Tracking the Thought-Stream

Patrick Kearney · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Patrick Kearney · 1:05:21

We've been looking at different aspects of the practice, starting with the body. Yesterday we moved on to vedana, feeling, experimenting with that. And today we'll start on the third satipatthana, citta, by looking in particular at the thought stream, making thought itself a meditation object. And we'll play around with this one.

Tracking the thought stream is for some people a very important part of the practice because it constitutes a major distraction for them. I know people in this room will find it difficult to comprehend, but there are meditators who feel, "If only I could stop thinking, then I could meditate. If only this thinking would even slow down, then I might meditate."

So the basic principle in this approach is: whatever comes up as a barrier, whatever is an obstacle, whatever is getting in the way, face it and make it the meditation object. This is implied in the Buddha's words, "establishing mindfulness directly"—establishing a direct face-to-face relationship with the experience.

Now in this case, the thought stream, the mind is constantly generating thought. It's like fire throwing up sparks. And this happens continually. And these sparks are like little elemental thought images, and the awareness will go, sweep in, grab one of them—any one of them—and then turn it into a movie. And then we get lost in it. And when that one runs out, the attention will grab another one, turn that one into a movie. When that one runs out of steam, there's another one there, and another, and another, and another. And so it goes.

The problem here is not the thinking. This is very important to understand. Apparently there's a new book out called "Thought is Not the Enemy." Of course it's also in most cases not an ally. What we do with thinking as a meditation object, as with any other meditation object, is basically what we're concerned with discovering or realizing: that it's just another empty phenomenon that comes and goes according to conditions. It's nothing special.

But what makes thinking difficult for the meditator is not the thinking itself, but our relationship to the thinking. And in most cases, that relationship is addictive. And it's the addiction which is the problem, not thinking. When we use thinking as a meditation object, really what we're interested in is the relationship to the thought, more than the thought, and certainly not the content of the thought.

Thinking is addictive because we create narratives, and you might notice that while we create this vast array of different stories, all of them have one thing in common, and that's the star of the show—and

that's me. No, it's you. We use these stories to generate a sense of identity. Basically we're telling ourselves who we are, and we're doing this all of the time.

And so any kind of relationship to the thought stream brings us into the whole world of what the Buddha calls atta and anatta—self and not-self. We construct a self in part through our thinking.

The American philosopher Daniel Dennett points out that we do not think our thoughts—our thoughts think us. They create us. And he also points out that while we think about many different things, all of us have a few core narratives that are our favorites at any given time, because these are the ones that provide the most solid sense of identity. And Dennett goes so far as to say that the self is the center of narrative gravity. It's like where the narratives most likely end up—that is the self.

So when we take on the practice of making the thought stream itself the meditation object, this practice is closely related to anatta, the understanding of not-self, which is one thing that makes it particularly interesting. When we look at our relationship to thought, what we're looking at is ourselves creating ourselves. When we let go of thinking, what we're letting go of is us and entering into a world in which we're not defined by our stories. And this is a whole different world. So this practice has potentially a great amount of power.

Let's backtrack a bit and talk about awareness, because in all meditation practices, but especially when we're making the mind itself the meditation object, then it's useful to remember this fundamental dyad that we've been talking about: awareness and its object. This is what we always work with—awareness itself and what we are aware of. There's always that basic dyad that structures everything.

Awareness itself is the presence of what is present, so awareness is not a something, but the presence of something. It's a quality rather than a thing. We gave the example: imagine stepping into a dark room at night and then turning on the light switch. Before flicking on the switch we don't know what is present. As soon as we hit the switch the room is illuminated, and the point is, of course, the whole room is illuminated and everything is revealed at once. Bang! So the light illuminates everything. But what we do is we tend to focus only on a few things within the room that are of interest and concern to us. So the attention immediately selects just a few familiar aspects of the room. Bang, there it goes.

Have you ever cleaned houses and then discovered in odd places layers of dust, and you've got no idea how it got there? Yet it was there in plain sight. I liked Jane's comment about vedana hiding in plain sight. The light illuminates everything.

