away

from learning how to be independent of the news that you're reading and the opinions that you're hearing so you can be wise about what you're hearing, reading, and seeing.
Thank you very much and we'll continue tomorrow.