

Resting and Befriending Thoughts Remembering

**Thoughts are simply the “stuff or stories” that minds interact with.
We don’t necessarily cause thoughts or create them.**

Sometimes the same old thoughts that incline us to lowering and/or anxious mood states come so quickly from years of conditioning (when this ← → then that) that we actually believe they’re real and feel trapped in a boxcar with them. The more we fight with them (sometimes having many repeated battles with them) the stronger they seem to get and we can feel out of control-sensing our body/mind rushing towards highly anxious mood states-clickity-clack, clickity-clack, fueled by hormones getting ready to flee, freeze or fight.

When we practice mindfulness we offer a way for the train to slow itself down so that exits from the boxcar can become apparent. As the train slows down, boxcar doors can open in the present moment and the fresh air of spaciousness and light can waft on in. Spaciousness and light allow us to see more clearly that thoughts come and go in an ever changing flow of experiencing and how we perceive and relate to flowing experiencing also changes.

What a relief!

Thoughts are not necessarily true, solid or fixed reality. Everything changes.

Stepping out of the boxcar

- The pause can offer spaciousness to simply watch thoughts as they come in and leave, without feeling that you have to believe them, get rid of them, fix them or fight with them.
- Over time, when you are able to include longer periods of formal mindfulness meditation (setting an intention with yourself to mindfully meditate for a specific period of time), you may notice that the onslaught of thoughts, accompanied by emotions and body sensations begins to slow down. You may also notice that you’ll be able to become aware of each element of experience with more clarity and ease. Space between experiences and perceptions of experiences may become apparent and thoughts and feelings may not continue to feel as powerful and out of control as they have.
- Taking a pause for 3 minutes or for a longer period of time inclines the train towards slowing down. This can be helpful to strengthening our ability to clearly see thoughts as ever changing mental experiences rather than fixed facts. It may be that this mental experience often occurs with feelings of anxiety and this does not mean that the thought is true. It simply means that when this thought experience arises it is often linked with this feeling experience. When we interrupt this link, by bringing the light of curiosity to the thought ← → feeling link, we are practicing out of the boxcar. We can move with freedom to examine what a thought is telling us about ourselves that may incline us towards feeling out of control, reactive.
- When we notice that we are in a reactivity mode that appears unstoppable, please congratulate yourself for noticing. The moment we notice reactivity, is a moment of mindfulness. When reactivity is noticed we have an opportunity to see thoughts that are accompanied by strong emotions and it may appear to be impossible to simply be with them for even a 30 second pause. The “reactivity train” has already left the station! At these times it may be helpful to write thoughts down. This interrupts reactivity and strengthens your ability to relate to thoughts in a less emotional, overwhelming mood state. Also, by pausing the thought ← → feeling link with writing, you are giving yourself the time and space to reflect on the thought and get off the “reactivity train” that leads to feeling out of control. 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 that I can question? How would I have thought about it at another time, in another mood? Are there alternative ways to view the situation?