

Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation, class 4-Thinking

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No, yeah. Thank you. Meditation at home seems more boring when I come here. It's more fun. Meditation is more boring. Well, this is fascinating. Yes. Yes, boring is fascinating.

And so what big part of mindfulness is learning about ourselves. So the fact that you're bored says something about you. There's a whole learning to be done there. There is nothing in the world which is inherently boring, except for the mind making it so. So there's something happening in your mind that's constructing, making this thing called boredom. It's an evaluation, it's a judgment, it's a resistance, there's a lot of things that could play there.

So the simple way that we practice with boredom in this practice, if you have the courage for it, is to look at it. Take it as an object of mindfulness and discover it. We would consider it like an emotion. So you would first recognize it. Remember RAFT? So first you'd look at it, recognize it.

Then you would allow yourself to be bored. Some people don't allow themselves. They react to it, they judge it, "I shouldn't be bored. Anything but this." But you have to allow for it. Not because it's worthy of being allowed for.

It's just that you want to just learn how to be with it in a simple way without adding second arrows. And then there might be something deeper going on that's good to see. But you don't want to be under the influence or affected by it or under the control of it. But that's not good. So you want to recognize it, allow it, and then you want to feel it.

So where in the body does the experience of boredom live in you? Do you have any memory of that? I guess all over it kind of comes to mind. In your little toe? I haven't checked there. Below your knee?

Yeah. Yeah, I'll have to look. Yeah, yeah. I'm having a good time. Yeah, kind of go by elimination. And you might find that it feels all over, but it turns out all over maybe is some feeling of discomfort in this area here on the belly.

Or it might be something really strong around the eyes, even though it kind of feels like it's everything. Where's the center of it? And then, once you're going to hang out with it, the physical experience of it, then can you then separate, make a distinction between the feelings themselves and the thoughts, beliefs you have about it? And it's possible, if you're really quiet, if you can be really still, you might start seeing very subtle thoughts of boredom or subtler emotions or fear. Sometimes boredom is a manifestation of some deeper fear because this is not good to do nothing, not to be entertained or something.

Or it could also be a subtle movement of aversion, of pushing away because we're not supposed to be bored, and this is not right. And so you start teasing those two apart, and all along just breathe with it. Stay close with the breath and let the breath breathe into the boredom and breathe through it. And the advantage of keep staying with the breathing, the rhythm of breathing, it's a little bit of a protection that you don't go into just thinking about it and trying to sort it out, figure it all out. Just go down, just breathe.

You don't have to do much. It's supposed to be very, very simple. So, with your simple breathe with it, and then remember RAFT: recognize, allow, feel, tease apart the thoughts. Does that make sense? Yeah, thank you. Now, is it starting to get fascinating?

Sounds so fun. Not yet, but maybe. Maybe. Anybody who's going to do meditation for some time has to, sooner or later, has to work with their boredom and you're just lucky it's early. But it's worthwhile. It's really worthwhile to sort through it.

I seem to make it through about 10 minutes, and then most of the time I'm asleep for the other 10 minutes until my timer goes off. And I think there are a lot of things that can contribute to that, and I'm trying to eliminate them, like my cats, because they get in my lap and they're warm and cozy. Yeah. But also maybe not eating right beforehand, because then your blood flow is going to digestion. Yes, yes. I don't know if you have other suggestions.

I know I'm not getting too comfortable. Yeah, some people have heard to meditate pretty early, first thing in the morning before breakfast, but after the coffee. And yeah, so I think experimenting and finding what works for you is important. And but you get early warning signs that you might be getting sleepy. Yeah, because I catch myself in thoughts that are like not related at all to trying to be... So once you catch yourself, you can... What you could do is open your eyes.

Just open your eyes and maybe sit a little straighter and see if that provides enough alertness that you're less likely to fall asleep. So when you say open eyes, you mean like glance downward a little bit? In our tradition, that's mostly what we do, is to glance down at about 45 degrees. Some people find it nice to look out at the sky if you have a window. And that kind of keeps them alert enough so they don't fall asleep. And then after a while, you might then try closing your eyes again.

