



The Wise Brain Bulletin

News and Tools for Happiness, Love, and Wisdom

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A Way to Evoke Loving-kindness

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“Love thy neighbor” is a grand idea, although one often honored in principle more than in practice. The Buddhist technique of loving-kindness or *metta* meditation helps you do exactly this, and scientific evidence is accumulating that shows how it may work.

The origin of Buddhist loving-kindness practice can be traced to the *Metta Sutta*, a discourse in the Pali Canon, the language of the earliest surviving written record of the Buddha’s teachings. The word *metta* comes from Pali and is generally translated as friendliness or loving-kindness. In the *Metta Sutta*, the Buddha offers maternal love as a model for a universal love that can embrace all beings.

Given that a bias toward one’s kin seems to be favored by evolution, it might be surprising that we can extend love more broadly. But the mammalian social-bonding system works in a sufficiently general manner to allow wide application. The actions of the hormones oxytocin and vasopressin are key in social bonding, as demonstrated by research by the biologist Sue Carter.

Greetings

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Studying a mouse-like mammal called the vole, Carter observed that the male prairie vole mates for life with his female partner and helps care for the offspring. In contrast, the male of a related species, the meadow vole, abandons his mate and progeny. An important difference between the species is in the amount of oxytocin and vasopressin receptors in their reward system—a key part of the brain that helps motivate animals (including us). The high levels of oxytocin and especially vasopressin in male prairie voles motivates them to care for their mate and children since it is highly rewarding.

Additional evidence for the role of oxytocin and vasopressin comes from studies involving genetic engineering. The neuroscientist Larry Young and colleagues succeeded in getting non-monogamous meadow vole males to become monogamous by injecting them with vasopressin receptor genes from the monogamous prairie voles. Mice that were genetically engineered to lack a functioning oxytocin system have a sort of amnesia for social relationships. Unlike regular mice, they treat mice they've met before like strangers. It should be noted, however, that oxytocin and vasopressin have biological roles

in mammals outside of social bonding, and other avenues that promote social bonding may exist that do not involve these hormones.

The neuroscientist Paul Zak has extended the study of oxytocin in social bonding to our own species. “What we’ve shown is that oxytocin release is stimulated by acts of kindness or trust by complete strangers,” Zak told me in an interview. “The feeling people get when their brains release oxytocin is one of empathy or emotional connection.”

In his 2012 book, *The Moral Molecule*, Zak writes that the action of the oxytocin system underlies “the Buddhist concepts of metta (loving-kindness) and karuna (compassion).” I asked Zak if oxytocin release would occur when you engaged with a person in your imagination, as happens in metta meditation. He said he had not studied that question specifically, but noted that one of his most effective methods of eliciting oxytocin release is to show subjects a video about a child who was dying from cancer.

The primatologist Frans de Waal wrote in a paper on empathy, “imagination activates the same representations as behavior and perception.” In other words, when you imagine an action, you put the brain and body through the same steps as if you were actually doing it—though with less intensity. If de Waal is correct, then imagining an emotional connection should activate the same brain systems as when the other person is physically present.

A scientist who *is* studying the specific question of whether oxytocin is released as a result of metta meditation is Barbara Fredrickson, author of the forthcoming book *Love 2.0: How Our Supreme Emotion Affects Everything We Feel, Think, Do, and Become*. Fredrickson has already published two studies of loving-kindness meditation. In a study in-progress, she is testing to see if oxytocin is released when people practice metta meditation. Her understanding of the mechanisms of social connection make her think this is likely to be so. “Based on the animal literature, based on the limited human literature, there is every reason to believe that’s likely to be the case, which is why we’re going after it,” Fredrickson said.

Fredrickson told me she first became interested in metta as a tool that would help her study positive emotions in general. “We actually had done some intervention studies prior to working with loving-kindness meditation that were all just colossal failures,” she said,



so she was excited to find that metta produces long-lasting benefits. “People got better and better at it with practice, which speaks a lot about the prospects of mind training. It is a skill that people are getting and developing,” she said. “So many other interventions in positive psychology wear out—go south—after a little bit.”

“Loving-kindness meditation does shift people’s daily experiences of emotion in a significant way and it doesn’t just affect their feelings of love and closeness, or trust or compassion. We found that across ten different positive emotions, people showed an upward shift in their feelings of pride, in their feelings of interest and curiosity, in their feelings of amusement,” Fredrickson told me.

