

Modes of Being: Profound Contemplation vs Shallow Thinking

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Well, good morning, everyone, and welcome. It's home. I think what most of you, I'm sure, know is that the primary practice that we do at IMC is mindfulness. And what maybe you don't know is that in practicing mindfulness, we can understand there are two different sources within us from which that practice can come. In fact, the Buddha repeatedly, in one way or the other, distinguished between two different modalities of engaging in the world, being in the world, understanding the world, reflecting on the world, contemplation, all kinds of things. And it really helps to understand this distinction.

If we don't know it, then we might be practicing mindfulness from a mode of mental life which is not so conducive to the depth of what's possible with mindfulness practice. So there's two different modes that the Buddha, one way or the other, talks about. These could be maybe understood in the modern world like we have two different operating systems. An operating system on a computer is what governs the whole computer, perhaps. And so we have different operating systems within us, and it depends which operating system we tap into, what the results are, what comes out of it.

Of course, they didn't have the word "operating system" back in the Bronze Ages when the Buddha lived. But what he did talk about, the word that he uses to distinguish between these two is not "operating system," but it's an ancient word. You don't have to remember it, but its word is *manasikāra*. And the *kara* part means to make or to do. The *manasi* refers to the mind, or maybe more properly, to mental processes, the mentality. So there's what the mind does, what the mind makes.

The mind in Buddhism, at least, is considered to be a constructive process. It constructs our reality, constructs our understanding, interprets our perceptions so we understand how to

navigate through the world. But there are these two different modes of this mental activity, mental doing. The adjective in front of this word, *manasikāra*, mental activity, is, in one of these operating modes, called *yoniso*. *Yoniso*, *yonī* in Sanskrit and Pāli, refers to the source from which an animate life is born, comes out. So the *yonī* for a chicken or bird is an egg. The *yonī* for a human or for mammals is a womb.

In the ancient world, they believed that some creatures, the so-called *yonī* for certain aquatic animals, is water. So it doesn't only mean the womb, but for humans it refers to a womb. I like to think of it as being a metaphor, representing kind of like a deep source of life within us. So it's kind of a powerful way of saying there's the mental activities from the source of life within. It's kind of a dramatic way of saying it. I don't know if it's, you know, but from the womb, that is kind of evocative. And for some people, it's very meaningful.

We have this deep generative place within from which mindfulness practice, Buddhist practice, from which our mental activity can operate from. The contrast to that is *ayoniso*, so not *yonī*, not from this profound source of life. So there's a mental activity that's not from this profound source of life. These two different modes of being, the Buddha presents this as a very stark difference. It's almost like it isn't one comparable thing, two sides of the same thing, but rather it's again like two very different operating systems existing almost like in different parts of our being or our inner body. Maybe different parts of the brain; we know now the different parts of the brain and reptilian brain responds one way and other parts of the brain respond differently. So it's like these different modes of being.

In this difference, the Buddha said that one, the one from the source of life, can bring you tremendous benefit. The one that's not the source of life can bring a lot of harm. The one from the source of life is wholesome. It makes things whole in a certain way. It makes us whole. Whereas the one that's not from the source of life is unwholesome, not part of the whole. These are all kind of very dramatic distinctions that are being made.

The Buddha said that some of the way he described what arises from this source of life, the mental activity that comes there, it grows within us. The not-source-of-life, it doesn't grow, but it's manufactured. It's constructed, it's built together. So one mode has a kind of thinking that's engineering, figuring out, putting things together, constructing things, often things which are not real. We live in, as I said, our mind constructs a lot about our experience. Most of the things that, especially us in the modern world living in urban settings, most of the things we touch, interact with, interact with all day long, is phenomenal.

Not only is it like the hardware of a computer or something, but it comes along with a whole set of built-in assumptions, interpretations, representations of what it means for our life,

what it's going to do for us, and that have nothing to do with the natural world. Some of you probably have a smartphone. I just came back from being in the high Sierras, and I looked all over, I was at 11,000 feet and 12,000 feet, and there was, I can tell you, there was nothing there that resembled a smartphone. I looked into these deep lakes, I looked into, you know, there was, you know, the natural world doesn't produce smartphones by itself. Nor does it produce all the associations, the meaning, the fantasies, the stories, the opinions, all the stuff that seems to arise and generate and flow out of these smartphones. These smartphones belong to this world of the mind being built and created, and people get paid a lot of money so that you will build up, create mental universes of abstract thoughts, fantasies, ideas, worlds to live in that are built, not grown.

