

Transcribed from a sitting with Emily Carson
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Know Your Mind

Still in the mind leads to still in the heart. Action follows thought like a translation; the text produces its outcome in behavior and in felt experience. Stillness, then, begins in the mind, as does kindness and contentment. True action, then, proceeds from truth in thought. Things understood become things acted well. You have not begun at the real starting point. You cannot change without beginning in the mind. Even your own environment is a product of that mind—everything you perceive proceeds from it, everything you know becomes something you perceive. And so begin at the beginning. Begin with the quality and content of your thought, the quality and content of your mind. Feel first the mechanism itself. Is it agitated? Does it run smoothly? Is it over-excited? Is it afraid? Is the mechanism itself spacious, or is it not? Is it wound or is it relaxed? And does it talk incessantly or is it sometimes quiet? And then look closely, calmly, at the thinking generated in that space you perceive as your own mind. What is it convinced of? What is its imperative? What is it saying to you? The quality and nature of your commentary matters to your experience; it translates into something felt, something palpable. Is your thinking like a whisper, or is it like screaming? Do you talk in your mind about others or is it mostly about yourself? And what do you say? What do you tell yourself over and over again, what is your refrain? And what is the pitch of your thinking? What is the tenor of your ramblings? Notice their quality; sometimes the quality of thought is more illuminating than its content. Do you say everything in a frightened way? Then find what you are frightened of. Does everything come tumbling out at such speed that one thought is hardly discernable from the next? Then slow down. Don't let your mind undermine your attempts to know yourself. Know your mind and you then are in charge. Know your thinking and know then the source of your own experience, the filter for all your perceptions, the subtext

that informs your beliefs even when you don't know you have them. Find the quality and content of your mind. Find it, and don't forget.

Questions and Answers

Q: I'm just beginning to learn about the soldier in me. I've come across some pretty strong memories of being on the battlefield. At first I was quite resistant, but I'm becoming more curious about this tough, powerful, and relentless one. I'd like to see if you can help shed some light and understanding on this place in me.

No soldier comes home to a memory of kindness. War leaves a certain legacy and you will never look back upon it and find in it the things you love, the things you wish for, perhaps even the things you went to war over. It is a memory of brokenness. Even for the victor, the battle is bloody and everyone is shattered. The desolation, the degree of loss, the magnitude of the bloodshed lead many soldiers into a position of forgetting. It's a memory people don't want. We want memories of peaceful times, of sunlit times, of tenderness and precious things. And so the soldier wants to forget even himself, even the person he knows he became in the midst of that devastation. "That can't be me," we tell ourselves. "That is too much for anyone to bear." But it was you and you did witness it and you became what you believed you must be in the face of what you saw there; you became a soldier. But no one is a soldier intrinsically. We learn to fight because we believe we must, not because the imperative is real. We learn to do whatever will enable us to live. That is the great mission of every soldier in every war: to live. And so you became someone you wish you were not. But forgetting the war will not help you. You must look, finally, at what was happening all around you; and remember, finally, the person standing in the midst of that brokenness. You must remember yourself while keeping your eyes open to the horror, and remember that while you may fight to survive in a battle like that one, no fighting erases the memory. *That* battle can't be won; that battle ends only with acceptance, tolerance, and the willingness to have the memory and to have the truth be known.

Q: So along the lines of your opening, I've been observing my mind for the last two or three months...to just figure out what's going on with me because I've been vibrating at a really low pitch and some old behaviors are back. I decided to get out of my head and just drop into my second chakra and see if I can get something new going, create something new,...and it seemed to help, just doing that; my attitude brightened up and I started feeling creative and attracting people again. I'm wondering what I need to hear now to sort of guide me and get some perspective....find out what's up.

What do you hear in your mind when you listen?

I hear me judging people like crazy and just singing a sad old song. Without being specific...

Be a little bit specific.

I project the worst-case scenarios and I'm pretty consistent about that...having to do with relationships. I get really laser-focused.

What does usually the worst case scenario consist of, in broad terms?

Getting feedback, either verbal or nonverbal, that is ambiguous and/or shoving me away.

