

The Four Types of Thinking

A Journey from Chaos to Clarity

by Michael Adamedes, adapted from a talk given by Osho on 13th November 1973

The human mind is perhaps the most complex and fascinating instrument we possess, yet paradoxically, it is also the source of our greatest suffering and our most profound liberation. In the depths of ancient wisdom and modern therapeutic practice lies a profound understanding: there are distinct stages through which human consciousness can evolve, from the chaotic patterns of everyday thinking to the transcendent state of pure awareness. This extraordinary journey represents not merely intellectual concepts, but practical stages of transformation that can revolutionize how we experience life itself.

The Great Paradox of Mind

Life presents us with a fundamental paradox: it is what we know that has enabled us to progress, and simultaneously, it is what we know that limits us from progressing further. This paradox lies at the heart of all human suffering and all human potential. The thoughts and behaviours that once served us can become the very prison walls that confine us, creating patterns so deeply embedded that they operate below the threshold of conscious awareness.

The Architecture of Consciousness

Understanding the four types of thinking requires us to first recognize that consciousness itself operates on multiple levels. From the everyday mind trapped in cultural conditioning to the awakened awareness that transcends all limitations, we journey through distinct stages of mental evolution. Each stage represents not just a different way of thinking, but an entirely different relationship with reality itself.

The Four Types of Thinking

1. Association: The Unconscious Habit



Association represents the baseline state of human consciousness—the undirected, vague, and chaotic flow of thoughts that characterizes most people's mental experience. This is not true thinking but rather what Freudians call association: one thought mechanically leading to another without any conscious direction or purpose. The mind becomes like a leaf blown by the wind, moving in whatever direction the strongest mental current takes it.

In this state, thinking is undirected, vague, and ultimately leads nowhere meaningful. It is the realm of mental chatter, worry cycles, daydreaming, and the endless stream of consciousness that flows through our awareness without our conscious participation. One thought triggers another through association—a word reminds us of an experience, which reminds us of a person, which triggers an emotion, which leads to a memory, and so on in an endless chain of mechanical responses.

2. Contemplation: The Power of Directed Inquiry



Contemplation represents a step up from association—it is thinking that moves in one direction, guided by conscious intention and focused purpose. When a scientist works on a problem, a mathematician explores a theorem, or a poet contemplates a flower, they have entered the realm of contemplation. The mind becomes like a skilled detective, following clues and connections with methodical precision. In contemplation, the whole world is bracketed out except for the object of inquiry. Many things from side routes will attract, but the contemplative mind does not allow itself to be distracted. It moves in one line, directed and purposeful.

The Foundation of Science and Logic

Science itself is based on contemplation. Any logical thinking is contemplative thinking, it is thought that is directed, guided, and purposeful. While ordinary associative thinking is absurd and chaotic, contemplation is logical, rational, and progressive. It builds upon itself, creating new understanding through sustained inquiry.

This is the mind of the researcher, the philosopher, the artist who has learned to harness the power of directed attention. It is still thinking, but it is thinking with purpose, direction, and conscious intention.

The Therapeutic Perspective: Conscious Reflection

From a therapeutic standpoint, contemplation represents the beginning of conscious reflection and self-awareness. It is the stage where the person begins to actively engage with their patterns rather than being passively carried along by them. Through contemplation, we begin to understand the origins of our psychological conditioning and the mechanisms by which our patterns operate.

This is where therapeutic dialogue becomes most powerful. Through guided inquiry and conscious reflection, people can begin to explore the deeper layers of their psyche, understanding not just what their patterns are, but why they exist and how they can be transformed.

Dysfunctional Pattern Clearing operates at this level of contemplation, using directed inquiry and conscious reflection to explore and understand the psychological patterns that limit us. This work involves systematic investigation of beliefs, emotions, and behaviours through sustained attention and purposeful exploration.

3. Concentration: The Breakthrough Point



Concentration represents another step in the evolution of consciousness. It is not thinking at all, but rather the state of being completely focused at one point, not allowing the mind to move in any direction. If association is like a mind moving as a madman, and contemplation is like a madman being led and directed, then concentration is like stopping all movement entirely and focusing all energy at a single point.

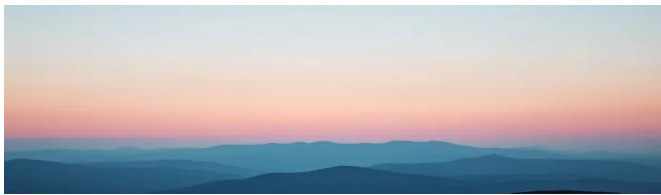
In ordinary thinking, the mind is allowed to move anywhere. In contemplation, it is allowed to move only in one direction. In concentration, it is not allowed to move at all—it is only allowed to be at one point. The whole energy, the whole movement stops and sticks to one point with laser-like precision.

