

Dharmette: Introduction to Mindfulness Pt 2 (4 of 5)

Thinking Well

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Welcome to this fourth talk on a five-part series, that's the part two, of Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation. Building on part one, today is the day where we talk about thinking, the instructions in thinking, and... So the very basic idea of how to practice mindfulness is, mindfulness meditation, is to have a grounding place, to have a place of settling in the body that is the default, that is the kind of home base for practice. And it could be many places. I encourage people who can for it to be in the belly, the movements of the belly, the centeredness, the steadiness, the weight of the belly. And to, as the belly moves with the breathing, to just rest there and come back to that, and center yourself there.

It could also be with the air going in and out through the nostrils, or the movements of the chest, or different places. And then if something else becomes stronger, where there's a pull to be aware of something else, it's loud, then to let go of the breathing or bring the breathing with you, to now attend to this stronger thing. Breathing, bringing breathing with you means to breathe with it or through it. And make this new thing the subject of the mindfulness. Take it in and learn how to be present for it in a non-reactive way. And then after a while, go back to your breathing.

So this can be done with thinking. If we don't have a clear, full acknowledgement that we're thinking, thinking might just have a life of its own and keep taking over and keep pulling us into it and we get lost in it. So part of mindfulness is to, if you find yourself thinking a lot, to maybe let go of the breathing for a few moments, go and really acknowledge that you're thinking. Kind of like looking, thinking right in the eye and say, I see you, I know that this is thought. And maybe stay with it for three, four, five breaths. Just know and recognize

without being pulled into it or caught in it. And after three, four, five breaths, come back to the breathing again.

But sometimes thinking is so strong that it needs to become the primary subject of mindfulness. Primary thing we take in and receive and recognize. And one of the things that's invaluable to know about thinking is there's more to thinking than the content. And if we focus on the content of what we're thinking about, it's all too easy to be at content and react to it and build on it. But instead of the content, to be aware of the wider experience of what thinking feels like. So the physicality of it, the somatic nature of it, sometimes that's not so easy to feel, especially if thoughts are very quiet.

But if thinking is strong... the muscles in our body get activated. Sometimes you see a furrow between the eyebrows in a person or scrunching up of the face or the jaw gets tight or sometimes it's a little marble of pressure or tension, contraction at the kind of behind the forehead in the head or middle of the head that might be there. There might be a little pressure pushing forward, leading forward to think there might be an activation of energy that's swirling and activated and kind of restless energy that's there. So to feel the energy of it, to feel the physicality of the tension of it, and that's one of the things that keeps thinking going. And so without acknowledging and feeling that tension, you can let go of thoughts forever, but the tension is just going to keep pumping out new thoughts.

What really needs attention is the tension, is the pressure, is the investment we give to thinking, the leaning into it, the sense of urgency that's there. And if we know that and are mindful of that, something quiets and settles. We don't get pulled in so strongly. Right? Also, we can be aware of the emotions that are connected to thinking. And those are often the fuel, or that's what gives the power to thoughts, is that because the emotion that's connected, if there's fear, anxiety, that gives thinking power.

We're invested, it's important, we're leaning into it, and we think we have to engage and solve something. If there's strong desire, if there's strong aversion, if there's a lot of doubt, confusion, that's present too. So we must step back. Sometimes we need to step back and just feel the emotion, the attitude that's connected to thinking. And if that's recognized and acknowledged, then there's less fuel for the thinking. But the thing I want to introduce today is the idea that we're not trying to stop all thinking and not think at all.

But by reducing the tension, the pressure to think, the urgency to think, the fascination with the thoughts, and they're leaning into them and identifying with thinking, as that quiets down, it gives us the opportunity to recognize that we can be happy on dual track thinking. There's different layers of the mind that think in different ways. And as the ordinary discour-

sive thinking quiets down, then we might begin to recognize that there's a deeper, quieter, almost effortless way of thinking that it's kind of in the background or in the periphery or deep below everything or something that maybe is almost a non-verbal, non-verbal thinking. And... Or maybe it's very lightly verbal or just light images. It's very light, very soft, gentle.

And it might be operating the background. It's a gentle recognition of what's happening, gentle exploration. What is this? Let me feel this. Let me be here for it. And the idea is to feel this effortless, deeper, quieter way of thinking that is not so interested in stories, not so interested in the future and the past.

It's really attending and caring for what's here right now. And to encourage that side of it, and to take refuge in that gentle thinking about the present moment, and have it help you become more centered in the practice. Help you to explore and be mindful. It can be as simple as saying... It's breaking as, oh, there's a little bit of tension in the top of the inhale. It'll feel a little bit held in the chest. What is that?

Let me feel that. Let me be with that. It's okay. Let me be with it. And so a kind of gentle expiration, gentle saying, stay there. It's not anything more complicated.

It's not asking, well, why did this happen and why did my second grade teacher kind of do that? It's just, oh, just this is how it is now. Let me be with it. Now I've been away there for a while. Let me settle. Let's see if it can relax. Return to the grounding place of breathing.

So there's this idea of there are different tracks of thinking. And part of what mindfulness can begin showing us, there's a track of thinking which doesn't have that strong somatic association. There's no pressure or tension behind it. That we don't identify this is who I am. There's no, it's not necessarily caught in the mood of different emotions. But it is a kind of quiet, supportive thinking that points us, leads us to the end of thinking, to the thinking becoming even quieter and stiller, slower, and wiser and kinder.

And... So, mindfulness of thinking, if you're just letting go of thought and coming back to the breathing, you're not learning anything. You're not learning to understand and deepen your wisdom about what this thinking is. So from time to time, it's good to take thinking, the process of thinking, into account and to be mindful of it. And what does that process feel like? Not the content, but the process, the activity of thinking.

And you start feeling, seeing how much we identify with it, how much glue there is that we're wedded to it, how much investment we put into thinking. They're so important, these thoughts, I have to, even though I've had these same thoughts for a thousand times, I have to kind of go back into them. And we start feeling that tension, the pressure, the pull, the jus-

tification, the strong interest, and maybe something begins somatically to relax and soften that quiets the thinking down enough that you can begin recognizing a kind of effortless way of thinking. A thinking that has, it's very light, that kind of floats like a cloud drifting in an endless sky that has no solidity, no substance, no weight, no hardness, It's just kind of like a hologram almost in terms of its substantiality. And to begin appreciating that there can be a way of this very, without pressure, without expectation, without demand, without self, without a complicated story, just simple being present here in the present moment, the present moment experience.

And that effortless, light, quiet way of thinking maybe connects the mindfulness to kindness, to goodness, to warmth and compassion, because it's a thinking that comes maybe from the heart or from deeper than the heart even. So mindfulness of thinking can lead us to thinking in better ways, to learn how to think in ways that, because we have to think, that's an ordinary part of life, but can we think better? Can we think in ways that are nourishing for us rather than debilitating? Think in ways that are kind of healthy and enlivening and nice rather than stressful. So that's the opportunity, mindfulness of thinking.

So I would encourage you today to periodically, much as you can through the day, stop and notice that the attitude, tension, physicality, somatic nature of how you're involved with thinking. And if it's possible to relax the thinking mind and begin seeing is there in fact a substrada, a second thought track that maybe is more healthy for you than the loud thought track that you usually live with. And what is it like if you start attuning yourself, aligning yourself in this second thought tract that's maybe healthier. So I hope this becomes a fascinating and useful discovery for you. And may your thinking bring you much joy. Thank you.