Wednesday Dharma talk

Gil Fronsdal

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So the topics for these afternoon talks have been the body, emotions. Today it's thoughts, and we shouldn't just think about thoughts. We shouldn't just talk about thoughts. The practice of mindfulness is to see thoughts, experience thoughts, feel thoughts, and hold thoughts in good ways. So this talk will be experimental, experiential, and some of it will be guided meditation. So we'll probably go back and forth between some guided meditation and some of my talking about the topic.

And it is possible through this practice of mindfulness, especially, I find, in retreat practice, where we're coming in the midst of ourselves so thoroughly for so long, with, you know, not a lot of external distractions. You might have internal distractions, but that's part of the whole ecosystem of thinking that we're going to discover and become wise about. But it's possible to develop a friendly relationship between you and thinking, and between thinking and you. The two of you can be friends. And some people, that's not the case.

Some people think of their thoughts as almost the problem: painful, unfortunate, harsh, judgmental, and critical. They wouldn't necessarily think of thought as their friend. Some people are not happy with the kind of thoughts they have and are quite critical of it. Some people suffer a lot because of how thought, thinking, works—how people think. But it is possible to develop a friendly relationship to thinking, and we're always going to be thinking some kind of thoughts.

It's kind of built into our whole humanity to understand, to think, to process things through these cognitive ways. And it has a lot of benefits. It's a wonderful ecosystem. There are wonderful things that we can manage with thoughts, and there are also horrendous things we can do with them, and difficult and painful things that are carried along in them. But how to transform them so that thinking becomes a resource, thinking becomes a benefit for

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you, something thinking even can become inspiring and useful, beneficial, is what's possible through this practice.

So you don't have to be stuck with the thinking mind you already have. There are many thinking minds. There are many—thinking is not just one thing. It's almost as if there are different parts of the brain that are operating when we think, and depending on what part of the brain is being used for thinking, it puts out different, you know, different kinds of thoughts. There are places in the brain that specialize in fear, and so if that's where the energy and the focus of thinking goes to and comes from, then that produces a lot of fear: fearful imagery, fearful thoughts, stories, ideas.

There are other parts of the brain that are involved in harmony, bringing things into harmony, holding things together as an ecosystem, and getting things coordinated and cooperating with each other. And when the focus of the mental energy goes into those parts of the brain, we get very different kinds of thoughts come out. A lot of it depends on which we feed, which we support, which we are addicted to, or stuck in. And it's possible to get unstuck. It's possible to become unaddicted.

It's possible to switch from painful forms of thinking to even pleasant forms of thinking. It's possible to tap into different areas of thinking—not just those two—but there are lots of different ways we can think. Thinking is not just one thing. Thinking is actually many things, many things, and to be able to distinguish between what different thoughts are gives us a lot of wisdom. It gives us a choice of how to participate with the world of thinking.

Sometimes, in the area of meditation, to be very simplistic, some people believe there are only two choices: either thinking or not thinking. And thinking is not good. You're supposed to not think. Some people have been around long enough to know that's not reasonable. But still, there's this kind of duality. It almost operates, and sometimes it's so strong that thinking is considered bad and wrong.

I remember I was in Burma practicing there, and there was a very senior *vipassanā* practitioner-teacher who was there practicing at the same time. He was getting ready to leave just as I was arriving at the monastery to practice. So I had a question for him. So I went to his room and knocked on the door, and he was packing.

I said to him, you know, I started my question by saying, "What do you think about? What do you think about?" And he didn't let me finish. He kind of came back really fast and said, "I try not to think." And I thought that was a little unfortunate, to have that kind of sharp relationship that you don't think at all. I like to think that we're not supposed to stop thinking

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when we do mindfulness, because if we do that, we actually cut off our intelligence.