And maybe then you're good for three minutes. But those are three good minutes and then open your eyes. But one of the important things that I'm trying to say is catch the early warning signs so you can make an adjustment that keeps you awake. Hi, those of you just came. I'm just seeing if there's any questions about the meditation or the teachings about it or your experience before we start. Yeah.

So... Hopefully this isn't a dumb question, but, you know, I'll start to meditation and maybe after a few minutes kind of I get to a state of calm and everything's good. But then I'm wondering, should I be thinking about something or should I be feeling something? Like, how do I know if this is going, going, you know, a good way or not? You know, it's just like. If I've cleared all the thoughts out of my mind, then what should I be thinking about or contemplating?

If you've gotten fairly calm, you cleared your thoughts from your mind, then the most useful thing to do, there's different choices, but what I try to teach people is just give yourself over to the breathing and become intimate with the breath. Intimate with it in a very relaxed way, kind of just open and receive and sense and feel the whole kaleidoscope of little sensations that are at play as you breathe in and as you breathe out. And kind of like enter that world of breathing. Does that make sense? Yeah, and then don't, and if you can do that, don't put aside any kind of concerns by getting anywhere, right? You know, or any idea of what's supposed to happen.

Those are, if something's supposed to happen, if that was true in meditation, being concerned about getting there keeps you away. So just put it aside, and just give yourself over to the breathing. And then at some point, something else might arise that's more compelling, and then give yourself to that for a little while, and then come back to the breathing. Yeah. So, any other comments or questions before we start? Okay.

Well, let's start with a simple meditation, and then hopefully we'll work for the people who are new and everyone. So, you assume a posture that you think you can hold still without moving for about 15 minutes. And... Kind of adjust your spine a little bit, so the spine maybe feels a little bit more free, a little bit more loose, a little bit more alert. And then gently close

your eyes.

And in the most silent way you know how, meaning without a lot of thinking about it, just feel and check in with what's all going on for you and your body. What are the sensations? Okay. What are the tensions? What is comfortable for you and your body, even if most of it is not? Quietly becoming aware, sensing, feeling the body.

And then as a way to relax a bit, to gently take some fuller inhales, filling the chest, the belly, and a long relaxing exhale. And to do that a few times, and as you exhale to relax different parts of your body. And if they don't relax, that's okay. Let them soften or soften around them. And then letting your breathing return to normal and find where in your body it feels most comfortable or easy to be aware of the sensations of breathing.

It could be the movements of the belly, diaphragm or chest, the air going in and out of the nostrils. And notice how the experience of breathing in is experienced differently in the body and the experience of breathing out. No need to think about it, but to feel or sense that difference. And if there's a lot of thinking, perhaps you can feel energy of thinking, the agitation or restlessness of the mind, pressure to think, tension or tightness. And if you feel any of that as you're thinking, I call it the thinking muscle, as you exhale, relax the thinking mind, like the thinking mind can take a break, have some rest, it's okay for it to settle.

And as if you're lowering your body into a comfortable pool of water, maybe a warm pool of water. Let your attention be lowered into your body and in the torso, feeling the movements of breathing. And from time to time, quietly notice, recognize how you are. If you're breathing, if you're thinking, let go of the thoughts or if the thoughts don't want to go. Lighten up on them. Ease up.

From time to time, notice and feel your mood, your mental state, your bodily state, your emotional state, and see if the noticing can be quiet, non-reactive, maybe even wise in staying very simple, not reactive, not making a story about it. Staying close to breathing, feeling the body breathing, the movement, as if it's a gentle massage from the inside out. And if you can hang out with the breathing, to get a sense of the rhythm of breathing in and breathing out, let that rhythm be a reminder that it's okay to rest in the breathing. It's okay to let the mind rest from all its thinking, allowing and feeling whatever silence that there is in you and around you. And in that silence, silence of the mind chattering, allow yourself to rest in the breathing, almost like you're floating on waves, lifting and falling one wave after another.

And then to end this meditation, gently take some fuller breaths to feel your body more fully, the contact of your body against a chair, cushion. And then when you're ready, you can open

your eyes. So sometimes people find that guided meditations is helpful. It helps them get more into the meditation and be focused. And that's nice.

