

INTRODUCTION

*Thinking seriously harms you
and everyone around you!*

Imagine you want to mow the lawn. You get the mower out of the shed and complete the job. What do you do with the lawnmower once you have finished? You put it back in the shed, right?

Imagine if you were to go round in circles day in, day out, mowing the same patch of grass over and over. How tedious and exhausting, not to mention pointless, would that be?

And yet, this provides a good analogy to illustrate how most of our minds work. We spend our days lost in unconscious and unproductive thinking – addictively replaying the same mental patterns, the same old stories, over and over in our heads like worn-out gramophone records.

Rather than being a helpful tool to be picked up and used when required, the mind is more like an out of control Frankenstein monster with a life of its own. And we don't know how to stop it. We don't know how to pull the plug and put it back in the shed.

Worrying about the future, obsessing over what could or should have been, forever doubting our decisions, criticising ourselves and others, blaming the world for our woes – these are some of the habitual thinking patterns we can become unconsciously lost in for hours, days or even years. I say unconscious because much of our thinking happens on autopilot.

Used productively to carry out specific tasks, the mind is an

incredible tool. A restless and out of control mind, on the other hand, creates no end of trouble and can be exhausting and deeply destructive. This type of thinking can seriously harm you and everyone around you.

In his book “The Power of Now”, Eckhart Tolle likens unconscious thinking to ‘being possessed by an invading entity’. And this is how it seems.

If I say that “my mind is driving me bonkers”, **my** mind is perceived to be an object separate from myself and thinking, as something that happens TO me. We APPEAR to have no choice but to listen to the mind’s endless ramblings and spend our days listening to, believing and taking seriously the voices in our heads.

As we shall see later, this type of addictive and unproductive thinking is no more than a deeply ingrained habit, which stems from a lack of awareness and understanding. The key to becoming free of the habit is to make thinking conscious.

For many years, I explored different ways of freeing myself from the pain and frustration I often felt at being trapped in the confines of my own head with a restless and whingeing chatterbox for company.

Looking back, I can see that my own journey involved four distinct phases, which I will call Distraction, Self-Improvement, Awareness and Presence. These four themes, typical, I believe, of most people’s journey, loosely comprise the sections of the book.

At first, I sought distraction from the voices in my head through numbing myself with alcohol, TV and other drugs or through attempting to fill every waking moment with activity. These solutions provided only temporary relief.

The next obvious step was to attempt to change or fix the voices through self-improvement. It seemed logical that if I could find a way to convert troublesome thoughts (I include feelings and emotions here too) into more pleasant ones, that I could free myself of mental suffering.

Over a twenty-year period, I immersed myself in countless self-help programmes and spiritual books as well as making numerous visits to spiritual teachers in India and the Far East. Although I undoubtedly became more content than I had been, this approach did not address the true cause of my restlessness and discontent – my addiction to thinking itself.

Although I had, to some extent, succeeded in converting my ‘sad and unhappy’ story into a happier, more spiritual one, I still spent my days lost in unconscious thinking. I was just as addicted to thinking as before. What had changed was the content of the story.

Then, on a meditation retreat in 2004, I SAW something, which brought about a radical change in my experience – a tiny shift in PERCEPTION, which changed everything in an instant.

Although the thoughts themselves were pretty much the same as before, the restlessness and frustration I had known for years were gone. For the first time ever, I felt content and at peace.

I saw clearly how to pull the plug on the mind and, furthermore, I understood why my previous attempts had not worked – and could never work. The purpose of this book is to share these discoveries with you.

I saw that the mind itself is NOT the problem, rather our relationship WITH the mind. I saw how the real key to kicking the addictive thinking habit is through awareness and through understanding how the mind works.

Up until that point, my focus had always been on the mind itself, either trying to escape it, change it or fix it. It had never occurred to me to step back and objectively observe the mind – to make the mind itself the object of my attention – without judging, without analyzing, without labeling, without trying to fix or change anything - simply allowing it to do its thing, without getting involved.

When we shine the light of awareness on the thinking process itself, we see how thoughts appear (by themselves) from nowhere and how, because we give them our attention, they flourish and turn into unconscious thinking.

We also see that:

- it is not so much the thoughts themselves that cause us to suffer, rather the mental commentary ABOUT the thoughts.
- although we have no control over the thoughts that appear in our field of awareness, THINKING ITSELF IS A CHOICE.
- we suffer to the extent that we resist and struggle against the content of our mind.
- the mind tells a lot of lies.
- there is so much more to us than the thinking minds we believe ourselves to be.
- the moment we become consciously aware that thinking is going on, thinking stops. We are present.

If addictive thinking were an intrinsic part of who we are – part of our essential nature – there would be little or no hope of ever

being free of the relentless chatter in our heads which, for many people, is the primary cause of suffering in their lives.

Fortunately this is not the case. Unconscious thinking is no more than a habit that we have picked up and which, through awareness, we can also learn to drop. Furthermore, in order to free ourselves of addictive thinking, it is not necessary to fix, change or alter the content of the mind. That would be a never-ending task, which could well take us the rest of our lives.

What IS required is to change our relationship WITH the mind and with thinking itself. This is achieved through making that which is unconscious, conscious. What we become aware of, we become free of. When we understand how thinking works, the voices themselves may or may not remain, but either way, they cease to have the same impact on our experience of inner peace.

So, if you are ready to pull the plug on the mind, read on.

