

Mind Related Articles

By

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Mind related articles

#1 Thoughts are likeBirds in the sky, Clouds, Trains arriving at a train station, Uninvited guests, Imaginary demons, Delusions, Plants in the garden, Images on the screen, Balloons without air (More)

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#4 Mind – Its Nature and Training: Theme is similar to the above but presented differently, with plenty of stories and examples. Long article.
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#5 The living lessons I learned from my brother's childhood death:I received a postcard from my father that my wonderful brother Ramu aged 10 died due to drowning in the lake near our house. A question repeatedly arose in my mind – "Why did God take away such a wonderful boy at the premature age of 10? Why? Why? Why?.....(More)

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#13 My shopping cart pulls to one side: Sometimes I pick a shopping cart that pulls to one side. I make periodic adjustments to prevent any mishaps. I realized that my mind also tends to make biased and wrong judgments. I adjust my mind like I adjust my shopping cart and avoid mishaps. (More)

#14 On being happy: Two articles

A - Then What... Then what?....An imaginary dialogue between a cowkeeper in a village and a group of visiting managers.

B - The grumpy spinster and the dancing homeless man: A true life experience

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#16 You try to use the diseased mind to cure itself?: This is not my thought but of Mary Karr, a famous poet. It expresses powerfully the stupidity of helplessly listening and attaching value to a mind that is disturbed and stuck in the negative mode. (More)

Thoughts are like

(Wherever you see More at the end of a para, look for the full article with the same number. in the following pages)

- A. Birds in the sky:** When you show interest, the bird lands on your head, builds a nest and breeds more birds. More
- B. Clouds in the sky:** Keep watching the clouds of different shapes. Your rich imagination sees in them dogs, rabbits, cats, monsters, so on. No cloud stops for you. Every cloud is on its way, slowly going past you, even as you keep watching it keenly. In a few minutes, that monster like cloud becomes invisible and a dog cloud appears in its place. Similarly, thoughts of various shapes inciting colorful emotions appear in your mind. Just keep watching the thoughts, treating them like the clouds. Let them slowly fade out of your mind, just like the clouds.
- C. Trains arriving at a train station:** Every thought train has its own color and destination. You ignore the thoughts going in the wrong direction by keeping yourself busy with a calming task. More
- D. Uninvited guests:** You allow the uninvited guest to enter and let him settle down in your living room sofa. He feels accepted and welcomed. After a while, he brings his wife, then children and then grandchildren. More
- E. Imaginary demons:** In a typical folk tale, a demon kidnaps the princess. The prince goes searching for her. He comes to know that the the fierce demon's life is in an insect which is kept inside a jewel box kept in a secure place. The jewel box is in a place guarded by several giant dragons spewing fire and other scary creatures. The hero reaches the secret place crossing many hurdles. He now sees the fierce looking demons guarding the door leading to the small jewel box. These creatures threaten to kill him if he goes near them. But when the hero boldly faces them and decisively strikes them with his sword, all the fierce looking demons instantly disappear. He then opens the jewel box, takes out the small insect and squeezes it between his two fingers and kills it. The demon holding the princess at a distant place falls to the ground and dies immediately.
- F. Delusions:** This is a scene from an Indian movie 'Namak Haram'. The actors Amit and Raj drink a hallucinating brew. Amit is disoriented but Raj is in his senses. More
- G. Plants in the garden:** The garden has desired plants and also unwanted plants, the weeds. Paying attention to a thought is like watering a plant. Responding to a thought mentally, verbally or in action is like supplying plant food to the plant. More
- H. Images on a screen:** Your mind is like the movie screen on which thoughts are being constantly projected like images. You are in the audience seat watching the thoughts. More
- I. Balloons without air:** A thought entering the mind is like a limp balloon without air. Believing in it, is like blowing air into the balloon, giving it life and significance. More
- J. Tuning forks:** We get about 70000 thoughts in a day. Most of them just flicker in our minds and we hardly notice. But a few thoughts grip our minds like leeches robbing us of our peace of mind. Their effect lingers for quite some time. More

A. Thoughts are like ‘birds in the sky’

You are sitting in the open, casually looking at the sky. You see a bird, flying in your direction. You keep on looking at the bird. The bird sees your interest. It slowly descends and lands on your head. You make no effort to drive it away. It jumps to your shoulder. You watch its colors and movements with interest. The bird happily settles down on your head. In a few days, it builds a nest on your head. You make no efforts to shake it off. In a few more days, the bird lays eggs and soon there is a family of birds chirping happily on your head. You are getting distracted and not able to focus on your work. You now dislike the family of birds and wish they would all leave your head and find another place. But having lived with them so long, you developed an attachment to them. You don't have the heart to drive them away. You now wonder “how did I get into this mess?”

You initiated the mess when you continued to pay attention to the bird after seeing it in the sky. You nurtured the mess by not shooing the bird away when it was building a nest on your head, laying eggs and hatching them. If you had just diverted your attention on seeing the bird, all the subsequent mess would have been aborted. Your head would have been free and you could pursue your chosen activities.

A similar mess develops when you pay attention to unwanted, stressful or negative thoughts. If you pay attention to such a thought, it lays eggs and expands its family of negative thoughts, progressively occupying more of your mind. The more you delay diverting your attention, the more difficult it becomes to get rid of the family of negative thoughts. The simple trick is to immediately divert your attention whenever such a thought appears. Then in a while, it quietly disappears.

When we analyze our stream of thoughts, we find that there are only a few negative thoughts about own self or others, that repetitively appear in the mind and create stress. When you frequently and promptly divert your attention from them, their visits to your mind will progressively decrease. After a few months of this ignoring treatment, such negative thoughts stop visiting your mind! This is not just a theory. Try this trick from today. You will see the amazing results in a few weeks.

“Don't let the birds build nests on your head and then complain.”

C. Thoughts are like ‘Trains arriving at the train station’

You are sitting at the train station, waiting for the train to New York. You keep yourself busy with the newspaper. An approaching train is visible at a distance. You do not know where it is going. Do you jump onto it when it arrives at the station and go wherever it takes you? No way! You watch the approaching train till you see its number and destination signs. You will enter only that train which has the ‘New York’ sign.