We want to be intelligent when we do this practice. And part of that intelligence is to know how to think, know what part of thinking, what kinds of thinking are useful, and when to use them, and how to use them so they even can support the meditation. And so, if you only have one relationship to thinking—like either you're supposed to not have it or have it—or if, you know, you can't get rid of it, so you're supposed to just be mindful of it, and that's the only option, just be mindful of it, then everything will work out. There are lots of options with thinking. Thinking is a whole universe.

And part of what I find part of the great richness of mindfulness practice is we stop to see and understand and uncover and discover what's really here in our life, so we become wise about it all. And if we only have one policy about thinking, then we're not going to get very wise. Then you're not going to be able to use it intelligently, and maybe you won't discover how to have a friendly relationship to it, a kind relationship to it.

And so, thinking. One of the reasons we're using these themes for the *Dharma* talks here is a central feature of the instructions in mindfulness that we do here at IRC, which was quite common in the IMS Insight Spirit Rock world for a few decades, but now maybe not so clear anymore. The idea is that you would have a home base, some place which is comfortable for you to stay present. And if all things are equal, you stay there and cultivate, develop your mindfulness, your present-moment attention in this place.

So often it's the breathing, but it could be other things. Some people do the whole body. Some people used to do sound as a way of just—that was the home base that they were going to be present with. If nothing else was calling attention, it would be there. But not to limit it to that place, but slowly learn to be mindful of all areas of your life.

There's something about the act of attention, of awareness, of mindfulness, that has embedded within it a degree of freedom, a degree of not being caught by what is known, not being attached or reactive to what we're aware of. And to begin learning how to have that kind of non-attached contemplative awareness, non-reactive awareness, to the whole range—anything at all—that a human being can experience. There's nothing outside of what we can meet kindly, nicely, presently.

And so, it's a remarkable transformation when you see that every—no matter what it is—you could have the world's most horrendous thought. You can get an award for having the most horrendous thought that any human being has had. And from the point of view of mindfulness, it doesn't matter. What matters is that you just thought, "Oh, look at that. That's a

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horrendous thought." But the way you know it, there's freedom right there.

It would be like, you know, you wanted to acknowledge that the bell is here. The bell needs some attention, so you say, "I'm here with you." And so you just come up with your open, soft hand and just gently kind of touch it, reminding it, you know, "I know you're kind of cold, being left alone a lot, but, you know, I'm here with you." Versus, you know, "You should really know that there's a bell here," so you go, you know, that. Or you say, "Well, that doesn't count. I mean, a bell is a bell. I mean, what's the big deal? I'm not supposed to be mindful of that. Give me a break. I have more important things to do with my thoughts. I can think about my fantasies."

But, you know, everything that occurs to you, you meet with an open, soft, nice hand. Hi. Nothing's left out. I remember many years ago, I was helping do a guided meditation with someone around her fear. She was kind of getting settled and quiet, and I asked her to feel her fear, and that was easy for her.

Then I asked her, "Where is your fear?" And she said some place in the body. I said, "Now, okay, go down there and feel it where it is in your body." I said, "Kind of trace the outline of the fear, the sensations of fear, and after you do that, now go into the middle of it and feel it there. And then, how is it to be with the fear?" She said, "Oh, it's kind of tender."

"Okay, go back to the fear. Where is it now?" And her eyes popped open—not out of fear, but, like, surprise. It was gone. Like, where did it go? She was disoriented. Only those few moments, you know, it was with the guidance of me, but so we can keep people's focus.

But she learned how to be with it in this kind, soft way. Just felt it and be with it. Something wasn't being fed anymore. It wasn't being reinforced. And something about that kind, simple awareness of it, knowing it, it went away.

It's often not that easy, but what was so much fun for me was how her eyes popped open—like, you know, "Is this for real, or is this a trick?" Because she had been dealing with her fear for decades, and it came back. Of course, it wasn't like it was gone for then, but to have it kind of disappear so quickly opened a door for her that there was a new possibility.

