

# Mind Medicine: Is it possible for our thoughts to heal us?

*"Very little is needed to make a happy life – it is all within yourself, in your way of thinking." – Marcus Aurelius*  
*"Don't believe everything you think. Thoughts are just that – thoughts." – Alan Lokos*

There is an old saying that goes: "The mind has a mind of its own."

In this time of digital distraction and social communication obsession, coupled with what seems like an ever increasing pace of life, it is easy to forget our minds—literally. We forget that though the mind controls us, we can reverse direction and can take control of our minds, too.

And happiness is not something out there. It is a room inside us, something to pass through—even in, or especially in, our toughest moments. Easier said than done, right?

Or is it?

In his book *Just Be Glad*, Christian D. Larson writes: "Do not think that happiness must

keep its distance so long as you have so much to pass through. The more you have to pass through, the more you need your happiness. It is the shining countenance that never turns back; it is the glad heart that finds strength to go on; it is the mind with the most sunshine that can see the most clearly where to go and how to act that the goal in view may be gained."

The process of awakening to inner happiness means first, being awake to our thoughts. We have to watch what we think, literally, because we have so many "automatic" thoughts, pre-programmed messages from childhood, from parents or teachers, friends or enemies.

John Milton said: "The mind is its own place and, in itself, can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven." Or Shakespeare's Hamlet: "Why, then, tis none to you, for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so. To me, it is a prison."



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Is your mind a prison or a shining presence?

Be your own best friend and begin to witness what you think. In this world of selfies, thinking can be thought of as nothing more than self-talk. What are the messages the automatic mind thinks or "says" to you? Do you hear judgment? Negativity?

When you try meditating, you begin to understand that the mind is a roller coaster and, like dreams that seem to be their own surrealistic world, the world of the mind is its own crazy place. As Meg Selig says in her article "Eight Things You Did Not Know About Your Mind," "(Sometime) you will come face to face with the sudden and shocking realization that you are completely crazy. Your mind is shrieking, gibbering madhouse on wheels barreling pell-mell down the hill, utterly out of control and hopeless. No problem. You are not crazier than you were yesterday. It has always been this way and you never noticed."

The first step in learning to manage the three-ring circus in your mind is paying attention to your thoughts, witnessing what

you say to yourself. Though this is the practice of Zen meditation, you do not have to wait for that quiet moment to meditate. You can witness your thoughts all the time, and then begin to change the talk if it is not working for you.

Selig: "Odd as it may sound, as you create new thought patterns, you actually rewire your brain." Not only can your thoughts change you, they can actually change your brain—physiologically, neurologically.

Once you witness a thought, ask yourself if there is an emotion attached to it? If you can label the feeling, you begin to objectify it, remove it from the primal "fight-or-flight" part of the brain (amygdala) and move it to the reasoning area of the brain (the prefrontal cortex).

The underlying problem is an evolutionary one. Wired for survival, we innately respond to an alarm first. Negative comments are alarms, we hear them first, and they are seared into our psyche in a way that positive comments are not. The human mind actually has a negativity bias.