

## Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation: With Wisdom

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**Gil Fronsdal**

Good evening, everyone. Welcome. As we did last week, if you have any questions you want to ask, this might be a good time. Some people might still be coming, so we'll start officially in a little bit. Do you have any questions about what I taught last week or about your meditation?

Participant 1: Can you hear me? One of the things that I don't seem to be able to do is to be able to observe my thoughts. I guess the thoughts or the emotions are maybe so strong that I had just hopped on that train and didn't realize it until I had kind of come off the train. I was wondering if you had suggestions.

Gil: Hold it closer because maybe my hearing is not so good.

Participant 1: I'm not able to observe my thoughts. I guess maybe I'm just so attached to them. I was wondering if you had any suggestions.

Gil: Yeah. I don't know what to say. Then I wouldn't worry about it. But do you notice when you're lost in thought?

Participant 1: I notice afterwards. After I've kind of gotten off the train, I can say, "Okay..."

Gil: How long do you spend on the train?

Participant 1: It could be 30 seconds. It could be two minutes. It could be five minutes.

Gil: One way to deal with it is just be content with that. Slowly, what you're doing is trying to develop your mindfulness. And so, when you come to, after however long it is, just exercise the muscle of mindfulness and try to be present for a while, to be with what's going on. And slowly over time you'll settle, you'll relax, your ability to be mindful will get stronger. And, at some point, it'll be time for you to see your thoughts as they occur. And you won't get pulled into them so quickly. That's one thing you could do.

But is there any time during the day when you're self-reflective about the fact that you're thinking? Like do you ever say, "I have to think about a shopping list now"?

Participant 1: Yes. I mean, there could be lesser things or it could be more serious stuff. You

know, like my mom died a few years ago, so a whole bunch of stuff was happening with the estate. That I understand. But it could be as simple as, "Did I pay my water bill?" or something like that.

Gil: So find something which you can think about that you can watch also. You can stay mindful as you're thinking, and see what you can learn about yourself.

Participant 1: So probably pick one that's weaker, so to speak.

Gil: Yeah, yeah, but maybe not in meditation. As you go about your day and you have one of those weaker ones and you're aware that you're thinking, just start paying attention to some of the different characteristics of your thinking, like we did last week. And then slowly, you'll become more familiar with it and maybe then you won't be pulled in so quickly.

The other thing about thinking is the more easily we get caught in thought, the more likely there's tension somewhere in our system, in our body, in our mind. So when you finally catch yourself being lost in thought, one of the things to do at that point is to check-in, where am I tense? For people who notice their thinking and just come back to their breathing without doing anything else, the conditions for thinking are still there. So you have to relax. See if you can just take a deep breath and relax. See what can be relaxed, and that could be the body, it could be the thinking muscle itself, the kind of tension in the mind where you're thinking.

Tension is kind of like this. I don't know if any of you have had the experience that if you're squeezing a toothpaste tube, you are wiping the toothpaste off from the opening, trying to get it away, and it keeps coming out. You have to stop squeezing. I'm not trying to be disrespectful of your thinking too much. But if there's a lot of tension in our system, it's kind of like the toothpaste tube is being squeezed. So you have to stop squeezing. And so, don't just let go of your thoughts and come back. Spend some time seeing where the tension is and see if you can soften a little bit. Don't be too ambitious about relaxing, but it is really helpful to relax.

Someone else?

Participant 2: Yeah, I found that the labeling technique that you mentioned, I think in one of the ...

Gil: Which technique?

Participant 2: The labeling technique. That is when I'm racing, so every so often it'd pop up and, "Okay, that was that," and then go again on the train. So that was helping and slowly

kind of...

Gil: Fantastic. The labeling, for some people, is extremely helpful. And that also might help you with your thinking. If you have a kind of relaxed, ongoing rhythm of just labeling your experience – “in-breath,” “out-breath,” “sound,” “itch,” “breath,” “in-breath,” “out-breath,” “belly tight,” “feeling tightness,” “breathing in,” “breathing out,” “thinking” – if you have that as a regular habit, then you're using thinking to keep you present, rather than using your thinking to take you away.

An idle mind sometimes wants to do something. And so, sometimes you want to give the thinking mind something to do. The labeling gives it something to do. But it's helping you out, rather than taking you away.

Some people complain about labeling because they think it just makes the mind more busy. However, it's actually better than the alternative, which is getting lost in thought over and over again.

Also, if you have a regular kind of gentle rhythm of noting, then you're more likely to notice if you get lost in thought, because you stop labeling. So I'm glad you brought it up.

Participant 3: Good evening. I remember the first class you mentioned that there was a reason for your ordering of the breath, body, emotions, and thought. I was wondering if you could remind us what that is. And then I seem to recall there was something about it that was maybe culturally based?

Gil: Culture?

Participant 3: Culturally based? Yeah. And I was wondering if you would have a different order if you were teaching the class in a different part of the world.