Coming to thoughts –

Every thought has a color and a destination. The ‘Anger’ train has an eye catching red color and will take you to the ‘Revenge’ destination. The ‘Guilt’ train has a shining black color and takes you to the ‘Self punishment’ destination. When any thought appears in your mind, you can see clearly what is its

direction even if you do not know where it will take you ultimately. If it is not going in the direction you wish to go, don't be tempted into boarding it. Ignore the stressful or negative thought trains by diverting your attention. No thought waits for you. Every thought passes in a few moments. When the positive thought train appears, board it and enjoy the ride, reaching the destination of 'Happiness'.

D. Thoughts are like uninvited guests

Imaginary scenario:

It is a weekend evening. You are sitting in your living room with your family, enjoying a popular TV show. The doorbell rings and you open the door, wondering who was disturbing your happy hour. Waiting at the door is a known person whom you did not invite. He is not a bad person but definitely not welcome at this time, specially when you are watching a good TV show. But you feel obligated to invite him, though internally you hate his visit at this time. So you invite him in and he sits down in the sofa. You half watch the TV show and half engage the guest, trying to be nice. It is tea time and the guest joins the family for tea and snacks. He is happily settled in the room and enjoying it. After some time, the guest excuses himself and goes out, saying he would be back soon.

In a few minutes he comes back, bringing his wife with him (she was waiting in the car outside). She, the guest -2, is also a known person and happily joins the company, further distracting you from the TV show. You feel uncomfortable but being a nice a person (or meek person?) extend equal hospitality to her. Both the guests are well settled in your living room. You practically give up the TV show. Now the guest -2 excuses herself saying she will be back soon. (You might have guessed what happened next!)

She comes back with their three children (they were sitting in the car outside). You can now write the rest of this story. The grand children (guests X, Y and Z) have also been brought in. Frustrated, you switch off the TV show. You are a very nice person fuming inside but trying to be nice to the three generations of guests. You wonder why your happy TV time was spoiled and what did you do wrong.

You could have saved yourself, if you handled the first guest differently. When he entered the room, you could continue focusing on the TV show and not respond to his attempts to engage you in conversation. He would feel unwelcome and leave in a few minutes on some pretext.

If you are more bold, you could respond differently on seeing him at the door. You could politely but firmly tell him that you were working from home on an important office assignment (a lie of course) and you would call him as soon as you were free. He would leave immediately. It is similar to what you do when talking on phone with one person and another person's call comes. You promptly tell the second caller that you are currently answering a call and would call him back as soon as possible. If you were not smart enough in preventing the entry of the first guest and he is sitting in the room, you could have rescued the situation. You could have told him a different lie, saying that you had to go out for a concert, movie or whatever and ask him to please visit another day, by calling you a day before. You would be tactfully walking him to the door.

Coming to the thoughts

Most thoughts are uninvited thoughts (UIT's). We don't invite the thoughts. They enter the mind without an appointment or invitation. They don't wait outside and ring the bell, seeking permission to enter, as the mind space does not have walls or doors. Unless a thought pops into the mind, you can't see what

kind of thought it is – positive or negative, useful or useless, relevant or irrelevant. But you are not helpless. As soon as a thought enters, you can see its nature. If it is one that can help you, you can allow it to linger and grow its family of related thoughts. If not, you can engage your mind on something soothing like ‘focusing on breathing’ and ignore the useless thought. When that thought does not get any attention or response from you, it leaves quickly.

F. Thoughts are like delusions

This is a scene from an Indian movie called ‘Namak Haram’. The actors Amit and Raj drink a hallucinating brew, on a festive occasion being celebrated outdoors. Amit’s had too many glasses and his mind is disoriented, but Raj is in his senses. Amit sits down on a boulder and fiddles with his fingers, inserting the fingers of one hand into another and taking them apart, like a child. Suddenly, he feels that his interlinked fingers are stuck to each other. He tries to pull them apart with all his power but fails repeatedly. He is scared that something terrible happened to his fingers and cries loudly like a small child, shouting “My fingers are stuck! my fingers are stuck! please help”.

His friend Raj who was dancing with a group at a distance, hears his friend Amit crying and comes running. He had seen Amit having too many glasses of the brew before that. On seeing his condition, Raj quickly understands his friend’s Amit’s delusion. To rid him of the delusion, Raj holds both the wrists of his friend with his own hands and quickly pulls them apart. Amit repeatedly plays with his fingers, inserting and taking them apart, just to make sure they are really free. He is overjoyed that his fingers are now free and shouts happily “My fingers are free! My fingers are free!”. He once again continues to play with his fingers, as though there was never a problem with them.

Some of our thoughts are delusions caused by the influence of our genetics, family, education and life experiences. These delusions make us feel we can’t do this and we can’t do that. Our lives are stuck to our imaginary limitations. When we defy such limiting thoughts just for a moment and act as we wish, we find that they were only delusions, not real! Once the spell of a delusion is broken, it becomes easier to ignore that thought and similar ones, again and again. After a few acts of defiance, a delusion may totally disappear. We are now able to act with more freedom, in our best interest. When we attack our delusions one at a time, in this fashion, even the general tendency of feeling stuck may be weakened.

G. Thoughts are like plants in a garden

Mind is like a field and thoughts are like plants. Negative thoughts are weeds and positive thoughts are useful plants. Paying attention to a thought is like watering a plant. Responding to a thought mentally, verbally or in action is like supplying plant food to it.

When we pay regular attention to negative thoughts and respond to them mentally, verbally and in actions, they get wonderful nourishment. They grow rapidly developing deep roots. At that stage it will be very difficult or impossible to uproot the stressful thoughts. What can we do?

Starve the negative thoughts of your attention and response by diverting the attention to the breath or your chosen chant if any. Such thoughts will not grow deep roots. It will be easier to starve them and

get rid of them. Instead, pay more attention and response to positive thoughts. Let them grow deep in the mind and become giant trees.

