

Practice Note: Thoughts as Scenery

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdaal on July 20, 2016

When people meditate, one of the topics of concern to address, to understand, is our thinking. Some people think more in words, some more in images. We have concerns, interests, preoccupations, and we get involved in these thoughts. As people meditate, they begin to learn that it's not necessary to live in their thinking. It's not necessary to always be seeing ourselves or the world through the lens of our thoughts. Some people are so closely wedded to their thoughts, that they think they are their thoughts. It seems like what they think is who they are.

It's also possible to shift that relationship. Thoughts can occur, but we don't have to identify so strongly with them. When we aren't glued to them, they become more like scenery. We can see the thoughts arise, and they're scenery; they're phenomena of nature. They can be wondrous in their own way, but we don't have to feel like we're in the thoughts, that we're living in them, or glued to them.

This ability to step away from thoughts and see them as part of the scenery is a very helpful part of meditation

practice. It takes a lot to get the hang of it. In this room, we have a high ceiling and big room, and it may be easy to be more interested in the people in the room, than the space. You might be very interested in the people, so you're thinking, "Who am I sitting next to? Who's here? What's going on? How do I fit in?"

It's also possible to look around and notice that there's a lot of space in the room, and especially if you look up, you feel the space and have a very different relationship to the room and to what's going on. It's more spacious. We're not so fixated on the people.

Or there might be sounds, and we might be very concerned with the sounds, but the sounds are a part of the scenery, and actually simultaneously there's a lot of stillness – a lot of silence. Our interest focuses on the sound, but the open awareness sees the sound just as scenery. There's actually a lot of silence around it. It's the same way with thinking. If you look beyond the edges, or on the other side, or in the space around your thinking, you'll see that there's a lot of space within which thinking occurs. If you think in words, if it sounds like an inner voice, or a noise, and there's actually a lot of silence on the edges, around it, below it, above it.

If your thinking is agitated, then beyond the edges of that agitation, there's actually a lot of peace. So, what you might try to do today, is to see if you can become

aware of what's outside of the boundaries, the limits of your thinking.

I guarantee that your thinking doesn't fill the universe – the infinite cosmic space into which your thoughts go out. And they don't fill your mind either. The mind is vast. So see if you can get the hang of how to step away from your thoughts, to see beyond them, to their edges. What's just beyond? What's just below? What's just above?

And you'll probably find a very different relationship to yourself, to your thoughts, and to the world when you're aware of all the space, stillness, peace and silence here as well. So I hope you enjoy this morning.