But the goal is to not need it, something coming from the outside. The goal is to really be able to sit peacefully with yourself and learn to track and recognize what's happening in such a way that you settle and are here more. So you become kind of independent and don't require any input from the outside. And sometimes the kind of meditation just makes people feel like they have to do too much. Makes it sound like they'll get busy. It's like, why is this person still talking?

Right. I just want to be quiet. So that's also nice. Then maybe the art of it is just to tune out the person who's doing the guided meditation. Or just trust them that maybe they're trying to teach, like in this course, they'll try to teach us how I... So we go along here.

But sometimes the guided meditation seems like there's a lot to remember, a lot to do. The default here is there's very little to do. It's like if you ask yourself the question in meditation, what should I do now? Probably the best answer is nothing. Nothing but be awake, nothing but just notice what's happening. If you want something a little bit more to do, just come back to the breathing.

Just trust the breathing. Be with the breathing. But in the bigger picture, what we're trying to develop here is not even meditation, but rather to develop our capacity to be peacefully aware of anything that goes on in our life. Often, we're all aware kind of all the time. We might not be so cognizant. We might not be tracking the fact that we're aware because we're so caught up in things and busy.

But often our awareness is used as a servant of our reactivity. So something happens and, you know, we want to know more about it. I just heard a plane go overhead. And so, okay, I wonder what kind of plane that is, and maybe I should go out and see if I can still see it. And, you know, that was an interesting roar. And, you know, so I was aware of the plane, but now the awareness is being pulled into this world of thoughts about what is this thing about.

And so we start seeing as we meditate, that's what the mind does. Look at that. You know, or I'm sitting quietly and it's quite peaceful and calm. And I remember what my boss said at work to me today, and I get furious. And now, you know, wow, I didn't know that I was still carrying that. This is interesting.

So let's just kind of be present for this now. You don't have to think about it. You don't have to come up with better responses to your boss in meditation. You're just like, wow, that's interesting. Let's breathe with it. Let's just be with it.

Let's do nothing with it. But allow it to be there and sense and feel what happens. Most things, most reactions that we have, and some people live in constant reactivity, but most of them involve some kind of way in which we're stirring ourselves up. And this very profound thing of not doing anything is the opposite. And so it makes room for something to settle. Right?

Or if it doesn't settle, it makes room for us to see it more clearly. Oh, I'm upset with my boss. But you know that I see that clearly. I think I'm always upset with my boss. I'm always having resentment. Wow, I didn't know how constant it was.

I think something else is going on here than my boss. And then kind of start understanding something more deeply. Oh, maybe I'm afraid. Or something, who knows what, but... But it's the AI doing nothing so we can see more clearly. And that's the kind of meditation that we do here at IMC.

It's usually called mindfulness. But the original Indian Buddhist word means to see clearly. We're trying to see clearly what's happening in our direct experience. And when we're meditating, it's mostly what's right here, very close in. And... And yes, we'll tend to get calmer, distressed, more peaceful this way.

But that's not the real point of it. The point is to be calm and settled enough so that we can see clearly. And it's a seeing clearly that begins opening up the vista, opening up deeper and deeper insights and understanding about ourselves and the world we live in. But the point is not to have insight even. Even though that's just like it's a point is not to be calm. The point is not to see clearly and see what's going on.

The point is to see well enough that you can start letting go of your clinging, letting go of attachments, letting go of the ways that we get caught in our thoughts, caught in our emotions. And that is more the ultimate purpose of this meditation that I'm teaching, is to learn to be uncaught, to be at peace with all things. And the stepping stone to that is first to calm down, huge undertaking for some of us, and then to learn the art of doing nothing but seeing clearly.

So in the first weeks of this, we began with meditating on the breathing, which is a long tradition in Buddhism to focus meditation on the breathing. And it tends to be calming for some people. But as we settle down, then we start using this clear seeing to see clearly into our body. And that kind of makes sense because most people, when they sit down to meditate, who are not used to it, after a while the body begins communicating to you. You know, it gets restless, it starts hurting, aches, there's soreness.

And so rather than seeing those things as a distraction, in this meditation, it becomes the object of the clear-seeing. Look at that. So, you know, if I have, you know, if I have, if my wrist hurts, it aches a little bit, and, you know, I could just kind of stretch it out and massage it and, you know, shake it out during meditation. I can do all kinds of things to my wrist. Maybe it's okay to do that.