H. Thoughts are like images on a screen

The movie theater has a screen on which images are constantly being projected. You are sitting in a chair in the audience, watching the images. You see the image of a bad guy aiming a gun at you but you are not scared and do not run for cover. You see the image of a snake but you are not leaving your seat and running away. At the end of the movie, you walk out of the theater with memories of some images, which will fade away after some time.

The mind is like that movie screen. Thoughts are like the images coming on the screen. They are mostly images of past negative or stressful experiences. YOU are the audience watching them. Treat the thoughts coming into your mind as you treated those images on the screen. Watch them passively and let them pass on. Don't confuse the thoughts to be your own creations. You really don't know who is projecting those thoughts into your mind without your permission.

Alternatively, whenever you feel stressed due to a negative thought, you can project your own chosen image and calm your mind. The secret of the mind is only one thought can be in the mind at a moment. If thought 'A' is in the mind, 'B' can't be there. If 'B' is in the mind, thought 'A' can't be there. We can displace the stressful thought 'A' by 'B' i.e, 'focusing on breathing' (FOB) using one of the modes. As long as the sensation of the breath or its number is lingering in your mind, no stressful thought can enter it. Every time, 'A' enters evict it using FOB. Gradually, the mind gets more comfortable with FOB and by will naturally lose its addiction for stressful thoughts.

I. Thoughts are like balloons without air

We constantly get thoughts in the mind – mostly negative ones and rarely positive ones. Most of them are random thoughts and vastly vary in content and rarely relevant to the task on hand. Often we get carried away by the content and message of such a thought without questioning its validity. We don't raise the question "Is there any truth in this thought? Do I believe it?"

A thought has no impact on our mind or behavior unless we believe it.

I can visualize thoughts entering the mind like limp balloons landing on my desk. I don't know where they are coming from. I don't have to blow air into every balloon that lands on my desk. I can take a look at each balloon and decide which one I like to keep. Then I can spend my energy blowing air into the chosen balloon.

Similarly, we can decide which thought arriving in our mind has significance to us at this moment, examine its validity and decide whether to believe in it and act on it. Believing in a thought is like blowing air into a limp balloon, giving it an attractive look and utility. Not believing in a thought is like leaving it limp, lifeless and insignificant, as good as dropping it in the trash can.

J. Thoughts are like tuning forks

One of my clients Naveen, a Software Engineer in India has been doing well and happy as a software Engineer in a multinational company. In spite of this, he has been reporting that when he compares his financial strength with some of his relatives and colleagues in a better position, he is overcome by an intense feeling of inferiority. This has been a chronic problem happening even when the other person says nothing. He tends to avoid coming into contact with such people. This feeling arises spontaneously and severely disturbs his mind and body. He gets trapped in this negative state frequently and it may arise anywhere – home, work, among relatives or in community. He takes a long time to recover his healthy mental state. In spite of reading all my mind related articles repeatedly, he has not been able to overcome this major handicap. I wondered for a long time “Naveen gets countless thoughts in a day and none of them makes such a major impact. Why does this single thought impact heavily on his mind and body and keep recurring?” His problem prompted me to come up with this article comparing thoughts with tuning forks. Read on –

We get thousands of thoughts in a day. Barring exceptions, we experience them as distractions from whatever we may be focusing on, at the moment. Hardly any of them lingers and bothers us. But some thoughts resonate with us intensely and create severe negative reactions – mental, physical or both. What could be the reason? Let us take a clue from our middle school experiments with tuning forks.

You might have done experiments with tuning forks in the Physics lab at your school. I remember mine. We had sets of tuning forks of different natural frequencies in wooden cases. We took them and placed them standing them in wooden holders with the forks pointing up. To test the theory of ‘Resonance’ my classmate placed his set of forks at one corner of the lab and I placed only one fork at the far corner of the lab.

My classmate tapped on his set of forks, one fork at a time with a small wooden mallet. I was watching my single fork at the other corner. My fork did not show any response when he tapped several forks at his corner. But when he tapped one particular fork, my fork instantly responded by vibrating visibly. When I took my responsive fork to him and compared its natural frequency with the fork he just tapped, we found they had the same natural frequency. Let us now transfer this concept to thoughts – neutral and disturbing thoughts.

During about 17 hours that we are awake, we get thousands of thoughts, the highest estimate being 70000!. How many of those thoughts are we even aware of? Like tiny sparks from a sparkler, they appear and disappear. But, some thoughts are immediately noticed by us and cause huge discomfort. We try to push them away. They are like some exceptional sparks that fall on the skin and sting. Such stinging thoughts grab our attention and drain our energy. How do they become so overpowering? What is special about them? They are like my tuning fork which resonated with a particular fork my friend tapped but did not respond to any of the other forks. They exist deep in our minds when we bury some unpleasant beliefs and feelings arising from our experiences which we could not place in proper perspective. The exceptional thoughts that disturb us may be triggered by a scene, word or behavior of a person, resonate with our buried beliefs and feelings and shake our minds and bodies. What can we do? We can use such occurrences as messengers, pointing at the buried stuff. Then, we have to bring such buried stuff into our consciousness and defuse them, using effective techniques like ‘Meditation on

breathing'. They will gradually lose their power, letting the current triggering incidents pass through our minds without significant impact.

#2. You are the trainer for your Mind and Body

Do this simple exercise alone, or as a group, sharing the results. Read the passage between the two lines, top down, and find the total number of times the letter 'a' occurs in it. Count only the lower case 'a' s, ignoring the higher case.

Different methods of counting are suggested below. You have to write down the results of your counting at the end of each count.

"Of all the examples on mental conditioning, this is the most insulting one, for intelligent human beings. We see ads in newspapers and magazines, showing a celebrity (celeb) endorsing a product. We know many things in this game – that the celeb may not have used the product even once and he may be just selfishly selling his popular image to that company, to get a huge amount of money. He is most likely cheating us, by giving us the impression that he used that product, feels happy about it and hence suggesting us to use and benefit from it. We also know that the celeb gets his money out of all the monies that we, the buyers, pay for the product. In spite of knowing all this, we get influenced by the ad and the sale of that product goes up. Are we not indirectly paying the celeb to cheat us, without even realizing it?"