Everything is available, but we don't see most of it because of where we put our attention. Most of what's going on we simply don't notice—it's invisible. But that doesn't mean it's not illuminated. That's part of the choices we make. Why we focus here rather than there is driven, of course, by vedanā. And so again, getting to know vedanā, you get to see this whole process of selection: I'll send the awareness here, I won't send it there.

I remember one example. One time I was doing walking meditation during a retreat, and the mind was particularly restless and couldn't focus on the walking. Then it occurred to me to note, or to name: avoiding what? As soon as I did that, it was like the awareness went bang to some element of discomfort in the mind, in the heart. To avoid that, I was doing all this thinking. The mind was generating all these stories to keep me away from here. So I just kept doing that—avoiding what? And when the mind would get restless again: avoiding what? Ah. Very quickly, everything was quite settled and I was right there. It was quite interesting.

Again, it was there. What was happening was there, but I just didn't want to look in that direction. But it was available. It was illuminated. I just didn't want to go there because it was unpleasant. And therefore, because I wasn't going there, it was dominating the entire experience. This is quite common when we practice.

So awareness is like the light. It illuminates. It brings everything into presence. But we organize awareness. Awareness will land somewhere in a particular location and it will construct some sense of meaning and coherency around that location. It will organize the contents of the room, as it were, in some particular way that makes sense to us and gives us a sense of meaning and even purpose.

Here's a rough example. Notice how you come to a place like this—you come to this place, in fact. You're going to be meditating here for a month and you try to get to the hall early so you can pick your spot. Then you gather the furniture, settle in, and every time you turn up here you go to that spot. Have you ever had the situation in which you walk into the meditation hall and someone's in your spot? How absolutely outrageous that is! So you sit down, but there's a certain amount of edginess because you've actually never been in this hall before. You've got to get used to it all over again.

This is how we work. This is how awareness itself works. It settles, it lands. The Buddha uses this term, the landing of awareness. Then it organizes itself around that location and gets comfortable with it. That's where we construct our sense of identity and our world.

We experience—we're not simply aware of, we are aware from. There's a particular place from which we are aware. Again, it's habitual; we're used to that. With the thought stream, we are aware of it from a certain place and we are used to aiming our awareness to certain aspects of the thought stream, usually content. When thinking comes up, what am I interested in? I'm interested in what I'm thinking about. What is significant to me? The content of the story. So it's always content.

What we're doing in this practice is reorganizing the normal habitual structure of awareness by learning to attend to what we normally ignore—things that are there and available but we normally just put aside. We normally ignore them because we're interested in something else.

So the key here in this practice is learning to drop any concern with the content of our thinking. The content is basically irrelevant—it has nothing to do with anything. I like to work on the principle that

every thought I think is a lie, including the thought that every thought I think is a lie. I find this a very useful working principle myself.

Some people argue with me. They say, "No, no, no, some thoughts are true." I don't try to persuade them otherwise—I simply find this a useful working principle.

What we're interested in is not what we are thinking about, but the process of thinking itself. Thinking is a process—it's constructed and conditioned by something, and it in turn constructs and conditions something. That's what we're interested in. In other words, what the Buddha calls dependent arising. This is actually what we're interested in regarding everything: process. Things arise and cease—how they arise and cease. That's what we're interested in.

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj compares this practice to a mother watching a child play with a favorite toy. The child is playing with the toy, and the child's focus is on the toy—that's what's important to the child. The mother is separate from this but really interested. She's not interested in the toy, however—she's interested in the child playing with the toy. You see the difference?

We are normally like the child, and our job is to become like the mother. It's not that we have to throw the toy away—the toy is not the problem. What we have to do is step back and watch the game. That's what's interesting, and that is what can teach us something.

We're going to do a few basic exercises in this. For each one, we will begin by settling awareness in the body, grounding ourselves there. From that foundation, at some point I'll ask you to direct your attention to the mind. We'll be looking at some aspect of the thought stream.

