

MindfulLiving™ Module 3

Mastering Mindful Thinking

Chapter 9 - Reading

I Hadn't Thought of That

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After years of meditation practice, one of the most significant changes in my life has been my relationship with my mind. Of course, we still live together and remain friends, but my mind and I are no longer co-dependent. I am reclaiming control of myself.

This shift began when I admitted that my mind had a thinking problem. I used to be a heavy thinker, starting with two or three thoughts the moment I woke up and continuing to think throughout the day until bedtime. My mind churned out thoughts about love, work, existential questions, trivial matters like clothing and food, music, and politics—endless subjects all centred around me. This constant thinking became embarrassing and oppressive, preventing me from being at ease or present. I began to see my mind as an insecure, nagging inner voice that was robbing me of happiness and ruining my life. For our mutual survival, I decided to seek an intervention.

Initially, I tried analysis, hoping to uncover the psychological roots of my mind's incessant thinking. Later, I engaged in Gestalt therapy, with screaming, flailing, and crying, which only temporarily halted the flow of thoughts. I also experimented with drugs, attempting to "blow my mind" and short-circuit the neural wiring. Finally, I turned to meditation.

Meditation's goal was not to stop thinking, as I had assumed, but to expose my mind to itself. Before meditation, I focused solely on the content of thoughts—how to manipulate them and extract meaning from them. I was evaluated on this in school and what our culture values.

No one had taught me to observe the process of thinking itself or the intrinsic nature of thought. As the Tibetan sage Tulku Urgen said:

"The stream of thoughts surges through the mind of an ordinary person, who does not know whatsoever about who is thinking, where the thought comes from, and where the thought disappears. The person is completely and mindlessly carried away by one thought after another."

Let's be clear: thinking is not inherently wrong or a barrier to enlightenment. Thinking is an essential tool for our well-being and survival. (Perhaps a warning should be posted at meditation centres: "Give up thinking at your own risk.")

Indeed, thinking is remarkable. A unique trait is our ability to create complex symbols, agree on their meanings, and use them to encode knowledge and describe plans. Thinking allows us to reason, compute, imagine, and share our understanding through speech or writing. We can even record our thoughts for future generations. ("Hold that thought!")

Unfortunately, we have come to overvalue thinking, often to the exclusion of other aspects of our being. The more we identify with our thoughts, the more we become absorbed in our narratives, disconnected from our common humanity and other life forms. We have handed over our sense of self to our thinking mind, leaving us lost in thought and disembodied. Especially in Western culture, our identity is heavily tied to our thoughts.

Although we often believe that our ability to think makes us superior to other species, this belief is being questioned. Charles Darwin wondered why thought, a secretion of the brain, is considered more extraordinary than phenomena like gravity. Stephen Jay Gould questioned whether an intelligent octopus would be so proud of its eight arms.

The new cognitive sciences are helping to place thought in its proper context. Research into the brain and nervous system shows that most of our world interpretation and decision-making occur at what Daniel Dennett calls the “sub-personal” level, without a conscious, rational self-directing process. Brain science reveals that thinking arises later in the cognitive sequence, mainly to weave our experiences into the ongoing story we tell about ourselves. As one neuroscientist said, “We don’t have a rational mind so much as we have a rationalising mind.” Our thinking is often an afterthought.

Do we overvalue our thinking? Scientists seem to think so. Cognitive scientists view thinking as a way to organise experience, while evolutionary scientists see it as an adaptation akin to the eye or the opposable thumb. It’s a valuable tool but not the ultimate aspect of existence.



The Buddha seemed to agree with Darwin and the scientists. He viewed the mind as a sixth sense, giving it no more or less importance than sight or hearing. Like the other senses, our thinking is another way of interpreting the world, primarily serving survival.

Imagine what humans thought about 20,000 years ago: “Who is going hunting tomorrow?” “The gods want me to paint my face with red clay to scare off enemies.” “Who is watching the fire tonight?”

Today, our thoughts revolve around medical insurance, global news, or romantic relationships, and as the song says, “It’s still the same old story.” On our mental screens, past and present, it’s another episode of human experience.

I can better understand and depersonalise the process by viewing thinking as a survival tool. I see my thoughts as somewhat generic, familiar to my species, rather than as “I,” “me,” or “mine.”

After years of meditation and with insights from modern science, I now understand the source and nature of thought—and a degree of freedom. I no longer need to believe in or be carried away by every thought that arises.

Thank you for your valuable participation in the MindfulLiving™ program. We appreciate your dedication and commitment. Our goal is to help you navigate any challenges and obstacles. Most importantly, we hope you enjoy the process, relax, and have fun. Feel free to reach out if you have any questions or need assistance.

Blessings. Stay Healthy & Safe ❤️ Love, Shery



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