This deep place within is where things can grow. What can grow there is our wisdom, is what's wholesome. What can grow there is our character. Our deep kind of personal maturation cannot be constructed. You cannot go on YouTube to get instructions: How do I mature? You're going to go through the steps, one, two, three, four, as if it's an engineering job. There's probably, I mean, this will end up on YouTube, so. But the idea we're pointing to is what can grow.

So what does that take? It takes a deeper sensitivity than think activity. If we're spending all the time thinking about things and fantasizing about things and ruminating about things, we are far away from this deep place of something that can grow if we're aware of it, if our awareness comes from that. If we make time, lots of time, to feel and sense from this deeper place within. For the Buddha, this not-of-the-deep-source, the primary fuel for it is clinging, is tension. There's a certain kind of tension, a certain way of thinking, when thinking is powered by tension.

For the Buddha, thinking powered by tension and clinging belongs to this not-of-the-source. When there's no tension, no clinging, then we have a chance to kind of take time to be sensitive and to feel this deeper place. There's a whole different operating system that operates when there's no tension, that has a chance to operate. For that, that's what mindfulness is for: not to simply just know what's happening in a cognitive way, not to go through and just kind of name what's happening as if it's a mental exercise. Rather, mindfulness is more like bodyfulness, more slowing down and allowing and sensing a deep place from within. So there's room for this profound way that we have, this profound intelligence we have, for how we can operate in this world.

If our world that we live in is from the neck up, it's a truncated world. I don't know how it is for some of you, but I certainly have felt if I spend too much time on a screen, I'm in my neck up.

It's rare that the screen supports me to be from the neck down. So it seems like that's where the whole world is, is in this cognitive thinking, ruminating, figuring out, fantasizing mind. But it disconnects us to this deeper operating system, which is whole, meaning it includes all of who we are, not from the neck up. One of the interesting questions in Buddhism is where is the mind? That begs the question, what is the mind? Does anybody really know?

One of the things that might be, if it's all the nerves in the brain and in the hands and the arms and the stomach, if it's the whole network of our neurology, then it's pretty much everywhere in our body. So this place of the deep source then is part of the mind that's connected to this intelligence of the nervous system that's deep, deep within us that works together in a coordinated way. From the neck up it's not coordinated. So it misses a lot of the information, a lot of the intelligence, a lot of the processing that is possible when we're there with the whole. Again, there's all these different ways that Buddha makes these distinctions, these two modes of being.

One of them is those feelings that we can have, those sensations we can have, that are of the muscles versus those that come from deeper than the muscles. Maybe they come from the hormones, maybe from our neurology, our nerves. There's all these different systems of chemicals and stuff that are going on that are not of the muscles. If you feel kind of a care and love for a newborn baby, chances are that you're not all getting yourself buffed up for that. That's not a muscular thing. A fight you might want to be strong and buffed up and get your muscles going. But the tenderness to care for a baby, the whole motivation and feeling and movement of that comes from some deep place inside that's not of the muscles.

The Buddha made this distinction, of the muscles, not of the muscles. For the depth of the spiritual life that Buddha is living, He wants us to become aware of those sensations, those feelings that seem to well up from a place that's not muscular, that's not about fight or flight. A lot of anxiety, I think the Buddha would place in the muscles, because that's what gets activated when we're afraid. That's where there's tension when we're afraid. Fear often comes with some form of tension. Once we have tension, it's all too easy for the focus of attention to become this place of, not from the source.

There's different translations into English for these two modes. I'll offer you mine, but one of the wonderful ones is what Bhikkhu Bodhi, the great translator of these ancient texts, has. One he calls careful attention. From the source, it's literal what the meaning is, the womb, but he calls it careful, careful attention. That not of the source, he translated as careless attention. My preferred translation is a profound contemplation versus shallow thinking.

The Buddha, and the reason for that, why I like to translate it as contemplation is a form

of thinking, is that the Buddha used his profound contemplation, careful attention, for his own process of becoming awake, become enlightened. The way he describes this is that from this profound source from within, the profound mentality within, he contemplated, he considered, reflected on where his own suffering came from. What was behind it? He went through a process, he describes in the ancient text, a process of asking himself a series of questions about what is this suffering that I'm having? Where is it coming from? Where is that coming from? Where is that coming from? He followed it to the source, to clinging.

