

These Are Not “Your” Thoughts

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It is important to make thoughts the object of mindfulness. If we remain unaware of thoughts as they arise, it is difficult to develop insight into their impersonal nature and into our own deep-rooted and subtle identification with the thought process. This identification reinforces the illusion of self, of some “one” who is thinking. To meditate upon thoughts is simply to be aware, as thoughts arise, that the mind is thinking, without getting involved in the content: not going off on a train of association, not analyzing the thought and why it came, but merely to be aware that at the particular moment “thinking” is happening. It is helpful to make a mental note of “thinking, thinking” every time a thought arises; observe the thought without judgment, without reaction to the content, without identifying with it, without taking the thought to be I, or self, or mine. The thought is the thinker. There is no one behind it. The thought is thinking itself. It comes uninvited. You will see that when there is a strong detachment from the thought process, thoughts don’t last long. As soon as you are mindful of a thought, it disappears, and the attention returns to the breath. Some people may find it helpful to label the thinking process in a more precise way, to note different kinds of thoughts, whether “planning” or “imagining” or “remembering.” This sharpens the focus of attention. Otherwise, the simple note of “thinking, thinking” will serve the purpose. Try to be aware of the thought as soon as it arises, rather than some minutes afterward. When they are noticed with precision and balance they have no power to disturb the mind.

Thoughts should not be treated as obstacles or hindrances. They are just another object of mindfulness, another object of meditation. Don’t let the mind become lazy and drift along. Make the effort for a great deal of clarity with respect to what’s happening in the moment.

Suzuki Roshi in [Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind](#) writes:

“When you are practicing zazen meditation do not try to stop your thinking. Let it stop by itself. If something comes into your mind, let it come in and let it go out. It will not stay long. When you try to stop your thinking, it means you are bothered by it. Do not be bothered by anything. It appears that the something comes from outside your mind, but actually it is only the waves of your mind and if you are not bothered by the waves, gradually they will become calmer and calmer . . . Many sensations come, many thoughts or images arise but they are just waves from your own mind. Nothing comes from outside your mind . . . If you leave your mind as it is, it will become calm. This mind is called big mind.”

Just let things happen as they do. Let all images and thoughts and sensations arise and pass away without being bothered, without reacting, without judging, without clinging, without identifying with them. Become one with the big mind, observing carefully, microscopically, all the waves coming and going. This attitude will quickly bring about a state of balance and calm. Don’t let the mind get out of focus. Keep the mind sharply aware, moment to moment, of what is happening, whether the in-out breath, the rising-falling, sensations, or thoughts. In each instant be focused on the object with a balanced and relaxed mind.

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