And its effects are not limited to the period of formal practice. “It’s not just what people are feeling while they’re meditating. It’s what they’re feeling the rest of the day,” she said.

Fredrickson’s emphasis on positive emotions is somewhat different to what I heard from Buddhist teachers I interviewed. Narayan Liebenson Grady of the Cambridge Insight Meditation Center emphasized that the *intention* toward loving-kindness was important, whether or not it translates into feelings. “That loving feeling might accompany the intention. If that happens, wonderful. You really want to be in the body when you’re doing metta,” she said. “You want to let the intention affect your body, let the intention infuse your body.”

Fredrickson puts more emphasis on feelings. “Our data so far suggests that positive emotions are a really important mediator. And yet the real psychological action of metta meditation doesn’t come while you’re meditating. It comes while you’re interacting with the world. Working on that intention then changes what people’s motives are when they see people and interact with them in their daily life. They approach it with more warmth and goodwill and care and concern.”

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To return to the theme that began this essay—that metta meditation could even help you generate loving feelings toward a person you have heretofore not liked—it would be helpful to go through the steps of the practice. In the meditation, one contemplates a series

of individuals in order to express metta to a widening circle. Here is one version of the practice, which can take five to thirty minutes depending on how much time you devote to it.

1. Bring to mind someone you consider a benefactor—someone who has really helped you at some point in your life, someone who makes you feel warm when you think about him or her. And if you can visualize that person, all the better. Try to be as fully present as possible with this person in your imagination. Now, say to the imagined person words such as:

May you be safe.

May you be happy.

May you be healthy.

May you be at ease in the world.

2. Shift the spotlight to yourself. Wish the same feelings of kindness toward yourself, in your imagination, using whatever language seems appropriate. Take as much time as you need to generate warmth toward yourself.



3. Think of a neutral person, someone toward whom you have no particular feelings one way or the other. This could perhaps be a clerk at a coffee shop or grocery store you recently visited. With this person in mind, wish him or her well using language similar to what you used toward your benefactor.
4. Think of a “difficult” person, perhaps someone who has mistreated you, or with whom there is tension—even someone you consider a rival or enemy. Imagine this person is present with you, and offer him or her the same good wishes you offered the neutral person. Be mindful of any resistance you feel in doing so.
5. Imagine that your feelings of loving-kindness can overflow and embrace all beings. Use whatever language seems appropriate to inspire this possibility.

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You probably had no difficulty feeling positively toward your benefactors. Hopefully, you also had little difficulty feeling kindness toward yourself. But if you felt a new-found affection toward the neutral person *after* the metta practice, as many do, you might wonder, how could this be? When contemplating the neutral person, why don't your feelings quickly

snap back to neutral? What accounts for the carry-over or “emotional momentum” that makes you feel kindly toward a neutral person?

It may be due to the persistence of oxytocin and vasopressin. A team of European researchers led by the neuroscientist Kjell Fuxe note that oxytocin and vasopressin—like other small-molecule, peptide neurochemicals—are released in quantity from the cell body to diffuse relatively slowly throughout the brain. During this period of

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diffusion—which may last many minutes, unlike the neurotransmitter transfer at synapses that takes a fraction of a second—the brain is basking in these social molecules, and thus inclined toward empathy, trust and kindness.

“There is roughly a 20-minute window in which, once your brain has released oxytocin, we’ve shown in experiments that people are basically much nicer to each other, give much more to charity. They behave in ways that are very pro-social even with strangers,” the neuroscientist Paul Zak told me.

Thus, it is plausible that the warmth and benevolence produced in metta meditation promote releases of oxytocin and vasopressin in the brain. These neurochemicals would continue to circulate for several minutes afterward. If you shift your thoughts toward a neutral person during this period, you may find, to your surprise, that you *like* this person.

When you then shift your thoughts toward a “difficult” person, the neuropsychological momentum of oxytocin, and related thoughts and feelings, may continue or it may be squelched by your aversion to this person. That is why teachers of metta meditation often suggest that beginners start with a “difficult” person who is not all that challenging—perhaps an irksome co-worker. “Don’t start with the person who hurt you most in your life. That is just setting yourself up for failure,” Christiane Wolf, a mindfulness teacher at InsightLA, told me in an interview.

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The brain chemicals released when we contemplate a benefactor seem to have a spillover effect that makes us feel more kindly toward everyone—for a matter of minutes. But if metta meditation only made us loving during the formal practice itself, and we snapped back into unkindly habits immediately thereafter, it wouldn’t be all that valuable.

