

DO THE THOUGHTS EVER STOP

By Bob Sharples

The biggest hindrance to our meditation is constant intrusive thoughts. This is normal for everyone and from the beginning you should expect it. The nature of our mind is to think, and it is childish to imagine that we can simply turn that process off when we wish to. Our minds have been almost completely out of control for most of our life. Recognizing this can help us to be practical and patient—it may take us some time and a lot of skillful practice to tame the crazy “monkey mind.” My own meditation practice was helped when I came across the instruction that while I have thoughts I am not those thoughts. When you stop to examine your thoughts you start to see that they have a life of their own, they come and go, generally in a random, idiosyncratic way.

Recognizing the constancy of our endless thinking process is said to be one of the important early steps we take on the meditation path. In fact, for many people it is only when they take up the practice of meditation that they become aware of this incessant stream of unexamined thinking and the attitudes that lie behind it.

In the beginning the instruction is to notice this stream of thoughts. The practice is to try and simply let them come and go, without fighting or resisting them. Naturally, this takes a great deal of practice. It is helpful at the beginning of your meditation practice to free yourself from the idea that in order to meditate properly you must have no thoughts. Instead, establish a different relationship with your thoughts so that over time they can fade more effortlessly into the background. All meditators have thoughts arising during their practice—it’s what you do with them that matters.