



WEEK SIX

MINDFUL

COMMUNICATION

Thoughts are not Facts!

“It is remarkable how liberating it feels to be able to see that your thoughts are just thoughts, and that they are not ‘you’ or ‘reality’ ... the simple act of recognizing your thoughts as thoughts can free you from the distorted reality they often create and allow for more clear-sightedness and a greater sense of manageability in your life.” - (Jon Kabat-Zinn)

“From thoughts come actions. From actions come all sorts of consequences, in which thoughts will we invest? Our great task is to see them clearly, so that we can choose which ones to act on and which simply to let be” ~ (Goldstein)

Recap:

Over the last 5 weeks we have been learning to watch our thoughts and noticing how they move in and out of our awareness, like clouds across a blue sky (our internal landscape/Intrapersonal world). Now we are moving to use practices to help us gain a little perspective- to cultivate awareness of thoughts as being just thoughts and not necessarily the whole truth. At this stage, we may also be becoming aware of how many of our thoughts are triggered automatically and of how one thought can spiral into a whole pattern (often leading to a spiral of stress).



By becoming aware, over and over again, of the thoughts and images passing through the mind, and letting go of them as we return our attention to the breath, to the body and to this moment, it is possible to get some distance and perspective on them.

This can allow us to see that there may be other ways to view situations, freeing us from the tyranny of the old thought patterns that automatically “pop into the mind”. Most importantly, we may eventually come to realise, deep “in our bones” that **all thoughts are only mental events** (including the thoughts that say they are not), that **thoughts are not facts**, and that **we are not our thoughts**

SESSION SIX: MINDFUL COMUNICATON (Thoughts & Mood)

Thoughts and images can often provide us with an indication of what is going on deeper in the mind. We can “get hold of them” so that we can look at them from different perspectives. By getting to know our own “top ten” habitual, automatic unhelpful thinking patterns – we can find it easier to become aware of and challenge the processes that lead us into downward or anxiety-laden mood spirals.

It is particularly important to become aware of thoughts that may block or undermine our practice, such as “there’s no point in doing this, or “it’s not going to work, so why bother?”, or “this is a load of rubbish”. Such pessimistic, hopeless thought patterns are one of the most characteristic features of depressed mood states, and one of the main factors that stop us taking actions that would help us shift out of those states. It follows that it is particularly important to recognise such thoughts as “negative thinking” and not automatically give up on efforts to apply skilful means to change the way we respond.

WAYS YOU CAN SEE YOUR THOUGHTS DIFFERENTLY ~ Here are some of the things you can do with your thoughts:

- Just watch them come in and leave, without feeling that you have to follow them.
- View your thought as a mental event rather than a fact. It may be true that this event often occurs with other feelings. And when it does, it is tempting to think of it as being true. But it is still up to you to decide whether it is true and how you want to deal with it.
- Write your thoughts down on paper. This has the effect of letting you see them in a way which is less emotional and overwhelming. Also, the pause between having the thought and writing it down, can give you a moment to reflect on its meaning.
- Ask yourself the following questions:
 - Did this thought just pop into my head automatically?
 - Does it fit with the facts of the situation?
 - Is there something about it which I can question?
 - How would I have thought about it at another time, in another mood?
 - Are there any alternatives?

For particularly difficult thoughts, it may be helpful intentionally to take another look at them in a balanced open state of mind, as part of your sitting practice- let your “Wise Mind” give its own perspective. (Source: Josephine Lynch & Helen Byrne)

It is remarkable how liberating it feels to be able to see that your thoughts are just thoughts and not ‘you’ or ‘reality’...The liberation from the tyranny of the thinking mind comes directly out of the meditation practice itself. When we spend some time each day in a state of non-doing, observing the flow of the breath and the activity of our mind and body, without getting caught up in that activity, we are cultivating calmness and mindfulness hand in hand. As the mind develops stability and is less caught up in the content of thinking, we strengthen the mind's ability to concentrate and to be calm. And if each time we recognise a thought as a thought when it arises and register its content and discern the strength of its hold on us and the accuracy of its content, then we let go of it and come back to our breathing and a sense of our body, we are strengthening mindfulness. We come to know ourselves better and become more accepting of ourselves not as we would like to be but as we are.

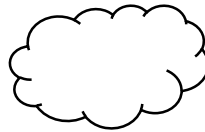
(Adapted - Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living* p. 69 - 70.)