Consequently, it’s important to cultivate kindness as an ongoing experience—so it’s present even when a difficult person acts in a hostile manner. “In that moment—this is where practice comes in—we’re able to remember. Metta becomes our fallback instead of ill-will being our fallback, or instead of confusion being our fallback,” said the Buddhist teacher Narayan Liebenson Grady.

Oxytocin has a long-term impact on our nervous system, according to Paul Zak. “We are laying down memory tracks using oxytocin on who is safe, trustworthy, and kind. These memories are being rehearsed each time we have a positive interaction and so it can lead to us being kinder to more people more of the time. Practice is the key to activate this effect,” Zak said.

Barbara Fredrickson’s original study of metta meditation found benefits among participants taking a seven-week meditation class. She followed up with the same participants after 15 months, and found that one-third maintained a regular meditation practice of some sort. She said, “The people who were still practicing were doing better than all the others, and they weren’t doing better beforehand. That was the real key. It wasn’t like they were the ‘happy people’ for whom loving-kindness came easily.” She said her results indicate that metta meditation does not simply produce a change in a person’s short-term mental state.

It also develops durable aspects of personality that psychologists sometimes refer to as “traits” but she prefers to call “resources” because they can accrue or wither over time. Such long-term changes suggest the brain may be rewiring itself in some way, as generally occurs when a person learns a new skill.

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Increased trust appears to be another outcome of metta meditation. In a study now being prepared for publication



by Michael Spezio, a neuroscientist at the Claremont Colleges, students were randomly assigned to groups that were taught either metta meditation or mindfulness of breath meditation. Before and after the four-week meditation classes, participants played something called the Trust Game. In this “game,” participants are given real money they can keep. If they entrust a partner with some money, and that partner proves trustworthy, they and the partner may both wind up better-off. But they can lose money if the partner exploits their trust.

Among the findings, Spezio, working with graduate students Vanessa Kettering and Patrick Williams, found that after the four-week training, students who had learned metta practice shared 40 percent more money, indicating a higher level of trust. Students learning mindfulness of breathing, in contrast, grew no more trusting over the four-week period. Both groups of students had started with the same measured levels of trust.

It’s good to know that there is a practice that can make us more loving and trusting. This raises the question, though, of when it’s wise to use this practice. After all, not everyone is trustworthy. The psychologist Robert Hare, creator of the Psychopathy Checklist, has



estimated that slightly under 1 percent of North Americans qualify as psychopaths. Many or most of them are *non-violent*, but as a group they are characterized by coldness and lack of empathy for others. In his research with college students playing the Trust Game, Paul Zak has found that as many as 5 percent siphon off all the money their partners entrusted them with.

Ideally, one would like to trust people who are trustworthy without becoming prey to scam artists. One relevant finding, therefore, is that people given oxytocin, compared to a placebo, are better able to gauge the moods of others through observing their facial expressions. Another study, which employed the Trust Game tool, found that oxytocin makes people more trusting except when there are cues that the other person might be inauthentic (for instance, that the person may be selling something). So it would seem that practices that promote higher levels of oxytocin, such as metta meditation, may cultivate both the kindness that could help knit our frayed world together *and* the empathic insight into others that can protect this kindness from being exploited.

Even among people of good-will, though, one cannot be certain that kindness will be reciprocated. People are busy and stressed. One solution is not to crave reciprocation. Unrequited love, whether romantic or platonic, can be a source of suffering. But loving-kindness, extended unconditionally, can be its own reward.

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Rick Heller facilitates the Humanist Mindfulness Group, (<http://harvardhumanist.org/harvard/humanist-mindfulness-group/>) a part of the Harvard Humanist Community. He is the creator of *Seeing the Roses*, (<http://seeingtheroses.org>) which offers videos demonstrating mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation in a secular context. His writing has appeared in *The Humanist*, *Free Inquiry*, *UUWorld*, *Buddhadharma*, *Tikkun*, *The Boston Globe* and *Lowell Sun*.

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This workshop will benefit the [Wellspring Institute For Neuroscience and Contemplative Wisdom](#), which publishes the [Wise Brain Bulletin](#), offers all the great resources at [WiseBrain.org](#) and hosts the [Skillful Means Wiki](#) (methods for psychological and spiritual growth). Registration is \$50.