If you get lost—in other words, if you get lost in the content of the thinking—drop it, come back to the body, re-establish yourself, and then return to the mind. The body is always the background. In a sense, it's the body that thinks. Keeping a sense of this background is extremely helpful.

Any questions or comments before we get started?

If you would, settle into your meditation posture. From there, settle into your normal meditation object. And at this point, stop thinking. Just don't think. Stop thinking.

Any luck? Maybe no.

"A couple of times I asked myself, 'Am I thinking?'"

Were you thinking at the time?

"No. But I did think, 'Am I thinking?'"

But apart from that, you weren't?

"No. Images sometimes lead to thinking. So if I stop the images, I go back to the..."

So you had images, but you didn't turn them into stories. What category would images be in?

You notice how we have made no attempt to actually define thought? We've blathered on about stories, but that's for the next exercise.

Did anybody consider the exercise to have been a total failure?

They just kept thinking continuously?

I had images too, and I thought, well, there's only just thought, so...

So did you reflect on that? Did you think about that?

Yeah.

So you had images and then commentary on the images?

Yes.

What questions about images is this thinking? It's a very good question, of course. It's like, what is thinking?

Blake?

I have a few thoughts, but you told us not to think of the content. I was trying to think of other factors of thought, like the tenor or the sort of timbre of the thought, like a radio in another room. What sort of voice it had, that sort of feeling, what sort of qualities it had apart from the actual story of it.

Did you have a look at that?

Couldn't get there.

So all you got was the story?

The second one hooked me.

The reason why I do this first exercise, apart from entertainment value, is to illustrate the addictive quality of thought. A lot of people get really frustrated with this. It's a minute and a half, and I get the impression that some people spend a minute and a half thinking, "What a stupid idea, what is he talking about?" But it illustrates the addictive quality. Basically, it's the classic story of the addict: "I can stop any time I want to. It's just that I don't want to."

This is the relationship that we're interested in. The thinking itself is mostly pretty pointless, but it's the relationship which is interesting. But as pointed out, we've so far made absolutely no attempt to even

define what we're talking about. So this next exercise, we're going to look at what exactly do we mean by thought.

What we're going to look at is the question: how do I know that I'm thinking?

So if you get into your meditation posture, settle awareness in the body, and turn your attention to the mind. Are you thinking? If you are thinking and if you know you are thinking, then thoughts must be appearing to you in some way. How do thoughts appear? Do they appear as words? As visual images? As feelings? As combinations of these? As something else? Study the flow of these thoughts. Don't focus on their content, but on their appearance, how they present themselves to you.

How do thoughts appear? What are they?

How do they appear? Of course for the Buddha the question "what are they" and "how do they appear" is the same question. Because all there is is phenomena, appearances. They come and go.

I noticed that images appear and words appear, but with images it always seems that they just come out of nowhere. But with words sometimes they come out of nowhere. Sometimes I definitely get the feeling that I created it. So images just seem to pop up by themselves.

Yes, I don't feel they're created.

And some words pop up like that, but some words, there's a decision behind them. There's some kind of active agency.

So you've got images and words.

Yes.

And the words are sometimes written but usually they're spoken.

So sometimes visually they're written and sometimes just sounds.

There's a sense of body sensation and movement. So it could be words or not words. If they weren't words there was something which I would describe as body sensation.

So there's a physicality to the thought.

There's a fascinating range in how thought manifests itself. For some, it begins as pure body sensation—a movement, an energy that may or may not crystallize into words. The physicality comes first, then perhaps emerges into language, though it doesn't always make that transition. Sometimes thoughts simply surge around as body sensation, understood and known but never verbalized.

This embodied quality of thought feels distinctly different from fantasy or mental proliferation, which tends toward the disembodied. When thoughts remain at the level of physical sensation, there's both the

bodily experience and the mental cognition—a knowing of the meaning without spelling it out explicitly.

The location of thoughts also varies significantly. Some practitioners notice words appearing in the head with heavy cognitive content, while others arise in the chest carrying emotional resonance. The affective quality seems to determine the physical location—different sources manifesting in different places throughout the body.

