

How Our Thoughts Can Blind Us (Article) by Cain Ramsay of Udemy



Thoughts, like our emotions, tend to arise without any effort or conscious intention. Thoughts will often pop into our minds and end up taking on a life of their own. One minute we can be happily enjoying a coffee with friends, and the next minute we can be lost in a bombardment of destructive thought patterns.

While thoughts are commonly triggered by our initial interpretations of our life events, thoughts are often associated with emotions. However, thoughts themselves are separate from our emotions.

Thoughts are the offspring of our beliefs, attitudes, reasoning and the like. Collectively, our thoughts become the stories that our minds tell us (which sometimes, can very easily be proved as inaccurate and untrue).

Often when our attention has been captured by an event in the external world, the emotional reaction we experience will activate a story in our mind in the attempt to work out and interpret what is happening.

Our 'conscious thinking' part of our mind is wired to reason, form beliefs and attitudes that are representative of how it is that we interpret our most important life's experiences. The reasoning human mind is ingenious. It is why we each have the ability to be infinitely creative.

Take a moment to become mindful of the device that you are reading this article on right now ... another human being has created this. No other mammal or creature on this planet has adapted so well due to their ability to work through complex problems and establish the most appropriate solutions to resolve them.

However, the rational part of our mind is like a double-edged sword, especially once our emotions have been triggered. Our mind can jump to the most ridiculous (and incredible) assumptions that are not only false, but that are also completely detrimental to the health of our relationships and our general well-being.

We often try to simplify (or dumb down) our everyday experiences, so that we can understand them and explain them away if deemed necessary. We each do this by creating judgments, misguided opinions, and incorrect beliefs - many of which, some people will even declare an 'all-out war' to defend.

Many of the assumptions we jump to and judgements we make might satisfy our minds and emotional reactions in the short-term, however, they seldom serve us in our relationships and infrequently will reflect the actual truth of any given situation.

The aim is to train our minds to tune out our unhelpful thoughts, and we do this through practising mindfulness.

We Can't Stop Our Thoughts

The important point is that while we can discipline our minds to focus on more important aspects of our life, ourselves and our surroundings, we cannot prevent thoughts from entering our minds, to begin with. They come from

somewhere else. Historically, I've known people to end up increasing their fears or anxieties as a result of believing that who they reflect what they think. A person is separate from what a person thinks, or, as it was once said, "Man is not what he thinketh."

Some people find that out-of-control thoughts plague their minds following a traumatic event or personal failure. Other people become tired and exhausted with the pace and rate of which their minds think. However, stopping thought in its entirety is not possible.

If I were to ask you to close your eyes for a moment and think about pink dancing monkeys, you would most likely be able to do this. And even if you consider this a ridiculous idea, there is still a high chance that the thought of pink dancing monkeys is still rattling around inside of your mind. Why? Because the seed (the idea) has been planted. It's now up to you whether you focus on this seed or not.

So, the trick to becoming efficient in practicing mindfulness is not about stopping our thoughts entirely, but rather, becoming more aware of our thoughts and managing them with greater efficiency.

Mindfulness is about increasing your awareness of what is happening in the present moment and making a choice in regards to where or what you focus your attention upon.

Mindfulness does not stop thought, but it does determine what types of thinking we accept, and what kinds of thought we reject. The art of mindfulness is about mastering the ability to change or modify our habitual thought patterns or processes as soon as we identify that they are no longer serving us (or others).

The Gift of Mindful Awareness

If we are to hone our mind to appreciate and understand anything accurately, then the best place to start is within ourselves. Through active mindfulness

practice, we can begin to increase our awareness of the thought patterns that dominate our minds, and what stories or meanings we are creating as a result of them.

It's only through doing this that we can begin to master our minds and influence our emotions in far more empowering ways. By observing our thoughts and simply being present with them, we empower ourselves to appreciate thought for what it is. Just thought!

If we will just action our ability to step back and cease believing every mindless thought that pop into our heads, we become free from those thoughts and consequential emotions we experience as a result of focusing on them.

Upon doing this, we create space in our universal minds to establish a greater appreciation for truth, rather than being held captive by the thoughts we have and the limitations of our perceptions. When we relax enough in our minds, it's only then that we can gain the clarity and insights that we seek.

This is the gift of mindfulness, to step out of the unconscious, mindless automatic brain functioning that most of us are programmed to embrace as children, and increase our awareness of ourselves, other people and the immediate environments in which we live. This is what gives us the inner peace that we desire.

EXERCISE: One way to evaluate our thoughts is by asking yourself the following 9 questions:

- 1) Where does this thought come from?
- 2) Where will these thoughts lead me?
- 3) Will these thoughts get me where I want to go?
- 4) Are these thoughts scripturally acceptable?

- 5) Will these thoughts build me up or tear me down?
- 6) Could I share these thoughts with someone else?
- 7) Where did these thoughts originate?
- 8) Do these thoughts make me feel guilty?
- 9) Do these thoughts show me as a mature and balanced individual?

Most of us would probably benefit from reviewing these questions at least once a day, if not more often, as the need arises. Feel free to print this list and keep it close. As you mentally recap the goings-on of the day, consider the things that occupy your mind and commit to your thought life to the courtroom of truth. If you have thought that isn't valid, don't validate it!