The Yogic Approach to Mind

Yoga is fundamentally concerned with concentration. While the ordinary mind engages in undirected thinking and the scientific mind employs directed thinking, the yogic mind has its thinking focused and fixed at one point with no movement allowed. This is the disciplined mind that has learned to gather all its scattered energy into a single, powerful focus.

This concentrated state is where breakthroughs occur. It is the point where the accumulated energy of focused attention reaches a critical mass, creating the conditions for transformation that would be impossible in the scattered states of association or even the directed state of contemplation.

4. Meditation: The State of Pure Awareness



Meditation represents the highest possibility of human consciousness—the state of pure awareness where even the focused attention of concentration is transcended. In ordinary thinking, the mind is allowed to move anywhere. In contemplation, it is allowed to move only in one direction. In concentration, it is not allowed to move even in one direction but is focused on one point. In meditation, mind is not allowed at all.

This is the state that cannot be grasped by the mind because mind itself is not present. Up to concentration, the mind has a reach, an approach - it can understand what is happening. But meditation is beyond the mind's capacity to understand because meditation is the absence of mind itself.

The Paradox of Pure Awareness

Meditation is pure awareness—not even concentration is allowed. Mind itself is not allowed to be! This is why meditation cannot be grasped by the mind. In concentration, the mind is allowed to be at one point. In meditation, even that point is taken away. It is pure awareness without content, consciousness without object, being without doing.

This is not a state of unconsciousness or sleep, but rather a state of super-consciousness where awareness is present but mental activity has completely ceased. It is the state of pure witnessing, where one is fully aware but no longer identified with the content of consciousness.

Meditation is actually beyond therapy; it represents the ultimate integration where the person is completely free from thinking. This is the state of inner peace, it is not something that can be achieved through effort, but rather something that emerges naturally when all the layers of psychological conditioning have been cleared.

Practical Exercises: From Limitation to Liberation

The journey from association to meditation is not merely intellectual but deeply experiential. Each stage represents a fundamental shift in how we relate to our own consciousness and to life itself. Understanding this progression helps us recognize where we are in our development and what the next step might be.

Association (Recognition)

Awareness Practice: Spend 10 minutes daily simply observing your thoughts without judgment. Notice how one thought leads to another through association.

Pattern Recognition: Keep a journal of recurring thoughts and emotional patterns. Look for themes and connections.

Mindful Observation: Practice being the witness of your mental activity rather than being identified with it.

Contemplation (Understanding)

Directed Inquiry: Choose a specific life pattern or challenge and spend 20 minutes exploring it through focused questioning.

Therapeutic Dialogue: Engage in conscious conversation with a therapist or trusted friend about your patterns and their origins.

Systematic Investigation: Apply the scientific method to your own psychological patterns—observe, hypothesize, test, and refine your understanding.

Concentration (Focus)

One-pointed Focus: Practice maintaining complete attention on a single point without any mental movement.

Absorption Practice: Develop the ability to become completely absorbed in a single object or awareness.

Stillness Meditation: Cultivate states of complete mental stillness and one-pointed focus.

Meditation (Stillness)

Silent Sitting: Practice periods of sitting in complete stillness without any mental activity.

Pure Awareness Practice: Rest in awareness itself without focusing on any particular object.

Integration Practice: Maintain meditative awareness while engaged in daily activities.

Conclusion: The Extraordinary Journey

The four types of thinking—association, contemplation, concentration, and meditation—represent more than categories of mental activity. They are stages in the greatest journey any human being can undertake: the journey from unconsciousness to consciousness, from limitation to freedom, from suffering to peace. This journey is not easy, but it is extraordinarily rewarding. It requires courage to face our conditioning, patience to work through our patterns, and persistence to continue when the path seems difficult. Yet the rewards are beyond measure: the freedom to live authentically, the peace that comes from inner alignment, and the joy of expressing our true nature.

In this extraordinary journey, we discover that we are not separate individuals struggling against an indifferent universe, but expressions of the one consciousness that is the foundation of all existence. We are not trying to achieve something we lack, but to remember something we have temporarily forgotten; that we are, in our deepest essence, the very awareness that is reading these words, the consciousness that is having this experience, the love that connects all things.

About Osho, also known as Rajneesh, was one of the clearest minds of the 20th century. A disrupter of the conventional forms of religion, education, medicine, psychology and politics he was much misunderstood and maligned. In time, much of his mentoring and teaching will be appreciated as providing some of the most effective methodologies for the transformation of the conditioned mind and entering the state of meditation.

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