

Practice Notes: The Landscape of Thoughts

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And then, to offer you just maybe some ideas for the practice here this morning, it might be interesting to offer you some metaphors, a metaphor for doing the practice, navigating yourself. And that is driving in a car in a beautiful natural setting, which may be a beautiful natural world or something. And maybe there's a lot of traffic, and so you're navigating the traffic, you're navigating the road. And you know the car is kind of like the vehicle that you're in and navigating and working. You're the driver, and you're trying to make it all work and find your way. And your passengers in your car are there to go, "Oh," and notice how beautiful it is.

But you're just dealing with a car, and that car looks like it's running out of gas, and you're wondering, can you get to the gas station? And then you hear a funny rattle in the engine. They don't hear it, but what's going on here? You're wondering, you know, and you're navigating the car, and your passengers go, "Wow, look at that out there." So there's a big difference between navigating the car and looking and enjoying the landscape.

So many of us, the way we live in ourselves, we are the car in a sense. And a big part of that car that we're driving is our thinking, our thoughts, our ideas about things, the thoughts that have to do with our desires, our aversions, our fears, our fantasies, thoughts about the past and what has happened to us, thoughts about the future and what could happen to us. The world of thoughts, that way we construct a sense of self, we tell stories about ourselves. That's a big part of what, so big part of what some people are navigating. It's more or less the car that we're in. And we're navigating and managing our world where there's a lot of traffic in this world of our thoughts and everything.

But it doesn't have to be that way. It's possible to understand that your thinking is the landscape that you're in, not the car that you're driving. And the car you're driving is your body

and your awareness, your attention, your mindfulness. That's the center. And thoughts are just landscape around. It's possible to have a relationship to all your thoughts that you're not living in them, you're not defined by them. But rather, you see them as something which is beautiful, maybe, it depends on what kind of thoughts you have, but they're just part of the landscape.

And, "Oh, look, that's an interesting thought. Wow. Wow, that was a beautiful thought. Wow, I should take a picture of that." Or, "That wasn't, you know, I think that we need the park rangers here to clean this part of the park up a little bit because it doesn't quite look like it's been cared for for a while." And, "Uh-oh, uh-oh, we're not going to use that toilet. You know, let's not stop here." But it's just the landscape, right? Very different relationship.

So you might use this metaphor, see if you understand yourself better, and recognize, well, actually, you're having your thoughts be the car. Everything you're doing is navigating, working through this world of thinking. And that's even being here. You're thinking about being here, and the thoughts about here, and, you know, what's going on here, and what is that, that person's walking too slow, that person's walking too fast. And I wonder if, you know, X, Y, and Z about IMC. But all these thoughts are what's navigating and figuring out what to do here.

But what if you switch and just say, "Oh, look, those are thoughts." Let's be grounded in the body. Let's be grounded here. Let's be present here in the embodied experience. Be attentive and see the thoughts as landscape. Can you do that? Can you make that shift? Yes.

And will that protect you a little bit from getting swept away in your thoughts? It's just the landscape. And you might from time to time, when you realize you've been caught in the traffic, say, "Wait a minute. It's not the car. It's the landscape. Let's stay in the car. Stay in the body. Stay here." So hopefully that's interesting for you to experiment with. And if not, just forget about it. And I look forward to meeting those of you who signed up.