Your mind runs your outlook because there is something you are deathly afraid of. It persists despite your good attempts to keep it in check because, in fact, the consequence you are always fearing has you under its sway, and so the mind fantasizing that consequence is always in charge of you. There is something to you unbearable about the kind of rejection and separateness you imagine might happen at any time, and it is the fear of that consequence that you must investigate if you are to stand any chance of quieting your mind and brightening your perspective fundamentally. There is a kind of cavern, a dark place you feel you are lowered into when this abandonment and aloneness seem real to you. But right now your fear of that cavern keeps you doing things which can't bring you lasting contentment, even if they can alleviate your pain for some time. What's down there, T., is something remarkable. What's down there is something you need. And you need it more than anything else this life could ever offer you. When you feel you are being lowered into that place where the sun is eclipsed and the air goes cold and no one can reach you, you need to turn your sights on the darkness and not scramble back towards the light. You could put this off for a long time, T., but you cannot put it off forever, and the longer you stall the more difficult you make your task in the future, the more hopeless you become, the more confused. What's down there is like a kind of magic. It's the deepest form of connection to other living things. It's the most pristine kind of relationship, and it's mind-bogglingly intimate. And you are terrified of it. Please go to that place and find out for yourself what is really there. You will lose all other options eventually. Go now; it would be so much better for you.

Q: I've managed to distract myself less with women in the last four weeks or so, and now there's this ambiguous fear coming up and...desperation. I know it's the right thing, I just want to hear what will help me stay with being alone.

What are you afraid of? Do you know?

I have a sense that it's the aloneness I felt as an adolescent. Just a lot of pain and I don't really want to go there.

What was your experience as an adolescent?

Just really lost. I didn't have a sense that there was anyone I could go to for support. I was just on my own and had to figure it out.

When you were an adolescent you really were alone. You really didn't have anyone to turn to or any meaningful support or any source of wisdom or guidance, and so you had a very real and poignant experience of being isolated and being lost. Right now—and it's important you understand the difference—you have an equally poignant experience of being separate, alone and lost, but you have help; you have very good help, and you have enough. It will be important in the upcoming period of time that you remember what is experience and what is belief, and that you separate how you feel from what you think. You will be tempted to tell yourself that you haven't sufficient resources, but that is not true. The people you have to turn to are sufficient to help you, and your own internal resources, which have grown since the time of your adolescence, are more than adequate to help lead you through this. So please have your experience of being lost, but know in your wisdom and in your sobriety that this time you aren't. This time you can navigate even an experience of being so alone and disoriented. You only get truly lost when you believe things that are lies—and your mind will tell you many of them, so you will have to be careful and you will have to be vigilant. And its favorite one is that you haven't enough support, that you need something which you don't have. Not in any way, conventional or ultimate, is that true for you right now. You are well supported. Everything you're facing can be felt as an experience. And you will know at the end of it that to be alone is no tragedy. In fact, it means nothing. In fact, it means only that you are self-sufficient enough without the intervention of anyone else, and fed even as that separate being you're so afraid to be. And you will know too that you can't get lost like that again because you have something you have never had before,

and that is your own wisdom and your own willingness. Once you have those, they can't leave you, so you will never have to go back to that. Try to feel this experience understanding that.

Q: A couple of weeks ago at the end of [my therapy] group, I was all set to leave and then [my counselor] asked me a question that ended up making...me stay. And I just got really, really angry. What came out of that was I just felt trapped. So I stayed and worked that a little bit with her...[and] I just had a light bulb go off...where I just see how I feel trapped all of the time. I can be having a conversation with someone and it's...innocuous, but I want it to end so I can leave; or it's getting close to the end of a meeting and I feel like I just need to get out of there. It's...this huge feeling. I knew that I was anxious to have things move on, but I didn't know it was this feeling of being trapped. I'm wondering if you can talk about that.

Do you feel it right now?

Yes, I do a little bit.

Can you tell me what it would be like for you if you weren't allowed to leave? What would your experience of that be like?

Well, maybe not so much tonight, but in other situations it's like somebody dragging their fingernails down a blackboard. It almost feels intolerable to me. It almost feels like if I can't leave I get this white noise in my mind where I can't even think about anything but leaving. I had been doing some infant work in group that night, and then the next week I came back and was doing that again, but only in the ways of kind of being trapped, and what came up was just wanting to get out of some place and there not being any help to get me out of it.