Gil: Well, I think one of the cultural things that has developed in Buddhism in the United States is putting much more emphasis on emotions. A very famous Westerner, Ajahn Sumedho, who's a very senior monk in Thailand now – he's almost retired now – is fluent in Thai but also teaches a lot in English. He says he teaches differently for the two communities. For the Thais, they don't have the same acculturation around Freud, Jung, and Western psychology that is kind of part and parcel of some of the popular or common culture in the United States. It's so common here in the United States that people don't even know where it comes from. It's just part of life. It's just obvious, isn't it, but we use language, we use thoughts, we use orientations that are only a hundred years old and have kind of crept into

our culture in the West. They don't have that in Thailand. So, here, Ajahn Sumedho will talk about psychology, emotions, acceptance, all these things that have to do with psychology. He would never do that in Thailand. For the Thais, that wouldn't compute. It wouldn't work. So there are cultural differences that we take into account.

And, in fact, it's hard to find in some Indian languages a nice, clean word for the English word "emotion." That's even more so for Pāli, the ancient language. So we've organized the human pie – we all have the same pie, we're all humans – we cut the pie pieces in different sizes or different ways. And we've made this cut in the pie and called it emotions. They cut it a little bit differently and it could be something else. So those are kind of cultural differences.

The logic of what I did is that thinking is hard for many people to be... it's one of the biggest obstacles to being present because we get pulled into thoughts. If you start with being mindful of thinking, what it's going to be is thinking about thinking. It's not really going to be mindfulness. So it's a lot easier to be mindful of thinking if you have some mindfulness of your emotions, because a lot of the thoughts, especially the ones that drive us or catch us, have an emotional base. The emotions are sometimes the factory. Sometimes it's the other way around.

Emotions are always present moment phenomena. Thoughts could be about the past and the future, and we get pulled out of the present. So it's easier to be with thinking if we know we're connected to the emotions. It's easier to be with emotions if you're connected to the body. The body creates a container, a context, a safety, a grounding to be with emotions that is hard to do for some people if you just... Some emotions are just so difficult. Just be aware of your emotions and some people have panic attacks or something. But if you have the body as a foundation, it's easier grounding. And it's easier to ground yourself in your body, some people say, if you start with breathing. And breathing kind of stabilizes some people. It gets you out of your head enough. And so it's easier to be with your body.

What I've seen in a recent generation of Vipassanā teachers, like what I'm teaching here, is that we have much more diversity now among the teaching community. My generation was basically white, privileged people, and so they had a particular way in which they organized or had to deal with the world. With a newer generation of teachers, who come from very diverse populations, some really disadvantaged populations in this culture where there's been a lot of trauma, they find that it's much better to start with the body than with breathing. And so, in a sense, that's a cultural difference as well. For them, I'm not as trauma-sensitive in my teachings for certain populations as they are. And that's true. So I have to kind of navigate

all these different issues. There are cultures within our culture, right? So how do we manage with it all?

Participant 4: Hi, Gil. I, like everyone else, am suffering with all these uncontrolled thoughts coming, entering my mind when I'm meditating. And it comes and goes, et cetera. But I wanted to say that since the pandemic, I've been attending the 7:00 a.m. morning sessions pretty much every day that they're on. I'm finding over the past three years, I feel more settled. I don't know how. I feel my language has changed. I refrain from saying some of the things I used to say or the way I said them before. I'm not sure if it's wisdom or whatever, but I see it when I digress or move away from what I think I should be doing. I see it right away, before I was oblivious to it. So it does work. I have no idea how, but it does work. And that's all I have to say.

Gil: Great. Thank you. I loved hearing that. That's a nice testimonial. It does work. And it's a slow process. Slowly we begin to be able to monitor, to see what's happening as it's happening. And we have more choice. We have a choice with the words we use and the activities we do because we see it coming. We see ourselves in the middle of it. And there's much more awareness.

Also meditation provides a different reference point for what it means to be alive. You discover that you can be alive and feel at ease. You can be alive and feel comfortable in your skin. You can be alive and feel a kind of ethical sensitivity.

That's one of the reasons it's so good to be in the body, connected to it. The body is kind of an ethical antenna. It picks up and understands when something is ethically off. It'll understand it in yourself – the tensions, the yuckiness. It's very subtle. But if you're lost in thought all the time or filled with greed and hatred all the time, you don't have that subtle tuning in to the antenna that's here. But if you've slowed down, quieted down, have a heightened sensitivity, one of the consequences of that is heightened ethical... wanting to live an ethical life. It's quite inspiring to see it in people as they get into this practice. So you kind of described that.

Participant 4: I feel there's someone next to me watching everything I do.

Gil: And it's yourself, right?

Participant 4: It's myself. But, in a way... you know, in private you may think or do something, but not in the presence of others. I feel there's somebody right next to me watching.

Gil: Fantastic. So this heightened ethical sensitivity is part of what happens through this practice. And you're not even asking for it. Some of you are going to run away now. Probably one of the more common ethical reports that people make to me – people who work in an environment where they kind of hang out at the coffee machine or at snack time talking about things – is they say the medium for talking at work is gossip, but “I don't want to gossip anymore. It doesn't feel good. But now it's really hard to be social with people. It's like now I feel like I'm disconnected or I'm not part of the gang.” It's kind of awkward because gossiping is how people connect. But it just feels wrong to do it.