So the core practice here is to stay with some home base we are comfortable with, to cultivate present-moment awareness, learn how to be mindful of all aspects of your experience. And the core way we begin that is to learn about body, to learn about emotions, and learn about thinking, the thinking mind. And then eventually, these expand outward to include everything. Nothing is left out.

So today is thinking. So how well do you know your thinking? So maybe let's do it as a little

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guided meditation. And so you don't get too settled, you're allowed to think right now. One hundred percent allowed to think.

Actually, it helps if you could think to do this exercise about anything at all. Imagine coming to our scene having that kind of permission. And your thinking has been around for a while, but do you know whether you tend to think more in words, like an inner voice, or more in pictures, images? Or is it an equal combination of both?

And if it's an inner voice, thinking in words—there's a few people I've known who see their words like print on a page. So that's how they think. But if you have an inner voice that thinks, where's the mouth? Where's the loudspeaker? Where is that voice inside of you? If it has a location, maybe in the brain or the head or the heart or someplace, how loud is that voice?

Is it relatively slow in its thinking, or fast and rapid? Is there a lot of energy in thinking, or is it very quiet and soft, and just looking at it, it disappears? If you think in images and pictures, where's the screen upon which they're projected, that they appear? Some people, the screen is just a little bit in front of their real eyes, so it's almost like you're looking out the eyes to see it in front of you. Some people, it's in the head itself.

Some people recognize they think in images, but there's something—it doesn't fit any of these questions. It's like, you know, it's images, but it's not like in any place. Maybe it's like a dream that doesn't quite exist anywhere. Right? Is there any mood music that comes with the images?

Is there a screen, but is there also a projector, a place from where the images are coming? Are you not really looking to understand how it is for you because you're annoyed with this whole exercise? And there are particular thoughts around that. And if there's a location that you associate with however way you think, are there any sensations associated with your thinking? Is there any tension, pressure, contraction?

Is there tension around the eyes associated with thinking, around the temple or forehead, deep in the head, or some place else in the body where clearly something is tightening up when you think? And if there is tension and pressure, tightness associated with thinking, a feeling of hardness, coagulation, is it willing to relax? Can you relax the thinking muscle? And if instead of staying with the content of your thoughts, you go in and feel the sensations of thinking, tracing their outline, feeling the center of the sensation, feeling the front and back of the sensation underneath them.

And finally, is there any emotion or attitude or mood, mood music, that comes along with

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your thinking? So I've offered you a few things to notice about thinking: how you think, words or images; where those words and images seem to be located as a locus; what the physicality of it is like; is it possible to relax some of the tension associated with it; is there any emotion or mood that comes with it? So this is part of the ecology of thinking. Thinking is a composite. It's not one thing. It's made up of all these elements that come together.

So we can end this meditation now. You can open your eyes, and I'll talk a little bit more, even though I'm talking all the time. So thinking is part of the totality of who we are. It's not an isolated phenomenon that just kind of goes spinning by itself. It's deeply intimate and deeply connected to our emotional life, our physical life, our cognitive life, our belief life, our external life.

There's all these things that come to bear on how we think and what we think and why we think. And it's fascinating to begin seeing the cause-and-effect relationship between things. Sometimes it's really clear that something begins in the body, maybe an emotion, and that emotion gives rise to certain thoughts. And I've had fear sensations in my body. I had no idea what it was for, but then my mind just happily produced the things to be afraid of.

I remember once when I had surgery, and I took a little bit of pain medication, but I didn't want to take it long, so I took it for a few days, a couple of days, and then I stopped. I was still lying in bed recovering from the surgery, but that day, the day after I stopped taking the medication, I had these thoughts that I never had before. My thoughts were, "Well, I'm in the downside of life. It's pointless to do anything anymore."

My son, who is in his twenties, is on the upside of life. Like, he has life in front of him, and I have life behind me, and I might not start anything new, and this and this just going, you know, oh, you know, it's like, oh. And so I was talking to a friend on the phone. I explained to her what I was feeling, and she said, "Gil, that's the withdrawal speaking."