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Mindfulness as Nutrient

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It seems that all we hear about lately relative to health and healing is “*Mindfulness this and Mindfulness-based that.*” With this wave of ideas on mindfulness come many misperceptions, as if mindfulness were a product for purchase, that once we own, will make us better. I fear that the word itself, in its overuse, leads to the rolling of eyes, “oh no, not that again!” or an over-consumption of its superficial application. It takes a lot of courage to be mindful, and this seemingly simple awareness of “right now, as it is,” is not easy. It is difficult for us to set down our reflexive judgments that push away what we don’t want, or draw us to what is known and brings confirmation. **Mindfulness asks us to show up and fully experience what is occurring in the immediacy of this moment, with a simultaneous ability to observe with open curiosity.** That means sensing it all, in mind, in heart, and in body. It gets to the gritty engagement of actually *feeling*; for without this, mindfulness is just a great concept in search of a body.

Mindful eating is a great “practice” and eventual consistent capability, which helps teach us how to return to the present through this very sensory experience of consuming our food. Quite frankly, if we check ourselves, we might find that we are the one ingredient gone missing at the table! Have you ever had the experience during a meal of reaching for another bite but finding your plate empty and wondering *who* ate your food? How about feeling so speedy that you find the act of chewing to be irritating? (*There is no time for all this chewing, there are places to go and people to see!*) The classic American style “Big Gulp,” where more is better, leads to over-consumption and an inability to know when we are satiated, and then to the incessant over-eating/dieting loop.

So how can ‘Mindful Eating’ help? Simply, it **guides us back to a quality of awareness which reconnects us to our body and its real needs;** where we can know when we are

hungry, what types of food we need, and when we have eaten enough. Direct sensory awareness brings us here, not dulled down in our conceptual knowing that says, “been there done that, I know this food because I have had it before.” It lets us know that “No, you have never had *this* before, on *this* particular day, in *this* particular moment,” and moreover, that “it will never be like this again.” Now, this attitude can bring forward a new kind of aliveness, preventing our “sleep-eating,” which leads to unconscious consumption and disconnection creating dis-ease and lack of vitality. This is not the typical awareness of “I know what I *should* be eating” with all the external concepts of what is/is not healthy, or the internal attacks about weight and lack of will. This is not the limited awareness of immediate pleasure at the cost of a larger value. **It is a kind awareness, not harsh and attacking, but a gentle remembering** of what it feels like to be in a body, to sense its continual generative capacity, to create a relationship to it which gives an affectionate attention, appreciating and accepting it as it is and attuning to what it needs. Moreover, mindfulness is an awareness which attunes us to our heart, and what *it* needs, thereby freeing us to learn how to eat to live, rather than live to eat; eating relative to supplying vital nutrients to sustain good physiological functioning, not eating to soothe or disconnect from being “here.”



Perspectives on Self-Care

Be careful with all self-help methods (including those presented in this Bulletin), which are no substitute for working with a licensed healthcare practitioner. People vary, and what works for someone else may not be a good fit for you. When you try something, start slowly and carefully, and stop immediately if it feels bad or makes things worse.

Mindfulness becomes the first necessary nutrient by creating a conducive environment for receiving what is good, in the same way that tilling soil to soften and stimulate its richness provides the elements for full growth of seeds planted therein. Health can't be found in a particular diet or supplement.

I have counseled many people

caught in fear and rigidity about perfectly eating to create the perfect body or the perfect health. **The quality of relationship to Self, to our emotions, to our body, determines our health.** This relationship determines the connections made between our mind, brain, nervous system, and all the other interactive loops of our experience between emotion, thought, behavior, and sensation, to create wholeness and health, or stagnation and illness. **The nutrients that make up our health begin with our mind's quality of awareness.** When we direct our attention to the sensory awareness of our body we create neural connections which inform our capacity for self-awareness and regulation of emotions, allowing us to respond rather than to react impulsively or mindlessly. Further, we help inform our body that it can rest and digest now. The real physiological process of ingesting, digesting, metabolizing, can only be done efficiently and effectively with a body that is feeling safe and relaxed to allow these processes.

How do I practice Mindful Eating?