You can't know about this in a productive way while you still seek so single-mindedly to be released from your trapped position. See if right now you can let yourself stay trapped and forego your need to flee, and try to feel what starts to happen in your body. I'll come back to you.

[Later:]

So, what I felt...was that there was just no escape, and I was just letting myself be with that. I started to feel really nauseous and then...I couldn't tell if it was either a sexual feeling or something in my first chakra releasing. And then I just felt fine about being here.

This is the exercise I would have you do with this. The problem you have is that there is both a real experience here of being trapped and a simple, mental defense that expresses itself in some

resistance to a thing you call “trapped.” The mental defense you can will to be rid of, and that is how a mental defense must be dealt with. A feeling of nausea is a real experience; it involves sensation and it may, if you try this again, lead to other real experience. But you may find, if you do this again, that much of your distress evaporates when you’re simply willing to part with the defensive thinking imposed by your mind. Both of these are to you about being trapped, but they are entirely different in nature. Seek only how you feel if you don’t run. Do this again the next time it happens. No matter what you find it can only have a positive result; either you learn something about how to control your mind or you learn something about how you actually feel more deeply than you are usually aware of. Just continue this when it happens again.

Q: Since I asked you a question a couple of weeks ago, my response to your answer has been a couple of things. One, I get really upset when you tell me I need to take more risks and go toward my wanting. I just get really upset and scared about that. And there is this other part that is adamant and really strong that says, “I am not going to take risks and go towards my wanting.” And it feels like “I’m not going to get hurt.” So I just notice that I’m unwilling...and certainly a part of me knows that my life really stinks and I’m unwilling to let myself get hurt.... I’m wondering what I need to hear tonight.

You won’t get hurt, M. I really can’t say it any more plainly than that. This isn’t a question of getting hurt. You already were hurt. No matter what you do, no matter how much you risk and how much you don’t, the pain that is already in you will be in you in exactly the same magnitude and with exactly the same ferocity that it is right now. All of your surrender and resistance means nothing to that pain. The event that you hate is long, long over, and the risk you take in this life that you lead now is not the risk of that pain repeating itself, that hurt being done to you again. It’s the risk that you will have to acknowledge what is already real, already alive, already haunting you every day of your life. There is no danger in the risks you’re being asked to take, and there is no danger in not taking them. The fact is that nothing is happening right now. You believe that you actually stave off danger with your strategy of self-control and self-denial. But as there is no danger to stave off; you gain nothing. You’re like someone protecting the fortress against an enemy that is already inside. You stand guard at the gate and exhaust yourself and refuse your own living, but the pain crept past your guard a long time ago and it’s flourishing within. And so I say, stop waving your sword at an imaginary enemy. Stop wearing your armor when there is nobody there to strike at you. Leave your post and go inside where the thing that

already happened waits for you. That is all I can say to you. You defend against no danger; you risk nothing at all. There is nothing reasonable left to do except to return to the pain that is already there, to leave your guard and to know the truth.

Q: My question is also about unwillingness. I have been just unwilling to kind of do what I know are next steps for myself. So my recent work has been to try and be sober about my resistance and look at the fact that I'm saying no and to not pretend I'm doing something when I'm not. So, I feel like I've gotten to this point where I'll do something part of the way, but I'm not going all the way. Some of that has to do with just expressing my full intensity with people. Like recently my mom was visiting and I really needed to say things to her that I've never said before...,but also to say them with the intensity with which I felt them. And I just wouldn't do it. So, I guess my question is about resistance and I guess if there is something else that I need to be doing in relationship to that resistance.

Why do you do this kind of work with yourself?

I think I started doing it out of this belief that I could make myself better...,sort of a self-improvement plan. And also out of a desire to not be in pain. Over time I do have a different awareness of the point of it; I have experienced feeling more open and feeling more in touch with what's really true. But sometimes I wonder what I'm doing, like why am I coming to group if I'm not willing to do what I know I need to do? It's like there's a part of me that is unconvinced.

You mean unconvinced that doing this work is useful?

Yes.

And what about the part of you that still shows up in group? What motivates that part of you?

It's the part of me that has experienced a quiet mind, that has had an experience of a connection with something bigger. Also, I think it's a part of me that is motivated by the truth...,that really loves the truth.