That somehow the whole biology, physiology, has a huge impact on how we think. My wife, in her thirties, went through medically induced menopause for a few months for some condition she had. But she had enough wisdom. She said, "These thoughts I'm having are not my thoughts." They were so bizarre that she was thinking these thoughts that she had, but she associated them with the medication she was taking.

Not that she was responsible. She didn't identify with them. And part of the challenge, I'm thinking, is how much we identify with it, how much we define ourselves by it, how much we are the thoughts. Some people get scared as meditation gets quieter and there's less and less thinking. There are gaps between the thinking because they get scared because they don't

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exist if they don't think.

Or they feel like thinking is what's going to keep them safe. They have to think their way into safety or distract themselves into safety. And if you don't have the thoughts to do that purpose, then you're not safe. And so some people get really scared because of that. Some people don't recognize that maybe some of their thoughts are chemically induced, or alcohol-induced, or sleep-deprived-induced, or all kinds of things that can affect what we think.

And we give a lot of authority to our thoughts. Our thoughts must be true, and that's a whole study of mindfulness: how we hand authority to our thoughts. After all, it's my thinking, so it must be true, or I have to go along with it. It is certainly being spoken; the belief is being spoken with tremendous authority. And I told this to someone yesterday: it took me a long time in my early years of meditation to see that I had this very, very quiet, maybe close-to-subconscious belief.

There was a kind of thought that was kind of—I realized after many years that it was always in the background, kind of operating. And in terms of meditation, it took the form of the statement: "If the meditation experience is happening to me, it's not the real thing." So no matter what I was experiencing in meditation, it could never be the real thing because this very authoritative, quiet, almost subconscious kind of belief was telling me, "Well, Gil, that's not the real thing."

So if I got a little bit concentrated, it didn't matter whatever it was. If I felt relaxed, this is not the real relaxed. If you're calm, it's not the real calm. I could never, you know—it was hopeless, you know, because I had this very insistent, authoritative voice that was telling me this important news bulletin.

And so there's all kinds of things we tell ourselves in the quiet of the mind, and we repeat it over and over again. You know, the thoughts: "I can never do it. This is impossible. I'm not good enough." You name it. I mean, we have a whole repertoire of things we do that.

And so to be able to see thoughts directly—oh, there it is. It has a place. It has a way of operating. It has sensations associated with it. It begins to help us separate a little bit, step away from it, and to see it for what it is.

Oh, it's a thought. And some people find it phenomenally useful to look at a thought and be able to say, "It's just a thought. It's just a thought." Meaning, it doesn't have to be believed. It's not the truth. It's just a thought.

Some people I know have imagined that—I mean, this is—you have this, I don't know how to say this, but imagine that someone left the radio on two blocks away, and they're just

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hearing the radio, you know, the talk show, and just thinking that it's not their thoughts. It's just coming from someplace else. Some people then pull back and say, "Okay, I can leave it alone. It's not my business. It's not who I am. It doesn't have to be given so much authority. It doesn't have to have, you know, the attention."

And so some people find they get some distance from it. Oh, just a talk show from down the street. And just that kind of makes space, changes the relationship. Sometimes it's possible when the mind gets quiet enough to see something about how we relate to the thoughts. And sometimes I felt that my mind had glue.

I had glue attached between me and the thoughts. There was no separation. Yes. When I was younger, we didn't have superglue, so it wasn't that bad. But now I feel sorry for all of you.

And then there were sometimes I felt like there wasn't glue, but there was a rubber band between me and my thoughts, so that if I kind of let go of my thoughts a little bit, I would snap back to it. It couldn't get far away because the rubber band gets tight enough; it'll pull back. And sometimes the glue is strong interest, like I'm really interested in those thoughts. Even though I've had the same thought 500 times today, it's amazing.

