

# 2008-01-25 Anapanasati Calming The Thinking Mind 4 of 8

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## SPEAKERS

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So the, in the first eight steps to mindfulness of breathing, because they divided into four half, two halves, four steps each. And there's a parallel quality to each of those four steps. That is the first part has to do with the first two steps have to do with verse three steps have to do with just experiencing something being present or an experience of something particular. And the fourth step is to attend to tranquilizer calm or relax what you become aware of settlement. So the first four steps have to do the body. Becoming aware of the body first, through the breathing, just becoming aware of breathing the way it is, and then calming the breath. Then becoming aware of the way the body the body is the physical tension and holding and activity of the body and then As you can be fully aware of the body, then as you breathe can begin to soften, relax the body. in the, in the second tetrad now 5678 The idea is versus to experience, joy and happiness, joy and delight or joy and pleasure in meditation. So as meditation deepens sooner or later, people tend to feel some kind of joy is fine to experience and allow that to happen. So there's a whole art of letting that joy and happiness bubble up. And then the seventh step is to become aware of what's called the mental formation, the mental activity, the whole thing that all the activity that goes on within the mind, the way that the mind is shaped by what's happening, and the way that the mind shapes what's happening. So by that, I mean that perhaps the If you might, you might be aversive to the blowers. And so that aversion then conditions, shapes, influences the quality of your thinking the quality of your mind gets tight or constricted or something. Or it might be that that the mind is tight. And so that conditions, how you're breathing is actually breathing really gets tight. It's kind of reciprocal relationship to the conditioning relationship, a shaping relationship, where the words are, that can be significant. And so start noticing how the mind the mental conditions, the mental activity, what's going on, and then with the help of the breathing, then the eighth step is to calm the mental activity. Sometimes if you pay attention to your mind You feel the mental activity is quite energetic, really busy. Sometimes you feel really, really calm and settled to begin with. But here you're allowed, you're given permission to not just be aware of things, but also to relax it, to settle it. And that has to be done with wisdom. And because it's so easy to try to change your experience without the proper wisdom, many vipassana teachers will say, well emphasize don't do anything about your experience. Just know it, just be aware of it. Because we tend to kind of get manipulative and engineers meditation becomes an engineering feat, and they were striving and things don't change fast enough, we're disappointed and we get impatient and all this extra stuff happens. But if we can be wise enough not to let those extra reactivity happen, then it's here the instructions is to help calm the activity of the mind help calm the activity of the mind, calm the all the way the mind is conditioned in shape. And built up. And the two main things I was emphasizing during experimentation was the thinking, thinking as an activity of the mind. And it's very interesting over the course of a day and a week or a lifetime, is to notice this changes and shifts in, not what we think about, but how we think. The intensity of it, the

softness of it, you know, all these different qualities that go along with thinking thinking is not an isolated phenomena. It's like we say that disembodied words that flow through the mind with no other connection, those words have tentacles that go out and touch her or body or emotions, Coalition's all kinds of things. So the one was the thinking and the and the second was the whole, the whole, that part of mental activity, reactivity that has to do with liking and disliking, having preferences.

So something happens when we don't One that we're impatient, we don't like it, we want to go away or we want something we like it, that's great. The sound the blower went off. And he got pretty quiet. But this is much better. It's kind of sense of relief. I like that. That's really good. I really prefer that. So it can be preferences, you know, for or against things with a field that is a mental activity. It's not an disembodied, innate, effortless phenomena of the mind that just kind of their liking. disliking is an activity to doing it's a movement of the mind that goes on. So to become aware of that, see what that how that works. And then developing the art of kind of settling that relaxing. So that's kind of an overview and introduction to this. We'll do going to boys afternoon but I'd like to hear from you now. If that what happened to you as you follow the instructions, we would have To you, as you kind of turned and looked at thinking itself. What happened to your thinking? What do you discover about your thinking? What could you notice about your thinking that was different than the content of what you're thinking about? And what happened? Were you able to kind of relax or tranquilize calm? The thinking muscle, the thinking activity? Some curious someone you'd like to share? A little bit? Yes, if you could use the mic, we appreciate it because some people can't hear otherwise. And then the button the bottom, there's a switch.

I've noticed this in the past, whenever I

pay attention to my thinking kind of what you were referring

to earlier,

it seems like it's it's shy, and it just scatters away. And

yeah, that's what happened. And then I find that I maybe have a lot of thoughts, but it's going to Scattered I'm not really sure.

But then it feels forced afterwards.

which feels worse.