There are people who find out that the work they do... I remember one person who said that the company he worked with got commissioned a job to make parts for fighter jets. He went to his boss and said, “I can't do that. Can I be assigned to something else?” And so he was. It wasn't that anybody taught him to be ethical. It's just this ethical antenna develops inside. And what I'd like to say is that antenna is you already. So it's not like anybody's imposing anything on you. It's like you have a capacity to feel and sense in a deeper ethical way. It's ever-present in you, but mostly you're distracted from it. You're too busy to notice.

So, for me, that's very inspiring. I don't know what some of you think about that. I've never said that in an intro class. Although I have said sometimes that we could call this a five-week introduction to ethics. But then no one would come.

Okay, let's get ethical. Let's meditate. It'll be a guided kind of mindfulness exercise. It's not exactly how you should meditate. You could if you want. But it's to give you a direct experience of a way that mindfulness can work.

So, as I've said, the way that we teach it here, the default is to cultivate mindfulness and stability, steadiness, continuity of attention on the breathing. But if anything happens that is pulling on your attention... If it's just a sound in the room and it doesn't pull you away from the breathing, don't worry about it. But if the sound is strong enough it starts pulling you away, then follow your attention, follow where your awareness is drawn. And be aware. Note mental labeling of what that is that has your attention. Know it, be mindful of that for a while. And then when that's no longer compelling, come back to your breathing. And so that could be the body, it could be emotions, it could be thinking, it could be sounds in the room. There are a lot of different things it could be. But the idea is we're always going back to the center.

In this exercise, we're going to alternate between being with the breathing and then going out to these three other areas that I've taught you about. And then I'll add one more area to

that. So that's what we'll be doing.

Assume a meditation posture. If it's the end of the day and you feel really tired, you might feel like relaxing back. But I would suggest that for this time you sit up straighter, so there's a little bit more energy coming out of your body into your mind. And if you're tense and agitated from a difficult day, then you might want to settle back and rest a little bit more in the backrest. Then gently closing your eyes, or if you keep them half open, have them pointed down towards the floor.

To transition into the meditation, you could take a few long, slow, deep breaths. Deep enough, maybe like three quarters full without straining, but full enough lungs that you feel your insides, your ribcage, expand and stretch. And then relax on the exhale, with a longer exhale than usual, just to allow more settling in the shoulders and the arms, maybe the belly.

Then letting your breathing return to normal. And continue for a few breaths to see if there are more places in your body that you can relax, soften. And this relaxing the body is also a way of becoming more sensitive to the body, attuned to your body.

And then you might also see if in the mind, the thinking mind, is there any tension, pressure, or contraction associated with thinking, the thinking mind. And if there is, as you exhale, soften the thinking mind, as if it's a muscle – relaxing the thinking muscle.

And then center yourself on your breathing. Your body, your torso, has its own experience of breathing. Follow that experience as you breathe in and breathe out.

Now switch your attention from breathing to the most compelling sensation in your body. It doesn't have to be that strong, but whatever it might be. The body has its own experience of that place, of those sensations. Notice how the body is experiencing this strong bodily sensation. Letting your awareness be close in, or letting your awareness rest in this place in your body. While you feel it, receive the sensations. And for a few moments, to allow this bodily sensation to be there, as if it has full permission. It's okay. And for you, you accompany it. You're present with it.

And then return to the breathing. Maybe there's some way that you can center yourself on the breathing, the body breathing. Then, in a relaxed way, notice the predominant emotion, mood, mind state, or inner state that you have. It doesn't have to be easily identified as an emotion, but some state that you have. And allow it to be there for these few moments of mindfulness, as if it's never had a chance to be in the sun, the sun of awareness. Let it be there

and just notice it, feel it. Feel how it's experienced in the body. See if you can experience your emotional state, mood, or state of mind without any stories connected to it, without adding any meaning to it. Just let it be what it is.

And then return to your breathing. If it helps you, you might take a little bit stronger, fuller in-breath to reconnect. And then continuing now for a three-breath journey. Just give yourself over to three breaths.

Now switch your attention to your thinking, whether it's strong or weak, whether it fades away if you notice it. Notice your thinking. And see if you can notice how you're thinking without thinking more. Very simple matter of fact. If there's an emotion connected to it, be aware of that. If there are body sensations connected to it, include awareness of that.

And then return to your breathing, reestablishing yourself on the body breathing. And then one more shift of attention. Now become aware of how you're mindful. As you're aware of your breathing or anything else, how would you characterize how you're aware? Is there any strain involved? Expectation? Is there any hesitation or reluctance or lack of commitment? And then come back to your breathing.

We'll continue for just a few more minutes, maybe with the breathing at the center. But as you need to, become aware of whatever pulls your attention. And then return to the breathing.

To end this sitting, you can take some long, slow, deep breaths. Feeling the contact of your body against whatever surface that you're connected to. And when you're ready, you can open your eyes.

So this is a particular way of doing mindfulness meditation. There are many different ways it's taught. And I just want to say that for some people, what works best is to just stay with what I taught the first evening, mindfulness of breathing. Don't make it any more complicated than that. And if all you did was every time you wandered off, you came back to your breathing, stayed with it, and developed stability in your breathing, it can be phenomenal. A Buddhist teacher that I spent time with in Japan said that everything you need to know about Buddhism will be discovered through your breathing. So breathing is considered really great. If you want to keep it really simple, that's one opportunity for you.

