

Week Four: Working with Thoughts (14 minutes)

00:01 So allow yourself to come into a comfortable and relaxed posture and notice with a sense of internal awareness, internal knowing, if there are any parts of your body that need some attention. Might be noticing some discomfort or holding or bracing. And taking a few moments to allow your attention to notice these different parts of your body and inviting in some sense of ease, whatever that means for you.

[15 second pause]

00:58 And now, turning your attention to noticing your belly. And as much as you can, allowing your belly to be soft and loose. Tuning into all of the sensations of this soft diaphragmatic breathing. The movement of your belly as it expands with each inhale. And the sensations of your belly as it falls with each exhale. And as much as you can, giving your attention completely to your breathing. Almost as though you're resting into the rhythm of each in-breath and each out-breath. Noticing the qualities, the coolness, or the warmth.

Noticing the length of each in-breath and each out-breath. Shortness or its length. And seeing if you can hold a relaxed and curious attention with all of the changing sensations moment to moment. So the direct felt sense of your breath rather than the concept. The moment-to-moment experience. And as much as you can, doing this in a relaxed way, not needing a lot of effort or energy.

Just giving yourself completely to your breath which will allow you to settle and become a little bit calmer as you rest with the process of your own breath. The process of breathing.

[15 second pause]

03:41: And if you notice yourself thinking and for the next couple of minutes, gently reconnect yourself with the soft belly breathing. So just allow yourself to connect with the steadiness of your own breath and the rhythm of the in and the out. And staying close to the felt sense experience, the moment-to-moment sensations.

[15 second pause]

05:12: All right. So now with a sense of calm, letting your breath fade into the background of your attention and allow yourself to open the field of your attention wide, and becoming interested in noticing when you're thinking. So no need to stop thinking and remember that thinking is not a problem. So long as you're clearly aware that thinking is happening. So allowing your attention to directly look at your thoughts. So instead of returning to your breath, as we've done before, noticing the process of thinking itself. And if your thoughts fade away as you watch them or look at them, then just wait until they come back or rest with an open and quiet state of mind. What's it like to have a mind that's not thinking as much? You can even use a very, very soft whisper of a note in your own mind as a way to help label the thinking process. So you might drop in the word thinking, thinking, very softly with maybe only 5% of your attention, but just as a way to give you some distance between the-

11:16 thoughts and your awareness. And sometimes thoughts can be images or words. And you can even notice how you're relating to the thoughts by the tone of that internal note or label. Is it soft and gentle thinking, thinking, or is it harsh and loud? Thinking. You might even be able to sense some emotion that's connected to the thought. There's excitement around the thought. Or a sense of annoyance, wanting it to go away. Well, there could be underlying worry or concern that's keeping your attention fixated on the thought.

So as much as you can, again, keeping the attention wide open; and if you get stuck using this very gentle whisper-like label or note, thinking, as a way to help untangle you from the thinking process. And remember that if the thinking goes away, the thoughts disappear, then you can relax into that quiet space of mind; a sense of spaciousness and openness. So as you continue to notice the thinking process being opened, any thoughts, allow yourself to be curious about if there are any physical components of thinking. Can you sense any pressure or tension in your body as you're thinking? Often, the face or the shoulders or the belly will hold some of this pressure or tension. And if you notice this, is it possible to relax and soften any of this tension or pressure that's connected to thinking? And this is where you could perhaps take a deeper inhale and a deeper exhale. And then with the exhale, imagining that you're relaxing the thinking brain like you're relaxing a muscle, inviting it to rest, and not needing to exercise.

[1 minute pause]

Sometimes thoughts can be very sticky. They can be very persistent. And if you're noticing that a pattern of thought is very persistent, it's calling your attention again and again, and then you might try using a simple metaphor to remind yourself of the nature and the quality of the thinking process. So thought is mostly an empty, quickly-passing experience that dissolves in the spotlight of your attention. It's like a fog that rolls in. And if you take time trying to find the center of the fog, you'll just get lost in the thought. Instead, if you step way back, allowing the mind to be very open, your attention to be wide, you can notice that there's a light fog that's passing through.

You're no longer lost in the fog. And there's nothing that you need to do. The fog will pass on its own. And the more that you stay aware, it will dissolve in the warmth of your own moment to moment attention. So at times, you can use a metaphor like this, the thinking process or thoughts like fog as a way to help open up the mind and to untangle your awareness from the thinking process. So now for these last few moments, just return to the felt sense of your body and your breath and seeing if you can rest with your soft belly breathing for a few more moments.