It feels like I'm generating thoughts. So

Oh yeah, you don't need to do that. You can just heading out on that. So it is I don't know what what you mean by scattered but if the sense that that kind of thinking gets fragment and a lot of small thoughts kind of been all over the over the map,

yeah, once I shift my attention to pay attention to it, it just seems like they run away

to the mighty silent and yeah. So then appreciate that enjoy that. If the if there's not a lot of involvement with thinking, then generally for bring attention to it, they fade away. And the reason why they don't fade away is because we're involved with them. I make a distinction between thinking and thought in the

mind naturally, the mind naturally thoughts. That's what the mind does. It's both machine and actually thoughts but mind doesn't have to think, you know, it has to thought. And, and the difference is that thinking has to do when you have a thought, and you latch on to it, or you get involved in it, or you get involved associated thinking. So it's like an ongoing thing. And so thinking only persists, if we're involved in it, somebody can be very subtle involvement. And so if you're not that involved, and you shift the energy of attention away from, you know, just to look at it, that's enough to kind of take the fuel away and they dissipate sometimes. And now if you're much more involved, then don't go away that easily and you can just sit there watch you know, if, if your boss just fired you, and you sit down to meditate, chances are that you can't those thoughts which is going to go and disappear like that. But you know, it was just kind of don't come through quite strongly and you sit, sit back and watch, wow, that's intense. So there's two things you could do. If you One is that you can have to go back to your breathing at that point you wait to the next thinking comes up, just be alert enough to notice that and then turn your attention back to thinking. But the other thing you can do is when you sometimes when the thoughts fade away, there's a kind of sense of silence or spaciousness that replaces it, and then just linger hang in that to open, cavernous spaciousness or whatever. And just sense and feel that be with that kind of explore that a little bit, the boundaries of it, the sense of it, the texture of it. And until new thoughts bubble up. And some people have a sense sometimes of kind of getting a sense of the place, somehow the place where thinking arises, and you're clipping like a cat at the muscle. You're going to use to stay there and stay at that mouse on watch. We have little thoughts kind of pokes its head. And, and one of the really interesting things that can happen when your mind is pretty concentrated, pretty settled is the you know that you could just sense that some kind of thought is about to happen like some people talk before like a bubble coming up in their mind. It's a little bubble thinking thing. Because you're right, they're so attentive to right the beginning of it, it fades away. And you'll never know what that was. But when I thought it was going to be about, it's like you have it, you have it, you see it coming before you know the content. And so that's very interesting about the relationship between the conscious mind and thinking and what goes on consciously and what happens kind of know unconsciously, but the fact that you can have a thought, your mind can have a thought, seemingly have a thought, make constructing a thought, outside of conscious awareness, and then starts coming into consciousness, and then fades away and you never know. That could have been the best thought of my life and meditation ruined it. Thank you. estimate something

real quick, I noticed that

when you let let us through the thinking process, I was watching my thoughts and this is working pretty good and flattening, flattening out. Finding a sense of ease and happening, it's working

pretty good. And then

what you just brought up, I got stuck on something. And what why I'm here is what happened is I caught myself I held my breath. So I stopped breathing. And that causes me a lot of problems. And so, I just wondered what you had to say about that. Because one of the things I wanted to find out today was

when I stopped breathing in Why are

you saying generally in life you have this issue that you stop your being you hold your breath, I do. So like this means It's common enough that people do that for sure. The most common thing a yoga teacher sometimes it says is remember to breathe, breathe because all these Yogi's are, you know, holding their breath when. And so that's great. If you were to look into that. That's, that's great. Why is it so important for you?

I because it gives me headaches

and general sense

of disease.

Great. And so as you were doing the exercise today, following along, you could actually follow along well, but then at some point that happened. Near the end.

Yeah, I was I was sort of just writing me and Yes,

actually, and I thought, there it is. And so if you look at that, then kind of

the young lady mentioned where my brain kind of scampered away.

So you you then looked at for a moment you looked at the holding,

yeah, and my thoughts just kind of

scattered. Get away What happened to your breathing

I thought I just mechanically thought, okay, breathe.

It says, You got involved. I started breathing, I see. And so I think, you know, give yourself a lot of time to explore this phenomena. But when next time it happens, certain looking around a little bit more widely to see what else is going on when you're holding your breath. And one of the things that might be useful to look at is what's going on emotionally?