Method 1

Count the total number of 'a' s in the above passage, counting top down. Write it down as result '1A'. Next, count the same letter, starting from the last letter upwards (bottom up) and write this number as result '1B'.

Both the numbers '1A' and '1B' will be different for most people! Repeat this process and you may be embarrassed at the recurring variations in the count of 'a' s! Done by a group of people, it will be amusing to find literate persons reporting different numbers, for such a childish task! There is no apparent justification for any difference. This exercise shows how your 'Body' (eyes, hand and brain) is bound to its habitual style of working. It seems to be unable to correctly count a letter, in spite of your best intention and efforts! Think about it.

Method 2

Now, your analytical 'Mind' goes to work trying to fix this problem of not being able to get the same count every time. It comes up with this 'Method 2'. See how the performance of your body and mind improves.

Point at each and every letter in the passage individually with the tip of your pen, before moving to the next letter (don't make marks on the paper). Lift the tip of the pen every time you move from one letter to the next letter. Stop when you notice the first 'a'. Breathe-in once and while breathing-out, silently speak the number 'one' because it is the first 'a'. Continue to silently repeat the latest count, 'one, one, one ...so on' and move on to the following letters. When you notice the second 'a', stop. Breathe-in once and while breathing-out, count 'two'. Keep on repeating 'two, two, two...so on', till you notice the

third 'a'. Repeat this process till you reach the last letter in the passage. Write down the result as '2A'. Repeat this process starting from the last letter of the passage and going up. Write down the result as '2B'. You will find that the difference between these two numbers is much less than the difference between '1A' and '1B'. But some small variations may still arise.

Method 3

Put your Mind on the job again. Now it comes up with this 'Method 3' to count the number of 'a' s with higher accuracy.

Turn the page upside down. Count the inverted shape of 'a' following the rules of method 2. With this method, you will get almost correct results every time. Try any other letter using this method. The results will be equally impressive for individuals and for the group, compared with the other 2 methods.

What is the learning from this Exercise?

Your 'BODY' (eyes, hand and brain) is not trained or used to reading individual letters. It has been used millions of times, to look at only the first and last letter of a word and figure out the whole word in a flash. (Don't believe me? Read this page in Wikipedia) That is how it reads so fast! To achieve your non-habitual goal of reading the individual letters without bothering about the words or their meaning, YOU have to use your MIND to develop an appropriate method and insist on your BODY to follow that method. The roles to be played by YOU, your MIND and your BODY to achieve your goals can be practically understood through this exercise.

It is another problem that your mind, which has to guide the body, wanders aimlessly and does not obey you, in spite of your best efforts. But you need not be a victim of the current state of your Body or Mind. To achieve your goals, it is YOUR job as the owner, to train your Mind and Body through appropriate mental and physical exercises as you would, for your pet dog. 'Focusing on breathing' is one such simple and easy method, to train your Mind to concentrate on what you want and as long as you want.

#5 The living lessons I learned from my brother's childhood death

In the year 1965, almost 50 years back, I was in a place far away from home, in my first job. That was the first time I left home alone and yet unmarried. One day, I got an open post card from my father that my brother named 'Ramu' of age 10, died due to drowning in the lake near our house. His body was found by the divers in a decomposed condition after searching for 2 days.

Ramu was the darling boy of our family. He was exceptionally good in behavior, studies, and helping mother at home. I remember him sewing on the sewing machine and helping mother in domestic chores.

When I got the news of his death, I was in a turmoil. One question arose in my mind: 'Why did God take away such a good boy at the premature age of 10? Why? Why?' This constantly swirling question did not allow me to do my normal work, eat or sleep. I was totally restless and inconsolable for 2 days.

Later on, I came to know that my brother, who did not know how to swim, went to a nearby lake along with some of his friends who could swim. When my father came to know of this, he thrashed him and warned him, to never to go near that lake. It was also learned that some time back, he came across a

fortune teller sitting by the side of a road with a parrot in a cage. There were printed cards kept outside the cage with different printed versions of future written on each of them. My brother paid that man, he released the trained parrot, it came out of the cage and picked up one of the cards spread out neatly before the cage. The card picked up for my brother was contained among other things, that his life was in danger from water. This was perhaps working in his young mind, making him to seek out the danger from water. Or perhaps, he was destined to die as a child and the parrot forecast served as an excuse.

Let me come back to my agony over his death. On the third day, I heard a silent voice asking me a counter question “Mr Suryanarayana, why do you blame God for your brother’s childhood death? Did HE promise you that your darling brother Ramu would live into old age? If ever some entity made such a promise, blame that entity for breaking the promise. If no promised, you have no business blaming anyone. You can’t even raise that question. I was stumped by the irrefutable truth behind the counter question.

My mind was stilled into silence. The restless questioning of the last two days suddenly stopped. There was some peace in my mind.

After some time, a supplementary thought popped into my mind. It is said in some spiritual texts that this world is like a stage. We are all the actors. Some people play the roles of older people, some that of middle aged ones and some of children. Every actor enacts one’s assigned role and goes back stage. My brother Ramu was assigned a child actor’s role. He played it wonderfully and went back stage, never to appear again. What am I complaining about? On the other hand, should I not be happy that he played his assigned role superbly, giving us the pleasure of his company for 10 long years. In spite of all the above self explanations, I was still suffering for the loss of my dear brother.

After a few days, another wave of a thought arose. Why was I suffering? A thought came in response. I am suffering because of my own invalid expectation about his life term. If I had been aware about the uncertainty of my brother’s life, like that of any other human being and accepted that he may die any moment, I would not have suffered beyond the practical loss of a very dear family member. If I had imbibed the uncertainty of any individual’s life, not only his, I would have thought this way – ‘Yes, nobody guaranteed his long life, neither God nor anyone. He might have died any moment. But we are lucky that he lived 10 full years giving us the gift of his company.’

When these thoughts repeatedly circulated in my mind over a few weeks, the reality of his death did not cause me any further suffering. I was at peace with the occurrence of his death and could function normally.

Later, when faced with some disappointments in life, another offshoot of a thought arose. If there is no certainty about the full disc called life, how can there be any degree of certainty about the other segments of life: education, employment, marriage, children, so on? If the disc itself uncertain, any segment of it has to be equally uncertain. If I could be at peace about my brother’s death as child, I might as well be at peace about the other incidents in my life or of any other person.

