

Auto Think

The word “science” can be used to denote two different but related things:

- a certain body of acquired knowledge—scientific theories
- a certain way of acquiring knowledge—scientific methods

The Sanskrit word [prajñā](#), usually translated as wisdom, has a similar double denotation. It refers to:

- a body of teachings. Examples of wisdom teachings include things like: impermanence, emptiness, no self, the nature of suffering, the nature of oneness, the primordial perfection of the senses, the natural link between nothingness, oneness, and unconditional love....
- a way of knowing, i.e., a certain mode of operation in a human mind that acts as a kind of spiritual intelligence faculty. This mode of knowing might be referred to as the wisdom faculty, the wisdom function, or wisdom activity. (It’s also sometimes referred to as intuitive knowledge; but be careful of the word “intuitive”; that word can mean different and even opposite things depending on context).

The two sides of wisdom are symbolized in the attributes of the bodhisattva [Manjushri](#): in one hand he holds a book, symbolizing the content of wisdom, and in the other hand he holds a sword, symbolizing the activity of wisdom. You can study the books, but that probably will not be enough; You also have to practice wielding the sword, i.e., systematically cultivate the wisdom function within you.

There are many ways to cultivate the wisdom function. In the early Buddhist formulation, the wisdom function is developed through careful observation of sensory experience. But The wisdom function can also be cultivated by maintaining equanimity with [Don’t Know](#) (as in [koan](#) practice) or by noticing the primordial perfection that’s always there (as in [Dzogchen](#)), or by merging inside and outside through high concentration (as in [Raja yoga](#)).

Recently I’ve been working on a novel strategy for fostering the wisdom function. In this approach, you first become familiar with something that I call a “global unfixated state” in the mind. Then you notice when wisdom thoughts arise spontaneously from that state. I call this technique **Auto Think**.

Auto Think proceeds in four steps. Step 1 is immediately doable by everyone, even a rank beginner, and can often be quite powerful. Step 2 is also doable by anyone but may require some practice. On the other hand, Steps 3 and 4 are relevant only if certain *windows* spontaneously show themselves. If those windows arise, you proceed to those steps. If not, that’s okay; there’s plenty to learn and experience in the first two steps.

Step 1. Note Mind States

Monitor your mental experience moment by moment in terms of the following mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive possibilities. You can do this with or without labels. At any given instant you may have:

1. visual thought only (Label: See);
2. auditory thought only (Label: Hear);
3. visual and auditory thought at the same time (Label: See-Hear); or
4. no conscious thought activity (Label: Rest).

In this particular context, the phrase “mind states” refers to the above four possibilities. In mindfulness practice, one is sometimes asked to “observe thoughts.” But usually rather little systematic instruction is provided for how to do that. Perhaps you’re asked to monitor thought in a general way or to identify categories such as memory, plan, fantasy, judgment, and so forth. Of course, if those approaches work for you, then fine. But in my experience, analyzing thought in terms of its basic sensory composition is more powerful than observing it in terms of general content. By basic sensory composition, I mean the four possibilities mentioned above.

After you’ve gained momentum with noting mind states, if you wish you can move on to Step 2.

Step 2. Cover Mind Space

Evenly spread your attention between image space and talk space, i.e., simultaneously hold the whole of mind space without being particularly concerned regarding details. If you’re aware of details i.e., which of the four above mentioned states is occurring, that’s fine, but if not, that’s okay too. There are no labels involved in this step (or the following two steps of this technique). The main point in this step is simply to keep the awareness simultaneously distributed over as much of mind space as you can. It’s an expansive flavor of concentration.

Mind space = image space + talk space. By image space I mean the locations where you detect visual thoughts. By talk space I mean the place where you hear mental dialogue and monologue.

As you explore evenly covering mind space, you may encounter a characteristic wall or a characteristic window (or neither of those).