I think it's one of the great wonders of human life that you can have the same thought 500 times and it can be just as interesting as the first time. You know, if you went around next to a friend and talked to them as much, saying the same thing as you're saying to yourself, your friend would beg you, would pay you, bribe you to be quiet. They would think you're crazy, but we don't think we're crazy. Most of us.

But this repetition. So what's the glue? Why is it so interesting? Why are we so fascinated? Why do we think it's so important what we think about? These are questions that mindfulness practice can bring because it helps us to see more clearly.

Wow, I'm afraid. No wonder I'm thinking so much. That's the glue. I didn't know I was so afraid. And so we start seeing how this stuff works.

Sometimes you see the thought arises, and the thought itself produces an emotion, a sensation in your body. I've sat quietly in meditation, completely minding my own business, sitting peacefully and quietly. But my mind has other thoughts, other ideas, and so it brings up my high school vendetta. I mean, it's been over fifty years ago that I graduated from high school, and my vendetta probably doesn't even know who I am anymore.

But, you know, the thought arises, and all this heat begins rising in my body. I'm settled in my belly, relaxed down there. That's the center of gravity. Not only the heat, but the whole center of gravity of my very being goes up toward my head. That was fast.

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I mean, wait a minute. That was like in one second. All I had to have was those uninvited thoughts, and the volcano begins. It's fascinating to see how it works: that the mind is a certain way, has certain thoughts, and there's such a strong—we're so glued to it, so interested in it, so affected by it, so taken in by it—that there's a whole emotional response to it.

And so to see, "Oh, look at that. I had the thought, and now there's an emotion," as opposed to if you don't see them as two different things, they compound each other. They seem even more real, more important. Now, you know, having those vendetta thoughts seems really important because they're being fueled by the anger. And the anger is important, and the anger is me.

And I'm going to really kind of let that person know what I think fifty years later. But to see it as two separate things, there's a kind of backing off and a quieting that can happen. And then there are different kinds of thinking that we do, and this is very important for understanding meditation.

The kind of thinking that's not helpful for meditation is discursive thinking. Discursive thinking is conversational thinking, where you're having commentary, you're telling yourself a story, you're reviewing a story, you're trying to figure something out about a story, about something in your life. You're having a conversation with someone in your mind, so it's discursive, conversational. They say it's much more involved, and it's like, you know, your thoughts are paragraph long.

And if you're thinking in German, it probably, you know, goes over a few pages because they have very long paragraphs, sentences. They have sentences that are the whole page. And so, the discursive is what—that's what we get pulled into: a story that's so captivating, so interesting. And that's what we're trying not to do in meditation, not be involved in.

If we know that's the case, know that's the story, then we're not trying to dismiss all thinking. But actually, instead of letting go of your thoughts, it's possible to switch and think in better ways. If it's only a matter of, "I have to let go of my discursive thoughts," then you leave a vacuum. And vacuums are not good. Your mind will fill the vacuum with thoughts, most likely very quickly.

And if you don't choose something wise, it'll just find the same discursive theme to continue, or find even a better one. But can you change what you're thinking? How you're thinking? Is there some way to think that supports you in the meditation? And one way to do that is to—they can involve sentences even—is give yourself meditation instruction.

"Okay. Feel your body. Feel the body. Sit up straight. Take a deep breath or two. Relax as

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you exhale." Just whatever it is, just go through and say it to yourself, so the thinking mind is engaged in something that supports the purpose that you're here for, rather than the thinking mind taking you away from what's going on here.

And sometimes you need to remind the mind that, yes, the discursive thinking is dealing with really important things. But you've thought it a lot before. Your track record of having successfully figured everything out is really poor. And there is a better way. You want to give the mind a carrot.

