

Can Thinking be a Problem?

Many spiritual teachings point to mind and thinking being a problem, and the need for practices to 'still the mind'. Usually, those practices involve replacing our usual thinking with focusing the mind on an object such as a mantra or the breath. But as Jean Klein explains:

JK: All technique aims to still the mind. But in fact it dulls the mind to fix it on an object. The mind loses its natural alertness and subtleness. It is no longer an open mind. Meditation is not meditating on something. Focusing on an object keeps you a prisoner in the known. Meditation belongs to the unknowable.

[Jean Klein, *Who Am I: Meditation*]

But although trying to get rid of thoughts or replace 'bad thoughts' with 'good' ones is not the most direct way, the idea that thoughts can be problematic does make sense, because the sense of being a separate entity is created by thought. As Jean Klein says:

JK: The ego has no concreteness, no substance, no continuity. It is a collection of thoughts held together by memory. The person appears when you think of it. When the body wakes up in the morning, awareness is already there. You may not have noticed it, but it is so. This awareness is not a thought, not a subject, nor a feeling. It finds no concretisation. Moments later, habit associates awareness with a body and a personality. Then you say, 'I am this. I am that.'

[Jean Klein, *Who Am I: Knowing Yourself*]

Here is Francis's description of the kind of meditation that he teaches:

FL: Sometimes we have guided meditations, but often there will be no instructions, so I'm giving the instructions on day one.

It's about freedom. Meditation is freedom, to take your stand in your freedom. What I mean by that is don't do anything which is contrived, which is not natural. To meditate is not natural, therefore you shouldn't try to meditate. You should simply enjoy your natural freedom.

You shouldn't try to suppress or repress or change the thoughts that arise in your mind. But rather, to give them the freedom to arise, to unfold, and to live. Understand that no matter what, you have no control over your thoughts. They arise like the clouds in the sky and they dissipate in the same way. There is no point going into a fight with your thoughts, because that is even more thinking.

Meditation is free thinking, be a free thinker, meaning you allow for the thoughts to unfold freely. Simply knowing that as a separate individual, you are not the creator of these thoughts. They are cosmic events like the clouds, like the weather.

And once you have understood this proper attitude with regard to your thoughts, you can transpose it to the realm of feelings and bodily sensations. Because those, too, are not personal events, but cosmic events. You have no control over them, they appear like the clouds, like the weather. They are simply the presence to which, or in which, they appear.

And finally, there are the so-called external sense perceptions, through which you perceive the world. If you keep your eyes closed, they will be very limited. Mostly sounds, and the contact between your body and the chair, or between your body and the floor.

A few other very limited items, but they too appear in the sky of your awareness, without your intervention. They are spontaneous appearances, cosmic events. So, to meditate is really to sit back, relax, and enjoy the cosmic unfolding.

Now you could ask, of course, yes, but what if I'm not enjoying it? Then if you are not enjoying it, you obviously cannot meditate, then you have to investigate. The investigation is the investigation into the nature of the separate entity we believe to be. Because if it is, or seems to be your experience, that you are not enjoying the cosmic show as it is manifesting in this very moment, it's because somehow it goes opposite to the desires of the personal entity you believe to be.

So rather than trying to interfere with the cosmic flow of events, I would suggest to investigate the nature of the personal entity which is dissatisfied with the course of events that take place in the universe. What is this? What is this dissatisfied customer I call I? Obviously, it is not the presence to which the dissatisfaction appears.

The presence is neutral, just like a mirror which has no colour or no shape of its own. This colourlessness and shapelessness allows for all the colours and all of the shapes to appear within the frame of the mirror.

Similarly, it's because this awareness which is hearing these words in this moment has no colour, no shape, and doesn't say anything about the various cosmic events it manifests, but it has the ability to manifest them.

So consciousness at every moment says yes to everything it presents to itself. The no-sayer is something else. It is the no-sayer, the I-don't-like-this-sayer that is the subject of this investigation. It is the prime suspect of this investigation.

Of course, we have undertaken this investigation, otherwise we wouldn't be here. But most of us have undertaken it mainly at the conceptual level, which is fine, but also insufficient. Here we go deeper, we go into the new feeling, the feeling of being separate. And we allow for it to reveal its true colour, to reveal its true shape, to come out of the closet. So even the investigation, in a sense, is a continuation or is the beginning of the welcoming, and the meditation itself is pure welcoming.

But in order to understand the little me, the troublemaker, I first have to welcome it as one more phenomenon taking place in the cosmos. So the little me is in fact the voice of ignorance, and the voice of ignorance is the only instance ignorance has. It appears as a reaction, as a fear or a desire, which are both a rejection of what is, a rejection of the now. Ignorance, this no-sayer, has to be investigated simply through welcoming it.

It's like saying: 'Oh, you claim you're here, fine, tell me more about yourself, I'm interested, instead of saying I don't want to speak to you. No, I'm interested. How big are you? How old are you? Where are you?