One of the reasons why we expanded outwards to include the body, emotions, and thinking, and then other things as we go off, is that then more of our life comes under the purview of our attention and awareness. And the more we can hold everything in awareness, it tends to move our whole life towards health. It tends to move to freedom, to healing, to all kinds

of good things. And we learn how to be present in life for our emotions, for our thinking, for different parts of our life. There'll be a time when it's really useful to have that skill.

When I was a Zen student, I was pretty good at breath meditation, but I had no idea how to be mindful of my anger. In fact, I didn't even know I was angry. People would tell me, "Gil, you're so angry," and I said, "Really?" There was no teaching about how to notice your emotions and be mindful of them. And so they were just there operating in the background, kind of subconsciously and having their effect and influence on me. The same thing with the thinking.

So, to be able to have a practice that encompasses everything – Buddhism doesn't say this explicitly – your awareness, in my mind, then becomes sacred. It's so special to have an awareness that nothing is outside of it. Nothing is not acceptable for awareness to hold. You enter into almost like a different universe if everything can be held in awareness. And so we're learning how to do that in this practice, how everything has a place in awareness, everything we can include, and be present for it.

The big delight, the aha moment for me, when I was practicing in Asia was I was learning about how to be mindful. And I was learning, just a simple act of mindfulness, there was a kind of freedom that could be found there – freedom from entanglement, freedom from being for and against, a variety of freedoms. And I said, "Wow." I had this moment where I kind of was literally stopped in my tracks. And I realized, I thought, "You know, I can be mindful of anything that's an experience. Anything that's a direct experience that I'm having in the moment, in theory, I can be mindful of it. And so in theory, I could be free in relationship to everything." I got so happy. "Wow, that kind of freedom is possible in this world?" And it comes from being mindful, being present for experience.

So we're trying to teach you here at IMC a way of bringing in or encompassing your whole life in the scope of mindfulness, of awareness. One of the things that includes is not just meditation, but bringing the practice into daily life.

One of the great rewards that I get from teaching this is when people come, they've been meditating for a little while, and they say, "This is fine and good, this meditation, but how do I bring this into my life? How do I bring more mindfulness into my daily life and my activities of what I do?"

The line between you in meditation and you outside of meditation is an arbitrary line. The deeper ethical sensitivity, deeper sense of peace and calm, deeper intimacy with yourself,

deeper sense of not being caught, seeing more choice in what you're doing when you meditate, all these good things that happen in mindfulness, why should you only do it while you're meditating? Why not the rest of your life? This was my big question that brought me to live at a Buddhist monastery. I wasn't so much interested exactly in the monastery. I was interested in how to expand what was happening in meditation to talking with people, working, doing the different things that I do.

And so a very important part of this practice, or potential of this practice, is to start bringing mindfulness into daily life activities, rather than being distracted. We live in a distracting culture. I mean, people have written about this, or people get paid a lot of money to keep you distracted, or to grab your attention and keep it going, and get more clicks on your device, whatever, to get your attention. And so people's minds, they're jumping around, jumping and jumping and jumping here and here and here. In doing that, they're not being mindful, they're not centered, settled on their experience here and now.

To bring this mindfulness into daily life is helped a lot by finding things you can do that you just do that one thing. Don't multitask. If you're at home and cooking, just cook. Don't have the radio on – if anybody has radios anymore, maybe podcasts – don't have music on, don't be on the phone, don't have all of them on at the same time and read the news on your tablet. Just do cooking.

As you're chopping a carrot, just be there, like you would be just with your breathing in meditation. Just be with the carrot and chopping the carrot. Put your attention in your hands. Have your eyes looking at what you're doing. And then watch your mind. If your mind wanders off thinking about something else, “This is boring,” come back. “No, there's more. I have a lot to do. I have to multitask, otherwise I can't do all these things.” Come back. It's just you and the carrot.

And then slowly, you'll learn something about getting concentrated. You'll reclaim your mind that you've lost to distractions. You'll feel how delicious it is to be present for an activity. Washing your dishes, just do the dishes with both hands. You don't have to do this, of course, but if you want to start learning how to bring mindfulness into your daily life, you have to train, you have to practice it, and develop it, that capacity. And then start expanding where you do it.

A little trick that I learned from Zen was every time I walk through a doorway, you're walking into a new place. Pay attention. Be mindful of the place you're walking into. It's been a fantastic thing to do.

I'm certainly capable of doing very important things, like thinking about how I'm going to teach mindfulness to you, caught up in that, and I just walk from one room in my house to another room in the house thinking. I'm capable of that. But that's not a good life either. It's good to be present for the life you're living.

It might seem boring. It might seem you're not getting a lot of excitement in your life. But it's kind of like you have to go through a transition time, like a withdrawal time – withdrawing from caffeine – to switch over to being present until being present is delicious and deeply satisfying. It's like now you feel a sense of integrity, wholeness, completeness, or contentment with whatever you're doing because you're present for it in a good way.

And then, when you do that, that becomes a vantage point for wisdom. One of the qualities of what mindfulness is leading to is wisdom, to understand better what we do in our lives. And so, once you have some settledness, some stability, some continuity of mindfulness, that helps highlight when you start losing it.