I think so I think it's going to be a step by step process. But

yeah, so look on what's going on emotionally. And then eventually, if you have to do that for a while, then you can also look and see, are there any subtle beliefs that are somehow embedded in this connected somehow with this holding, and then as you continue for longer, you can and you get settled enough and get familiar with the territory, then you can notice it happening. And then you can say, well, as soon as you notice what happened, you can ask yourself, what happened just before just before you held your breath, what happened just before and there might have been some thoughts and something happened. That that is really significant that you react to your catches you that you do something with. And then there's the indirect approach to dealing with us. And that is not by understanding it by getting into your breathing, developing a relaxed, easy breath, getting into your breath, enjoying your breathing. And as you get into the more of enjoying your breathing more and more, it becomes kind of a counter conditioning, to the conditioning of holding. And it kind of kind of all kind of ease ease easier out of it.

That's what I've been thinking to.

As I practice on my own at home, that's my, my line of thinking is just keep practicing breathing.

It's great. It's great, you want to do this. There's a lot to explore. There that one more thing, if I may be on this is sometime when you're hunched up, holding your breath, hold it better. And then just kind of hanging out with to feel really good job and really hold it you know, just you know, don't you know even longer than you would naturally do it, you know, hold it just hold it just kind of just so you can get to know it better. Okay, okay, I see you. You're my friend. Let me be friend. These are the kinds of your friends to it, you know rather than diversity, but this is my big problem. Oh, here you are again. All right, welcome. I'll help you stay for a while. Okay. Great idea.

Thanks.

So when you mentioned

Holly, well watching the thoughts bubble up and maybe they'll be able to see them. You'll miss out on the fun. I

missed out on the fun. So you said miss out on the fun miss out on the thought or another thought with that. I'll say I didn't.

I don't know I had that attitude. But I noticed that some thoughts I can see the bubble rising Like an image, or something, or maybe a word. But

I've noticed then,

oftentimes, if I'm interested in the thought, if I collect there's some emotional charge to it, like, several times, pictures of people I work with rose.

And then

I'll have, you know, I have some issues going on at work. So then I just I kind of went with it. And then it just sort of blew up this big, you know, scenario and I was getting angry and everything. So I think, you know, that part of it was the thinking part. I think the following part was the bubbling.

Yeah, you got involved in the in the bubble? Yeah, yeah.

Yes. And then I realized that appointment. When I

disconnected from I could still feel the residual tension in my chest and all that was fill

didn't didn't go away as easily.

And so the, one of the one of the so as well as thinking that goes on, and we're investigating the whole phenomenon and things of thinking, the activity of thinking, the whole kind of composite event of thinking, one of the interesting aspects can be interest. And sometimes interest is not noticed. And sometimes it's important to notice the interest. And then if it's more than interest, but can you dive in, you know, then it's very interesting to start exploring and feeling what that sense of being grabbing or being intensely engaged feels like. Don't say it's bad. Just say, Okay, well, now I get to study what it's like, but it's feels like this truly what it feels like, mentally to kind of be so caught up in this. What does it feel like physically, emotionally, what's going on there? And then at a time when you're not caught by

your thoughts, really get into feeling what that's like and get a sense of the contrast between the two ways of getting a sense of the contrast between the two ways is very, very informative, very helpful in what's going on so it's all just good stuff to pay attention to. So we've got you know, if you do get caught just a great, now I get now we get to study with Caithness feels like, and then the thing for the interest as well. There's other other phenomena that happens in meditation or in life. But it's a meditation that some people are disturbed by or troubled by, or something has persisted over time. And, and they're wondering why it persists. And then finally, they notice that they're interested in it. And when they know, they note the interest when they bring their attention to Oh, this is what interest is like, and they've dropped the interest, then that phenomena stops, because sometimes the interest which fuels that there's a subtle clinging, sometimes an interest. And now if you come to meditation with a relatively active and coarse mind and distracted mind, then we often say you're interested You know what's going on. But at some point in the mind is settled enough. Even interest is too much. You still need to be present.

All the way. Maybe one more, but one more split. There's the middle.

There you go. Okay. What you said

I think I didn't have the experience today. But prior to the New Year's retreat, and then the New Year's retreat is sort of an expanded version of that experience. And after getting really calm, and looking back on how much I was suffering with thoughts, I'm at the point now where when you said think today, my reaction was no thank you.

I'm not going there. And I thought, well, I Cool, but I think there's actually a version in that too. Yes, I was like, it's so know how to work with that.

You know, I think you know, the generic instruction that I want, I think, you know, the generic instruction.

Be with it.