With this clear attention, this clear focus, this kind of profound way of creative, imaginative, kind of intimate kind of way of reflecting, he was able to then go deeper and deeper than he could when he was only involved in this surface thinking, shallow thinking. Because he refers to it as his own experience as a kind of thinking, I like the word contemplation. Contemplation for me has a kind of spiritual connotation. Contemplative life is kind of a spiritual life. So to have this kind of time for a deeper contemplation, deeper reflection, where there's a careful attention, a caring attention, an intimate kind of intimacy with oneself, that something arises, something flows, something develops for us, that is very different than what we're trying to figure out how to figure out our life, figure out what's right and wrong and all that.

So two important things that Buddha mentions for Buddhists that grow from this profound form of attention. One is what's seven different mental states that he calls the seven factors of awakening. So mindfulness itself, for the Buddha, grows out of this place. It's not an engineering task to be mindful. A deep discernment, a deep looking and feeling and sensing what's going on here. The effort we make, and the Buddha makes this in his teachings, that there are two modes of effort. There's the effort that comes from this deep source within, and that doesn't come from this deep source within.

This shallow place, this place of tension, of excessive rumination, there's a kind of effort that can come from there. But that is reinforcing itself. If we can, if our very, what animates us, what engages our vitality, comes from this deep place, we get a very different result, very different reference point. Joy can come from this deep source. Calm, tranquility, concentration or unification of the mind. Many people in our circles think that concentration is important in meditation. They try to concentrate with a shallow mind, not from the deep mind.

So trying to engineer concentration rather than allow it to grow and evolve on its own. Very different results happen from it. For me, when I tried to do that, this kind of forced myself to get concentrated, the primary result for me was a headache from the neck up kind of thing. Then equanimity, the profound sense of peace and non-reactivity. The contrast to that, the

shallow mind, the Buddha said, that gives birth to the five hindrances. The five hindrances are sensual craving, ill will, sloth, agitation, and doubt, or indecisiveness, being indecisive of what to do.

So those are very different lists. If you hold those lists next to each other, you get a very different feeling. I would suggest if you sit quietly, maybe even right now, just yours, just close your eyes, and I'll recite these two lists and see what responds inside of you as you hear them. Mindfulness, discernment, vitality, joy, tranquility, stability, equanimity, peace. I'll try it with the same tone of voice so we have a fair comparison. Sensual craving, ill will, sloth, agitation, indecisiveness.

So, was there a difference that your body, your inner life, your place of the source inside of you, that these live in a different way in you? Yes, I'm nodding your head. Maybe it'd be nice to hear a few comments. What was the difference between these two lists and what it did to you or what responded in you? Okay. I felt so uncomfortable after the second list that I had to recite the first list in my head again to be okay. Yeah. So someone in the outer hall first. Yes?

The first list felt right, and I could see beautiful images, images of people that I love and that bring me joy. Then the second list felt so forced. I was trying, you know, to find an image, but it would just knock me out over and over again. My body would tense up, and I wanted to go back to the first list. So both of you wanted to go back to the first list. Yes?

It just struck me so much. You have such a wise tone of voice. So to hear you, you know, deliberately trying to say these words in your wise, ill will. On ease, it just really was such a contrast between your voice. No, okay. Interesting. Well, I was trying to do them fair. But I don't know if you could hear, but I could hear myself. I couldn't quite do it. So it wasn't a fair test. Yes.

In the second list, I noticed thoughts of I, me, and mine, whereas in the first list, that did not come up at all. Oh, fantastic. That was great. So I'm going to use you to kind of—this is a whole other part of the talk I was going to talk about. In fact, I, me and mine are the primary constructs of the shallow mind, of this not-of-the-source mind. Because me, myself, and mine, to a great degree, I don't want to say all degrees by any means, we have to be very careful with this. But especially, I think, in the modern world, with the help of the screens especially, the idea of self and identity and possession and attribution and who we are and how we present ourselves is such a huge construct.

