

## EVERYDAY MEDITATION

### Verbal Thinking

*Cogito Ergo Sum...* There are thoughts so there must be a mind.

I thereby concluded that I was a substance, of which the whole essence or nature consists in thinking, and which, in order to exist, needs no place and depends on no material thing; so that this “I,” that is to say, the mind, by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body.

– Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method*

Children are often envied for their supposed imaginations, but the truth is that adults imagine things far more often than children do. Most adults...wander the world deliberately blind, living only inside their heads, in their fantasies, in their memories and worries, oblivious to the present, only aware of the past or future...Imagination can be a beautiful thing, but it’s also a trap. The wisest people are those who use their imaginations when they are children, and then learn to see the actual as adults.

– Dara Horn, *The World to Come*

Ours is a culture based on excess, on overproduction; the result is a steady loss of sharpness in our sensory experience. All the conditions of modern life – its material plenitude, its sheer crowdedness – conjoin to dull our sensory faculties.

– Susan Sontag

---

### TALK SPACE (Shinzen Young)

For most people, the verbal component of the thinking process involves spatial areas in and around the head and ears. Internal talk might be perceived in specific areas (toward the back of the head, behind the ears, etc.) or it might be observed as occurring vaguely throughout the head area in general. Listen for internal talk activity. Place your attention in the area where you are aware of words and sentences happening.

### Types Internal Talk

At any given moment, verbal thinking activity will fall into one of these possibilities:

1. Clear words – This activity includes words, phrases, or sentences you could repeat out loud. The voice might be your own, the voice of another, or your voice in conversation with another. Song lyrics and melodies are included in this category.
2. Subtle activity – You are aware of some vague activity and you might even be aware of themes. The gears are turning, but you aren’t able to make out repeatable words. You might be aware of a continuous flowing/buzzing/vibrating quality. This category also includes internal mimicry (tic, toc, tic, toc) or acoustic memories such as the sound of rain.
3. Clear words and subtle activity at the same time
4. Complete silence

---

**Daron Larson**  
[daronlarson@yahoo.com](mailto:daronlarson@yahoo.com)  
[www.daronlarson.com](http://www.daronlarson.com)

## **EXERCISES**

### **Listening to sounds with detachment**

1. Settle into your posture.
2. The domain is external sound. Decide if you want to focus on pure sounds or on the images, internal talk, and feelings which the sounds evoke.
3. Position your awareness on the ambient sounds occurring around you. Where there is no sound, focus on the silence.
4. Spend a few minutes focusing your awareness in specific directions:
  - a. Sounds on your right
  - b. Sounds on your left
  - c. Sounds in front of you
  - d. Sounds behind you
  - e. Sounds above you
  - f. Sounds below you
  - g. Sounds occurring in all six directions.
5. You can repeat this sequence as many times as you'd like. You can also let your attention move in each of the directions in rhythm with your breathing cycle.
6. Whenever you become aware that your attention has wandered from the object of meditation you have chosen, gently bring it back.

This technique is readily adaptable to a number of regular activities including walking, running (outside or on a treadmill), waiting, during a boring meeting, in a library, in church, when the content of a television program is of no interest to you, when the content of a television program agitates you (I have to admit that this is one of the one of the most challenging situations for me and I think it will take a lot of practice to even begin to not get drawn in and upset by certain types of programs).

### **Echoing internal talk**

1. Settle into your posture.
2. The domain you will be working in is the verbal aspect of thinking.
3. Position your attention in and around your head and ears, listening for the sounds of your internal talk.
4. Each time you become aware that you have just had a thought in words, mentally repeat the sentence or phrase. You may repeat it just once or several times. It is up to you. You will be intentionally echoing the conscious part of your spontaneous verbal thinking process. You can either echo the words in the same intonation you heard them or in an intentionally matter-of-fact, impersonal voice.

Try to bring the following characteristics to the echoing:

- *Pauses*. Pause after each syllable. During the pauses, focus on any subtle activity or silence that may be present. If there is competing talk within the pauses, try to let it be in the background.
- *Sound-ness*. The first time you heard the thought you listened to its meaning. This time, listen to its sound. Try to listen to the sounds that make up each syllable (a shift from “sentence content” to “sonic contour”).
- *Massage*. The idea here is to listen to the echoing of your internal talk as though it were massaging Talk Space. Using this technique can lead to a pleasant experience even though the content of the thought itself is negative.
- *Slowness and gentleness*. It may be useful to slow down each syllable and to echo in a gentle internal voice.