But what we do here is, is we don't do anything but have clear seeing or clear feeling, sensing of the wrist. And what we learn is we learn, I don't want to sit quietly with the wrist there. I want to fix this. I'm annoyed by this. This has to stop. And well, I'm okay with it, but my body is not okay with it.

My body wants to move and jitter and do something. And we learn all this about how we react to things on automatic pilot by not giving into it. So, oh, look at that. And then they say we're supposed to just have clear seeing. Okay, I'm going to sit here and breathe quietly and just relax. And I'm going to really feel or sense or see this my aching wrist.

Oh, look at that. Maybe it's not aching. Maybe it's a little sharp pulsing. Look at that. It's kind of like more on the surface rather than deep inside. Look at that.

It's not really aching anymore. Something relaxed. It's become something else. Oh, it changed without me having to shake out my wrist. Wow. Can then go back to my breathing?

So the same thing can happen with our emotions. We can have some big emotion. We can sit down with a strong emotion. We can sit down with a strong emotion. We might have something difficult going on for us. We can sit quietly, minding your own business meditation, and some emotion will just pop right up, unbidden.

And all kinds of things can happen. Emotions can be pleasant and nice, and they can be difficult and challenging. So there, here again, we try to relax and be calm. So that's why I breathe, staying with the breath close to the breathing. So the emotion comes up, let's just breathe with the emotion for a while. Let's breathe with it and see if I can relax with it and just settle.

It's going to be a little bit more settled and not so reactive around it. And then we practice clear-seeing. What is this? What is this experience like of an emotion? And this is what we talked about last time.

So emotions are mostly... All emotions have some manifestation in the body. Where in your body do you feel it? And as some people will say, it's everywhere until you start the process

of elimination. And you say, oh no, it's not in my ankle, it's not in my knee, it's not in my hips. I think it's mostly around my heart.

It just kind of feels like it just suffuses everywhere, but it's really just around the heart. Oh, and how do I feel it there? Let me just feel it for a while. That's the allowing it to be there. Let me just feel it, the physical sensations, physical feelings of what's going on around my heart.

And one thing you might learn when you do that, again, you might learn it shifts and changes just because you leave it alone. You're not trying to fix it or judge it. And you might also find that you do judge it. I have aversion, you have desire, you have fear, you have... All kinds of things. You have attachment, conceit, all kinds of added things that we add to the simple emotion.

Oh, look at that. I'm making it more complicated than it needs to be. I've got to do something about this. Nope. The default here is you don't do anything. You just look at it or feel it and just breathe with it and see what happens.

Try to be really simple. So finally, for today, the topic is thinking. And it's best to introduce thinking on the fourth week, because if we introduced mindfulness of thinking the first week, you would just think more. But hopefully now you have a basis to begin understanding how to have a peaceful, mindful awareness of thinking without getting pulled into the world of thoughts. It keeps you kind of afloat out of them rather than sinking into them.

So thinking is a normal part of human life, the human life, and it shouldn't be our enemy. It's very beneficial to think. And there are times when it's very harmful the way we think. Probably most ways that people harm each other and harm themselves has some strong connection to how they're thinking about things. So thinking can be a friend and can be a real problem for us.

So what we're trying to do in meditation is to learn to have a new relationship with thoughts, that is a little bit like what I'm saying, just know it and relax. There's a lot of thinking, soften, breathe, stay with the rhythm of breathing, relax as you exhale. Try to let the thoughts go to the degree that it's possible. And maybe a little bit you calm down, and then at some point, what do you do next? You do nothing.

Except look at it carefully. Okay? Or maybe feel the experience of thinking carefully. And rather than getting pulled into the content of the thoughts, rather than getting pulled into the stories, that's where usually the hook is. There's a really good story.

There's a really good event that happened and we're telling ourselves over and over again

or being involved in. And so we step back, what's really going on here? What's the bigger picture? And it turns out that thinking is not one thing. Thinking is made up of a number of different things going on.

And so if you can step back and watch and start looking around, feeling around, what is going on when I'm thinking, then you stop being pulled into the drama of what the thoughts are trying to tell you. What they're telling you is useful sometimes, but probably not as often as they believe they're useful. And so we kind of step back and look. What is this experience of thinking? And there are a number of component parts of thinking.