Yeah. You know, it's this, study that phenomenon, study the version get to know it better. Yeah, anything, anything you anything you don't like, anything you want to get rid of, which sometimes is appropriate mean, Buddhism is helping you become free of suffering. Anytime you want to become free of something. Hopefully your first stance your first approach is trying to understand it better. So don't be in a hurry. So okay, so now you notice something that's great. And now Okay, now your job is to get to know it better. And then once you know it's a little bit better, so much better. Then you could talk about maybe releasing it and relaxing it. So your job is to understand that aversion to thoughts and It's unfortunate, you know, I think there's nothing inherently wrong with thinking things actually can be quite beautiful. And thinking can be deadly. And so, you know, it's, you know, it's no need to have a version of a lot of meditators will have a version to their thinking. And that's to the detriment. And what I learned through meditation practice eventually was to be very friendly towards my thinking. So I have a friend pretty friendly relationship. And and, you know, I try not to think when I meditate, but I don't think thinking is my enemy. My problem.

I'm just my last comment is I'm approaching thinking right now. Not as as an enemy, but it's something that needs to be I need to be really careful. So that's good when I do

something, things can be really dangerous. Some habits might be really dangerous. So being cautious and careful and maybe don't know Oh, I don't know if I can afford For to get into that train train of

thinking, because if I do, the police will be here soon. So that is maybe why it's wise to kind of stay away. That's a healthy kind of net aversion but a healthy pulling away. So

that brings me to mind of the very first

paragraph of the

Dhammapada and I wonder if you could say to us

the way I translated was all experiences proceeded in mind made by mind his mind as he for led by mind suffering going blank, but we got the first part. Yeah, that's what I'm And recently I read someone who wanted to make the argument that the word mana which I translated as mind should be translated as thinking. So, it was kind of interesting. So all thinking all all experience is preceded by thinking made by thinking.

interesting to me.

Suffering follows a corrupted mind. Like the wheel follows the hook to the ox.

Ever hear your story?

Because I've always in my meditation, thought of thinking more as an enemy. And when you said, Now we are going to think or and also with the preceding meditation where I felt really calm. I I kind of welcomed what came up because It was now allowed. And I realized for the first time, there's many things in my life, and I realized how I loved them how. And so this feeling something comes up to take care of my grandson. It comes up and it was just spacious and open. And I'm doing this and I'm doing that and it was everything came up and then it would go away and I'd have quiet for a while. And then the piano came up and Oh, yes, music. So beautiful. But then I realized my breathing was getting a little tired. And there was the old thought, never get it all done. Never get work. You'll never get it all done. And so I thought, oh, let it just go. There we go. And so I sat with nothing for a while, but I thought it might just repressing this underlying anxiety of not having enough time for everything. Who does?

Because it's time for everything. Oh, I see the greatest lovely and so I don't know if this addresses your question or concern but they can be beautiful, nice, healthy thoughts that can bubble up and it's nice to make space for them to happen. But you also have to be very careful because they can also be very seductive. And the way in which the mind gets involved or latches on or kind of get seduced by them is very quick and very, very tricky. And it can feel pleasant and one hand on one side can be very pleasant. But we don't notice it can't pleasantness of it, the beauty of it whatever can camouflage the suffering that's a part of it as well. The tension and suffering and attention involved in being interested caught you know, so beautiful piano thoughts is just beautiful piece of going to play and we're really going to play it I'm really going to play that wonderful piece I wonder so beautiful that piece, you know, the mind kind of gets caught up in. So it's very, very important to pay to be very careful with things that are beautiful and nice and thinking as well that we don't stay balanced. Don't get Interested are caught up in it.

And actually happened. It was very open very, very easy. It just came. So it's not came and went well, at some point, you started at some point you started to contract.

Oh God, I got so much didn't.

Yeah. So as soon as you had the thought I have so much to do. At that point you started to get attached to something. And it probably you got attached just before that. So can you see that attachment? And what do you do when you see it? What can you do with it? So once you see it once you see it, the attachment? Do you believe it?

I've been working actually for a few days now and

trying to let go of

the attachment. The attachment for me is that I'm kind of an addictive reader. Yeah. And I do everything quickly so I can get to my book. And I have been trying to let go and every time the book came up, I thought let go let go to become a with my other. It is good. So I

said beginning of the day is big irrelevant, that the only real book for you to read is in here. So thank you. And

when the thoughts came into my mind, they were very excited. It's not like a big banner comes on with bright lights. And here's the thought. And sort of as we went along that wasn't quite so bright, but it was, you know, really up.

So, so that's interesting. So what else did you notice about the brightness of it, the energy of it? Look, was it feel like in your body?

Oh, it felt wonderful. It was like, it was sort of like, I'm really happy to be here. And it's like, I haven't spent a lot of time looking at my thoughts. And it was like, you know, sort of like this is great. So it was very positive.

And in that sense of positiveness of it. Were you then attached to it

No, I was sort of, well, I guess because I

was looking Wait, then it would fade away. And then I was waiting for the next one. Wait away.