And the better way is to get calm and settled and peaceful, unified—a feeling of all wholeness, all of you is here, not just little discursive mind, which is like the wizard in *The Wizard of Oz*. It's—you want all of who you are participating in meeting something important, maybe you have to think about. So you tell the mind, "Wait. If that's an important topic to consider, let's put it off for now until we're in a better place to think about it."

And meditation is a way to kind of prepare to have that really important conversation we have to do with myself. But let's give myself meditation instruction. So that's in sentences. There are even quieter forms of thinking that are not giving yourself instructions, and maybe that even makes your mind feel a bit too busy.

But the next level of thinking is very quiet thoughts of recognition. "Oh, I feel warm. No, my belly feels extended; it's full. I feel an itch on my back. I feel the texture of my pants on my hand." So you're giving the thinking mind something to do, but it's almost the same thing as mindfulness: a very simple recognition. "Oh, this is what's happening."

People will protest this instruction because, "I'm just making my mind busy. I'm just being too active." And maybe. But the chances are it's better than the alternative. If you have a better alternative to get yourself quiet and still and mindful, then don't use these recognition thoughts. But if it's better than the alternative and keeps you here, keeps you connected, keeps you from drifting off in discursive thoughts, do these very simple thoughts.

Very simple: "Here. Now. This." And then there's a combination where, as we see things really clearly, there might be very simple thoughts that are instructional or little question marks. Something like, "Oh, I feel a tightness in my shoulder. Let's go feel it better. And let's feel it. Where is it?"

"Oh, it kind of feels like there's a lot of tightness in the middle of my shoulder. Oh, is it really in the middle? Well, if I feel it carefully, it feels like, yes, it's in the middle, but more in the back. And let's feel it better. Let's trace the outline of it. Let's go to the middle of that pain."

"Is it solid, or is it dancing around? What's happening here with it?" So you're asking yourself

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very simple questions that guide you to stay here, stay here. And that's a kind of thought. These are all useful thoughts to be had, provided you have those thoughts be gentle, soft, kind, relaxed, calm.

You have to kind of moderate your inner voice, your inner way of thinking. It's not like a drill sergeant. It's not like, you know, so laid back that you might as well never do anything about it. That's just, you know, easy come, easy go. It's like, you know, you're here, mature in a mature adult way.

I'm trying to understand. I'm trying to be present for this. I'm trying to be kind. Trying not to be assertive or probe or, you know, be judgmental of myself. Just, "Oh, pain in my shoulder. Maybe I should feel that."

And then after a while, you might have the question, "Maybe I felt it long enough. Maybe it's better now to leave it alone and just go back to my breathing. How's my breathing been affected by my shoulder pain?" "Oh yeah, looks like my breathing is a lot tighter than it was before. Well, that's interesting. Okay, I'll just now feel tight breathing."

So these are all—some people would say this kind of thinking is not really thinking because they think only discursive thought is real thinking. And some people, this is almost nonverbal, this kind of thinking that's exploratory, questioning: "What is this here? Put your attention here. This might be good now. Let's try this." Very quietly, easy and relaxed way, but it helps wake you up.

It turns on the light of awareness. Helps you feel more and sense more. Become more familiar with what's here. You can even do that directly with thinking itself. "Okay, thinking is not stopping. Thinking has a mind of its own. It's speeding along."

"What is that speed like? I wonder how many miles a minute it's going. Whose tone? Whose tone of voice? Whose voice is doing this speaking?" Some people internalize a voice from growing up, and the most common thing that some people have reported is some harsh voice that they've internalized, and so their own voice has a harshness to it. So, what's the tone of voice of that inner voice? Am I glued to it? What are the sensations of thinking?

So we kind of—and what this does, it begins to extract us from being identified with the thoughts, believing we have to figure something out or do something. It's like taking two steps back and getting the bird's-eye view. "Oh, here's thinking going on. I don't have to be in it. I can be outside of it, looking at it, sensing it, knowing it." A whole different relationship to thinking that's possible.