An analogy that's given is that if you have a napkin or a towel that's full of stains and really dirty, you and no one else might notice one more stain. It's just not noticed. But if you clean it and bleach it and there are no stains, then you notice the dirt spot that comes. And then you clean it or do something.

So, it turns out the same thing with our mind. If our mind is fragmented, busy, running around, doing too many things, distracted from distractions by distractions, then you don't see what you're doing. One more mean word, you don't even notice you've been mean to someone because you're mean all the time. It's just normal or something. But when you settle down and become calm, you see the meanness coming. "Oh, look, there it is." "Oh, wow, that's a big deal. I didn't know I did it so much." And so, we start seeing how this works.

I want to do a demonstration for you of what you might see, how your mind works, when you are settled enough and mindful enough to see. I hope that this is kind of an analogy for you. So, the idea is you apply this to yourself in some way.

It's kind of show and tell. Okay, here we have a flower. There's a famous story in Zen that once upon a time, the Buddha had an assembly of people listening to him, ready for him to give a Dharma talk, a sermon. He didn't say anything, but he lifted up a single flower like this. Maybe most people were perplexed. But one of his disciples smiled, and he knew that that disciple understood. And we're supposed to figure out what the meaning of the story is.

This idea of holding up a flower. So, the flower – many people think a flower is beautiful.

A flower is a flower. And with one flower like this, we have what in Buddhism is called the suchness of the flower. The flower is just being a flower. It is itself. It doesn't even use the word "flower" to describe itself. It just is. The isness of the flower. Its content being itself. Happy.

But now look what happens. Now... let's see how I do this. Now I'm holding up two flowers. And now we can say something about the first flower we couldn't say before. We can say that this flower in my left hand is the big flower. And this is the small flower. Big, small. Okay? That's pretty straightforward. This is the big one, right?

I'm going to do a slight of hand and you're going to see how... I'm not going to do it so fast that you don't see the magic. You're going to see how the magic works. And some of the magic is your mind.

So this was the big flower, right? This one's kind of wilted, but now this is the big flower. And the big flower has become the smaller flower. You see that? Small flower, big flower. Wait a minute. Big flower, small flower. What is it? It's a flower. The isness of the flower. But the human mind can compare. And some things only exist in the comparison. Big and small only exist in the mind that compares. It's not inherent in the flower.

A lot of human suffering comes from comparisons, one way or the other – comparisons to others, to ourselves in the past, or in the future, or ideals, or all kinds of things. As we get quieter and mindfulness gets stronger, we start seeing the mind doing this. We see the birth of a comparison. And because we see it in mindfulness, we have a choice whether do we believe it? Is this a useful comparison? If I want to ask someone to go get the big flower, then that's useful because I said the big flower, not the small one. There's only two, so that's practical. But go get the ugly flower or get the beautiful flower for me, thank you. Bring me the beautiful person. No, no, bring me the ugly person. I mean, isn't that painful that we live in a world like that?

And so, we do a lot of comparisons. I did a lot of it when I was younger. For myself, my self-worth was tied to all kinds of things about my body. I grew up in hippie times. I was a little bit young for it, but I used to sit in school pulling my hair to make it grow faster because that's what it took. Or it was just the generation I was in, junior high school and middle school, when they started bleaching blue jeans. Some people would actually put them on a road for cars to drive over. They're brand new, right? Or put them through the washing machine 10, 12 times to really make them look old. They would tear them and all that. And I didn't know that. That happened over the course of the summer when I was away in Europe. And I came

back and my hair was shorter and my blue jeans were new. That was a disaster. I was no longer acceptable. Whereas when I lived in Italy for that summer, I had longer hair than any of the Italian boys, so I was cool. All I had to do was fly over the Atlantic and come back to the United States and I was no longer cool. Right? Big flowers, small flowers, cool boy, not cool boy. It's ridiculous when you describe it that way. But we do this kind of thing all day long.

So, part of the wisdom of this practice is to have the foundation, the settledness, the clarity, that we can see this operating as it's operating. We can see it in ourselves, we can see it in other people. It's tragic what happens in our society around these kinds of things. But to see it in ourselves and then see it clearly enough, we don't buy into it. We see it for what it is before we get hooked, before it drives us, before it evokes emotions and tensions and all kinds of things.

This is an example of the wisdom that can arise from the practice because we see what goes on in the mind. So this mindfulness of thinking is not just an abstract thing. It has tremendous consequence and application as we go about our lives. And so to cultivate slowly, cultivate a greater and greater capacity for mindfulness.

In terms of daily life and bringing it to daily life, it's invaluable to meditate every day or six days a week. The trick about that is to sit as long as it allows you to sit every day. So, if you say, "I'm going to sit for 45 minutes," but your life doesn't allow for that, then you will get discouraged and give it up. But if you can only do 10 minutes, do 10 minutes. Probably you should be able to get 10 minutes in. If you can't, do it anyway and find out what's going on. Find out what emotions, what beliefs, what feelings, what restlessness, what anxiety is operating that you can't take 10 minutes to meditate. You'll learn a lot about yourself that you won't learn if you just give in to all those things and go about not paying any attention, being driven by your desires or anxieties.