There's really only one ultimate answer to the problem of resistance and that is in asking oneself the question, "What do I want?" You do and you must return to that question over and over again, for eons, usually; so many times, in fact, that the pursuit of what you want and the curiosity about that pervades your life even when you're not conscious of it. The search for what you want is already running you, regardless of whether you are aware of it. To be, instead, poignantly conscious of your own desire, your fundamental desire, and then notice the way in which you attempt to fulfill that desire is the only way to overturn your own resistance.

Resistance is ultimately confusion; it always is. You believe you are gaining something that you want and need by refusing to take the steps that some part of you knows you must take, but if you did not believe very deeply that your own behaviors and choices were serving you, you would change them instantly. And so I say, ask yourself what you want and be willing to know that, both in the particulars of your desire and in its essence. What is the quality of the things you want? What is their nature? What is it about those things that makes you so hungry for them? And then look very soberly at whether or not you are getting what you feel you want. And I mean this very literally. I do not expect your list of wants to stop at God and truth. If you want to be taken care of, admit that. If you want to be comfortable in a certain kind of way, you need to know that. If you want material things or specialness or human dignity, you need to know that. But when you feel what you want, don't stop there. Try to feel what about those things matters to you. And then ask yourself if you are getting what you long for. It is really reason that leads us on a better path. It is because the road we are on dead ends that we choose a different one. It dead ends into nonsense, we realize it is not productive—that is how resistance changes and that is how it will change in you. Try this, not just as a method to help you where you're at right now, but as something you remember to do throughout your life. Because what more important question could there be than, "What do I really want, and am I really getting it?"

Q: I had a situation come up about a week or two ago where the possibility of leaving H.,...or losing him, I should say, was real enough that I could feel into that. And I went to a really crazy place.... The thing that I feel shocked about is that I've been alone, I've been without family,...without a partner before, but this was really bad. I feel like I went to a place where it's worse than being alone because I have all these dreams built up now...,something about dreaming with somebody, so it feels like not just being alone, but having those dreams shattered.... The other extreme is that I am...really happy, and I feel like the possibility of having a family with him is a reality. So there is just part of me that is soaring with joy...and then the opposite experience of "Oh my God, this is what could happen if it all falls apart." I'm not sure how to reconcile the two....

Is the danger of losing him still real at all right now?

Right now it doesn't feel real. It was very, very real when I went into it, but at this moment it doesn't feel real.

Has the circumstance which made it possible before changed such that it's not possible now?

No.

So that means, in reality, it still could happen?

Yes. It could still happen, but...and maybe it's false security,...the fact that he's expressed wanting to have a child with me makes me feel like there's enough sureness and commitment that he wouldn't leave.

You will be on the end of this kite's tail for a long time if you insist on basing your happiness on things which are so transient. Of course there is joy in this; there is joy when things go well, and there is an equal proportion of devastation when it looks like they will fall apart. This is one way to live. There is no guarantee that your relationship will remain intact—there just can't be, no matter what he said, no matter how you feel. These things are always precarious; people are mutable and they are fragile. And those two things cannot be overcome by any kind of a commitment; you cannot promise someone that you will not be mutable and fragile. And so you are blown about in this wind, and sometimes it is quite exhilarating and sometimes it is tragic. You have never felt this kind of risk before. You have never faced the kind of consequence you would be facing by learning how to be separated from the kind of bond you want with this person. You have never learned to lose what you believe you would be losing if you were to lose him. The stakes have never seemed so high. Being alone has never meant to you what it would mean now, and so you have never really had the chance to face what you can face now. You will continue to try for some stability and some permanence in your arrangement. I do not blame you for trying, but please watch what happens when you live tethered to someone else's whim, someone else's impermanence. You cannot expect a stable kind of joy or an enduring peacefulness, because that is not the nature of the thing you have decided to bond to. When you are tired of all the ups and downs, you may look for something stronger to root yourself to, but in the meantime this is what you want. And you will try for it. And it is all you can do—it is all you need to do.

The Sound of Rain is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the work of Emily Carson and making the wisdom that comes through her available to an expanding audience. For more information, visit us on-line at www.soundofrain.org.