Once I accept this fundamental uncertainty, I can deal with it. It need not paralyze me. Generally, we attach disproportionately higher weightage to our disbelief in success. We tend to believe more in failure. This may be because of the negative mode in which we are brought up since birth.

It is rare that I have zero chance of fulfilling my goals. The probability of some magnitude of success is as real as that of failure. I should not blow up the negative probability and not try at all, thereby missing the apparently available opportunities. That would be foolishness. This healthy attitude can motivate me to keep on trying to the best of my capability to achieve my goals. Whatever I achieve in my lifetime will be a surprise gift.

My brother Ramu's childhood death taught me some precious lessons for living: embrace the inevitable uncertainties; resist blowing up the potential failures; nurture the potential for success by putting in my best efforts and be grateful for whatever life offers.

I shared this story with a woman attending my classes. She was on the verge of an emotional break down due to the verbally abusive and controlling behavior of her boss at work. She realized that her expectation of caring and kind behavior from him was a major cause for her distress. She accepted that she could not change his behavior and should stop expecting him to change his behavior. Instead, she had to change the way she responded to his abusive behavior. In the next class she reported that this change in her attitude reduced her distress drastically.

#6. The courtroom treatment for stressful thoughts

Many of us get a few stressful thoughts that repeatedly pop into the mind. The moment such a thought enters the mind, the associated feelings of anxiety, guilt or panic arise. Result is stress in the mind and tensing of the muscles of the body. Every time such a thought enters the mind, its power seems to get enhanced, like a balloon growing bigger every time you receive it in your hands.

Here is the 'courtroom' treatment to drain the power from such thoughts. It is like pricking a balloon and deflating it, every time it lands in your hand. A few repetitions of this treatment will disable such thoughts permanently.

To illustrate this technique, we will use the real life story of Latha (name changed) a woman in her forties who attended series of my classes. She had the recurring thought that she was responsible for the death of her father who died 12 years back, due to heart failure. He literally in her hands when they were the only two people in the house. When he collapsed, she administered CPR as she knew it and tried to revive him. She promptly called her sister and emergency number #911. But her father died in her hands before the emergency medical team arrived. Though she did all that she could, to save him, the guilt laden thought that she was responsible for his death haunted her for more than 12 years. She was suffering from Fibromyalgia, Insomnia, Obesity and more. She was single, living alone and unable to do any work in her own house. She stopped driving. She was living on disability payments and her family was helping for all the physical tasks like vacuuming. She got addicted to powerful painkillers to suppress her body pains and painful feelings. Here is how we used the 'Courtroom' technique to defuse the destructive thought of guilt.

This courtroom has 4 key persons.

The alleged culprit (AC): This is the silent woman herself, drowned in guilt. Imagine she is at the heart position.

The prosecution lawyer (PL): This is the voice in Latha's mind, who is constantly blaming her, for her father's death. Imagine that the PL is sitting on the left shoulder.

The defense lawyer (DL): This is the normally dormant or sleeping voice in the mind. He needs to be woken up and motivated to defend the (AC), the alleged culprit. Imagine the DL sitting on the right shoulder.

The Judge: This is your own cool, unbiased and fearless mind, whose existence you may not even be aware. Its job is to listen to both the lawyers, examine the evidences presented by them and pass an unbiased fair judgement. Imagine the Judge sitting in your head position.

Latha physically enacted the court room scene in the waiting room of my daughter's office where I was doing the classes. She played the roles of PL, DL and the Judge, one at a time. We set up four chairs in a circle. On one chair we placed a magazine to represent the (AC), alleged culprit, the woman herself. The woman initially sat in the chair labeled PL (Prosecution lawyer) and made the allegation that Latha, pointing to the magazine representing her, failed to save her father's life, though she was present with him when he collapsed. Latha was guilty of her father's death and deserved an appropriate punishment. PL wrote down these statements on a sheet of paper under the sub title "Allegations by the Prosecution Lawyer".

Then Latha moved into the chair labeled DL (defense lawyer), carrying the paper of allegations written by PL in her hand. I told her that in this second chair, she being the DL had to make as many statements as she could, to contradict the PL's allegations. DL should try to prove the allegations of PL wrong or doubtful, citing the facts. This was a totally new thought process for Latha. Never in the past did she try to defend herself against the allegation. With some probing questions, she could recollect her loving and prompt actions to save her father's life. As Latha started narrating, truly playing the role of the DL, she became quite emotional and vigorously defended herself. She felt some visible relief immediately. She wrote down the counter arguments as DL on another sheet of paper under the title "In defense of the (AC)".

She then moved into the judge's chair, carrying the above two sheets of paper in her hand. Now her job was to consider the statements of both the lawyers and give an unbiased ruling on the allegation. For the first time in the last 12 years after the incident, she genuinely felt that she did not deserve to be blamed for her father's death. She said so in a matter of fact way without any difficulty. The spell of guilt which kept her imprisoned for 12 long years was finally broken. She felt tremendous relief.

I told Latha that whenever the guilt laden thought entered her mind, she should promptly recollect and re-play the above process enacted by her in her mind.

After a few days, Latha said that the extreme panic she experienced whenever she even looked at her father's photo gradually diminished. It totally disappeared in a few weeks.

#7. The three guys in the mind ‘Boss guy’, ‘Truth guy’ and ‘Image guy’

E-mail recently received from a client doing my classes:

“I have to be honest with you. When I told you I had gotten a blood test it was a lie. I didn’t get one. I’m not sure why I lied in the first place maybe it is what I had thought you would want to hear or maybe I was just scared to talk about my mental disorder at the time. However that is no excuse for my action. I am truly sorry for what I did but you deserve to know. At least I owe you that. The things you have shown me truly help. I am becoming a better person because of you.

I understand if you do not wish to meet anymore because of this & again I am sorry. Please do not stop what you are doing to help people because of what I have done.”

