



“I Can’t Hear Myself Think!”

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Did you ever hear yourself blurt out something like that? That string of words usually issues forth in frustration when there is a lot of noise in the room and we are trying to concentrate. It means something like “I can’t think straight, I can’t focus. Will you all please pipe down?!”

But when we sit down to meditate and drop into some degree of stillness, it is amazing ... sometimes all there is is hearing yourself think, and it can be louder and more disturbing and distracting than any external noise! The roar of our thinking can be deafening and seemingly endless. It can prevent any kind of stable focus or concentration. It also completely obscures the underlying peace and silence that are to be found right beneath this tumult in the mind once the mind has learned or trained itself to settle down and be still, or stiller.

If we begin to listen to the stream of thought as thought, to attend to thoughts as events in the field of awareness, as we do when we undertake to cultivate mindfulness through formal meditation practice, as described in Book 2 of this series, *Falling Awake*, and if we develop a certain calmness and quiet outwardly, we can actually come to observe our thinking much more clearly. We are able to listen to it, attend to it, recognize each thought as just that, a thought

rather than the truth, and thus come to see exactly what is on our minds, and how much of it is just mental noise. Once we know that, intimately, up-close and personal, we can begin to develop new ways of relating to it.

We may be shocked at what we discover, at how much of our thinking is chaotic and yet at the same time severely narrow and repetitive, shaped so much by our history and habits. Yet it is probably better to know this via firsthand experience than not to know it. When unattended, our thinking runs our lives without our even knowing it. Attended in awareness, we have a chance not only to know ourselves better, and see what is on our minds, but also to hold our thoughts differently, so they no longer rule our lives. In this way, we can taste some very real moments of freedom that do not depend entirely on inner or outer conditions of calmness, or the limited stories we tell ourselves, which may even be true as far as they go, but often just don’t go very far compared to what might be if we were to tap into the larger dimensions of being available to us when we approach and befriend our own mind.

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