Yeah, because they're so good is waiting. So that kind of waiting maybe is might also have an element of clinging or attachment to it. So you have to, you need to be very important include that as part of the mindfulness if you don't include it in its operating kind of offstage, then you're in trouble. But if you say, oh, there's an attachment again. straight back, maybe it's the last one, and we'll stop for lunch.

Okay, um,

let's see if I can, if I can express this. Well.

Guess the larger the biggest challenge I have and going through the meditation is a thought will come up. And they'll be it's almost suffocating in the sense that it wants me to go there and engage with it. And on the one hand, I don't want to reject it. I don't want to push it away because I think there's

something that's worth exploring. But I have a lot of difficulty looking at it. Kind of in a, I wouldn't say a detach way but in a in an exploratory way. In other words, I get I get pulled into it to a point where I'm not objective about it. And that's that's a big challenge that I'm having with going through the meditation. How do I How do I create that environment where I can look at something a little more objectively without getting so quickly drawn into it? And then, you know, there's a part of me that wants to push it away. But I know that's not a good idea. But how do I engage with it? constructive way?

Good question. One of the things you might consider is that I think it's very important for people to have quality time to think and but nothing meditation. So there's certain issues and areas of life that are actually well well warrant kind of thinking brainstorming in the mind, free association, the mind thinking, you know, free association and exploration and creativity, mental creativity around it. So I like to do that, for example. And when I go for walks, sometimes I drive at a time for it. variety of different settings where it actually get my mind much more freedom to think and thinking it enriches my life, and it's important part of it. And I try not to. And because if I have time in my day where I have that kind of activity, then I'm not so tempted to do that when I meditate. But if we're starved for some quality time with our own thoughts, then perhaps when it comes to meditate, there's this big, need pressure for it. And so it's hard to let go of it. That's one thing you might consider. The other is that, I find that my thinking is much more productive, if I'm relaxed. So sometimes it's actually wise to, if you can, let go, don't go there. First, we can just go back to your breathing, stay with your breath. Hang in there with your breathing, let go of your thoughts let go let go and stay with your breath until the breathing helps you calm down. Or if you can't, then try to notice the physical qualities physical tension or pressure that might be connected to the breathing, anatomy that the thinking. So you're not getting involved in the content to use the physicality of it. Sometimes I feel pressure inside my brain, a tightness sometimes on my forehead, my eyes, sometimes my jaw different places. And then as I find, sometimes I find if I can relax the thinking muscle, then it's easier to go back and be with the breath. And then after some time, then I will, then it's gonna find a much more interesting and productive to pick up the thoughts and, you know, to engage in, look at it more wisely the whole phenomena, because early on, I just kind of get caught in it. So you might want to wait. And then the third thing to say is what I said to Mary is that the fact that you get so caught up in it, that you can't explore it, perhaps what's going on is you don't understand what you need to explore. Sometimes people think they need to explore the trees instead of the whole forest where the whole forest and so rather than looking at the details, in some sense of you thinking what's going on, perhaps you need to take a wide angle lens back up really far and just become aware that here is a Just having a mental storm there's a hurricane going on just two cents that are here. This is what's causing this is like, I'm gonna become aware of caught. I'm so caught and I can hardly notice anything at all but I can just maybe if I just say the word caught quietly my mind caught, caught in a kind of rhythm. Every time I say caught, I've a chance to feel what I caught. This is like to see it step out of its orbit. So I hopefully those three things maybe are relevant for you. It's a good question. That okay. Okay, so I don't think any of you made comments about the liking and not liking part of it. Like him disliking what that was like in preferences and how you could have felt a sense of what it's like to look at that activity in the mind. It's possible none of you had likes and dislikes soon so. Yeah, so that wasn't relevant this morning. But maybe some other time, we can talk about that. After that, what your experiences of working with likes and dislikes, seeing how that activity of liking the disliking whether it feels like in the mind, the texture of it, the flavor of it, the tension, the physicality of it. And then is it possible? What happens if you smooth that out? tranquilize that? So it's a little after 12. And let's take almost an hour hopefully, if we start does it work does it work if we start again at one o'clock, just 55 minutes long enough people, anybody doesn't work? Because you didn't bring lunch or something to go out. Okay, so so we'll start again at one and, and you're welcome to talk if you want during this time, if you don't want to talk you can go into the conference room and eat there. You know, those several people can be in there. You know, he just eat there quietly. But if you want, this is a nice

time to meet and talk to people. You can talk about this, what happened more, or whatever and, and people will bring out the foreigner can bring other tables out there and sit around the other Hall. Thank you