So maybe we have time for one more little guided meditation around this. Maybe you'll learn

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about this a little bit better if you actually. So, as before, you're allowed to think. No problem. Just think all you want.

Maybe your thoughts are concerned with what I've been saying, and if you take an honest look at your thinking mind, what would you have to say about it? What do you recognize there, see about your thinking mind and the ecology of it? If the thinking gets quiet, disappears because it's being looked at, what's there? What are the remnants of it?

Are there remnants of tension, tightness, pressure, energy? Some part of you feels activated still, even though the thoughts aren't there. So to know your thinking, can you, in a very simple way, change how you're thinking so you're thinking in a way that puts you in the present moment, keeps you here? Can you give yourself instruction? Can you try to have very light, soft words of recognition?

Where people see with images, maybe images of recognition of what is happening here now. And then, as we're sitting here, I'm going to make it so that most of you will have a very simple, innocent thought arise in your mind. And just let it arise, let it surface, let it appear. Watch it appear and disappear. See if you can watch this thought arise without any reaction, any for or against.

So the prompt for this, I'm going to say: "You are practicing at the Insight Retreat..." I hope that most of you finished the sentence. There was no magic, you know, and this is not telepathy. But I hope you see this word "center" just rose by itself. You can almost say it wasn't you doing it. You could blame me. Just center.

But now listen to this with your eyes closed. I'm going to say something else and see what responds in your mind, in your thoughts, in your body, in your emotions. "I've suspected for some time now that we have a new dangerous animal near IRC living here. Saber-toothed tigers." Well, some of you were humored by that, but I was hoping some of you would get scared.

So whatever the response was, feel how little or how much it affected your whole body, your whole being. How much you were involved. There's a really strong connection, all these channels of communication, between your thinking mind and all the rest of you. Thinking is part and parcel of the whole, the whole of who you are.

And the goal of this practice is not to stop thinking, but to learn how to think without any clinging, without any grabbing on or holding on or resisting. So that it's just the arising of thoughts, and each thought is a hundred percent free of you. If you give your thoughts unconditioned freedom, your thoughts will return the favor, and you'll have thoughts that will

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have no influence on you, no bearing, unless they're useful.

The ancient Buddhist texts talk about the thinking mind being a puppeteer with strings that go from the mind to the hands, the arms, the legs, the belly, the heart, all over. And as we think certain thoughts, fear thoughts tug on the belly. Anger thoughts—the strings go down to the fingers and you start making a fist. Desire thoughts, and the strings are pulling the chest forward to get the object of desire.

I mean, there's all these different—the body responds. And it responds more if there's attachment and clinging and involvement. And it's possibly one of the glorious, amazing things to have your thought arise in the mind and there are no strings to anything. A thought floats up; it has no weight, no density, no solidity.

Thought arises and it has no strings, and instead of strings, it has a lot of space around it. Some of you will be disappointed to learn that your thoughts do not fill the universe; they're not that big. Every thought has space around it—lots of space. What's it like to feel a thought arise and to recognize all the space that's around it?

If there's space around a thought, around thinking, there must also be peace right next door to it. Calm right next to the agitation. To be able to gaze peacefully on your thinking, not reacting, not being for or against, leaving your thoughts alone, give them their freedom so they have no power over you. It's really freeing to see a thought arise, surrounded by space.

Just the thought by itself, floating in the vast empty sky of the mind. And if it's happened that all this discussion about thinking is too much for you, and you've already checked out and started thinking about other things and reacting to it, judging it, telling yourself stories about it, one option you have is to be amazed. "Wow, my mind is capable of this." And to finally say that a thinking mind is an amazing event, and it's possible to become friends with it, to live with it with a very friendly attitude.

You and your thinking can become good friends, keeping you company. But to do that, it's helpful to realize that you're not required to believe your thinking is who you are. If you need to be someone, be the awareness that knows. And then there's a chance the two of you will become friends. And may you keep good company to yourself through this practice. Thank you.

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