

## On the value of stopping thought



A long time ago, long enough so that people refer to it as the ancient world, sages were teaching people ways to still the mind in order to perceive reality clearly. Some humans, at least, recognized long before Jesus Christ was born, that how we use the mind determines the quality of our life. Around 300BCE, a little book known as “Verses on the Teaching” of the Buddha, the *Dhammapada*, appeared in India. Over two thousand years later, it is the most popular of all Buddhist scriptures. It begins, “All that we are is the result of thought: it is founded on thoughts, it is made up of thoughts.” Throughout, the *Dhammapada* counsels the hearer to control his thoughts, to learn mental focus. “This mind formerly wandered as it liked, but now I shall master it with wisdom, as the trainer controls an elephant in rut.” Perhaps it could have been more specific about what happens when this mind does not wander.

A few centuries later, in the second verse of his *Yoga Sutras*, the sage Patanjali wrote, “Union (or *yoga*) is restraining the thought-streams natural to the mind: *Yogas chitta vritti nirodha*. “Yoga is the stilling of the mind until it rests in a state of total and utter tranquility, so that one experiences life as it is: as Reality.”<sup>1</sup> This statement too can be unfolded so that “total and utter tranquility” and “life as it is” are more explicit.

In the third century, CE, the Egyptian philosopher Plotinus, whose career as a teacher was spent in Rome, developed a form of non-discursive, or intuitive thought. This kind of thought is not *thinking about* anything, but is a *knowing* that is direct and unmediated by words or concepts, a concentrated attentiveness to awareness itself.<sup>2</sup> At the risk of being repetitious, again in this case, the mind pants with hunger to know: then what?

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<sup>1</sup> Aimee Hughes | August 21, 2019, “Yogas Chitta Vritti Nirodha: Patanjali's Definition of Yoga, Explained”, <<https://www.yogapedia.com/2/8458/meditation/silence/yogas-chitta-vritti-nirodha>>

<sup>2</sup> Sara Rappe, 2007, *Reading Neoplatonism: Nondiscursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 20f., 49f.; Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson, 2007, *Plotinus on Intellect*. New York: Clarendon Press, pp. 176-183.

The reality that appears to a quieted, attentive mind is the Flourishing Earth, and is the experience that we will describe and give guidance to attaining as the main objective of flourishingearth.org. But we must walk before we run, and here we will take a moment to describe what masters of many times and places have said about the importance of quieting the mind.

Humans believe that they have made extraordinary progress in the past three centuries, with technology and modern science. This is undeniable, in one way. But if a person does not understand his own mind, and is unable to control his or her own mind, he or she will be controlled by the mind – by its illusions, fears, desires, and unquestioned beliefs and assumptions. At the beginning of the third millennium CE, there is no doubt that very few humans have learned the basic human ability of mental self-control. They may live in luxurious houses and own powerful machines, but they do not realize the extent to which they are controlled by the illusions of their mind. Such a life is less than completely human, no matter how many things one owns, no matter how sophisticated those things are.

What follows are a number of statements, in regard to the value of controlling the mind, from people who have spent a long time observing their own mind, particularly in regard to conceptual, discursive, or secondary thought.

I think it can be said that the essential point of all the great spiritual disciplines that the world religions have evolved is the letting go of thoughts.

Thomas Keating. 2002. *Open Mind, Open Heart*. In Foundations for Centering Prayer and the Christian Contemplative Life. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group. [Originally published 1986], p. 76.

The unhappiness and suffering that we experience arise through our inability to control our own minds, and the happiness that we wish to achieve will only be achieved by learning to control our minds.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Robert A. F. Thurman, "Buddhist Inner Science: An Overview", in Barbara McNeill and Carol Guion, Eds. *Noetic Sciences Collection 1980-1990*, Sausalito, CA: Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS), 1991, pp. 25-27 at p. 27.

Letting thought subside while holding onto the feeling that 'There is only this Being-Awareness' leads to the dissolution of thought. We dissolve into changelessness and silence. This is known as absorption. It is also called real knowledge.