My response:

“I greatly appreciate your honesty and courage in confessing your lapse. What you lied about was your own personal matter, not affecting anyone else. That day you spoke in a manner you felt comfortable. Many of us do this. But all of us may not have the courage to confess, like you have shown. You had enough trust in me to confess. I consider myself privileged for earning that trust. Let us try to understand this incident in the broad human perspective.

There are three guys working in our minds. One is the ‘Boss guy’ who ultimately decides on the contradictory issues like a judge in a court. Second is the ‘Truth guy’ who cares only about telling the truth, not caring for the consequences. The third is an ‘Image guy’ who only cares about projecting a positive self image, to feel secure and please himself and others. He does not care how he achieves this goal. Often, a clash occurs in our minds between the second and third guys, like the one you have experienced.

The day you lied about the blood test, the ‘Image guy’ took over, suppressed the ‘Truth guy’ and made himself feel secure. After a few days, the ‘Truth guy’ who was feeling snubbed, presented his case strongly before the ‘Boss guy’. Finally the ‘Boss guy’ in you was strong enough to decide the case in favor of the ‘Truth guy’ and silenced the ‘Image guy’. Then you, the Boss guy sent this e-mail. All is well that ends well! I congratulate you for your achievement and hope my explanation above resolves any feeling of guilt you may be carrying in your heart.

Let us get back to business as usual. We learned a lesson. I am happy to be working with a person who has the courage to face the truth and confess to another person. I am looking forward to seeing you at the next class.”

Postscript: He resumed the classes and working on his goals. He made appointment with the doctor for his annual physical exam and blood work.

#8. *This too shall pass

This page has two parts.

The monk story.

“Some problems are solved by ignoring them.”

The monk story

A monk visited a kingdom and at the end of the visit, he gave the king a small sealed box. He told the king to keep it in his pocket all the time but open it only when he felt his life was coming to an end.

After some time the king was attacked by a neighboring king's army and lost the battle. He ran away with a band of soldiers chased by a large group of enemy soldiers. On the way, he lost all his men while defending him. He was running all alone desperate to save himself. He finally reached the edge of a deep valley. If he went forward he would fall into the valley and die. If he stayed there he would be caught by enemy soldiers and killed. He felt that his life was coming to an end either way. He remembered about the small sealed box given by the monk. He opened it and found nothing but a piece of paper. Written on it were only four words "This Too Shall Pass". He was disappointed that no magic power sprang up from inside to save his life. But he trusted the wisdom of the monk. He took a deep breath, calmed himself and gained composure. He tried to make sense of the four words in the message of the monk.

He looked back in the direction he came from and to his delight he did not find any of the enemy soldiers. Even after a long time none came in sight. Apparently the enemy soldiers lost track of him quite some time back. Now he felt safe and walked carefully to the nearby village. Gradually he reassembled his loyal army and recaptured his kingdom.

What saved his life and helped him regain his kingdom? Only those four words "This Too Shall Pass". They made him look at his crisis situation from a totally different angle, helped him regain his composure and helped him see the opportunity in that near death scenario. If he did not heed those words he would have jumped to an honorable death, not willing to be captured by the enemy and face a humiliating death in the hands of the enemy.

Some problems are solved by ignoring them

This reminds me of an allied philosophy that I heard from one of our senior managers during my professional career.

We faced a crisis situation due to work stoppage in the manufacturing shop where our Industrial Engineering department revised some standard times based on time studies. The workers were unhappy as their incentive earnings were affected. They stopped work demanding compensation. A team of us from our department and the production department went to the General Manager of the plant and unburdened our distress. We expected a magic solution from him with his rich experience.

The General Manager continued to listen but gave no response. We felt he did not share our crisis perception and agitation one bit. He looked cool as ice even after 30 minutes of presentation by all of us. Seeing his coolness was in a sense, comforting. If the General Manager with much larger responsibility could be so cool why should we be so worried?

We sensed he was offering no magic solution. One of us finally gathered courage and asked him "Sir! We wonder how you could be so cool when all of us are in such a desperate situation? What is the secret of your coolness?"

He calmly replied “My dear friends! Some problems are solved by ignoring them”. We all laughed heartily and came out of his room feeling lighter in heart. In a few days the workers cooled down and a solution emerged to resolve the crisis and resume production.

Even after 20 years, his words of wisdom born out of experience ring in my mind sometimes.

#9. Sam fell flat at his birthday party

The Birthday boy Sam, not a boy really, but a young man, invited many families for a party at his house. All of them assembled early in the big party hall at the first floor, waiting for him to appear on the scene.

Sam was briskly coming down the steps from the second floor. He was dressed in a beautiful suit and his face was beaming happily. All the visitors were watching him coming down, anticipating the celebration. He came almost to the second last step, suddenly missed a step and fell forward with his knees hitting the carpet with a thud.

All the guests were stunned. A few standing close to him ran forward and helped him rise up.

Sam was stunned by the fall. He was not badly hurt and was able to stand up and walk with a little limp. Now he has two choices –

Choice One

Sam could feel mortified, miserable and ashamed at the way he fell on his birthday, in front of all his guests. He can show his misery by apologizing to them repeatedly, continue to feel miserable throughout the party and distribute his misery to all his guests. He could completely destroy every one’s happy moods. His guests would remember his fall and the miserable way he behaved after it, all their life.

His primary suffering due to the pain in his knees might disappear in a few hours but his secondary suffering for falling in public might linger for many days, weeks, months or all his life.

But he has choice two also.

Choice Two

Alternatively, Sam could rise up feeling surprised, look closely at the place he tripped and exaggeratedly laugh saying “What a day to fall!”. He could then join the guests feeling silly, rather than miserable and make everyone feel at ease. His guests would remember his response to the fall with admiration and wish they could take their own falls, as smartly as Sam.

The same person, the same fall but what a contrasting choice of responses! Totally different responses, with totally different impacts on own self and others. What choice would you recommend to Sam or Paul or to yourself when the next fall takes place? Choice one or two?

#10. Is it a living snake, a dead snake or a rope?

Imagine you are on your way to urgently meet your friend who lives very close to go to a movie in his car. You are walking along a narrow passage in a semi lit area. There is no alternative path close by.