Examples of Unhelpful Thinking Patterns

- Mind-reading: “He thinks I’m stupid / boring / unattractive.”
- Crystal-ball gazing: “I’m not going to enjoy this.”
- Over-estimating the negative: “This is going to be a total disaster.”
- Eternalising: “I’ll never manage this.” “I’ll always feel like this.”
- Expecting perfection: “I / people shouldn’t ever make mistakes.”
- Over-generalising: “This is difficult – everything’s such an effort.”
- Judgementalism: “I wasn’t able to do that – I’m just not good enough.”
- Taking the blame: “When things go wrong, it’s my fault.”



MORE TIPS ON THOUGHTS . . .



When you become aware of negative thoughts and images in your mind, hold them in awareness, with an attitude of gentle interest and curiosity, perhaps expanding awareness to include one or more of the following. *(go back to the breath after each one):

1. Perhaps I am confusing thought with a fact?
2. Perhaps I am jumping to conclusions?
3. Perhaps I am thinking in black and white terms?
4. Perhaps I am condemning myself totally because of one thing?
5. Perhaps I am concentrating on my weaknesses and forgetting my strengths?
6. Perhaps I am blaming myself for something which isn't my fault?
7. Perhaps I am judging myself?
8. Perhaps I am setting unrealistically high standards for myself so that I will fail?
9. Perhaps I am mind-reading/crystal ball gazing?
10. Perhaps I am expecting perfection
11. Perhaps I am overestimating disaster?

Be gentle and curious with your thoughts – as best you can ...

THE MOUNTAIN MEDITATION:

When it comes to meditation, mountains have a lot to teach us. The image of the mountain held in the mind's eye and in the body, can refresh our memory of why we are sitting, and what it really means to dwell in the realm of non-doing.

- Picture the most beautiful mountain you know- or can imagine. Notice it's overall shape, the lofty peak, the base rooted in the rock of the earth's crust, the sloping sides. Note how massive it is, how unmoving, how beautiful.
- See if you can bring the mountain into your own body- your head becomes the lofty peak: your shoulders and arms the sides of the mountain: your buttocks and legs the solid base rooted to your cushion on the floor or to your chair. Become the breathing mountain, unwavering in your stillness, completely what you are – beyond words and thought, a centred, rooted moving presence.
- As the light changes, as night follows day and day night, the mountain just sits, simply being itself. It remains still as the seasons flow into one another, as the weather changes moment by moment. Storms may come, but still the mountain sits. It is calmness abiding over all change.



Mindful Communication- When you pause, sit-back and consider many of the stressful situations in life, you'd probably notice most involve other people! In Session Six, we focus on communication and what it means to be mindful in our interactions with others, be it our direct family, work-colleagues, friends or acquaintances. Up to this point the FOCUS has been direct at our INTERNAL landscape (our thoughts, our feelings & our sensations) –Now we are moving from

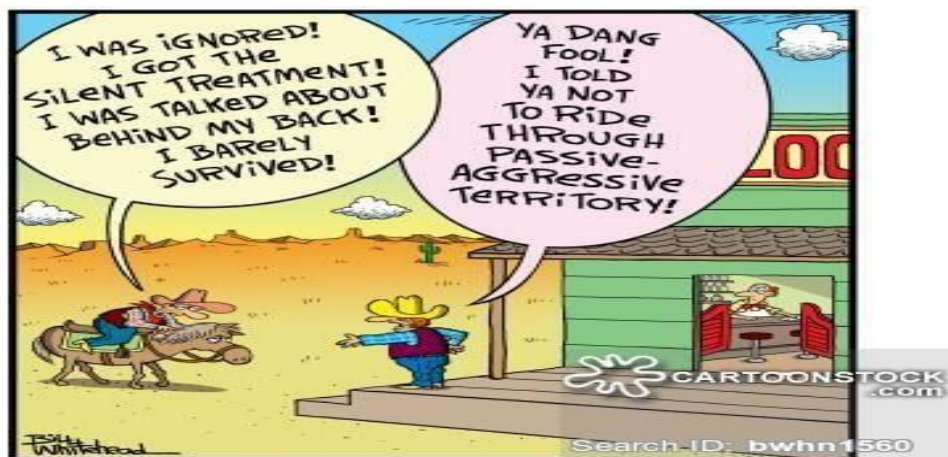
the INTRA-PERSONAL to the INTERPERSONAL, that is taking into account another's world, and the place where their world and ours meet. Most importantly, this means recognizing that "the other" (person or persons) have their own perceptions, feelings and needs, which are almost certainly different than ours.

What do you see?