Visual imagery presents another dimension entirely. For many, planning or questioning naturally takes the form of internal pictures rather than words. Some practitioners even report experiencing internal sounds—not necessarily verbal but auditory nonetheless—a phenomenon that can feel quite novel when first noticed.

What's particularly intriguing is how these patterns shift over time with practice. One practitioner shared how their thinking had transformed through retreat experience. What once involved a complex combination of words, images, and internal commentary had gradually simplified. The verbal narrative had dropped away, leaving primarily visual imagery.

Even more subtle was the discovery of how quickly images can arise in response to sensory input. The sound of a bird call might instantly generate the faintest image of the bird in its tree—so subtle it almost went unnoticed. This reveals how imagery can operate below the threshold of obvious awareness, taken for granted while words and commentary feel more like an active narrative demanding attention.

This points to the layered nature of mental activity. Words operate at the surface, obvious and narrative-like, while underneath flows this stream of subtle imagery, working quietly in the background of consciousness. The practice of observing thinking reveals these usually invisible processes, showing us the true complexity and richness of our inner landscape.

At that particular time, it's a response to the feelings in my body—a response. Today I'm feeling particularly exhausted, and I keep coming back to this: arms of tiredness, "I don't want to do this anymore"—negativity, aversion, pushing away. It's a response to the body. So the condition of the body, the body's state, conditions the kind of thoughts that will arise.

"The sentence 'how do souls appear'—I felt like it could be used when I was doing it to make the souls like... not being there, to sort of go empty. Because when you think 'how do souls appear,' it's like concentration, and there's no thoughts."

"Like when you said before, 'stop the thinking,' I just felt like I was going to burst out laughing quite frankly. But 'how do souls appear' then? I find it like a trying goal. Where do they go? Where are they? You know, like... it's more like an emptiness than actually trying to stop it."

Trying to stop thinking is totally perverse—for most people. For some people, not. I tell this story. I've done these exercises for donkey's ears. Years ago, I was doing this introductory meditation once a week at the

Buddhist library in Sydney. We did this exercise with these people who were coming once a week for introduction to meditation. And we did the first one: stop thinking. I said, "So, any luck?" And there was one young woman who said, "Yeah, it's like turning off a tap. You just turn it off."

Then we did subsequent exercises like this one, and the more we did, the more frustrated she felt. She was feeling like a complete failure at meditation because she couldn't do any of those exercises. Having turned the tap off, she couldn't figure out how to turn it on again. And I've often wondered what happened—how long did the tap stay off?

So there's this huge variety in the way that people respond. Some people can actually not think by making incredible effort to focus. But they say it's like there's this wall, and then the pressure on the other side of the wall builds. Then stuff starts to leak underneath. Then cracks appear. In other words, it doesn't work. It's not sustainable.

But in other ways, what you're pointing out is that if I actually focus on thinking, the more I put the spotlight on it, the more it disappears. But that also takes a lot of effort.

"I found it really strange, but I wanted to reach that point where the source comes from, and so it was all focus, kind of. So the thoughts have really more space because they're thoughtful."

That's very interesting when you do that. But of course, what we're looking for are strategies that we can employ over time. If a particular strategy requires a lot of effort, that's not sustainable. It's useful sometimes—you play with it and see what happens—but it's not sustainable. So we're looking for a relationship that is sustainable, a relationship to the thinking mind that we can sustain over a period of time.

"Is there a part in the suttas where I think the Buddha says the last resort for dealing with thoughts is to kind of crush them and squash them out of existence?"

Yeah, that's the last resort. And you wouldn't do it for long because you'd just get exhausted.

"I had this thought: what makes my thought different from sensations? And the other thing was the source of the thought, which was the mind."

So then I thought, they're like mind sensations. Like you've got a sore leg, the equivalent would be some sensation, not from the leg, but there'd be a thought that would be just the same irrelevancy as that physical sensation, but mental thought—just a coloring coming from the mind rather than from the body.