- The Wall: You find it very difficult to cover mind space and you get caught a lot in thought. If that happens, no problem. Go back to Step 1.
- The Window: A “global unfixated state” spontaneously arises in the mind. (Even coverage tends to induce this.) If that happens, move on to Step 3.

But what's a "global unfixated state"? The definition involves some subtlety and complexity, but it's worth investing a little time to grok the concept because it's potentially so powerful. A global unfixated state in the mind is any one or a combination of the following four possibilities:

- Rest: You have little or no conscious thought, i.e., the mental screen is blank and the head is quiet.
- Flow: You have subtle subliminal image and/or talk activity. (This can be interpreted, *inter alia*, as a kind of vibratory flow in mind space.)
- Sporadic spiking: Surface thought arises but it immediately dies out and never sucks you in. (I sometimes call this "popcorn thought.")
- Wisdom activity: Surface conscious thought arises but in the form of wisdom activity. Your thoughts carry intuitive insight and deep creativity. Thought happens *to* you. Thought dynamically self-organizes. It's thought without a thinker. This is the mental analog of acting without thinking—you're thinking without (intentionally) thinking.

I like to create idiosyncratic jargon. Since it takes a long time to say "global unfixated state," let's personify it with the acronym GUS (pronounced like the name Gus).

Step 3. Focus on GUS

If GUS, in any of its guises, is available, you focus on that state, become intimate with that state. Get to know it. Learn to enjoy it. If GUS becomes well established, move on to Step 4.

Step 4. Seek a Challenge

Attempt to maintain GUS as you expose yourself to motion challenge sequence or a trigger challenge. (See [An Outline of Practice](#) for details on these "practice accelerators.")

This challenge strengthens GUS. Depending on what form of GUS is present, Step 4 represents an exercise in:

- maintaining mental tranquility while being bombarded with stimuli.
- maintaining mental flow when being bombarded with stimuli.
- responding to stimuli with spontaneous, deep wisdom.

In the Buddhist tradition, mind is considered to be both a sensory experience (*manovijñāna*) and a form of motor action (*manokarma*). The Auto Think technique reflects that richness: Steps 1 and 2 are about working with thought as a sensory system, and Steps 3 and 4 foster the wisdom action. Even if you don't go beyond Step 1, this technique can still bring a lot of powerful insights. Parsing the mind in

terms of mental image and mental talk helps make thought tangible and tractable, gives you a way to detect impermanence, and allows you to notice natural rest states.

My hypothesis is that, with time, the fourth aspect of GUS – spontaneous wisdom activity – will begin to manifest. That’s why this technique is positioned in the “express spontaneity” [quadrant of training](#).

My ULTRA system organizes the world’s meditation techniques in a way that clarifies the relationships between them. Among the important relationships are—

Contrast: How technique A differs from technique B.

Cooperation: How doing technique A helps you to do technique B better (and usually vice versa).

Containment: Technique A is a specialized version of technique B (i.e., A’s focus range is a proper subset of B’s focus range.)

Complementation: How technique A and B, when taken together, represent a complete package with regard to some aspect of training.

Auto Think is placed in the Express quadrant because its long term goal is to foster the wisdom activity within your mind. Another way to cultivate mind is through intentionally creating and holding specific positive states. This is done through techniques in the Nurture quadrant such as See Good (holding a positive visualization) and Hear Good (repeating a positive mindful mantra). Auto Think both contrasts with and is complementary to See Good and Hear Good.

Contrast: Auto Think is about passively observing mind states. See Good and Hear Good are about actively creating them.

Cooperation: Each practice helps you do the other better.

Containment: The range of Step 1 in Auto Think (i.e., mind states) is contained within the range of Focus In, and the range of Focus In (i.e., inner activity) is contained within the range of Note Everything (i.e., all sensory experience).

Complementation: Taken together, Auto Think + See Good + Hear Good form a complete package imbuing the mind with positive emotions, adaptive rationality, creativity, and intuitive wisdom—the very definition of [mens sana](#).