

Dharmette: Deeper Thinking

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So as I sat down, the big kind of feeling was just being amazed. Just, just being amazed. For what reason? Because I don't know if it needs to have a reason. Just felt kind of amazed, just to be alive, to be aware, to be here.

But with that as a kind of backdrop, I also wanted to continue maybe a little topic that came up in one of the meetings just now. So there is a long history in meditation for people to have an aversive relationship to thinking, and it makes some sense to have that because we cause so much trouble with our thinking. And so, in some people's thinking is oppressive, and some people are begging the mind to stop thinking these thoughts, which can be so difficult. But also, there's the idea that what meditation is is a silencing of thoughts. You're not supposed to be thinking at all, and that's not really true.

But we are learning to think differently in meditation. We're not just allowing ourselves to continue thinking in the way that's probably true for just a few of us: thinking carelessly, thinking randomly, giving your thinking mind freedom and authority to think whatever it wants to think, and that it must be true, all these thoughts that we have. So there's a number of things to say about this. One is that we have different kinds of thinking that we do. There's not a single type of thinking, and all thinking should be seen or interpreted or addressed in the same way.

And so, we often talk about in the meditation world about discursive thinking. And discursive thinking is when we're having a conversation in our mind, or telling a story in our mind, or having commentary in our mind. It's elaborate. It's more constructed. It has more to do with the world that we make up in our mind, or maybe we don't realize we're making it up. But it's a commentary about the world, about our future planning, remembering, reviewing the past.

The discursive mind, and that's the mind that can be quite wonderful, can bring you a lot of joy. But also, that's the mind that's more likely to kind of bring a lot of sorrow. The mind that's often going to undermine us, because some of that discursive mind thinking can be very repetitive and very negative. There's the negativity bias that many people have, and one of the primary negative biases that seemingly a lot of people have is about themselves. And you know that some one way or the other, you're not up to snuff, whatever that means. You're not up to, you know, you're not up to some standard of what it should be like as a human being. You're not good enough in some way.

And so we undermine ourselves with these constant stories, repeating the same thing over and over again, the same fantasies and things, and it can be debilitating. But what we quiet in meditation, and it's good to know that this is partly what we're doing, is we are quieting the discursive mind. Or we're not giving it so much attention, we're not giving it credence, we're not emphasizing it. Sometimes it's enough to just realize, "But I don't have to be involved in those thoughts. Let me feel my way to what's deeper than those thoughts. Those are kind of surface chatter. What's deeper here?"

And let the surface chatter, the discursive thought, just kind of recede into the background. But really feel your way into something that feels deeper in you, fuller in you, more meaningful in you. Underneath, what's underneath your discursive mind? And for some people, that's a huge question because they identify with that discursive mind so much. "I think, therefore I am," is the saying. But "I story tell, therefore I am" is more like how most people live.

I'm a storyteller, therefore I am, and so we believe the stories, we believe the ideas, we believe the predictions of the future. And so it's very hard to let go of it because we are it. That's who we are. We've created a whole sense of self. The discursive mind is where we build up a sense of self. It's frightening to put it down.

But if we can stop giving it so much authority and let it be, leave it alone. And then shift your perspective, your orientation. See if you can feel what's underneath it, or what's behind it, or what's at the center of it. Anything that gets you away from the content into some deeper connection to yourself. And one of the things you'll find is that there's different kinds of thinking.

And there is a very quiet kind of thinking that some people might not associate with verbal thinking: nonverbal knowing, nonverbal processing, understanding. That's very quiet. Soft, gentle. That is not assertive. It's not trying to make something happen. It's not a project, but a kind of way of thinking that's thinking about the present moment, this moment, right

now.

And for meditators, it can be very simple, relaxed thinking that's thinking about, "How can I be present here? How can I feel and sense what's happening in a more deep way? Where does my attention want to go? How do I connect with my breathing more? How do I not be so caught in my discursive thoughts?"

"I wonder what's needed here. I wonder if I need more love, more kindness, more forgiveness. Maybe I need a little bit more discipline. Maybe what, you know, I kind of never even imagined steadying myself on the breathing. What if I steady myself here on the breathing? What if I feel my body more fully? What is this body?"

And if I ask my body, "What does it want from me? What in your body wants your attention?" Not your thinking attention, not analyzing it and making commentary about it, but the kind of caring attention that, you know, is not making judgments about the body or comparing your body to other people's bodies. It isn't the body you have after you look at all those advertisements about plastic surgery and how you're not quite up to snuff. But just quiet from the inside out. What's the body's experience of itself?

So there's a way of having very quiet thinking that supports waking up in mindfulness, waking up and getting concentrated, and it's self-corrective. You can kind of feel, "Oh, this helps me get—if I do this, if I study myself in my breathing, my thinking mind gets quiet, or I'm not so caught in my thinking mind. This is good." Or, "I study with myself my breathing, and I get agitated, I get tense. I don't think that's what I need. Let me try something else."

"Maybe what I need is just to open up into my body more widely, and not steady myself. That makes me tight. Oh, look at that! If I just kind of open up and feel the body as a broad panoramic experience, now my thinking gets quiet. Now something releases and gently goes."

So there's a way of not being at war with your thoughts, not thinking you're supposed to not think at all, but rather to think, "Let's shift how you think. Let's think in a way that's supportive of the meditative process." It doesn't mean think as fast as you can. It doesn't mean to think assertively. It doesn't mean to think with a big problem-solving mind, analytical mind, to try to analyze exactly what's going wrong in the meditation, exactly what the right thing is.

That probably just doesn't get that. If you pay attention to the feedback you get from doing that, you see, "Well, this doesn't work. This keeps me agitated. Keeps me in that, in that, you know, discursive mind." But how do I talk? How do I talk to myself? How do I think?

If you think in words, is there a gentle way? Is there a kind way? Is there a calm way? Calm thinking, and that helps support me to be present, to be here. And some people will describe this as the thinking that points beyond thinking. It's a kind of thinking that supports you to go into a place, into a time and place, a calm, a steadiness, where you feel, "Oh, here, now."

There might still be some remnants of thinking going on, but those thoughts are very soft and thin and light. They don't come with weight, hardness, insistence, and there's a lot of quiet all around them. Wow, this is amazing to have so much peace around my thinking.

So, to be curious about your—what do you do? What's your relationship to thinking? And might there be a better one for meditation process? Might there be a better one than head-long, kind of being swept up in the world of discursive thinking and living there and navigating your life through discursive thinking? What about navigating your life from this quieter place, where the thinking maybe is more curious, amazed, interested in what's happening here and now, interested in how you are in the present moment, and how you can be in meeting the world in this present moment?

Because it's through how we are that the *Dharma* is discovered. It's by how we are in the present moment that we really find the depth of our capacity to meet ourselves, to meet others, to respond to this world in a way that's caring. So you don't have to reject your thinking, but in this practice here, we do learn how to think better. May you think in such a way that it's for your welfare and happiness, and for the welfare, welfare and happiness of everyone. Thank you.