

Guided Meditation: Calm Thinking

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Hello and welcome to this series of introductory instructions for mindfulness meditation.

And today's topic for the guided meditation is thinking, mindfulness of thinking. And sometimes meditation... Hello and welcome to... Sometimes meditation is associated with not thinking, with the thinking mind becoming quiet and still and there be no thoughts. Sometimes it's associated with the challenge of distracted thoughts that pull us away into their worlds. And we get swept off our feet, swept out of our minds into the world of thinking. But I want to offer you a kind of idea that's not so common about meditation, Buddhist practice and thinking, is that we're not trying to stop thinking, but we are trying to learn to think better, to think in a healthy, supportive, and liberating way.

And so to learn to think in a different way than we usually think is... is the art of what we're learning through meditation. And so one of the important things to be mindful of then is not simply that we're distracted, we're caught and swept up in our thoughts, but thinking when there's that way is made up of different parts. It's a composite. And one of them is part of what contributes to distraction is the pressure and tension that goes into thinking. There's a pull, there's a pushing, there's an involvement, there's an investment that we make in our thoughts where we get engaged in them, they're important. There's a kind of desire to be thinking, to be concerned, to be worried, to be involved.

And so that desire that comes to me sometimes out of fear, sometimes out of greed, sometimes out of inspiration and delight, but there's a pressure, a contraction to think. Sometimes you can feel it like the glue between us and our thoughts. We can't really separate, or the yoke. And so one thing to become mindful of is not the thinking itself and not simply, but to be aware of the physical somatic experience of thinking. Right. So we can feel that pressure, that tension, that contraction that goes along with thinking. And we feel that gently.

That becomes the object of mindfulness. Mindfulness of thinking can be a mindfulness of the physical tension. And sometimes that physical tension comes with a sense of narrowing. Our world becomes very small. And some people say kind of dark when we're involved in thinking. There's nothing outside the thoughts that is of any interest.

And that as we begin relaxing deeply, the tension of thinking relaxes, and thinking becomes lighter. Thinking becomes softer. There's not the attachment to thinking. It's not the preoccupation with thoughts. And so the thoughts become lighter and softer and less prioritized, less centered on what we're thinking. And this lightness and softness and ease of thinking, as described by the metaphor of a small cloud drifting in an empty sky.

And now we're beginning to come into the capacity, the ability of unattached thinking, unpressured thinking. And this, as we enter the Dharma and go deeper and more settled in our body, and really here in the present moment, can give birth to wise ways of thinking about the present. Wise ways and light ways and soft ways and non-demanding ways, no expectation ways of just kind of swimming, navigating, floating in this world of meditation with thoughts that support us to go deeper, to become more present, to be more connected, to be quieter and stiller and more focused, more happy.

So to assume a meditation posture, and this posture of meditation is actually quite important, as I emphasized, because it's beginning to create a context for being present. It's more, involves more than just the mind. To slump in a couch and have the body be as relaxed as possible might end up prioritizing the mind, but to have a posture that involves some modicum of intentionality. There's a sense of presence through the posture, and then within that posture, to feel the body, let the attention roam around inside of the body, feeling the places of warmth and coolness, feel the places of solidity and strength, feel where there's muscular tension, and where the muscles are relaxed.

And then within this body, taking a few deeper breaths, fuller breaths, and relaxing the body as you exhale. Breathing normally, in a gentle but intentional way, purposeful way, center yourself in the body breathing, the breathing body, as if the rhythm of breathing is a gentle massage of the body from the inside, relaxing as you exhale. And then to feel in the inhale your thinking mind, not what you're thinking, but the somatic feeling of thinking. Any tension, pressure, pushing forward, pulling back, tightness, or somatic feelings of... agitation, activation of energy. And as you breathe in, feel that. And as you exhale, relax the thinking mind.

If you feel any tension or pressure to think the way you invest or lean into it, can you find kind of where more precisely those sensations are in your body? And what size are they? Are they

like the head of a pin, size of a marble, tennis ball. How big is this area? As you, the rhythm of breathing, gently have attention. Enter into the tension of thinking and relax it, soften as you exhale.

And is any of the pressure to think associated with any emotion? And if it is, for three or five breaths, breathe with that emotion, allow it to be there, just know it and feel it. Welcoming it, inviting it to relax too. And then to shift your focus to riding along with your breathing. Breathing in and breathing out. Allowing thinking and the pressure and the emotions to recede into the background.

No longer offering them much attention. Letting them fade away on their own, let them remain on the edges of things, and stay here with your breathing, steadying yourself on the breathing. And then to, again, on the inhale, to feel any pressure that remains, tension, interest, glute, that you have in relationship to thinking. What you're thinking about is not important. It's the way that you're relating to it, the way that it's being held, pushed. And on the exhale, let that relax, even if it's infinitesimal softening.

Maybe on the inhale, feeling how much energy is being funneled into thinking. Is it strong, medium, or light, the energy of thinking? In letting your thinking that you're aware of, let it be. But look beyond the edges of it. See if outside of this way of thinking, might there be a quieter, almost effortless thinking about the present moment that has no pressure? See if you can feel the lightest, effortless way that thinking thinks itself, outside of the usual way of thinking.

Maybe thoughts that float by, maybe thoughts that float up from deep within the body, maybe thoughts that are kind of in the background and taking these kind of effortless ways of thinking and think thoughts about being mindful of breathing. Gentle encouragement, instructions, and explorations just to be here with breathing itself. Gentle thoughts of discovery. Discovering what's here with the breathing. Discovering where the calm is.

Part of the tension of ordinary thinking is identifying ourselves with thinking as if you are your thoughts. Can you feel or sense an alternative to that? Letting the thoughts alone, maybe identifying more with a calm, quiet awareness, being centered here in the body being aware, more than being centered in thinking, with gentle, effortless thoughts of staying connected here to the present moment in the body.

And then as we come to the end of the meditation, see if you can identify within you the quietest effortless ways of thinking, the kind of gentle, quiet thoughts that have no force behind them. They float up in the lightest, softest way. Reflect, think about the value of

mettā, the importance of kindness, friendliness, and how kindness and friendliness is related to the softest, gentlest, effortless way of thinking. And then in that way of thinking, spend a few moments here with thoughts of goodwill for the people in your life, the people you'll encounter, the wider world of your communities. Wishing them well, may all beings be happy. May all beings be safe.

May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free. And may each of you be well, be peaceful, be happy. By learning to think without any pressure, learning to think from this deep, quiet, effortless place within that wants the best of you for you. Thank you.