So when you sit and meditate, for that reason, don't believe that you have to do something, which is called to meditate, or not to do anything. Allow for yourself to transition from meditation to investigation and conversely. And allow for the investigation to take place at all the levels of your experience, thoughts, but also bodily sensations, feelings and sense perceptions. Allow for all traces of separation to come up to the surface, to the full light, to be completely seen.

Either there is no separation, and when there is no separation, it's meditation. But if there is separation, then it's time for investigation on this very separation, no matter what shape or colour it takes to interfere to intervene with the flow of things.

As you notice this, just release the object you were trying to change, to transform, to maintain, release it back to the presence in which it appears. Everything you experience is such an object, either a sensation, perception or a thought. Keep them flowing, don't stick to them. Or if you do, at least be aware that you stick to them.

And when I say release them, release them only if you notice that you are sticking to them. You cannot release something that you are not sticking to. Because this release is a fake release, in fact, by releasing you go back to sticking.

So, it's easier than it seems because all you have to do is release that which you are aware you are sticking to. If the object you are sticking to is a bodily sensation of some sort, or a feeling of some sort, let's say a bodily sensation, be aware of the space in which it appears. Leave it there, surrender it to that space, let the space take care of it. And same thing with the thought that you notice you developed an attachment to. Just leave it there, surrender it to the consciousness in which it appears.

Observe also that feelings are nothing else than bodily sensations with like or dislike attached to it. So these types of feelings, the personal feelings, are likes and dislikes. I'm not talking about beautiful emotion, love, beauty, understanding. No. Who complains about those? Nobody. I'm talking about the feelings that make our life miserable.

The interest is not directed towards the thoughts, but towards the presence in which the thoughts appear. You may ask, why is that so? And the answer is this: if we observe our thoughts, we discover that perhaps 90 or 95% and perhaps more, in most people, of the thoughts they have, revolve around the feeling of me as a person, the belief of me as a human being, as a body, as a man, as a woman. That all the thoughts that make us miserable, all the thoughts of fear and desire, are about me as a person, as a separate entity. And the 'me' itself, we never investigate it. So most of the thoughts, in most people, in most cases, are about the me that they never investigate and that they don't know, really.

If you think about it, it's paradoxical and preposterous, this situation. To direct our attention to the thoughts themselves only perpetuates the problem. The only way out of it is to become interested in that which is at the core of these thoughts, the 'me' which is at the core of most of the thinking.

[Francis Lucille 2009 Thanksgiving Retreat, Day 1 Meditation]

Some spiritual teachers recommend asking the question 'is it true?' whenever you have repetitive thoughts that are unpleasant and keep repeating again and again. But Francis explains why this is not the most direct approach:

Q: I just want to double check an investigation I've been doing. I used to just notice my thoughts and then they would just be repetitive. But now what I've started to do is to put a little energy into asking 'is that true?'. I just wanted to run it by you.

FL: There are two kinds of thoughts. There are obsessive thoughts and there are thoughts that are not obsessive. So thoughts that are not obsessive, they are either creative or they are utilitarian. They have a practical purpose. Once they have fulfilled their purpose, they leave you. You don't have to do anything. Whereas the obsessive thinking comes back again and again and

again, and there is a kind of vicious circle to those thoughts. So these are the ones that are interesting.

To ask 'is it true?', you have to go into the story. But there is a more direct way. When you have such a thought, which is obsessive, you can always find out that this thought is about me as a separate person.

Q: Or it's usually I don't like him, I don't like him, I don't like him. So that's me as a separate person?

FL: Of course. I, me, separate, don't like him. So whenever a thought is obsessive and repetitive like that, you have to discover it's like a circle and it has a centre. And the centre of this revolving thought is always me as a person. So that's the first step.

And these are the thoughts that make your life miserable, because they are the problematic ones. In other words, you can always connect this type of thought that makes your life miserable with the belief to be a separate person. A separate consciousness.

Now, if it were true that you are a limited consciousness, then suffering would be unavoidable. But here, you hear a different tune. You hear 'no, it's not obvious, it's not obvious that we are a separate and limited consciousness'. So that's when the teaching comes into play. What you receive here is a doubt. You doubt, so that's where the question, 'is it true', could come in full force. 'Is it true that I am a separate consciousness?'

Instead of saying is it true, because if you say is it true, you enter into the whole psychological glue: he did that to me, I said that, is it true? But once you have seen that the entire thought hinges upon this belief to be a separate person, then the question is: 'is it true that I am a separate person or a limited consciousness?'

Then the question is really more surgical, well formulated, and it's for you to investigate that question. What am I? Am I the body or am I the consciousness that perceives? When I sleep, what am I? Am I still the body or am I somewhere else? The consciousness is always with me, so I am the consciousness. How do I know that this consciousness is limited? That's the investigation, and at the end of the day, that's what is going to put an end to this thought.