Shankara, *Aparokshanubhuti*, verse 124.

As we come to the direct realization that all that finally exists in life is this Awareness, the thinking mind naturally begins to dissolve. Beyond all thought, beyond perception of any object, we are absorbed into Oneness. In the yogic tradition, this is known as *samadhi*. It is popularly understood to be the final stage of spiritual attainment, but it is in actuality the inauguration of real spiritual life and heralds the advent of new dimensions of life.... "*Yoga citta vritti nirodh,*" says Patanjali. "Union (yoga) is the cessation of mental activity in consciousness."

Joseph Kloss, commentary on verse 124 of Shankara's *Aparokshanubhuti*.

Not to be able to stop thinking is a dreadful affliction, but we don't realize this because almost everybody is suffering from it, so it is considered normal. This incessant mental noise prevents you from finding that realm of inner stillness that is inseparable from Being. It also creates a false mind-made self that casts a shadow of fear and suffering.

Eckhart Tolle. 2004. *The Power of Now*. Vancouver, B.C., Canada: Namaste Publishing, and Novato, CA.: New World Library, [originally published 1999], pp. 14-15.

Before you can begin to worship God you must forget yourself, and before you can forget yourself you must learn to control your thoughts and silence your mind. It is a very difficult task to do this completely, but it must be done – at least to some extent. If you can still the mind only fifty per cent you will have accomplished something.

Paul Brunton, *The Inner Reality*, 8th rev. ed. London: Rider and Company, 1952, p. 33.

A basic tenet of mysticism<sup>3</sup> is that reality as ordinarily perceived is indeed a distortion and that human suffering is the consequence of believing in that distorted view. According to mystics, the problem is compounded by human beings' inherent need to progress in their ability to perceive the reality that underlies the phenomenal world, which can result only from the development of a higher intuitive faculty. . . . In fact, some see the evolution of consciousness as the principal task of the human race. Arthur J. Deikman, *The Observing Self*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1982, pp. 8-9.

Many spiritual practices seek to empty and still the mind until there is pure awareness with no content or object. Hindu and Buddhist contemplatives claim that the resulting experience is the light of the underlying Consciousness that is the source of existence. They believe that human consciousness emerges from this substrate, and not from the brain.

Malcolm Hollick, *The Science of Oneness: A Worldview for the 21st Century*. Winchester, UK, New York, NY: O-Books, 2006, p. 304.

In order to reach the more silent areas of consciousness we have to get beyond the noisy regions of our minds in which we spend so much of our time. This necessitates a control over our thoughts. We may then be able to reach that silent area which is the dwelling place of the Spirit, for I know of no better definition of the word Spirit than that it is pure Consciousness devoid of all thought and words.

Kenneth Walker, "The Supra-conscious State" *Image* Vol. 10, 1964, reprinted in White, John (Ed.). 1972. *The Highest State of Consciousness*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday-Anchor. 2nd Ed. 2012. Guildford, GUI 9EJ UK: White Crow Books, pp. 17-19

*And then? When we have entered the sanctum of "that silent area which is the dwelling place of the Spirit" – then what?*

When you meditate, what you actually do is enter into a vacant, calm, or still, silent mind. We have to be fully aware of the arrival and attack of thoughts. That is to say, we shall not allow any thoughts, divine or un-divine, good or bad, to enter into our mind. Our minds should be absolutely silent. Then we have to go deep within; there we can observe our real existence.

Sri Chinmoy

< [www.srichinmoy.org/resources/questions\\_answers/meditation](http://www.srichinmoy.org/resources/questions_answers/meditation) > Accessed May 10, 2020

*It is that real existence that is the subject of the Flourishing Earth. There is a path to that place "deep within, where we observe our real existence." Where those beings once known as Homo sapiens will take up their abode, bringing harmony to the material plane.*

[A]ll psychological systems and doctrines... can be divided into two chief categories. First: systems which study man as they find him, or such as they suppose or imagine him to be. Modern 'scientific' psychology or what is known under that name belongs to this category. Second: systems which study man not from the point of view of what he is, or what he seems to be, but from the point of view of what he may become; that is, from the point of view of his possible evolution... For with right methods and the right efforts man can acquire control of consciousness, and can become conscious of himself with all that it implies. And what it implies, we in our present state do not even imagine.