There's the thoughts themselves. Some people think more in images. Some people think more in words. There are, there's the, if there's a, if thinking is really strong, there's then probably some kind of sensation in the body that comes from it. Some part of your body is activated from all the thinking.

And sometimes you can tell when someone's thinking, you look at their face and it's obvious they're really deeply, deep in thought, deeply perplexed, deeply involved in some kind of, you know, they have their forehead, the brow is all bunched up or maybe they're clenching their jaw. You see, like, oh, they're really concerned about something. So what happens? So it can be much more subtle, so it's not so visible. But you, from the inside out, can feel, oh, no wonder I'm getting a headache.

I'm thinking it's all this tension around my forehead. Wow, I didn't know there was so much tension when I'm thinking. I'm too busy thinking to notice the tension. And the tension builds over the day. But in a day there's a big headache.

With mindfulness, we start noticing the tension earlier so it can relax perhaps. We can stop doing, repeating the same thing over and over again that is detrimental. And so there's a physicality to it. And Buddhism basically believes that all thoughts have a physical aspect of it, some tension, some pressure, some energetic, some restlessness, some agitation, that you can actually feel as physical sensations.

And then so that's the second part. So there's the thoughts themselves, there's the sensations, and then there's the motivations. Right? That they are. Usually there's some emotions want something to happen.

There's fear we want to get away. There's anger we want to attack. There's something, the desire we want to have. And so there's a kind of a directionality, something that, there's a kind of propulsion, a compulsion, a direction that we can feel that, oh, I really want that, or oh, I don't want, pull back. And so to feel what that motivation or that propulsion or compulsion

feels like in the body.

And then finally, thinking is often, especially when it's strong, usually has its roots, has its source maybe, or its fuel in some emotion. So, very common, if people spend a lot of time planning, thinking about the future, high percentage of that repetitive thinking about the future is rooted in apprehension, to say, likely. It's a fear that people might have. Thinking about the past or some event that happened over and over again, it might be fueled by the resentment. And if the resentment is just keeping the fire going, going, going.

There might be a strong desire for something. But there, maybe the fuel is loneliness. I feel lonely or I feel empty in some meaningless, feeling meaningless in some way. I don't have any meaning in my life, but at least I can get chips. And so, you know, to grab and fill that kind of sense of void, maybe that might be there.

So the emotion. So there's the thoughts themselves. Okay. There's the physical sensations connected to the thoughts. There's the kind of movement for and against things with the thinking.

And there's the emotions connected to them. And then there's some other things involved with thinking that we can start seeing as well that makes it kind of more and more fascinating to see. But the art of this is to stay really simple. Always remember, you're not really supposed to do anything. So you don't, even though I can talk about all this, don't get really involved in investigating, trying to figure it all out.

Don't try to stop, you know, get rid of thoughts at some point. Just settle back, relax, and practice this clear seeing, peaceful seeing, although this is how it is. But I don't like it. That's okay. Relax and look at not liking.

Oh, this is what not liking is like. Who would have ever... Yeah, I never stopped to look at not liking. I just always believed it. But, oh, not liking. There's tension in my jaw.

My diaphragm is pulled up. There's a... You know, I feel a little bit like I'm a fighter. I'm ready to fight. You know, I look peaceful, but I can feel that all my little micro muscles are ready to fight. Wow, I didn't know all that was going on when I don't like things.

And, wow, do I really want to live this way? Yeah. Maybe I don't have to believe not liking. Maybe I can do nothing and just let it be and not be pushed around by not liking, not be the slave of not liking, telling me what I should do or shouldn't do or what I should like or not like. I can just leave it alone.

And after a while you learn more and more to leave things alone. And some people report

after a while that what they gain is they gain themselves. Some people don't even know themselves very well. Some people are living so much in reactivity and doing and activity and thinking and planning and wanting and entertainment that they're actually distracted from themselves. Some people are so much thinking, thinking, thinking, thinking, thinking.

Because they think they are their thoughts, they think they're being intimate with themselves. But the thinking is extra. It's not really who you are. And not a few people come to meditation and discover they relax and quiet, oh, now I'm finally myself. I didn't know it was possible to be so at peace with myself.