Some people, it's been said, is kind of a cliché, that some people put more attention and

more money into how they appear than the words they speak. So me and myself and mine, that comes into play. Then we're supposed to be a certain kind of person and we have to prove ourselves in a certain way or avoid being a certain kind of way. This whole complicated world of me and myself and mine, especially if there's tension, is one of the primary representations of this constructed mind. The fact that you picked up me, myself and mine in the five hindrance list is right on track about how we have to be careful and why this is so difficult.

It does not mean that all understandings, all sense of self is part of that shallow mind. But there's a very different feeling of who we are as human beings if it comes from this source of life within, this deeper wellspring of growth and flow and inclusion of all who we are that has no tension and stress associated with it. There's a phenomenal amount of tension and stress that exists in our society with many people around who they are and who they're not. Even worse, in some ways, and more painful, who you are in other people's eyes. Other people's tension are attributing you, yourself, and yours to you. Then we're contending with all this world of tension and surface mind that we're kind of living in.

But to be able to drop down, to become calm, to settle, and to begin feeling and sensing how we are aware, how we know, how we feel from a deep source within is a profound thing to start doing. Very important. So I started this talk by saying there's two modes of mindfulness. If we're practicing mindfulness with tension and stress, like I have to do this, I'm supposed to be a good mindfulness practitioner, I'm going to really do the best, I'm going to be the competitive mindfulness school. To some degree, you can be mindful that way. You can kind of be more attentive to the present moment, but it's reinforcing the shallow mind.

What we want to do is to support and nourish the deep mind, the deep mentality that we're capable of. That's a different operating system. That's a place where if we have identity, if we have sense of me, myself and mine, it has a whole different feeling to it because it's associated with the places of love, associated with the places of peace, of wholeness, of feeling complete, feeling at home and feeling comfortable with ourselves. That's possible, which is not possible in the surface mind, where, if anything, where we feel not at home because everything is tense and stressful and constructed. If we live in the engineered, constructed world only, then it's very fragile.

There used another word for the shallow mind. Some of you know about Buddhism. I've heard this word, *saṅkhāra*. The word *saṅkhāra* before the Buddha in ancient India meant there is a word for a ritual, religious ritual, and the preparation for the ritual. The understanding, the Buddhist understanding is that a ritual is something that's humanly constructed.

Trees don't do rituals as far as I know. I saw a lot of little chipmunks this last week, and I don't know what kind of ritual they're doing, but they're just looking for food and trying to be safe.

So there's certain forms of constructed thinking in the shallow mind that the Buddha calls *saṅkhāras*, that he associates with or refers to as fragile. A lot of the sense of self, ego, identity issues we have are quite fragile. That's why we tend to get hurt by it all and challenged by it and why it has to be reinforced. The *saṅkhāra*, this constructed, this particular kind of constructed part of the mind that comes from this tension, from reactivity, the Buddha says, is a fire. We burn. It's a burden. It's a burden to carry. Some of us are exhausted from living that way all day long, day after day, and that it's suffering.

This other source is a mental activity as well. This deep source is a kind of construction. But in the example of the Buddha using it, on this night of awakening, it was the way of thinking that deconstructs the artificial world. It's the way of thinking that supports opening up to a whole different mode of being that doesn't depend on building up concepts, ideas of who we are, what this world is about, what our desires are. So when we practice mindfulness, how do you practice mindfulness from this deep source? Yes. How do you discover it? How do you feel your way into it? How do you make room for it? How do you even know that it's there? What does it take? That's the question for you now. Anybody would like to offer, make some suggestions of how that's done?

In asking this question, maybe as you reflect on it, as you contemplate it, maybe the answer can come from that deeper place, not from what you remembered from a book you read, for example, or something, or logic. So I'd love to hear. I didn't want to make it more challenging for you to speak, but... The first thing that came to my mind was being versus doing. Being versus doing. Thank you. Just a starting point. But of course, thinking is part of doing. So you also delve into deep thinking, but you don't start with thinking. Yeah. I think it's very important what you're saying. A lot of people, that distinction is so important for a lot of people in the West that we're so caught up in doing, but the doing is from this constructed kind of surface mind. So being makes room for this something else to operate.

For the Buddha, this deeper mind though is also a doing. *Manasikāra* is the mental... It's still a doing, but it's a doing from a very different source. So it's the doing from being. But in order for that, you first have to be. Two things come to mind. One is to, of course, listen to your talk here today again and again. Then the other one that comes to my mind is to practice our sitting, you know, meditation, mindfulness on a more regular, on a very regular basis. Perhaps on a, you know, like every morning at 8 a.m., I will now do this for this amount

of time as opposed to a haphazard thing. Nice. Because then that could build momentum. Nice.