P. D. Ouspensky, *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution*, First Lecture.

*The time has come to imagine this mode of consciousness – and to do more than that. To live this consciousness and allow its full, natural power to spread among the species which is able to regard its own mental processes.*

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<sup>3</sup> Mysticism is defined by Abbot Cuthbert Butler as "the secret knowledge or perception of God in contemplation." *Western Mysticism: The Teaching of SS. Augustine, Gregory and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life*, 2nd ed. with Afterthoughts. E. P. Dutton & Co., 1926. p. lviii. Reprinted by Dover Press, Mineola NY, 2003.

Of all the hard facts of Science... I know of none more solid and fundamental than the fact that if you inhibit thought (and persevere) you come at length to a region of consciousness below or behind thought, and different from ordinary thought in its nature and character – a consciousness of quasi-universal quality, and a realization of an altogether vaster self than that to which we are accustomed.... It is to die in the ordinary sense, but in another sense it is to wake up and find that the ‘I,’ one’s real, most intimate self, pervades the universe and all other beings. It is to be assured of an indestructible immortal life and of a joy immense and inexpressible.... So great, so splendid is this experience, that it may be said that all minor questions and doubts fall away in face of it; and certain it is that in thousands and thousands of cases the fact of its having come even once to a man has completely revolutionized his subsequent life and outlook on the world.

Edward Carpenter, *The Drama of Love and Death*, New York & London: Mitchell Kennerley, 1912, pp 79-80.

*This statement begins to describe the consciousness of the Flourishing Earth. The repost and the navigation of who have found that their ‘I’, their real self, pervades the universe and all other beings, will form the contents of the flourishingearth.org.*

There is an inner light, an inner peace, that can be found. There is an awakening of your mind possible that will indeed make ordinary consciousness seem like a state of sleep. It will make you more, not less, effective in the ordinary world, and allow you to give more genuine attention, care, and compassion to others.

Charles Tart, *Waking Up: Overcoming the Obstacles to Human Potential*, Boston: Shambhala, 1986, p. xvi.

### Drop off body and mind.

Rujing to Dogen. “Dropping Off Body and Mind”, Dharma Discourse by John Daido Looi, Roshi. Featured in *Mountain Record* 21.1, Fall 2002. <http://www.mro.org/zmm/teachings/daido/teisho29.php>.

Retrieved 9/17/2006.

From the power that binds all, none is free,            Von der Gewalt, die alle Wesen bindet,  
but one who wins self mastery.                            Befreit der Mensch sich, der sich überwindet.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Die Geheimnisse: Ein Fragment”, lines 191-192.

If you want to examine every thought, if you really want to see the content of it, then you will find that your thoughts slow down and you can watch them. This slowing down of thinking and the examining of every thought is the process of meditation; and if you go into it you will find that, by being aware of every thought, your mind – which is now a vast storehouse of restless thoughts all battling against each other – becomes very quiet, completely still. There is then no urge, no compulsion, no fear in any form; and, in this stillness, that which is true comes into being. There is no ‘you’ who experiences truth, but the mind being still, truth comes into it....

If your mind is not crowded, if it has space, from that space there is silence, and from that silence everything else comes. For then you can listen, you can pay attention without resistance. That is why it is very important to have space in the mind.

Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Think on These Things*.

