

Building Resilience



Intrinsic
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Focus Sheet # 2

Awareness – of the reality YOU create

Just suppose...

this is true...

**You can't believe everything
ANYTHING you think.**

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Awareness of Meaning-Making

Everything that we experience we make up in our minds. Yes, it is ALL made up – just like in the movies. If we watched something like that horror movie ‘Psycho’, where someone dies in the shower, would we worry that someone was going to jump out of the screen and stab us? If we did, someone might encourage us to do a ‘reality check’. We would be reminded that it is a movie – it’s made in Hollywood – it is not real. And you know what – there is more physical evidence for that movie than there is for the thoughts in your head! You can eject the DVD, and it stays as it was recorded. Your thoughts are not even as tangible as that! Yet we often act upon them as if they are real. This is dangerous and this is what creates struggle and suffering in life.

All of our thoughts are illusions! That’s a strong statement and perhaps a bit confronting. This is not to say that the pain and suffering we experience isn’t real. At the same time, the fact that our suffering is a result of *the meaning we make* can also be liberating and empowering. Once you get this concept – *really get it* – your life will change.

Not just the positive thoughts, but also the negative ones, are all made up. Positive stories are as de-stabilising for us as negative (contrary to what our society encourages). We are told we should be happy and not sad. But when you think that stability is in the center, right is as off-center as left. And because the universe seeks balance (metaphorically speaking), then whenever you create a high you invite an equal amount of low to restore balance to the system.

You might be thinking... *That can’t be true. Surely some thinking is just contemplating facts.*

How can we tell if what we are thinking is an illusion or just contemplating facts?

When you have ANY emotion, you are not centered, and this creates instability in your experience. This is different to having an experience of an event. Of course you have feelings about experiences, but when you remain centered and grounded you experience this completely differently – you don’t become ‘emotional’.

Movie-Making Thoughts vs Present Sensory Experience

Emotions are how you can tell if it’s an illusion. Notice if the thought stirs you emotionally. When you just look at facts – when you make no story – you are not making a movie – you won’t experience uneven emotional states. You will feel but you will stay stable and steady rather than emotional.

A personal experience may help to illustrate this.

Recently, someone dear to me had a mental break down. She had totally lost control: at times crying uncontrollably, at times acting very violently, other times self-mutilating and abusing substances. Naturally I felt emotion. I felt sad and concerned. I considered the situation. I contemplated the facts/data available; how she was suffering, what she might be experiencing, what the causes could be, what my part might have been and how I might respond. I cried and felt my heart was breaking.

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This though was very different to when I went beyond the ‘here and now’ – the data – and *imagined* her 10 years from now: needle marks in her arm from heroin use, lying in the gutter, in a poor state of health, thinking, ‘*she has destroyed her life irreparably*’. Ten years from now did not yet exist. I was making that up. I made a very effective movie of a future that did not exist. And that horror movie generated within me a sense of hopelessness and helplessness.

When I ran that movie, in those moments, it was a very destabilising emotional state. I was suffering immensely because of the movie-making in my head. That had not yet happened, but it was immobilising. I felt too overwhelmed with emotion and couldn’t act. However, noticing the movie and stopping – effectively ejecting the movie, returning to paying attention to what was here, now – the facts – serious as they were, enabled me to take action. This enabled me to stay centered.

And, I’m happy to report, she is now doing enormously better than she had prior to this event.

Of course there are states of being – ‘emotions’ too for want of a different word – that are stable – centered, but they have an entirely different feel about them. That is why they are referred to as ‘centered’, or ‘grounded’ states. Awe, gratitude, curiosity, and contentment are examples. They do not have that unstable feeling that takes you up and down – left and right. You know this, don’t you?

It is only when you have data and *you insert a meaning* that you get stirred, unstable feelings. Staying cleanly with the facts – the data – allows us to respond in a level, even-minded way and to move forward strategically. This is a safer way of operating and doesn’t deplete energy. Have you noticed how much energy is depleted being emotional?

Here is an example of what it is like to simply process data compared to meaning making:

Imagine looking out the window and seeing that there are black storm clouds, and trees swaying in the wind. You can use that information to prepare yourself calmly, can’t you? You respond by just getting a coat, an umbrella and perhaps making some calls, adjusting your day accordingly. The weather may be inconvenient, but you don’t catastrophise. You just get on with the day in a different way by incorporating the information.

On the other hand, imagine you look out the window, notice the weather and begin seeing yourself drenched and people being annoyed with you for being late. You say something like, “Oohhh... I am going to have a bad day now because...” You get a feeling that matches what you imagined will happen, even though it hasn’t yet. You experience emotions like annoyance or frustration.

When we just stay with the data, we haven’t made a movie of the future of standing out in the rain drenched. Nor do we feel dread about what’s to come and brace ourselves by becoming tense. We see it is raining and might simply dress warmer and grab an umbrella.

Keep in mind that our minds are meaning-making machines. Our brain has many mechanisms to automatically interpret incoming data and jump to conclusions. We cannot really stop this. What we can do is become aware of the thoughts that jump into our minds. We can’t really eject a movie if we haven’t even

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noticed that we are playing it, can we? So the first step in becoming more masterful of our mind is to start to pay attention to the movies it is making – the illusions it is needlessly trapping us in. This starts with awareness.

This week, remember, “**All of our thoughts are illusions**” – you are the movie-maker – the Director and Producer. If you don’t like the movies you’ve made, make a movie you’ll enjoy living in. *This week*, any time you feel emotionally stirred ask, ‘*What’s the story I’m making up?*’ and play with telling the opposite or more enabling story of the same data/situation.

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4. How did you use the concept on the front page:

**You can't believe everything
ANYTHING you think.**

5. What difference has the big thought for the week made?