**Concentration, awareness and distraction**

Zen is learning to think what you want to think, so you can do what you want to do and – in the longer term – so you can feel what you want to feel.

A fundamental difference between humans and animals is our ability to think not only reactively but also proactively. This means thinking purposefully, determining consciously what we want to think.

My guess is that most people think reactively ca 95 percent of the time, and proactively only 5 percent of the time. The latter only works when it is combined with a conscious choice for an action… We do decide to turn on the tv, but rarely decide to really only watch for only 1 or 2 hours. We think: let’s see what’s on the tele… and keep on ‘watching’. And there’s our own contribution to the situation out of the window!

It’s a challenge and an art, to keep our attention focussed time and time again on that for which we have chosen in complete freedom.

What keeps us most from what we want to think: external conditions or our own inner movements? .... Only a few will have the self-knowledge to say that they have let themselves be distracted, if other people or circumstances are involved. We’re more easily inclined to see others as the source of all distraction.

When we have may unprocessed experiences, whether positive or negative, we are prone to issues like sleeping disorders and concentration problems.

That’s why the most important ‘pillar of zen’ is: do what you are doing with utmost awareness. When we do two things at the same time, we do both things only 50%, and we also enjoy them for only 50%. For example, when reading, just read; don’t also turn on the radio.

Many people are no longer used to doing one thing at the time. In itself, there is nothing wrong with multitasking, and sometimes you cannot escape it. Moments of singletasking usually give the strongest feelings of wellbeing.

We will discover that meditating is a continous play between counting and being distracted. ...It is often said or thought that during meditation, we should not think of anything, and that you’re only really meditating when you are thinking of nothing. This is utter nonsense and perhaps even the biggest misunderstanding about meditation to be encountered.

*Practice*: turn a daily, relatively simple, activity into a real zen-practice. Do this one thing every day with your utmost and undivided attention and love! (think of: having breakfast, brushing your teeth, cutting vegetables). Reflect afterwards on how it felt and what thoughts you noticed coming up.