You see some curly thing lying on the path ahead. You feel it may be a snake and stop immediately to take good look. You are not able to figure out exactly what it is. It may be a living snake, a dead snake or a rope. But which of these guesses is true? Time is passing by. You are getting late and anxious to go ahead but afraid it may be a living snake.

If it is a dead snake or a rope, it is harmless, you are wasting your time looking at it and losing a cherished opportunity. If you conclude that it is a harmless thing and go forward but it happens to be a poisonous snake, you could be bitten by it and die. If you could confirm that it is a living snake, you could pick up a stick, kill the snake and go ahead without wasting much time. What should you do?

Seeing its true nature is all that is required to make the best out of your opportunity while keeping yourself alive. It is just a matter of correct perception. Once you judge correctly, you do not remain paralyzed into inaction. You will take the appropriate action and do your best. Can anyone do better than one's own best under the given circumstances? Should we not be happy that we did our best?

I told this story to a 76 year old woman who attended my weekly classes on 'Counting Breaths' and related methods as she had chronic anxiety problem. When I met her after a long time and asked how she was practicing, she said this story helped her a lot in countering her anxiety. Whenever she was worried about something, she asked herself "Is it a rope or snake?"

Another client who overcame road rage using the techniques also said he liked this story. His report

#11. To speak or not to speak? To act or not to act?

We face this dilemma many times, in personal, social and professional lives. Often we get doubts whether we did the right thing or not. Some of these questions can dog us throughout the life.

I found a way out of this morale sapping situation. I ask myself two questions when faced with the situation. First question: Is my mind clear? Am I confused? Do I have the best possible information to take my best possible decision under the circumstances? If I can't confidently say "yes" to these questions I better gather more information to clear my mind. If I can say "Yes" confidently, I crossed the first hurdle to a 'no-regrets' decision. The second question: Is my heart clean? Am I driven by anger, fear, vengefulness, hatred, greed, deceit or such negative emotions? If my answer is not a confident "Yes", I should hold my speech or action. I should wait for my emotions to cool down, for a few seconds, minutes hours or days. I should check again to see if my heart is clean. Once it is found free from such negative emotions, my heart is clean. I am now ready to go ahead because my mind is clear and heart is clean.

I can now speak or act with the conviction that I am saying the best words or doing the right thing. Of course my words and actions should be appropriate and considerate of the persons involved. What else can a human being do other than one's best, with a clear mind and a clean heart? What is there

for me to regret? If others feel bad about my words or actions, their minds may not be clear or hearts may not be clean. If so, they have a problem not I. They have to work on their problem. By regretting about how others reacted to my words or actions done with a clear mind and a clean heart, I am fooling myself and not playing my proper role and not helping myself or anyone.

I told this concept to a woman who was on the point of an emotional break down due to the verbally abusive behavior of her boss who was a health care professional. She was attending my classes. Within two weeks of adopting this strategy and a few more such concepts, she reported tremendous relief. She was no more afraid of her boss. She now speaks boldly to him, as she feels 'Her mind is clear and heart is pure'. I was surprised how effective this concept proved to be for her, having suffered from the abusive behavior of her boss for more than two years.

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#13. “Whatever happened is good for you!”

We sometimes experience small or big adverse events in life, causing a lot of suffering at the moment. Later, they may turn out to be blessings. This concept is nicely brought out in this story from India.

Once upon a time, there was a king. Whenever he or others around him had an adverse experience, the minister would immediately say “whatever happened is good for you!”. One day, the king was practicing sword fighting and accidentally, his right thumb was cut off. The king was feeling very bad, as he would not be able to use his bow and arrow without his thumb. But to the consternation of the king and every one present, the minister quietly said in his usual style “whatever happened is good for you”. The king was furious and said “I have tolerated your stupid statement all along but today you have made me mad. I am ordering the soldiers to put you in the prison. Even when the minister was being escorted to the prison by the soldiers, he said “whatever is happening to me is good for me”. The king and the people around him thought the minister was totally nuts.

After a few days, the king went to the forest along with his staff, for hunting. Around noon, he was tired and slept under a tree. When he woke up after some time, he found that the staff member who was sleeping by his side was missing. Though his people searched for him all around, he could not be traced. Later on, they came to know from the court spies that the missing staff member was abducted by local tribal people and killed for human sacrifice to their God. The king realized that he himself was not picked up, as he had no thumb, making him unfit for sacrifice to God. He realized the truth behind the (in)famous words of his minister, as losing his thumb resulted in saving his life itself. When he reached his kingdom, he ordered the immediate release of the minister from the prison.

After the minister came out of the prison, the king asked him “I accept that losing my thumb saved my life in the forest. How was going into prison good for you?”

The minister smilingly replied “If you had not put me in prison, I would have been sleeping by your side in the forest and the tribals would have picked me up for human sacrifice.” The king burst out laughing, admiring the wisdom behind his words.

Moral of the story: Some adverse events may subsequently lead to beneficial turning points in life.

#14. On being happy

There are two articles in this post. One is an imaginary story and another a true life experience.

(A) “Then what...Then what?.....Then what?.....” An imaginary story

(B) The grumpy spinster and the dancing homeless man – A true life experience

(A) “Then what...Then what?.....Then what?.....” An imaginary story

This is a story on how to be Happy. I heard it from a representative of the Vipassana (1) foundation at Hyderabad (capital of the Southern state of Andhra Pradesh in India) in the year 1997. He was giving a talk to the senior managers of our company.

A group of smart managers from the city were visiting a village. They found a middle aged man sitting under a tree, playing his flute. There was a cow grazing at a distance. The managers could not imagine a person sitting and playing music all alone.

One manager asked him curiously “what are you doing here?”. The man replied “I am employed as a cow keeper. I am watching that cow grazing over there for my employer till evening”. Their dialogue continued.

Manager: How much do you earn for the 8 hours you sit here?

Cow keeper: Rupees 20 (about half a dollar)

Manager: You can earn 100 Rupees in the same time if you watch 5 cows instead of 1 cow.

Cow keeper: Then what?

Manager: You will earn 80 rupees extra money every day.

Cow keeper: Then what?

Manager: Over an year, you will earn extra 20,000 rupees.