Practice is the operant word. We learn how by showing up, over and over, by "trying it on." In the case of mindfulness, it's not "practice makes perfect," but **practice reveals what is already perfect** in the middle of all our mistakes and messiness. The first step to implementing a change in our relationship to eating is to prepare ourselves by seeding our motivation. **Change occurs through our commitment to consistent focused attention on the thing we wish to develop.** Commitment arises from our intention. What is our good enough reason for practicing mindful eating? Our reason has to relate to some larger value or we will never stay motivated. Our intention is the engine of commitment.

Commitment soon falls off when things lose a sense of novelty and excitement, and efforts become momentary trends when the larger value guiding the commitment is not known. Commitment to practice is the fuel to keep our intention alive, and this commitment and intention can work in tandem, each supporting the other toward a steady consistency. This consistency might then allow a “good idea” to be known as a direct experience that can become an eventual effortless pattern in our lives. Without intention and commitment, mindfulness becomes a fashionable short-term idea rather than a long-term lifestyle shift. To simplify, intention is the “why bother” and commitment is the “no matter what” – and these two components are needed for “practice.”

With this clarity we can now engage with the two parts of being present in our eating: Experiencing and Observing. There is the *content* of the experience of eating: the food, our senses, images, thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, emotions (who knew so much was

happening with a hamburger!) and there is the *context* in which all this experience takes place. The context is the essential element which determines if it is *mindful* or not. The context is the environment, and the quality of our relationship to all those things making up the content. If it helps, use the acronym C-NOTE to remember what best environment in which to practice mindful eating. **C=curious, N=non-judging (or more aptly stated, judging and then noticing it), O=openness, T=turning toward, E=engaged.** This is creating the attitude or the ambience for your meal. This environment allows and includes whatever you might be experiencing, (content of experience simple acronym is SITE, **S=sensations, I=images, T=thoughts, E=emotions**).



Mindfulness is an open, inclusive, relational quality of awareness to what we are directly experiencing.

Now that the table has been set with your intention and commitment and a warm quality of attention creating a conducive ambiance – let’s eat!

1. Read through the elements of the long form for formal practice of mindful eating. Here you will notice the break down, step by step, of an experience which normally moves very quickly, to something resembling a slow motion video, where we can begin to see how much is really going on in such a seemingly simple act of eating. You can carve out some time and a place where this practice might be possible and just take it step by step.

2. You can utilize the short form to warm up to the idea, or to use in between long form practice, and eventually with consistent practice, experience on-the-spot awareness whether on an airplane, rushing through breakfast on a way to a meeting, or luxuriating over a beautiful meal with those you love. In the end, mindfulness is not so much about slowness, but about the quality of awareness applied no matter our external/internal circumstance.

Mindful Eating Long form

Prior to eating

- Set your intention (why bother): why are you interested in mindful eating? What is the larger value which guides your effort?
- Make a commitment (no matter what): for the next 21 days pick one meal per day to practice, (in order to know, you need consistent practice).
- Remove distractions such as TV, phone, computer, reading material, etc.
- Sit down to eat, pause to notice from head to toe the state of your body, feel the sensation of your bottom against your chair.
- Notice sensation of breathing. Exhale out your mouth, dropping awareness down, like an elevator from head to neck to heart, belly, perineum, bottom, legs, and feet.
- Notice attention of your mind: What are you “chewing” on right now? Where are your thoughts, concerns, anticipations, regrets? Just notice and come back to the sensation of feet, bottom, back, heart, neck, head, and breath.

Now attention to food

- Note color, scent, texture, and even the sound of your food
- Consider how it got to your plate: from earth to truck to table.
- Offer some gratitude that you actually have food and for all the work that went into its arrival.
- Notice anticipatory salivation.
- Notice your desire to eat—don't.
- Now Eat—aware of your hand moving through space and its dexterity to bring food to mouth.
- Chew, noticing chewing, its quality, how much, how hard, how soft, maybe count the number of chews, put down your fork.
- Be aware of the impetus to grab more before you are fully done with what is in your mouth.
- Be aware of the discomfort that might arise in having no distraction. Maybe this full awareness brings feelings of uneasiness, (remember your C-NOTE).
- This is not about being peaceful, not about liking, or disliking, but being aware.



- Sense inside your body: tongue, throat, stomach, and so on, aware of all it does to make eating happen.
- When you get lost or speedy, just pause, remember the sensation of your breathing, see your food, feel your feet, and then, gently, begin again.
- When finished eating—pause.
- Notice your body, new sensation of fullness/or not full enough in belly.
- Notice your mind, desire for more, or anticipation of where you are going next.
- Offer yourself some kindness and appreciation for showing up.
- Offer thanks, to this moment, to receiving, to your ability to receive, to your health.