I thought I'd always have to do something and accomplish something and get something and, you know, or fight the great battle. Oh, I can just be. Is this making some sense? I'm saying a lot. I apologize. Okay?

So then are you ready to do it? Again, another meditation. Okay. So why don't you stand and stretch and kind of refresh yourself a little bit. So this guided meditation we're going to be doing is a guided tour of your thinking.

So it's not exactly the basic meditation we do, but I'll include some of that as well. But I would like to do this so people get a fuller sense of the terrain of thinking. Like they have the map. They understand what's going on in a way that maybe they've never seen it before. It's like going into a new part of town.

You thought you knew your town, but then you go to a new part of town and... And it's, wow, I had no idea this was here. And you might be surprised by some of the tour. Basically, you're surprising yourself then. But you can always open your eyes. You can stop meditating if you like, if you don't like what's going on.

But monitor yourself a little bit. So we'll first do a little bit of just relaxing and settling, and then we'll do the little guided tour. And then we'll do, after doing that for a little while, we'll do some quiet settling again and just do the basic practice. So, again, giving some care to your posture. If any posture is okay...

But kind of, maybe twist a little bit or some people rock back and forth a little bit, sway. Just to kind of help, and then kind of gently find that midpoint or find some way that feels like it's nice to sit upright. And then gently closing your eyes and just breathing a little fuller than usual. So there's more momentum or more time to exhale, a long exhale, breathing in comfortably and then relaxing the whole length of the exhale. Maybe exhaling a little bit more than you normally would.

And letting your breathing return to normal. And to whatever way is easy enough, easiest for

you, move towards doing nothing but following the inhales and exhales, the movements of the body, the sensations in your body connected to breathing, relaxing your thinking mind as you exhale.

And then notice if you're thinking. For now, you're allowed to think. And do you think more in words, more in images, or words for you, a little bit more kinesthetic experiences? And gently... As if you can step away from your thinking, to have kind of a bird's-eye view of it.

Use a simple thought to recognize that you're thinking. You can use the thought “thinking” or “remembering,” but this movement of recognition is a step out of the fray, out of the thoughts, and look back at it simply to recognize it, to see it clearly for what it is. It's thinking. That's what's happening. So you're not in the thinking, but you're stepping away to observe it.

If anything, you're the observation of it. And as you're thinking, is there a tone of voice? If you're thinking in words and voice, inner voice, is there a tone of voice? Is it gentle or harsh? Is it confident or afraid?

Is the voice reactive? If you think in images, is there a mood, like mood music in the movies? Is there some kind of mood that comes with? Is there a lot of energy flowing into thinking? Is it thinking fast or strong?

Or is it more quiet, slow? Is there a location from where the thinking occurs, and location for the inner voice, or a location for the projector or the screen of the images. And if there's a location for your thinking, are there any sensations in that place associated with thinking? Any tension, tightness, pressure? Is your thinking more pleasant or more unpleasant?

Whatever you see about your thinking, it's okay. Just see it, just know it. Maybe breathing with it, where the breathing helps you not to be so involved or reactive. Is there any emotion associated with your thoughts? Any emotion is okay.

It might be subtle, it might be large, it might be pleasant, it might be more unpleasant. It might be a welcome, it might be a challenge. What's the basic mood or emotion associated with thinking? And then come back to breathing. Simple experience of breathing in and breathing out.

Staying close, riding the waves of breath, of breathing. No longer needing to concern yourself with your thinking. And then if you start thinking very, very simply, look the thinking right in the eye and recognize this is thinking, without being for or against it, without wanting it to go away or even wanting it to stay. Just quietly, peacefully, look at it directly. Recognize that this is a very clear, definitive way.

This is thinking. And what happens to your thoughts when they're allowed to be but they're known with that kind of clarity. And then coming back to breathing, to the closest approximation you can, to doing nothing. Breathing simply, being at ease, nothing to do anymore, just to be here. Breathing, mindfully.

And then to end this meditation, to take some deeper breaths again, feeling your body, feeling yourself here, and when you're ready, you can open your eyes. So thinking will be present when you meditate. And it's best not to fight it or think it's wrong. But it's also best not to give into it and participate in it and just kind of spin out in your thoughts. And so the middle way between thinking it shouldn't be there or spinning out with it and getting lost with it is to be mindful of it, to know that it's happening.