GOOD

Listening: When in conversation, most of us don't really listen very deeply. As Tara Brach says in *The Sacred Art of Listening*: "*We spend most of our moments when someone is speaking, planning what we're going to say, evaluating it, trying to come up with our presentation of our self, or controlling the situation. Pure listening is a letting go of control. It's not easy and takes training... The bottom line is when we are listened to, we feel connected. When we're not listened to, we feel separate.*"

Dealing with Conflict – Bring effective communication into play when dealing with those who we disagree with is extraordinarily difficult. If you are like most people, you have a fall-back strategy/ a default mode to deal with conflict that was learned very early in life. This style like many behaviours is habitual and embedded in interactions with others. The three most common strategies are: **Accommodate/passive** ("be nice"), **demand/ aggressive** ("me first"), or **withdraw/*can lead to passive - aggressive** ("I don't care...really!").



Some examples of passive aggression might be:

- **Non-Communication** when there is clearly something problematic to discuss
- **Avoiding or ignoring** when you are so angry that you feel you cannot speak calmly
- **Evading** problems and issues, burying an angry head in the sand
- **Procrastinating** intentionally putting off important tasks for less important ones
- **Obstructing** deliberately stalling or preventing an event or process of change
- **Fear of Competition** Avoiding situations where one party will be seen as better at something
- **Ambiguity** Being cryptic, unclear, not fully engaging in conversations
- **Sulking** Being silent, morose, sullen and resentful in order to get attention or sympathy.
- **Chronic Lateness** A way to put you in control over others and their expectations
- **Chronic Forgetting** Shows a blatant disrespect and disregard for others to punish in some way

- **Fear of Intimacy** Often there can be trust issues with passive aggressive people and guarding against becoming too intimately involved or attached will be a way for them to feel in control of the relationship
- **Making Excuses** Always coming up with reasons for not doing things
- **Victimisation** Unable to look at their own part in a situation will turn the tables to become the victim and will behave like one
- **Self-Pity** the "poor me" scenario

A FOURTH WAY (BLENDING)- MINDFUL COMMUNICATION

Mindful communication involves investigating both your world and the other's world and that can sometimes yield a surprising and creative solution that honours both worlds. In the martial art, Aikido, this would be called blending, a move that harms neither party and turns conflict into more of a dance than a fight. This is complex and an art form and one we will be practicing together.

Try this for yourself – 10 finger Gratitude Exercise

To gain a positive simple things in life once things which you are them on each of your get to 10 things even when harder after three or four! exercise is for-awareness the small, elements of the day.



appreciation for the small, a day bring to mind 10 grateful for- counting fingers. It is important to it becomes increasingly This is exactly what the intentionally bringing into previously unnoticed

The Cookie Thief

*A woman was waiting at an airport one night
With several long hours before her flight
She hunted for a book in the airport shop
Bought a bag of cookies and found a place to drop*

*She was engrossed in her book but happened to see
That the man beside her as bold as could be
Grabbed a cookie or two from the bag between
Which she tried to ignore to avoid a scene*

*She munched cookies and watched the clock
As this gutsy cookie thief diminished her stock
She was getting more irritated as the minutes ticked by
Thinking "If I wasn't so nice I'd blacken his eye"*

*With each cookie she took he took one too
And when only one was left she wondered what he'd do
With a smile on his face and a nervous laugh
He took the last cookie and broke it in half*

*He offered her half as he ate the other
She snatched it from him and thought "Oh brother
This guy has some nerve and he's also rude
Why he didn't even show any gratitude"*

*She had never known when she had been so galled
And sighed with relief when her flight was called
She gathered her belongings and headed for the gate
Refusing to look back at the thieving ingrate*

*She boarded the plane and sank in her seat
Then sought her book which was almost complete
As she reached in her baggage she gasped with surprise
There was her bag of cookies in front of her eyes*

*"If mine are here" she moaned with despair
"Then the others were his and he tried to share"
"Too late to apologize she realized with grief"
That she was the rude one, the ingrate, the thief*

- Valerie Cox, A Matter of Perspective

HOME PRACTICE FOR WEEK 6

1. Practice the GUIDED SITTING MEDITATION CD for 6 days. (Experiment with times of the day that seem to work for you in each day. Be flexible and open-minded.
2. THE THREE-STEP BREATHING SPACE – (REGULAR): practice three times a day. Either practice it when you think of it or connect it to 3 regular activities you do or places you are every day (e.g. on waking up and/or going to bed, before eating, after washing your hands, on first sitting down in your car or on the bus or at your desk).
3. THE THREE-STEP BREATHING SPACE – (COPING): practice whenever you notice yourself starting to feel stressed and explore options of responding with greater mindfulness and in a more friendly way to yourself and the situation.
4. Notice how you are relating to your thoughts day-to-day, as well as in the meditation practice.