Cow keeper: Then what?

Manager: You can buy some cows for yourself with the extra earnings, instead of watching other people’s cows.

Cow keeper: Then what?

Manager: You can sell the extra milk and earn 40,000 rupees a year.

Cow keeper: Then what?

Manager: You can buy more cows and make 80,000 rupees a year.

Cow keeper: Then what?

The managers were now thinking the cow keeper was crazy but patiently tried to enlighten him on how to expand his wealth.

Manager: You will have a lot of extra milk with which you can start an ice cream parlor.

Cow keeper: Then what?

Manager: Your earnings will be 120,000 rupees a year.

Cow keeper: Then what?

Manager: You can start franchises for your ice cream parlor and earn 200,000 a year.

Cow keeper: Then what?

Manager: (Impatiently) By repeating this model, you will earn so much extra money which you can put in secure deposits and earn lot of interest.

Cow keeper: Then what?

Manager: (Irritated) You will earn so much interest that you need not work at all. You would be able to simply sit, play your favorite flute music and enjoy your life.

Cow keeper: *(with a smile) That is what I am doing right now without going through all the extra steps you described!*

(1) Vipassana is an insight meditation practice.

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(B) The grumpy spinster and the dancing homeless man – A true life experience

This story appeared in the Indian newspaper 'The Hindu' around the year 2000. It was written by Sudha Narayana Murthy, the wife of the famous Infosys founder Narayana Murthy. It goes like this.

Sudha had a spinster friend Kamala (not her real name). Kamala was always complaining about something or other whenever she met her friends. This was so irritating to her friends that when they spotted her at a distance, they tried to take a detour to avoid listening to her grumpy talk. Sudha lost contact with Kamala for a long time and one day met her at an airport unexpectedly. Kamala saw her and came promptly to meet her. Sudha prepared herself for the stream of complaints.

To her surprise, Kamala did not complain about anything, but talked like a happy person! Sudha could not believe that Kamala changed dramatically. In view of their long standing friendship, she asked Kamala straightaway, why she was not complaining about anything whereas she was always complaining whenever they met in the past. She asked what changed her attitude so radically.

Kamala replied that her experience on one rainy day changed her attitude. She described it in detail.

Kamala was living alone in a big house surrounded by a boundary wall. A homeless old man was living with his granddaughter, under a plastic sheet tied to the top of the wall, as their only shelter. They were begging for food in the neighborhood and lived on the offered food. Every day, Kamala had some food left over in her kitchen. She carried it outside the boundary wall and offered it to the old man and his granddaughter. She had the satisfaction of feeding them some food every day.

One day, after her lunch, she put the leftover food in a container and was about to go out, to offer to the old man and his granddaughter. She saw that it was raining. She was not inclined to walk out, carrying an umbrella in one hand and the food in other hand. But a part of her mind was tugging at her heart, concerned that the old man and his granddaughter might be getting wet under the plastic sheet and also feeling hungry, not getting her usual daily donation of food. They might even be expecting it and cursing her silently. She watched out with concern through the window from the second floor of her house.

To her utter amazement, she saw them holding each other's hands and whirling round in the rain, laughing and singing a rain song!

The scene shook her, to her core. She felt ashamed of herself for complaining all the time, for something or other. Right at that moment, her attitude changed dramatically. She reflected on how many things she was blessed with – food, shelter and money and was still complaining whereas the homeless old man and his granddaughter had nothing but still were laughing and dancing in the rain, with hungry stomachs! From that day, she totally stopped complaining.

#15. My shopping cart pulls to the side

I go to the nearby Walmart store often for fresh milk and vegetables. As soon as I enter, I pull out a cart from the train of stacked carts and go into the aisles, to pick up the stuff. Occasionally, after pushing the cart for a few feet, I realize that wheels are not in alignment, pulling it slightly to left or right. I am not happy with its condition. But having walked a few feet ahead, I am reluctant to walk back to the entrance to replace the defective cart by a good one. So I go ahead and continue the shopping.

If I remain passive and allow the cart to move as it tends to, my cart will soon hit another shopper or the shelving. I silently curse the defective cart and the people who should have taken such carts out of circulation. To prevent any mishap, I periodically adjust it to go straight ahead. With a number of grumbling adjustments, I complete my shopping and walk out of the store, without any mishap.

One day it occurred to me that my mind sometimes behaves like that defective cart. I am aware of my mental bias pushing me to obviously unwarranted judgments of people. If I go by its dictates, I will definitely regret my judgments and consequent actions. Taking a clue from my experience with the defective carts, whenever I am aware, I ignore the wrong tendency of my mind and make a deliberate effort to judge and act correctly. Due to such repeated efforts, self correction of my mind has become natural and spontaneous, with less regrets.

#16. Do you try to employ the diseased mind to cure itself?

Here is a great thought excerpted from an interview with Mary Karr, a well known poet.

Question: The lines are rather breathless in tempo, and at the end of the poem you write: “Breath is God’s intent to keep us living. He was the self I’d come in // wanting to kill, and I left him there.” Can you talk a little bit about these lines, about breath and God?

Mary’s Response: Our autonomic nervous system breathes for most of us, and a priest friend told me once, when I asked him how I was supposed to know God’s will for me, that I should see what is. If you’re breathing, just presume you’re supposed to be alive and start looking around for some way to make yourself useful.

If you’re suicidal, your mind is actually the keenest threat to your survival. Yet depressed people still listen intensely to their minds even though said minds NEVER have anything good to say. Think of it, you try to employ the diseased organ to cure itself! If someone outside your body were shouting those awful things that you say to yourself in such times, you’d plug your ears and sing lalalala. You have to stop that mind or die.

A simple meditation practice I started twenty-three years ago involves counting my breaths one to ten over and over. Pure hell at first. I evolved through various practices — some Christian and Ignatian spiritual practices taught to me by a Franciscan nun and a few Jesuits along the way.

I came back to breath last year. For me God is in the moment, and I tend to do everything I can, to avoid being in such a stalled, unproductive place as the present. The ego has to stop inventing its reality and notice what's actually going on, which process kills it (the ego) a little if you're lucky.

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