*“In this stillness, that which is true comes into being.” It is this truth that the flourishingearth.org reports.*

On the last page of *The Zen Experience*, Thomas Hoover writes

One of the major insights of Zen is that the world should be perceived directly, not as an array of embodied names.... This insistence on direct perception is one of the greatest gifts of Zen. No other major system of thought champions this insight so clearly and forthrightly. Zen would have our perception of the world, indeed our very thoughts, be nonverbal. By experiencing nature directly, and by thinking in pure ideas rather than with “internalized speech,” we can immeasurably enrich our existence. The dawn, the flower, the breeze are now experienced more exquisitely – in their full reality. Zen worked hard to

debunk the mysterious power we mistakenly ascribe to names and concepts, since the Zen masters knew these serve only to separate us from life. Shutting off the constant babble in our head is difficult, but the richness of experience and imagery that emerges is astounding. It is as though a screen between us and our surroundings has suddenly dropped away, putting us in touch with the universe.

Thomas Hoover, 1980, *The Zen Experience*, New York: New American Library. Available online at [www.thomashoover.info](http://www.thomashoover.info).

At the very beginning of the book, Hoover wrote

Zen is based on the recognition of two incompatible types of thought: rational and intuitive. Rationality employs language, logic, reason. Its precepts can be taught. Intuitive knowledge, however, is different. It lurks embedded in our consciousness, beyond words. ... [The] end is an intuitive realization of a single great insight – that we and the world around are one, both part of larger encompassing absolute. Our rational intellect merely obscures this truth, and consequently we must shut it off, if only for a moment. Rationality constrains our mind; intuition releases it.

*Of course this intuitive realization is not by any means the end, but is this single great insight made flesh.*

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The reason random thoughts slip in and clutter awareness is that we are not focused, not paying attention. There is no mystery about it, and the idea that “The brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile,” as Pierre Cabanis wrote, is a reasonable observation – in regard to a brain untrained. Is it not possible to eliminate random, unnecessary thoughts and examine what remains? There is no reason that humans should not become far, far more aware than they generally are. Why are humans not trained in the use of their mental abilities?

I find it astonishing that the training of attention has been so marginalized both in modern science and in many contemplative traditions.

B. Alan Wallace, 2006. *The Attention Revolution: Unlocking the Power of the Focused Mind*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, p. xii.

*The following quotes were sent by a friend of mine who is not particularly interested in noting the exact source. It is enough for him to have found the thought and its thinker. Perhaps if you have the time, dear reader, you will be able to enlighten me of the exact source.*

When the mind is quiescent and there is no thought process, it is the One.

W.Y. Evans-Wentz, 2011, *Tibetan Yoga and Its Secret Doctrines*, Routledge: London and New York.

To remain without thoughts in the waking state is the greatest worship.

Nisargadatta

As long as you are a beginner, certain formalized meditations or prayers may be good for you. But for a seeker of Reality, there is only one meditation: The rigorous refusal to harbor thoughts. To be free from thoughts is itself meditation.

Nisargadatta

The absence of thought is the unique thought of the absolute.

Shen Hui

Truth lies beyond the reach of thought. Stillness is the sole requisite for realization.

Ramana Maharshi

Penetrate within yourself to the place where there is no longer any thought, and take care that no thought arises there. There, where there is nothing... fullness. There, where nothing is seen... the vision of being. There, where nothing else appears... the appearance of the self.

Swami Gnanananda

Just stop thinking for a second and see what remains.  
Bentinho Massaro

The light reveals itself in the measure to which the intellect is purged of all concepts.  
Philokalia

Let thoughts and ideas decrease, close the senses, make the mind steady, let it cease vibrating, let it become still, and behold!  
Swami Nikhilananda

The essence of the warrior's way could be expressed in one short sentence: Stop thoughts, as often as possible, for as long as possible.

Robert DeRopp

*And when we get good at this, something happens.*

*Please send your experiences of what happens when thoughts are stopped **long enough** so that you become aware of being the context far greater than the separate, individual organism. When you have made contact with that greater, true, complete self. Email [transletix@hotmail.com](mailto:transletix@hotmail.com)  
Perhaps we can grant an award to those best able to communicate this warrior's experience.*