

Audio Exercise 8: Mindfulness of thoughts

We often treat thoughts as if they were facts. You may have the thought “I am no good at this,” or “He’s a jerk,” or “Nobody understand me,” or even “I am brilliant!” Does thinking it make it so?

When we have a thought many times, over and over, it can condense into a belief. A belief is a thought, or several connected thoughts, that we have a lot of the time. Beliefs are then quite often taken as facts.

For example: “The world is flat.” Enough people had that thought, or held the assumption, often enough for it to be assumed to be a fact for centuries!

When we start to pay attention to our thoughts, with a gentle curiosity, then we start to think about our thinking. We can then move away from believing that the thought is a fact.

Then there’s this: If the thought does have evidence pointing to it being a fact, ask yourself a different question. “What does buying into this thought do to me? Does it help? Is it working?”

If the answer is no, then simply move on from the thought. Choose not to get caught up in it.

Start this activity with mindfulness of the breath. Allow yourself to notice any thoughts that come into your head as you are aware of your breathing. Notice, pay attention to and accept these thoughts, without judgement. Thoughts are not bad or good, positive or negative, they just are what they are – the thought that you happen to be having at this particular moment.

You may become aware that you are having difficulty thinking about your thoughts – so think about that. You may be thinking: “I can’t do this very well.” Well, that’s a thought too. Allow yourself to think about that.

Some people like the metaphor of allowing the thoughts to just float like leaves on a stream, or clouds in a sky, noticing each passing thought and then the one that comes after it, and then the one that comes after that. A Buddhist idea is to think of thoughts as pages written on water.

You may notice, that just at the moment you become aware of a thought, it passes and is replaced by another thought. That’s what happens – thoughts come and go.

Finally, bring yourself back to awareness of the breath.