

Stop Believing All Your Own Thoughts

Do you accept without question all the beliefs of your friends and family? I very much doubt it! Maybe one member of your family has extreme political views of some kind or another and secretly you think that they are totally deluded but you are just too polite to tell them so to their face. Or maybe a friend falls madly in love with someone whom you regard as a total waste of space but again you keep your counsel to yourself.

So it is pretty clear that we do not accept everyone else's views about the world as totally accurate and yet we tend to believe all our own thoughts without question. For example, if we say to ourselves, 'This government is a disaster for Britain.' or 'This pain in my knees is unbearable.', we do not then say to ourselves, 'Hmm, I am really not too sure that's true!' So we all live in our own extremely limited world made up of our subjective perceptions of everyone and everything around us, many of which leave us feeling at the very least mildly annoyed or anxious.

Now Byron Katie has developed a system called 'The Work' to help us distance ourselves from negative thoughts. She suggests that whenever we notice a painful thought popping up in our mind, we should pause to ask ourselves, 'Is that thought really true?' 'Can I absolutely know that thought is true?' 'How would I feel without that thought?' I have tried doing the 'The Work' quite a lot, and that last question does usually lead me to realise how much calmer I would be if I simply challenged all the fearful thoughts that pour into my mind day in and day out.

However, and it is a pretty big 'however', whenever I try to challenge negative thinking in this way, I am still stuck in my thinking mind. Yet this thinking mind is the very mind that has trapped me in an extremely uncomfortable position in the first place. The egoic mind –which we all need by the way to live safely and successfully in this world so there is no point in fighting this mind - lives in a dualistic universe. Its thoughts are all about 'me' versus 'you' or 'me' versus the world. This dualistic mind then more or less constantly feels threatened by a hostile environment all around it.

This egoic thought system is so deep and all pervasive in our world that we do not notice the damaging effects it has on us. We are rather like fish swimming around in a highly polluted pond. These unhealthy fish have no idea what swimming in crystal clear water would feel like.

But thankfully, there is a way to begin to escape from the prison that our egoic thinking creates in our minds. First, we need to understand that all thoughts, positive or negative, occur within a vast space that I am going to call pure, loving awareness. This spaciousness is very, very still and quiet, whereas our normal thinking mind is really rather loud and intrusive.

If you practise some kind of mindfulness, contemplation or meditation for long enough, you should eventually begin to see that you are not just your thoughts. Thoughts simply pop into your mind uninvited, hang around for a while and then dissolve away again, whilst you stay basically the same. This observation can really begin to assist you to escape from the trap of drowning in endless negative judgements about yourself and all those around you.

Whenever we see the world through our thoughts, which is virtually all of the time, 'we stop experiencing life as it really is and others as they really are.' (Adyashanti, *Falling into Grace*) But if we can expand our consciousness beyond thinking, we discover a spaciousness that is so quiet and so full of unconditional love for all sentient beings that we are completely blown away by it.

You are definitely not just your thinking mind. There is a deeper or more expansive part of you that can simply watch all thoughts, feelings and physical sensations pop up in your consciousness, display for a while, and then dissolve away to nothing. However, in order to gain access to this inner spaciousness, you do need to learn how to observe all your passing experiences without grabbing on to one particular thought or feeling and then ruminating on it – sometimes for decades! 'My father never really loved me.' for example is a destructive thought that we can regurgitate over and over again for the whole of our life

What we need to do, if we are determined to lead a more peaceful and fulfilling life from now on, is to learn how to expand our awareness so that we can watch thoughts coming and going in our mind, rather than being totally lost in our thinking. We can also watch physical sensations and emotions coming and going

in a similar way to our thoughts. As we gently do this, we begin to put some distance between ourselves and the passing crazy dream or drama that we call our life.

We can start to expand our awareness beyond our ever-changing thinking and feeling by practising a simple meditative technique in which we first breathe slowly and smoothly as we relax and open our body and mind. We then bring our awareness to the edge of our physical form and then expand our awareness out further so that all our passing thoughts, physical sensations and emotions are held in a much bigger field of awareness. Once we have experienced simply resting in this bigger field of awareness many times, we will inevitably discover that this pure awareness is always calm and always kind. This inner revelation is life transforming.

I have been meditating regularly now for nearly 35 years (How can that be possible??) For quite a long time whilst I was first learning to meditate, all I could notice was how busy my mind was and how fidgety my body was. It took several years before I finally experienced just a moment or two of profound inner silence and peace during a meditation with my wonderful meditation teacher Ken Mellor.

Since then, I have experienced many more moments of deep inner peace and calm during my meditations, but I have to tell you that it has only been very recently that I have begun to notice that I can access this deep inner peace as I go through my daily life - although I still only do this pretty intermittently. I am however finally beginning to realise that the point of adopting a regular, disciplined, daily meditation practice is not to become good at meditating, nor even to have some amazing meditative highs, but to cultivate our awareness of an infinite field of pure loving awareness that lies beyond all the heavy clouds of negative thinking and painful human emotions. Eventually, we should be able to rest in this awesome inner spaciousness even in the midst of a major personal or collective crisis.

So, I am going to end this month's message by urging you simply to sit still and observe your thoughts and feelings for a few minutes every day. If you already do this regularly, please never give up. Just pause several times a day, maybe for

just five minutes or so to observe all the thoughts and sensations passing through the clear sky of your calm, open loving awareness,

I urge you to keep resting in pure spacious awareness day in and day out because I long for everyone in this troubled world to discover for themselves what I have finally discovered: how to access, and then maintain throughout our daily life, a deep and lasting inner peace and joy even as we live our lives in a hyperactive and terribly troubled world.

Wishing you a wonderfully sunny, joyful June!

Peggy Foster

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