Yes, I think practicing regularly meditation allows the familiarity and the habit and the pathways to be more and more open for meditation to kind of work for us. If you only meditate once every year, some of those pathways and a deeper kind of familiarity and habits of meditation don't come into play. So like, for example, for me, I've been sitting in this posture for 50 years. When I sit down into this posture, I feel like I've gone home. It's such a deep, familiar, comfortable place that I've had so much of my life has been lived in a very profound and important way in this posture. So just to sit in this posture regularly, I feel connected to this deep source. And then you're next. Okay. Then mind if you go, Joe, and then...

Yeah, one of the phrases I like to use when I'm confronted with new things is "it's like this." Allow the feelings that come up, the sensations without judging, without trying to figure it out, but just allow it. Yeah, wonderful. So it's like this and then make room to feel what this is. Straight back. I came to Buddhism through Tai Chi. So when I think of mindfulness, it's a body motion for me. It's an opening, loosening, relaxing of the body. Fantastic. I think people who do a movement practice like Tai Chi, Qigong sometimes have a real head start for doing mindfulness because they're already tuned in to the energies, the flow, the sensations of the body in a deep way and appreciate it. So fantastic that you have that. So other ideas. How do we... Oh, it's over here. Okay. Oh, okay.

In a similar vein, allowing more time or space to become attuned to sense perceptions. So what we're seeing, hearing, touching, allowing the awareness to rest in that place of contact. So giving time and space and to connect and allow to feel this deeper place. One of the art, this art of doing this, which all of you answered the question the way I asked the question, so thank you. Then a different way of answering it is to say that one way to connect to this deeper source is the careful attention we give to when we're not there. When we're living in the stressful mind, the tense mind, the ruminating mind, the preoccupied mind, there's the art of just bringing a careful, loving, caring attention to that and not condemning it, not being at war with it, but rather here, like this. This is here too. That begins creating space to feel everything in a different way.

So we don't have to set these two modes at war with each other or tension with each other, but there's a way of bringing them together where the surface mind is held by the deep mind. At first it might be very, you know, not so strong, it might be a weak connection. But what that does, it allows the surface mind to unfold the way it's meant to unfold. If it's characterized by tension, the way it's meant to unfold, given half a chance, the natural way for it, is for the

tension to relax. So we're not forcing our way into anything in the Dharma. We're allowing this natural process to unfold. Those that need to relax and soften, we allow that to happen. Those that don't need to soften and relax, but rather their nature is to grow, to expand, and to fill us. Those we allow to grow and fill us.

This deep source within of life, of vitality, of these possibilities, this was a part of the possibility from this for the Buddha, was to develop these wholesome qualities we have so that the feeling of abundance within. There's a thriving, flourishing. There's a growth and expansion of these wonderful qualities. Those are all kind of words the Buddha used to describe the possibilities from this deep source of life for what's wholesome. So, for those of you who are practicing mindfulness, practice of attention, you might want to consider, is there some way that you can distinguish these two modes, operating systems, for how to be attentive to this world that we live in? Can you find a way to be attentive from someplace that's deep within, that requires a certain degree of quiet, a certain degree of calm, a certain degree of time, kind of a spacious present moment? If your present moment is very tight and you're mostly living into the future, there's very little room for this deeper source of... And chances are, if you can operate from a deeper source, if you take time for this to be connected to it, the vitality by which you live your life will feel much more satisfying for you than if the source of your actions, your thoughts, your speech is this surface mind. So may the deep mind be your source. Thank you.

And I don't think it was announced, but I believe next week we have the potluck, right? Here. Today is the 20th. So, yeah. So, the last – oh, we have a picnic next week. So everyone's welcome. We have – once a year we have a picnic instead of the potluck here. And I think we have it. Is it Red Morton? We're doing it. Some of you might know. Yeah. Yes, Red Morton Park. So it's a Red Morton Park, and it's on the calendar for IMC. But you're all welcome to come, whether you have some food or not, just come. That is. It's just an excuse for us to be together as a community. And it's usually a wonderful time together. So thank you.