Sitting every day for 10 minutes, what might happen to you is that you might find that after a while 10 minutes feels too short. Well, don't sit longer because I said so. But if you say so, well, it's okay. If you get the feeling, "It's nice, I'd like to sit more," you might start seeing that it makes a difference in your daily life. You might find that you're kinder. You might find that you're more relaxed. You might find that you're more paced in what you do. Some people actually say that they meditate regularly and they don't really see the effect after a while. They say, "Well, does it really do me any good?" And then they stop. "Oh boy, that was a hard day. I got so much more agitated, so much more anxious, so much more speeded up."

So, the idea is if you sit every day for a short period of time, start bringing mindfulness into

daily life. I don't know how it is nowadays, but there was a time when I could feel that if my telephone rang, there was some inner drive that it was essential to answer it as quickly as possible. No one ever told me that, but I felt like it was urgent. I had to get there. And I learned you don't have to do that. Most people don't hang up after two rings. And I found that I used that as a mindfulness bell. I would use that to check in with myself, breathe, relax, and maybe the fourth or the fifth... Not so long, right, four or five rings. But just that little bit of time to connect with myself, change my posture, relax, I was in so much better shape to answer the phone. I had much better conversations because I took that time, to just give myself that time.

There are a lot of these things you can do through the day. And the more you do it, the wiser you'll become, meaning you'll see more clearly what you're actually doing. You'll see the effect that desires and ill will have. And you'll say, "Wait a minute, this doesn't make any sense."

I knew someone here at IMC who had resentment for an ex-partner for I think seven years. One day she was being mindful about her experience of resentment. And she said, "Wait a minute, I'm harming myself more than him." Then she gave up her resentment. So, to really see the cost of these things.

Here's another teaching story that comes from Buddhism. It has to do with how you trap monkeys in India. You take a coconut and cut a slit in it and carve out a little bit of the inside. And you put some candy inside because apparently monkeys like sweets. But the cut is a slot, so in order for the monkey to get its hand into the slot, it has to have its hand flat and then it can get in. But in order to grab the candy, the monkey makes a little bit of a fist. And once it makes a fist, it can't get its hand out of the slot. But it's so greedy, it's not going to let go. And so then the hunter just comes and picks it up, because the coconut is attached to a rope, to a tree, right? So it can't go anywhere.

And so the monkey was so consumed by its greed, it didn't see the dangerous position it was putting itself in. But if the monkey had been mindful, it would have maybe felt the problems of having this fist that can't get out. And then it would have let go and pulled its hand out. So we can feel that for ourselves. We can feel the effect of greed – how it makes us impatient, how it leads to anger, how it leads to compulsive activity that ends up harming us.

And we can then ask, where is the grasping? Where are we fisted up? Where are we caught? And because we know how to bring mindfulness to our experience, we can feel the fist in our body. We can feel where the tension is in our body. We might feel the emotions. The desire,

the greed, that we might have for something might really have deep roots inside. It might be we feel really insecure and afraid. We think if I can have that, then I'll be safe. But that's fascinating, to understand those deeper roots. And then bring mindfulness to that.

It might be that because you're being mindful and you know how to do mindfulness of thinking, you start noticing the beliefs around what you're trying to grasp, what you're greedy for. "If I have this, people will love me." "If I could have this, then I'll be a success and have high status." "If I could have this, then I'll have the pleasure that will make everything right." Something, you know, you fill in the blank. I'm just trying to make something up.

So, to live a life that two things – where you see all these things, so you can be wiser, and to live a life where you see them and you know from your direct experience something better. You know it's better not to grasp. It's better not to be caught in those comparisons. It's better to be settled than it is to be tense, agitated. There's a feeling of wholeness, a feeling of contentment, a feeling of peace, a feeling of well-being that we can carry with us. It's better than a lot of other things.

And so, we do have a healthy comparison. There's a place for comparisons. "Oh, look at that. If I spend my day just pursuing everything that I want more and more and more and more, that doesn't feel as good as a day where I live contented and peaceful and at home, here, settled. At the end of the day, I fall asleep in the second way. The greedy way, I'm still spinning.

Many years ago, when I was in my early 20's, I loved... Some of you, I hope I don't have to explain to you what this is, but there was something called bookstores. There were lots of them. And I loved going into bookstores. I did a lot of reading. But after a while, I realized when I went to bookstores, I always was really exhausted and tired when I left. Why am I so tired? And then I realized at some point what it was. I had almost no money, so I couldn't buy any of the books that I saw. But I wanted a lot of the books. I want that one, I want that one, I want that one, and that one. I was just consumed by greed, wanting, wanting, wanting, wanting, wanting. And to spend an hour in a bookstore only wanting is exhausting. That's what tired me out. When I realized that, I still went to bookstores, but then I kind of just chilled. I just roamed around and looked at some sections and approached the bookstore in very different ways so I wouldn't get exhausted.

So this is another example of wisdom operating: understanding the consequences, understanding what's better for us and what's worse for us, and having a clearer and clearer reference point that for some people it's unimaginable the degree of peace and happiness we're

capable of experiencing. Unimaginable the feeling of feeling fulfilled, feeling happy with ourselves for no reason at all. Just because we're alive in this beautiful way. Our desires don't have to be fulfilled for us to be settled and happy. You can just sit and meditate and feel a greater degree of peace than maybe you feel any other time.