5. What to do if...

- ...you experience a lot of competing talk or internal comments about the process of echoing. → Let the competing talk do its thing, but try to let it be in the background. You don't need to track and echo the competing thoughts.
- ...you forget what you heard or miss phrases and sentences. → That's fine. Echo the next instance that you notice.
- ...you get emotional feelings in reaction to the process. → This is to be expected. Let the feelings be in the background. React to them with equanimity.
- ...clear talk ceases. → Monitor the level of any subtle activity or listen to (enjoy) the internal silence.
- ...you find it difficult to listen to talk as sound. → Experiment with generating a sound by repeating a syllable (la, oh, om, etc.) to sensitize you to what it is like to listen to internal sound, then return to the echoing and try to listen to it in this same way.
- ...you find it utterly impossible to do the exercise. → This is usually caused by having a lot of feelings which are associated with the thinking. If you want, you can switch over to observing the experience of the feelings in the body for a while and then return to the echoing technique.

6. When the interval of time you have chosen is over, drop the echoing for a while and monitor the general activation level of internal talk while continuing to rest your attention in Talk Space. You may notice some of the following effects.

- There is more silence.
- Clear talk seems to have slowed down and has become easier to observe.
- It feels as if there is more distance between you and the talk. You feel less involved in the content.
- You can hear spontaneous verbal thinking more in terms of its sound qualities.
- You become more aware of the subtle levels of activity that underlie conscious thought.

## Noting Internal Talk Associate with the Thinking Process (Shinzen Young)

1. **Settle in.** The first thing to observe when you begin a formal meditation practice is the sense of your body physically settling into your posture. Lengthen the spine as you inhale, and observe any sensations associated with relaxation on as you exhale. Take a couple of minutes to enjoy this. Establish a balance between a state of alertness and repose.
2. **Chose a domain.** The sensory domains include physical-type sensations in the body, emotional-type sensations in the body, mental images, and internal conversations.

In this technique we will be focusing on internal talk. We will refer to this area as Talk Space. Talk Space *tends* to be located in and around the head and ears.

3. **Position your attention.** Position your attention in Talk Space. Take a minute to feel satisfied that you are well positioned in this domain.
4. **Start noting.** The Basic States to note in Image Space are Image and Blank.

### Talk

Talk can be clearly active (words, phrases, sentences you could repeat) or subtly active (vague stirring, buzzing, forming, churning, grinding).

The label for activity in Talk Space is “Talk.”

### Quiet

No conscious awareness of any verbal component in thought.

The label for restful states in Image Space is “Quiet.”

5. **Establish a rhythm.** Focus on that state for a few seconds, letting your attention soak into it to the best of your ability. After a few seconds, note again, either the same state or a different one.
6. **What doesn't matter?** It doesn't matter whether you mostly note activity or mostly note rest or cover them both relatively equally. It doesn't matter whether you are always noting the same words, phrases, and sentences or if the content is continually changing.
7. **What does matter?** Stay in Talk Space. If you get pulled into Touch, Feel, Sight, Image or Sound Space, gently return to Talk Space. When you note a restful state, let it pull you into equanimity and consistently concentrate on that flavor of rest. When you notice an active state, bring equanimity to it and let your awareness soak into it.

## Friendship Meditation (from Sharon Salzberg)

Another strategy for extending the noblest of human feelings toward others is to call up the figures and symbols which for you evoke these impulses. They might be words or images associated with a religious or spiritual tradition or which merely embody in some personal way your deepest values. I have experimented with different such catalysts over time with varying degrees of success and encourage you to bring curiosity to this exercise, aiming to stay within the realm of what feels most natural and comfortable for you.

May all be free from sorrow and the causes of sorrow,  
May all never be separated from the sacred happiness which is sorrowless.

The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

O'seh shalom beem-romav, hoo ya'ah-seh shalom aleynu v'al kol Yisrael, ve'imru amen. (Grant abundant peace and life to us and to all Israel, and let us say, Amen.)

Once you have established a sense of warmth and compassion, extend these feelings toward your teachers, mentors, family members, friends and loved ones, neutral people, and difficult people. Then try using any expansive quality you discover during this process to broadcast these feelings more broadly. A strategy I've found useful for doing this is to extend these feelings for pairs of opposites.

Men / Women	Soldiers / Protestors	Liberals / Conservatives
Young / Old	Leaders / Followers	Urban / Suburban
Rich / Poor	Bosses / Employees	Vegetarians / Omnivores
Famous / Unknown	Doctors / Patients	Optimists / Cynics
Lonely / Connected	Humans / Animals	The dying / Newborns

## HOMEWORK

1. Fifteen to thirty minutes of formal practice each day using the technique of your choice.
2. Give one activity each day your full attention.
3. STOP\* when you are waiting (for a web page to load, for an email to open, for your turn in line, for the time to arrive when you can go home).
  - Stop.
  - Take a minute to make contact with Talk Space.
  - Observe the internal talk or internal quiet. Notice if it changes from one to the other without regarding the specific content.
  - Proceed.