If you know, if you recognize your thinking, bingo, you're doing the right thing. Many people immediately will judge it. Oh, I wasn't supposed to be thinking. I'm messing up. But before you had those judgments, you must have known that you were thinking, bingo.

That's all you needed to do. That's the, you're doing the practice then, even if you didn't know you were doing it. And as you know that you're thinking, then you can, you have a number of choices. One is to let them go and come back to breathing. It's going to stop them, stop doing it.

Occasionally that's easy. More often it's not so easy to do that. But that's always good. And sometimes some people will just let go. Every exhale they let go of their thoughts because they come back so quickly.

But every exhale, and it's a wonderful massage for the mind. Rather than the mind being caught all the way, you know, thinking, thinking all the time... Even if they come back right away, to let go, they come back. To let go, they come back. Something begins relaxing and letting go in a deep way in the mind.

If you just every exhale, let go. Sometimes they don't want to stop. You can't let go of them. An option you have is just to ignore them. Stay with your breathing.

Sometimes the best thing is not to be concerned. Let them be in the background, if you can. But sometimes they're pretty insistent. They don't want to be in the background. They want to be center stage.

So then what you can do is the idea is to do nothing in a certain way, do nothing, but see it clearly. So when we did this last meditation, I asked you to do the step back at the bird's-eye view and just really recognize thinking is going on or near the end. Look it right in the eye

and say, I see you, thinking. Okay. What happened to some of you when you had that simple, clear, full recognition of thinking?

I think I said you were allowed to think, but you also just really recognized it and named it. Oh, this is thinking. Did anything happen? Did anything change when you did that? Yeah.

The people online won't hear. There was a wave of deep calmness. Deep calmness. Yes, that coming with it, that... Just that like aha moment, that this is it, this is the story, what's happening, then it loses its power and becomes like a very, like a wave of deep, calm, refreshing way of being. Very nice.

That was well said. It loses its power. Where did its power come from? Attachment with this story. From you. Yeah.

But when you clearly recognized, you were stepping out of the attachment and leaving it alone, right? Yes. Yeah. So this clear recognition can be very powerful. And if it really helps you step out of the attachment, out of the involvement, there can be much more calm that settles in.

So that was very nicely stated. Anybody else has some experience similar to that or different? Yeah. So my vision inside, it physically went from darkness to a light. And I could feel like when you said look it in the eye, because I was thinking I had this blanket, this dark blanket.

And it often comes up when I have those thoughts. I feel that I'm removed or I'm protected or I'm in the dark. And then when I faced it and I just let it, when I let it, when I breathe into it, it's like all of a sudden light was there. Nice. And you could feel that calmness come up.

Very nice. So. Very nice. Thank you. Yeah, it's a fascinating exercise to do is, like if you've noticed, you get lost in thought a lot.

Because we're always practicing clear seeing, then what does it feel like? What is it like to be lost in thought? Yes. And then try to wake up and recognize it clearly. And what's that, how is that different?

And not a few people report what you said, that being caught in thoughts feels very, some people say it's very small and dark, but when we see clearly it becomes more expansive and open and light. And so there's like a different world we live in if we're really aware of what's happening or if we just go along with business as usual, you know, caught up. So that was wonderful. Thank you. Did anybody see anything new for you about thinking, that little guided tour I gave?

Was there anything particularly interesting, noteworthy for you? Anything that seemed useful for you to discover, the way of seeing, understanding, thinking? I'm trying to make sense of what happened, and I think we're not supposed to do that. You know, you said don't try to figure it all out. But...

I think that in the process of you guiding the meditation, I had gotten in, I had seen a really powerful image and I had gotten into story. And I knew, and I could tell that when I was trying to then detach and withdraw and look it in the eye, look those thoughts in the eye and just say, I see you. I felt like I was already too deep in. And so I think that's helpful maybe for next time, if I'm doing my own guided meditation, that cut it off at the pass, look it in the eye right at the very beginning before there's a big story going on. So that's why.

Yeah. But yes, that's very good. So please do that. But if you do find yourself caught in a big story, then try to, even there, to the best of your ability, try to do nothing. Okay.