The beautiful thing that happens with this practice is that your inner well-being, your sense of well-being inside, then becomes less and less dependent on what's happening in the world. And you're no longer a victim where your well-being is influenced by whoever comes along and praises you or blames you. You're kind of like at their whim. But if you carry your own confidence, well-being, and happiness that doesn't depend on how people think about you, then you're not so caught in that world. Let them think what they will. That's not dependent on having the latest and the greatest device that's out there. That happiness only lasts for an hour after you get the device. Or something like that. But the happiness of this inner device, inner connection, that we can get with ourselves, that can last for a long time.

So, now it's your turn. And if we have time, we can do another little meditation. But do you have any questions now about any of this – what I said today, what's happened here, about these weeks we've been together? Yes, please.

Participant 1: This is maybe kind of a trivial thing, but I think of some of the practice from kind of a scientific or curious point of view. So, like with distractions, when you were talking about doing one thing at a time, I have habits of multitasking. Just lately I've been trying the habit of just eating and not reading. I can talk, but just eating and seeing what that's like. So, I guess this is more of a comment than a question. I'm approaching some parts of the practice from that sort of practical let's just try it and see what happens.

Gil: I love it. That's the spirit of this practice. That's how we become our own teacher in this practice – by trial and error, experimenting, trying things out, seeing what we learn. That's definitely the way to go. And that's even true in meditation. There's a little bit of we try things out, like today I'm just going to stay with my breath. What's that like?

Participant 1: And then noticing how hard it is, like when I start, like, “Oh, the newspaper's over there. I can read.”

Gil: Yeah, exactly. I think that's very gratifying for me to know that you're approaching it that way with experimentation and learning. That's the way to become wise.

Participant 1: Thank you.

Participant 2: This is more of a comment, just appreciating something that you were just talking about. I found the idea really interesting of trying to understand why we want the things we want, because I'm aware that there's this kind of constant engine of desire. I don't think I'm alone. And we live in a very materialistic society also. So, I think the next step after recognizing that you have kind of non-stop desires is actually looking underneath and asking yourself what the root of it is. For some reason that never occurred to me before. But I really like the idea a lot.

Gil: That's fantastic. So, there's a number of ways to get to the roots, under the surface, to see what's going on. I mean, a person can go for a walk and think about it, reflect on it, and analyze in a more intellectual way. People can go to therapy for that kind of purpose and find out the historical roots of these things. In mindfulness practice, it's one approach out of many approaches. And I'm not saying this is the best approach or the right approach. But just to give you the full power in the way that mindfulness works, we're not thinking our way, we're not analyzing. We're actually being very simple. So, we would bring careful attention to the experience of desire. And as we stay centered on the desire, get to know what it feels like in the body, what it feels emotionally, what's happening in the thinking mind, what's happening in the breathing, you start seeing what's going on. Then, at some point, things begin kind of clearing up or breaking open a little bit. And then what jumps up at you, what comes to you, what gets revealed, not through analysis, not by figuring anything out, is "Oh, underneath that desire there's anxiety. Oh, anxiety is the root of it." It could be something else.

So, the point being is we're not trying to go below the surface in this practice. We're trying to be with what's obvious in such a way that whatever needs to be revealed will show itself to us. We don't have an agenda in the moment. In the bigger picture, we do have the agenda, like, "Yeah, I really want to get to the root of this. And Gil says, 'All I have to do is just stay really present and then it'll come.' Okay, so I'm going to be present without an agenda because Gil says, 'That's how it fills my agenda.' " But it's kind of true. So, just be with the obvious. The hallmark of this kind of mindfulness is just be present for what's obvious, and then what's obvious unfolds and changes as you stay and be present. And over time, you get through the layers and the depth.

Participant 3: I've been practicing with... Is the volume okay?

Gil: Yes, for me it's good.

Participant 3: Okay. I've been practicing with trying to stay present with really kind of strong,

unpleasant, difficult emotions when they arise. And sometimes it's really tricky to do, especially with anger. It's like there's a heat to it, and it's tough to stay with it. I appreciated some things that you said in the last number of sessions that have been helpful for this. I love the analogy of not looking a cat right in the eyes, just kind of coming up alongside it and waiting for it or something like that. I wanted to take the opportunity to ask if you have any other suggestions or guidance for how to be able to stay present with really kind of big emotions or tough emotions.

Gil: Yeah, I mean, there's a lot to be said. But with really strong anger, a nice thing to do is not meditate with it, but maybe go for a long walk and give freedom to the anger, give freedom to your thinking, but be present. There's something about walking, the rhythm of walking, at least for me that keeps me from getting stuck in my thoughts, stuck in whatever's happening. I'm paying attention, but I'm also giving it freedom. I'm not trying to stop it. I'm just letting it run. And then it's easier to be present for it that way sometimes than it is sitting still. The walking helps it all. And that might be a good way to kind of practice mindfulness while walking, that bit by bit you kind of start breaking it open.