Mindful Eating Short Form

1. Pause to know you are breathing.
2. Feel the sensation of the interior of your body.
3. Sense the bottom of your feet.
4. See, smell, touch, hear your food.
5. Then eat—and taste.
6. Chew and know you are chewing.
7. Sense chewing, sense breath, sense body, not thinking, but direct sensation of each.
8. Notice content of mind and return to sensation of eating, (Apply the C-NOTE).
9. Pause when finished.
10. Offer kindness to yourself, to your body, to all those who made this food possible.

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Diane Renz, LPC, founder of *Your Gateway to Healing™*, is a licensed psychotherapist interested in creating conducive environments through the cultivation of our open relational quality of awareness, both internally and externally, to begin the journey of our *Return, to Re-member, and Reinform™* our mind, brain, body, and heart toward our original wholeness. She is interested in bridging the latest contemplative science to practical applications in our day to day lives for the individual and collective health and well-being. www.yourgatewaytohealing.com



Skillful Means

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Awareness of Thoughts Meditation

Purpose / Effects

By learning to watch your thoughts come and go during this practice, you can gain deeper insight into thinking altogether (such as its transience) and into specific relationships among your thoughts and your emotions, sensations, and desires. This practice can also help you take your thoughts less personally, and not automatically believe them. Additionally, this meditation can offer insight into any habitual patterns of thinking and related reactions.

Method

Summary

Observe your thoughts as they arise and pass away.

Long Version

- By “thoughts,” we mean self-talk and other verbal content, as well as images,

memories, fantasies, and plans. Just thoughts may appear in awareness, or thoughts plus sensations, emotions, or desires.

- Sit or lie down on your back in a comfortable position.
- Become aware of the sensations of breathing.
- After a few minutes of following your breath, shift your attention to the various thoughts that are arising, persisting, and then passing away in your mind.
- Try to observe your thoughts instead of getting involved with their content or resisting them.
- Notice the content of your thoughts, any emotions accompanying them, and the strength or pull of the thought.
- Try to get curious about your thoughts. Investigate whether you think in mainly images or words, whether your thoughts are in color or black and white, and how your thoughts feel in your body.
- See if you notice any gaps or pauses between thoughts.
- Every time you become aware that you are lost in the content of your thoughts, simply note this and return to observing your thoughts and emotions.



- Remember that one of the brain's major purposes is to think, and there is nothing wrong with thinking. You are simply practicing not automatically believing and grasping on to your thoughts.
- When you are ready, return your attention to your breath for a few minutes and slowly open your eyes.

Optional:

There are various metaphors and images you can use to help observe your thoughts. These include:

- Imagining you are as vast and open as the sky, and thoughts are simply clouds, birds, or planes passing through the open space.
- Imagining you are sitting on the side of a river watching your thoughts float by like leaves or ripples in the stream.
- Imagine your thoughts are like cars, buses, or trains passing by. Every time you realize you are thinking, you can “get off the bus/train” and return to observing.

History

Awareness of thoughts and emotions is one of the areas of focus developed when cultivating mindfulness. In Buddhism, mindfulness is one of the seven factors of



enlightenment and the seventh instruction in the Noble Eightfold Path.

Caution

Please be gentle with yourself if you notice that you are constantly caught up in your thoughts instead of observing them. This is both common and normal. When you realize that you are thinking, gently and compassionately return to observing your thoughts.

If the content of your thoughts is too disturbing or distressing, gently shift your attention to your breathing, sounds, or discontinue the practice.

Notes

- Remember that you are not trying to stop thoughts or only allow certain ones to arise. Try to treat all thoughts equally and let them pass away without engaging in their content.
- This practice can initially be more challenging than other meditations. As you are learning, practice this meditation for only a few minutes at a time if that is easier.
- It can be helpful to treat thoughts the same way that you treat sounds or body sensations, and view them as impersonal events that arise and pass away.
- Some people like to assign numbers or nicknames to reoccurring thoughts in order to reduce their pull and effect.

See Also

[Mindfulness of Sounds](#)

[Breath Awareness Meditation](#)

[Tracking Your Mood](#)

External Links

[Meditation Teacher Paul Wilson discusses how to work with thoughts during meditation.](#)

Fare Well

May you and all beings be happy, loving, and wise.