I like that expression—it's a mental sensation—because mind is a sensitivity and it's registering all the time. When we ask the question "what is thought?" one of the problems we have, again with language, is that our culture is impoverished when it comes to words that talk about mind.

You look at the Buddha—he has this rich vocabulary for different aspects of mind. And we just don't have

these concepts. So we have "thought," and it just covers a huge amount of stuff. Whereas the Buddha has a whole number of different terms that look at different aspects of mental activity. And it helps because if you have a concept, it's like you have a direction with which to send your awareness. And it helps to become more sophisticated in your understanding of what's actually going on in the mind. The fact that the vocabulary exists indicates that it's being used by people who have this sophistication of understanding of what's going on in the mind. So it's something that we need to develop.

Shall we move on to the next exercise? Which has already been anticipated. This one is: where do we think? Where do you think?

So again, establish your posture and subtle awareness in the body. And from there, settle into your normal meditation object. Now turn your attention to the mind and in particular, turn your attention to the place where you think. Where do you think?

This is similar to locating the place where physical sensations arise. The difference is that physical sensations have physical location while the thought stream may not. People sometimes experience their thoughts in the general area of the head, and it may be useful to begin there. But don't take anything for granted. Where do you think? Is there a specific location? Is there more than one location? Does this location change? Or is there absolutely no location?

Where do you think?

Okay. Where is it? Where are the little buggers?

"I was finding a circle of the head and chest."

Oh, okay. No more specific than that?

"I could work out where they weren't, which was mainly the legs and arms. They definitely weren't there."

So the general area of head and chest, but you couldn't pinpoint it?

"No. But it was clear where they were not."

"So wherever your attention goes, that's where the thought is. Including outside the body?"

"I had a sense that I was perceiving them here, but I wasn't generating them there."

So that's in front of you?

"Yeah, in front of me was where I was perceiving them. But they weren't being generated there."

So they might have been projected from somewhere else?

"Yeah, but I couldn't find where they were. But you don't know where they're projected from. You've just

got the finished product, and that's out here somewhere."

It's interesting. Two out of three is definitely outside the body.

"I had that same experience that Katie was talking about. However, when I realized that when I was generating, there wasn't a space that I was generating from. It was just in a different realm."

What do you mean?

Different realm. It wasn't like there was a tendency to place it somewhere in the body, but it's not a... We do that. We construct that. Yet where we construct it from is not in the body. It's not of the body. It's not in our realm.

So basically it doesn't have location.

No. Location in a physical sense. If location is described as physicality, then it doesn't have location. So it's not a case of not finding it. It's simply not there. There is no location.

"I thought you were generating my thoughts. They were coming from way behind you."

So there's a difference between where you experience them and where they're coming from.

"Is there? Something like that. Is there? Because I experience them anywhere. In me, out of me. I'm like... It's not the right word. I sense them anywhere. How they arrive there. Or where they arrive from."

Yeah, where they come from. That's a whole different issue. And you don't have any clues about that. You've just got them where they pop up.

"Yeah, where I experience them."

Where you experience them. But what's behind that or underneath that?

"I'll have to look into that."

Yeah, I think that's it. That is a very interesting question. And you notice how it's like something grabs you.

If you look at the way one's meditation practice develops over time, what direction it goes in. And people's practice goes in different directions. Many years ago I was talking to one meditator who said, "Let's say you have a meditation hall with twenty people inside it. Let's say that they've only meditated at the same place with the same teacher, following the same instructions, and none of them have had any experience of any other form of meditation or any other meditation teaching. If you went around and asked each one of them, 'What are you doing?' it would be twenty different answers."

So people, in meditation practice, head off. And this I've discovered as a teacher is definitely true. Because you get to hear other people's experience. It's amazing what people do. Your meditation practice over time

heads off in a different area.

Now what determines the direction? To me there's basically two factors. One is: what are your obstacles? What's getting in the way? So you have to deal with that. If I've got a problem in my meditation practice, I've got to work with that. Because otherwise I just get completely bogged down.