The other thing to do sometimes with strong emotions like anger is, again, sometimes it's helpful to just let the thinking run. Don't try to stop the thinking because maybe that's even needed. Who knows? With anger, some powerful process is going on. We don't even know what's going on. In this practice, we want to be respectful of all emotions, even anger. And what I've found really helpful is to keep what I call composting it in the body. So every time I notice that I'm thinking about my angry thoughts, feeling angry, I have enough wherewithal to be present, I feel the anger, how it's being expressed in the body, how it feels in the body, and for me that's called composting it in the body. And I keep referring it back to the body. And every time I do that, I'm kind of disengaging a little bit with the story, but I'm not trying to stop the story. And I find that if I do that over and over again, something very different begins to happen. But I have to be very careful not to want a quick fix. I'm just patient and, "Okay, just feel it in the body, feel it in the body."

If there's grief, it can be very much the same way. With grief, it is more commonly recognized that the heart knows how to grieve if we get out of the way, if we allow it. And so, the art of allowing it is to allow it without sinking into it, without participating in it, but radical allowance to grieve. You're allowed to cry all you want in this meditation as long as you sit reasonably straight. But as soon as you go, "Oh, poor me," then you're participating, and the inner movement, the inner processing that the heart knows how to do gets interrupted. So, I've known people who sat like this. From a distance, they look like they're deep in medita-

tion, not moving, and their cheeks are streaming with tears. That's fine.

Participant 3: Yeah, just an experience I had last session, actually last week, that this is making me think of. I came here and was feeling some anger about something. And so I was like, "Okay, I'm here. Let me try and be present with this." And something switched, and it was grief actually. And so I was like, "Okay, let me try and be with the grief." And when I was with the grief and not in the story about the grief, it was like it got silent actually. And it wasn't grief. It was something else.

Gil: Fantastic. So you're describing very well what can happen here because you weren't in the story. The story sometimes feeds the problem. The story is kind of participating in it and feeding it. But if we can not be involved in the story, all kinds of other things have a chance to happen. That was beautiful. From my point of view, it's an example of the potential here.

Participant 4: I just wanted to say thank you. You spoke on Sunday and one aspect of your talk was about community. I'm very new to this, so I really appreciate the opportunity to meet some people who are also on the path. I think we're all kind of on our own separate paths, but towards self-improvement or discovery. I just wanted to say thank you for this community.

Gil: Thank you very much. So that's another thing in terms of learning, to bring this practice more into your life and spread it out. It's actually helpful from time to time to come meditate with other people. And so, you're welcome to come here. But there might be, I don't know where you live, there are other groups you can go to. But there's something about the osmosis of being around other people who are doing this kind of practice that we learn from other people. We're mirrored by other people very differently in this kind of environment than we are in a hectic work environment. We model things for each other. We model how we behave when we're connected to ourselves in a deeper way that sometimes is hard to see in other places in this world. We can be inspired. I know that some teenagers and kids will think that their parents are really strange or weird because they meditate. But then they come to a children's program here and they find out that other parents meditate. Suddenly, their parents are not so weird. Actually, now they're kind of cool.

So anyway, as adults it can help also that you're around people who have similar values. And as I said, there's this ethics antenna that we tune into in this practice. So there tends to be a little higher ethical values, an ethical norm in this kind of environment. And so when you're not gossiping, you can come here and you don't feel strange. It's a little bit reassuring that you're around people who understand you.

And then some people find it a lot easier to meditate when they're meditating in a group. Some people find it harder. For the people who it's easier, this is available. So come here whenever we have a session. You're welcome to come.

We have all kinds of programs. A lot of these programs are ways of building a practice or expanding it and developing it further and further. We have a whole series of progressive programs that you could be busy here for years, because we have so much in terms of just progressively developing and maturing this practice more and more. So that's another way of continuing is to just hang out in a place like IMC.

So, maybe we should end here in five minutes. I want to say thank you. I appreciate this chance. As I said I think the first day, I actually love teaching the intro class. I find it lots of fun and interesting. I'm also always seeing what else, what's new, that is going to come out of my mouth. Am I going to learn something today? So it is kind of wonderful for me to be part of this too.

Thank you. I used to teach these three times a year. I'll probably try to do it again in the fall, maybe in August. There's some talk about some other people here teaching an intro class. Is that right? Yes, that's right. Yes, so Tom's going to come and teach one maybe on some afternoon, like a Tuesday afternoon, maybe in the next couple of months. It'll be in the newsletter hopefully and in the calendar. Diana Clark has also been talking about wanting to do one. She's one of our teachers here. She might incorporate it into her Monday. She teaches every Monday. She might do an intro class on one of her Monday series. So we're going to slowly start doing more here. Some people come back repeatedly to the intro class. At first, I was worried. Am I not teaching well enough? But I think it's...

I'll end with this piece of wisdom. I don't think I've said it here. I say things in all kinds of settings that I don't remember. So, in meditation, there are only two types of people. There are beginners and experienced beginners. And you can decide which you are. But either way, we're all beginners. Isn't that nice? I think that's great. Then you don't have to compare yourself to the experienced ones. They're advanced meditators. There are no advanced meditators. There are just experienced beginners.

Thank you very much for being a part of this. And if you come back to IMC or in some other way, I look forward to seeing you. May this mindfulness practice support you in your life. Thank you. If you have any questions, Tom is available. Nancy is available and this Nancy too. There are two Nancy's. And I'm here for a bit. You're welcome to talk to me too. Thank you.