

Thoughts and Emotions (4 of 5) What Is In Our Depths

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This week, we are talking about the relationship between thinking and emotions, and emotions and thinking. Thinking has many different layers within us. Some of the more surface layers are called discursive thinking. Discursive thinking involves having a conversation, telling a story, or imagining some scenario. It's almost like watching TV. It can have a powerful effect on our emotional life.

Human beings are storytellers, and our stories have a big impact. We can imagine stories as if they're real, and we feel them in our emotional life. So we want to be careful with the discursive mind – with the stories we tell. Thinking can get quieter. This might not be discursive thinking, but it might be some repeated attitude or judgment we carry with us. The judgment might undermine us, inspire us, or buoy us up.

As the mind gets quieter and quieter, this doesn't mean

that we stop thinking. But the thinking becomes more subtle or more foundational in that it underlies everything else. Part of the advantage of getting calm and settled in meditation is that we can start recognizing the deeper currents of our beliefs, thoughts, and attitudes that are often overlaid by discursive or judgmental thinking. This deeper layer is valuable to see. Even if we don't know it's there, it's casting its influence on everything else.

It's kind of like the root from which everything else grows or the root that spreads food throughout the plant. The food that the root takes in from the soil might not be healthy. Or it might be healthy. So, to start seeing what the deeper attitudes are and what's going on.

These are some examples of the simple, deeper attitudes and beliefs that might be there. Sometimes when people get really quiet and still in meditation and are tracking their breathing, they can see that certain attitudes can appear at a particular point in the cycle of breathing. Sometimes people see: "Oh, I don't want to exhale because I don't want to lose something. I want to hold on. It's not safe. I have to be safe by holding on."

The end of the exhale is a common place for some people to get afraid. Sometimes a feeling of loss of control is there. Or: "Everything is going away, and I

might disappear. I might die. I won't exist at the end of the exhale." Or sometimes I've known people who have an attitude as they breathe in, they don't want to breathe in, like, "Leave me alone, that's too much work." It's like the world is imposing itself on them, and so there's resistance. It's kind of very subtle.

So these are kind of symbolic. It's like we are discovering in our breathing something that plays out in the rest of our life. But it's so subtle and quiet. We might discover very foundational emotions in our breathing, and those emotions give birth to a way of thinking or to discursive thoughts. So to get quieter and quieter.

As I said in the guided meditation, one of the attitudes or beliefs that I had in my early years of practice was that if something's happening to me, it's not the real thing. It's not necessarily logical to have that belief. But I never thought about it; I didn't think it out. I didn't even know I had that belief. But when I got quiet, there it was deep down inside. It was like a policy I had towards everything. So I could never do things right or never felt satisfied, content, or at home anywhere because it was always the wrong thing.

We might think then that we have to cultivate the opposite – that everything I'm experiencing is the right thing, is the real thing. Or for example, if you've

discovered deep inside that you feel that you are somehow bad, then you might think that now you have to cultivate thoughts that you're good.

So there's a trap in recognizing some deep belief you have and thinking the solution is to have the opposite belief, the positive version of it. For example, if you have a belief that you're wrong or bad, then you have to kind of find a way to believe that you're right and good. But that's kind of a headache. That's work, and how do you do that anyway? It becomes kind of a strain, expectation, or challenge that you live by.

The alternative is to recognize some of the deeper beliefs you have, some of the deeper emotions you have that are difficult, and not set up the idea you now have to experience the opposite. It's powerful enough just to stop thinking, "I'm wrong" or "I'm bad." So rather than thinking you have to now become a good person, just stop believing you're bad.

Instead of thinking that because you're afraid, you now have to develop bravery and courage, it's enough to learn how to settle and quiet and let go of the fear, perhaps. You don't have to replace it with something else. Because if you replace the fear with something else, you tend to be in a pendulum that can swing too easily between these extremes.

Sometimes the attempt to go into the positive is wonderful and nice, but it often carries with it even deeper attitudes and beliefs around self: me, myself, and mine; I'm the agent; only then will people love me. For example, there can be a deeper belief or concern about what it takes to be loved.

So as we go deeper and deeper in the practice, what we learn is that it's powerful and wonderful to simply stop this way of thinking, these beliefs that we have, and not replace them. There, in the depths of who we are, maybe we'll discover a kind of peace, stillness, spaciousness, or calm that has no opposite. There's a kind of joy and happiness that has no opposite. Then we're not swinging back and forth so much. It can just be there, and it comes without a belief. There doesn't have to have a self connected to it. It doesn't have to have some idea of who we are, what we have to accomplish, and what we have to do to be a good person, a successful person. We can just be.

We're allowed just to be at home in ourselves. We don't have to prove ourselves. We don't have to defend ourselves. We don't have to have any particular experience that's the experience we have to have. We're allowed just to be ourselves.

In Zen, sometimes there's the idea that when you are yourself, the Dharma is the Dharma. When we allow ourselves, in this kind of way, to live in that deep place of not living in the opposites that we swing by, it's just this deeper place that has no opposite.

So with this idea that there's a deeper voice, belief, attitude, and mood that underlies it all, you might want to let today be a quieter day and see if there's something there for you. You have to be very careful with this, and very tender and compassionate. If it feels like this is too much for you, or if the information you learn now is something you need to digest, work with, and get support for, by all means, do that. Don't stay kind of right up against it all the time.

But you might also see if today can be a day for this deeper, quieter listening. You might have a busy day, but maybe there are little corners of the day where you can sit quietly and just kind of tap in. What's deep inside? What does it want to say if it could speak? Sometimes that reveals something that won't be revealed if we're just kind of feeling or tending to it.

Maybe you'll discover too that in the depths of who you are, that's where your wisdom resides. Thank you, and we'll continue again tomorrow.