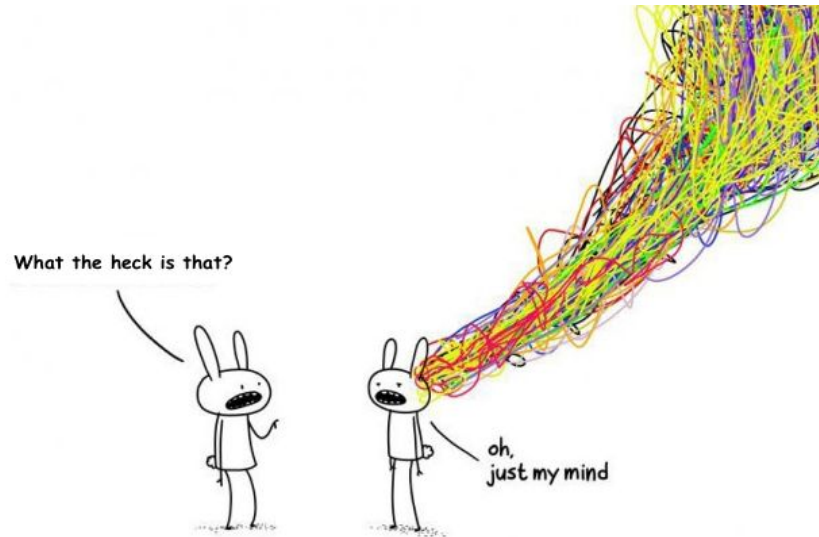


## Day 3 Stop Torturing Yourself With Your Thoughts



One of the foundations of being friends with our own mind is to be able to work effectively with our thoughts, with our responses to our thoughts, and with the energy and sensations in our body that are stimulated by our thoughts.

Positive thoughts, like remembering someone we love or basking in the glow of a beautiful sunset create a feeling of relaxation and softness in our body. Neutral thoughts flow through without much of an effect.

Negative thoughts have the most power to attract our attention. Our survival system is set up to notice danger so we can protect ourselves. When we've been hurt and scared, it becomes a traumatic memory that triggers a tightening in our body. We might bring our shoulders up around our ears, hold our breath, or clench our teeth. We can work with compelling catastrophic images so we're not at their mercy.

Thoughts are images (we see) and words (we hear or see). Images are still photos or video clips and are made up of colors and shapes. We can look at images of words, and see that some of the letters are curved and some have straight lines. Some have circular spaces, like O's and D's. The arrangement of letters means something to us.

When the words or images trigger sensation or energy in our body, they feel more true or real. Tomorrow we go more deeply into working with energy in our body. Many people experience high levels of activation in their nervous system. We have a survival system that responds to present

experience through the filter of the past. Acknowledging that makes it easier to not shame ourselves or wish we had a different system.

Using mindfulness, we are able to work with thoughts. Try this with your eyes closed or open.

Put a frame around the image and put that picture on a wall across the room. This reminds us we're looking at an image. We are not actually back in the situation.

Break down the experience of thought into small pieces so you can work with them. Is it the look in someone's eye? Color or shadows? Watch your responses to each.

The content of thought arises from our pool of associations, memories and experiences. We don't plan thoughts. They arrive and sometimes we get very attracted to them. We pay so much attention to thoughts of the past or future that we are no longer aware of what is going on in the present moment.

There are many ways to emotionally self-regulate and calm ourselves. Limiting our intake of violent images helps. This includes watching the news. If you want to stay informed, it is less alarming to read the news than take it in visually.

Two types of unhelpful thoughts are ruminating: where we compulsively go over a situation because we need to have it turn out differently or to experience a sense of agency; and catastrophic thinking where we imagine the worst possible outcome. Nothing bad has happened yet but it feels like it in our body. This is part of the negativity bias of the brain. Our primitive brain does not have the skill to negotiate the flood of images and fast pace in our modern world. Our brains developed to respond to first hand threat and aren't well equipped to handle images of distance threat.

### **Three tools to work with thoughts:**

Tapping, tracing and changing our focus are three simple ways to lessen the intensity of troubling thoughts. We are not actually at the mercy of our thoughts.

**Tapping:** With two fingers, lightly tap on your forehead just above and between your eyebrows. Bring your attention away from the images or words and into the sound and sensation of the tapping. After a few dozen times, stop tapping and bring your awareness back to the thought. Most people find their thoughts lose intensity when they interrupt them with tapping. You can repeat this a few times. Put the image on the wall or keep your eyes closed and bring the image alive in your mind's eye.

**Tracing:** Notice the image in the frame then notice the frame then the space on the outside of the frame. Take your eyes around the space on the outside a few times in each direction, then look back at the image. Notice if it has changed. You could also put a frame around a collage of pictures and trace the space on the outside of that.

**Focus: Wide Angle and Narrow Lens:** You might be working with an image of a word like shame. With your eyes open, put the word on the wall across from you. Notice some of the letters have space between them. Some are curvy and some are straight lines. Notice the font. Is it heavy and dark? Does it feel threatening and do you feel uncomfortable looking at it? Now notice the space between the letters. Notice the space between you and the letters. Notice the space behind the words on the wall. Then zoom in again to notice the shapes of the letters. Zoom out to look at the words and their meaning.

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