



Detox Your Heart

How Are Thoughts and Feelings Running Your Life?

There are the three traditional types of feeling: pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. “Feeling” refers to feeling tone in the body; it is a sensate experience. We may have more than one feeling at a time, even a mixture of all three, as sometimes we can feel pleasant in our hearts but experience unpleasantness in another part of our physical body. Anything else we are feeling is really what we are thinking.

The feeling tone gives rise to thoughts, and thoughts create emotions. Usually when we are in touch with any of the three feelings we react by swiftly naming or labeling them with thoughts, which become emotion, judgments, or interpretations. So let’s see how they run our lives. The basic pattern of feelings and reactions to them is as follows:

EXAMPLES

Feeling tone: Unpleasant tone in the body

Reactive thoughts: I am feeling abandoned; I’m being intimidated; Something is wrong with me.

Feeling tone: Pleasant tone in the body

Reactive thoughts: I want more; I don’t deserve this; What if I lose him/her.

Feeling tone: Neutral tone in the body

Reactive thoughts: I’m bored; What’s the point?; I can’t be bothered.

It is often easier to notice the reactive thoughts than the feeling tone. So we will begin with the reactive thoughts.

EXERCISE ONE-PART ONE

When you become aware of your reactive thoughts, ask yourself the following questions:

- What story am I creating in my mind? _____

- What interpretations am I making? _____

- What judgments am I holding on to? _____

- Am I ready to let go of the story? _____
- Am I ready to let go of the judgment? _____
- Am I ready to let go of the interpretations? _____
- How true are the beliefs I have been holding on to? _____

- How have the beliefs caused me misery? _____
- Can I see how I have been creating the extra suffering in my life? _____
- What am I going to choose to do? _____

Whatever you choose to do, just accept you have made that choice with some awareness. You can always make a new choice if you need to.



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EXCERCISE ONE-PART TWO

If you are not ready to let go of the story, judgments, and interpretations, ask yourself the following questions:

- Why am I holding on to the story?

- What do I gain from holding on to the story?

- What do I gain from holding on to the judgments?

- What do I gain from holding on to the interpretations?

- What has holding on to the story cost me?

- What has holding on to the judgments cost me?

- What has holding on to the interpretations cost me?

- Can I see how I have been creating the extra suffering in my life?

- What am I going to choose to do?

Now spend some time to sit with your answers. Maintain awareness of your mental actions, and ask yourself if this extra baggage of story, judgment, and interpretation is something you want to keep carrying around.



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Let's practice looking at these types of reactive thoughts in more detail by considering some real-world examples. I will write examples in the first person. Notice where I write "I feel" and ask if it is a feeling tone in the body, an emotion, or a story.

EXAMPLE: PLEASANT FEELINGS

Trigger: I see someone I am romantically interested in.

Feeling tone: I feel pleasant.

Reactive thoughts: They fancy me; They must like me; I feel in love.

Are these thoughts true? I feel like they are: my heart is pounding and I'm tongue-tied when I see them.

How do I know it's true they fancy me? Well, I saw the way they looked at me!

How true is all of this? If I am totally honest with myself, I don't really know.

Is there a story in this? Yes. I saw the person, they looked at me in a certain way, and I took it to mean that we are in love.

So what are the facts? I feel very pleasant when I meet the person I am romantically interested in.

Now ask yourself: Can I stay with this pleasant sensation without turning away from it with a thought?

Say to yourself: "As I breathe in I feel pleasant; as I breathe out I feel pleasant," and sit with the pleasantness without reacting. Perhaps allow laughter or tears to dissolve the emotions that can emerge from experiencing pleasantness in the body.

What we learn by practicing in this way is that we can feel sensations in the body without having to react.

EXAMPLE: UNPLEASANT FEELINGS

Trigger: My friend forgot my birthday.

Feeling tone: I feel unpleasant.

Reactive thoughts: She always forgets; I feel abandoned; Nobody cares.

Are these thoughts true? I feel like they are: she forgot my birthday a couple of years ago, and if she cared she would have seen it was my birthday on Facebook.

How do I know it's true that she always forgets? I don't actually know that.

How true is it that I have been abandoned and nobody cares? If I am honest with myself, it's not true; some people do care about me.

Is there a story in this? Yes. A friend forgot my birthday again, I felt hurt by it, and took it to mean that I have been abandoned and that nobody cares about me.

So what are the facts? I feel very unpleasant when my friend forgets to wish me a happy birthday.

Now ask yourself: Can I stay with this unpleasant sensation without turning away from it with a thought?

Say to yourself: "As I breathe in I feel unpleasant; as I breathe out I feel unpleasant," and sit with the unpleasantness without reacting. Perhaps allow laughter or tears to dissolve the emotions that can emerge from experiencing unpleasantness in the body.



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EXCERCISE TWO

I have given you two examples in the first person. Now choose an example of your own—something that triggers reactive thoughts—and work through the same process of noticing, identifying, and investigating your reactions.

- Trigger:

- Feeling tone:

- Reactive thoughts:

- Are these thoughts true?

- How do I know they are true?

- How true is it that . . . ?

- Is there a story in this?

- So what are the facts?

- Now ask yourself: Can I stay with this _____ sensation without turning away from it with a thought?

- Say to yourself: “As I breathe in I feel _____ I breathe out I feel _____,” and sit with the _____ without reacting. Perhaps allow laughter or tears to dissolve the emotions that can emerge from experiencing _____ in the body.