And the other thing here is what I'm interested in. What is it easy to pay attention to? What I find interesting. And sometimes, of course, those two are actually the same thing. If you're interested in your obstacles—which is my case, I'm interested in distraction—

I find distraction fascinating. For me, the basic koan of my meditation life is, why is it that I can't keep my awareness on a meditation object for more than 2.5 nanoseconds at a time? Why? I'm really interested in distraction.

So if you find something interesting, go for it. Because it's easy to develop and maintain mindfulness on that if you're interested in it. And of course, if you're looking at an aspect of mind, this is fantastic, because seeing the nature of mind is very, very useful. And it doesn't matter from what point you enter.

This principle of dependent arising, this multidimensional network of conditionality—once you're in it, all the pathways will become available. The practical problem for most of us is how do we get in there? What's our entrance? So if you find something which grabs your interest and attention, go for it.

Again with this kind of exercise you get this huge variety of different responses that people get. People find their thinking in all sorts of weird places, inside the body, outside the body. Some people simply cannot find location—they just can't find it. And some people will declare with great confidence, it's not that I can't find it, it is that it does not apply. There is no location to thought.

I've had all of them. I've had times when I've been able to pinpoint the exact location of thought and I've had times where it just does not apply. Thought is both everywhere and nowhere simultaneously—it just doesn't apply. But the thing is with these exercises is there is no right answer, there's no correct answer. It's simply an exercise in directing attention into the mind and seeing what happens. Whatever happens is what happens. Every answer is the right answer.

The important thing is we're learning to look at the thought stream without getting caught up in the content. So the basic principle is find some aspect of the thought stream which is not the content and focus on it. And it doesn't matter what it is so long as it holds your attention. And when you're not focused on the content you're not feeding the content and the whole thing collapses. And you're just watching the activity of the mind, which is extremely useful.

Sometimes you need to know enough about the content to know what hindrance is. Because if I completely ignore the content, how would I know if something was ill will or sense desire? What does ill will feel like in the body? It feels horrible. But that's how I know. There's always a step where I go, "That

bastard... oh." But that's how I know.

In other words, basically there's one thing that the content of thought can tell you: the current state of your citta. We think that thinking tells us about what's happening in the world. We even think that it tells us what's going to happen in the world or what did happen in the world. But actually all it tells us is the current state of the citta. Which could also mean what hindrance?

So that is a useful piece of information that you can pick up. But it might be interesting for you as a meditation exercise to try to work out the hindrance without thought.

"Don't take the easy path of having someone tap you on the shoulder and tell you what it is. You should echo it in the body—it's definitely something in the body."

This brings up the issue of meaning. One of the basic functions of the mind is to give the experience meaning. So I can have something going on in the body which I'm very, very clear about. But what does it mean? Do I need some kind of story to tell me that? Or can I have meaning without the story, without the thought? Interesting question.

What can I experience without meaning? Can I experience without meaning? Or what do I, if I experience without meaning, what is it? I've worked with this—I got very interested in this a while ago—and sometimes there is experience without meaning. But the problem is that as soon as I notice it, it has meaning. As soon as I notice it, it has meaning. A function of awareness gives it meaning. Which is, "Oh, this is experience without meaning."

And I've already lost it. As soon as you notice it according to that dimension of meaning. But that meaning is a concept.

Yes, but it can be very subtle. Like in the example I gave—let's say I'm doing walking meditation and I look at the end of the track and think, "Oh, that would be good to get there." That indicates vedanā. But let's put it slightly differently: I look at the end of the track. How do I know that's the end of the track? That's meaning. Now I'm not thinking, but simply in the seeing there's a knowing that's the end of the track.

"Isn't it that to be aware you've got to have some sort of meaning? You can't be aware of things that don't have any meaning."

Is that true? I'll think about it this morning. Don't think about it. Try to find it. Don't waste time thinking about it.

"If it has no meaning at all, isn't it a bit like neither positive nor negative? Is it sort of irritatingly confusing?"