But there are moments when we do this investigation when we are not under stress, the moments when we are not subjected to these revolving thoughts, the moments of availability. This thought comes to me, 'Francis said that', or 'I read that somewhere'. What does that mean? Just out of interest.

These are the most creative moments. Because when you have revolving thoughts, you can apply what you understood during these moments of freedom, of openness. Then you say, oh yes, it's more of the same, but now I know that I have these doubts about consciousness being limited and separate, about consciousness being dependent upon the body.

[Francis Lucille, Summer Retreat 2015, Week 2 Day 1, 7]

Rather than watching and judging our thoughts, once we understand the true origin of problematic thoughts, they tend to dissipate more and more quickly in an entirely natural and effortless way. Here is Francis's explanation of this process:

The only thoughts that are problematic are the ones that come from the belief to be a separate reality. Most people don't know that these thoughts are problematic and that as a result they create misery in them and around them.

But once we have understood that the belief to be a separate entity and all the thoughts and actions this belief creates are leading to more misery both in us and in others, then we become more careful about these thoughts. So we become more discriminating and we don't indulge as much any longer in the thought of me as a separate person. So when we catch ourselves entertaining this kind of thought, we step back. It's like all of a sudden we have seen a poisonous snake and we step back.

[Francis Lucille 21/2/2025 Online retreat]

As problematic thoughts diminish, we find that we have more and more happy thoughts. As Francis explains, any thought we may have about our true nature is a happy thought:

FL: We have to understand that the thought about our true nature is a happy thought. Why? Because it comes from happiness itself. So it's like a fish coming out of the water. The fish is wet. So the thought that originates from happiness is wet with happiness. So it's a happy thought. In the same way, the body that originates from happiness is a happy body, from the experience of happiness. It is still pregnant, if you will, with the presence from which it emerges.

It is not any kind of thought that has this quality. Some thoughts originate from ignorance. Some thoughts are just old thoughts that just come back to the surface. They are not fresh, creative, new thoughts. So the thoughts that are really pregnant, happy thoughts, are the creative thoughts, or the thoughts of understanding, the thoughts of love. Because the thought of love comes from the experience of love. The thought of understanding comes from intelligence. So these are the happy thoughts.

Typically, as a truth seeker, to be practical, I may be driving and all of a sudden my thoughts drift to something I've read, something I've heard in satsang, and I experience as a result a joy which is causeless. It's not like being based upon a Ferrari or something tangible. It's just the joy to be, you see. The joy that there is being.

The joy that there is being is not related to me as a person. You can have it in the morning. You look at the sun, you look at nature, you look at the sky, and you feel this joy. And this joy is not about you, this little ant in this huge landscape. The joy is the joy of marvelling, awe at this extraordinary being that is deploying this extraordinary scenery.

[Francis Lucille, 24/3/2014 [How to Get Established in Happiness](#)]

A Contemplation from Jean Klein

Thinking is not based on thoughts.

Our real nature is stillness beyond all complementarities. It is presence without becoming. In the absence of becoming there is completeness and absolute tranquillity. This tranquillity is the home ground of all activity. The activity of thinking, like all activity, is grounded in wholeness. Tranquillity is the continuum in which thinking appears and disappears. What appears and disappears is in movement. It is energy extended in space and time. Thinking, energy, represents itself in discontinuity but as it arises out of and dies in stillness, fundamentally it is nothing other than this presence beyond past, present and future.

What we generally call 'thinking' is a process of memory. It is a projection built on the already known. All that exists, all that is perceived, is represented to the mind. Sequential thinking, rational or scientific thinking, thus begins with a fraction, a representation. Such fractional

thinking is born from the conditioned idea that we are independent entities, 'selves', 'persons'. The notion of being a somebody conditions all other thinking because the person can only exist in the repetition of representation, the confirmation of the already known. The brain tends here toward constant representation. Memory is the originator of the idea of being a continuous entity. From the ultimate view thinking is a defence against the death of the ego. Who are you when you don't think? When you look away from thinking, where are you? Thinking is generally an escape from your wholeness in which there is no one who thinks.

When the ingrained idea of a personal entity, a thinker, intender or doer, is absent, thinking still occurs as before in succession using memory but now this functioning is firmly rooted in the global background – wholeness, is-ness, non-duality. In the absence of a thinker, thinking is freed from all that is personal. There is no goal, motive, anticipation, intention, will or desire to conclude, etc. There is no psychological interference, no reference to a centre. Thinking freed from this memory comes out of the moment itself, is always new, always original. Thinking does not here call forth the situation; the situation calls forth thinking and brings its own conclusion. All intentional, fragmentary movement must cease before the whole can operate. As long as there is movement in one direction, totality cannot find its own way.

[Jean Klein, *Who Am I?*]