And look around. What is it like to be caught? What's it like to be lost in this? What's it like to already be consumed by it? And just keep asking, what is this like?

What is this like? Go give yourself a tour. So, you know, the warning is don't spend a lot of time paying attention to thoughts if it just keeps you caught in thoughts. Right? But there is this art that we're learning here of how to have a kind of a silent awareness, you know, silent meaning not more thinking, of the thinking itself that begins to free us from our thoughts.

Most people don't know that they've actually lost their freedom when they think. It's possible to think very creatively and freely and mindfully and aware. It's possible. But most people are locked to their thinking much too much. And it actually narrows their life a lot.

It limits it a lot. It's also, if you're really... What's really surprising is how little we're bored about it, because thinking is often quite repetitive. And it's an interesting thing that often our thoughts, one of the main characters in our thoughts is myself. And if any friend of yours walked next to you, and spoke the same repeated things over and over again with the same primary character of the thinking, and spoke it out loud to you, you'd be begging them to stop.

In fact, you probably do, after a while, worse than begging them. You'd think they were crazy. And you're getting bored with their train of thought. But what's remarkable is we don't get bored. And why is that?

That's right. I think my theory is primarily because we're the main subject. So it's always very interesting. In meditation, you can actually see, wait a minute, I've had that thought 32 times now. Do I really need to do a 33rd time?

Why do I have so much? Because there's fear, because there's desire, because there's something that's fueling it. Oh, let me just be aware of the desire, let me be aware of the fear. Okay. And now something settles.

So it's fascinating to include thinking as part of meditation, but don't get enamored with it, don't get too involved with it. Keep it really simple and come back to the breathing a lot, breathe with it all, be with it. And then I'll end with one little interesting perspective about thinking. There's a difference between thinking, and thoughting. It's not an ordinary English word, thoughting.

The mind is a thoughting machine. That's what it does. It produces thought. Thinking is a chain of associated thoughts. I have a thought.

Maybe I think about the carpet. It's a nice carpet, nice color. We don't have a carpet at home. We have a wood floor. It's kind of scratched old wood.

Maybe I should get a carpet. Maybe even I cut out, this is big enough for my little living room. They won't notice it here. And off I'm going, a train of associated thoughts. That's thinking.

But the thought, oh, they have a carpet here. That's one thought. It doesn't lead to the next one, to the next one, to the next one. Why do they lead to the next one, next one, next one? Because we're involved.

We're invested. Some part of us is engaged. We're interested. We're interested. There's nothing wrong with that, necessarily.

But it doesn't point us, doesn't give us a chance to find that deep place of peace inside. That deep place of freedom and independence, where we're not always caught up, always chasing after thoughts, always adding and adding and adding and adding. It can be exhausting to be on that train. So you might see the train of thoughts coming by. Right?

And sometimes, some people like the image of a train of thoughts. Don't get on the car. Let it just keep going. So we're getting close to a time to finish. Does any questions, any concerns, any protests, anything that you'd like to ask or bring up before we finish?

Was it all clear enough? Not so clear? Too much? Too much? Gail, I think what I'm doing right now is more like a generalization of becoming the witness of the breath, the witness of body sensations, the witness of thoughts.

And so this just like the idea of don't get in the train, something like that, right? And so most like... Seen that thoughts go by, right? It was more like an observer of thoughts. Is that more or less what you're...

Yeah. In some way? Yeah, that's a very nice way of saying it. We're being the witness, we're being observer of everything. When this meditation practice goes deeper or fuller, we discover that the notion of an observer or witness is just a kind of thought, too.

An unnecessary thought. Right. And so then it becomes just witnessing, just observing. And this whole idea of being the person who witnesses, being the person who observes, is not really needed. But until you come to that point, it's fine to have that idea that you're the witnesser.

But it's a stepping stone, too. It's a going further. They're going further. So, we have one more class, which is next week, and that's kind of, partly that's used to tie all this together in a nice way, hopefully, and also talk about bringing this practice from meditation into life, where it's really helpful to bring, and also some ways to actually help support the deepening of the practice. So...

I thank you for coming, and if you have any questions you want or something you want to ask, I'll stay here, and then also you can ask her any questions you want about meditation or IMC, if you have questions about IMC. And thank you for being here.