Is it? "Irritatingly confusing" is a meaning. It's the meaning that we put onto the experience.

When you look at dreams, when you start to do recollecting of dreams, you can give meaning to it if you

want to. Meaning is what you ascribe to it. But watching the mind ascribe meaning is quite interesting, regardless of the question of whether you can not have meaning. Watching the creation of meaning and the investment that we have in it is really quite interesting. Again, this is an aspect of seeing ourselves create ourselves and our world. And in seeing this process, we are in that very action deconstructing. So we're approaching the unconstructed.

Peter?

"Words around that insight, which is great. And I'm really happy to have words to put around that. There's a good—I'm just thinking about it now—there's also a great felt sense as well. So it feels really good to get the insight that that's something I've been cooking on for a very long time. So I love having words that come to my brain around that time, in my thought process. They're very attractive."

Even for a normal human life, absolutely necessary. But it is interesting to see if you can get actually underneath that. And what is there, if there's anything?

Kim, did you want to say something?

"This is just to lean on something Katie said about hindrances. Last night I was feeling sleepiness, really gross sloth. Just go to bed. I hope this wasn't during the Dharma talk. It was. I thought, 'I'm just going to get out of here. I'm going to lie down.' But anyway, I thought, 'I can't leave. I've got to watch this.' And I went to the vedanā and I experienced there was a real heaviness in the body. So when the talk was over and you left, I did lying meditation but not for very long. And it went away immediately. It was like the mind had discovered the process out of it. Oh, it's just heaviness. It's not—"

You know, the mind stopped thinking, "Oh, I've got to go to bed. I'll try another posture—one closest to going to bed." And it worked. Once it became simply heaviness, it no longer was the hindrance.

That's precisely it. The hindrance was something you had carefully constructed out of raw materials such as heaviness, but also resistance and aversion. It's a fascinating example of the constructed nature of experience. We take for granted, "Oh yes, this is X," but when we start to examine it closely, we discover something quite different.

The examination included your decision to go into the lying posture—that was a wise decision. You could allow yourself to experience the heaviness directly, allow the body to feel it fully. It was a suitable posture for investigation. This is what I would call a craft decision: How do I work skillfully with this? One approach is to lie down and create space for exploration.

You set it up in such a way that you could go into the experience and tease it apart, finding its elemental qualities. You focused on the most obvious quality—the heaviness—and deconstructed the whole fabrication. This is essentially what we're doing in practice. What we take to be real is often just a construct. This becomes increasingly evident when working with the mind.

Since time is moving on, let me offer another exploration following from yesterday's discussion: What does thinking feel like? What does it actually feel like to think? I recommend playing with this question if you need something to investigate.

One final reflection on thinking: To me, thinking is essentially the cognitive aspect of the mind. We've discussed vedana, the feeling aspect, and thinking generally covers the cognitive dimension—the knowing aspect, how it works, what it constructs, and how it moves. Using the thought stream as a meditation object provides a gateway into understanding how the mind constructs meaning and how the process of knowing actually functions.

I think it was Jane who mentioned experiencing a knowing that may or may not be turned into words. I find this observation fascinating. I call this "the one more cup of coffee before I go" syndrome. As a dedicated coffee drinker, I notice that the thought "it's time for another cup of coffee" occasionally arises. But when I pay careful attention, I realize there's a moment of instant knowing that precedes any verbalization. The words cement the knowing, but they also cement the one who wants the coffee, embedding that person into the whole situation. Yet the knowing was already present.

When you use thinking as a meditation object, you discover something interesting: you'll think less, but the quality will improve. You begin to realize that, at a conservative estimate, ninety-nine percent of our thinking is a complete waste of time—everybody's time, and especially our own. The half-life of an unattended thought is perhaps twenty nanoseconds.

This reminds me of a recent study where researchers attempted to reproduce three hundred significant psychological studies, and in the vast majority of cases, they couldn't replicate the results. The findings were dubious at best. Perhaps much of our mental commentary deserves similar scrutiny.

Thank you very much for your attention and engagement in this exploration.

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