

Byron Katie's The Work

This is a booklet on how to use Byron Katie's four questions process to inquire your thoughts and beliefs. Her process is highly effective and after some practice becomes very straightforward to use. The idea is that when we stop believing a thought we don't have to effort, to make us think positive because we no longer believe that the thought is true.

Byron Katie tells the following teaching story: imagine you are walking along a road at dusk and you suddenly see a snake curled up on your path. You get a fright and want to run but in this moment a car passes by and in its headlights you can see that the snake is in fact a garden hose. Once you know that you are unlikely to still be scared of the 'snake' and will be able to calmly walk past it and resume your walk peacefully.

The same is true for our thoughts. If you don't believe whatever thought pops into your head you are very unlikely to have a reaction to it. In that case you may be puzzled or amused by this random thought. If on the other hand, a random (and most of our negative thoughts are random) thought pops into your head that is inline with your negative beliefs, you will have a emotional and physiological reaction to it which makes it feel true.

The process of inquiry is best done in writing, especially when you are doing this on your own because otherwise you can get distracted by your thinking and not follow it through all the way to the end. You may instead get stuck in a thinking loop instead.

The inquiry

First you need to identify which thoughts are causing you distress. Write them all down and start with the one that makes you feel the most uncomfortable.

The four questions to ask are: is this true? Can be I certain that this is true? Who do I become when I believe this thought? Who would I be without the thought? And then you 'turn the thought around' at least three times.

Let me walk you through the process with an example. Let's say your thought is 'I am a failure'. I will use answers to each questions that I have often encountered facilitating this inquiry with clients.

1) Is it true? (Yes or no answer) Here you want to give an honest answer as to how it seems to you.

Yes

2) Can you be absolutely certain that it is true? (Yes or no answer) This question's purpose is to make you double check whether you might have any doubts.

Maybe not, so no.

3) Who do you become when you buy into this thought? How do you feel? How do you behave? How do you treat yourself and others? What sort of images come into your mind? Any memories or future projections? How do you feel in your body? This is designed so you start understanding how the thought impacts you and how the brain creates the experience of reality in that moment.

So for example: I start feeling anxious and scared, I see myself in the meeting unable to speak clearly, I imagine my colleagues looking at me with a smirk on their faces, I start feeling shame and wanting to disappear. I feel hot and cold, sweaty, jittery and like I will pass out. My thoughts become faster and faster and I can hardly concentrate, I start thinking that I might die or am going crazy. I remember how in fifth grade the whole class laughed at me when I gave the wrong answer and how the teacher was mocking me. I don't believe that I can ever come back from this. I will be exposed and loose my job. My family will hate me, my friends won't speak to me anymore and I will end up under a bridge. I stop

myself from answering the question even though, I think I have an idea to share but I am too scared to get it wrong. I become quieter and quieter and have trouble following the meeting.

4) Who are you without the thought?

This is usually a bit more challenging because we are not used to imagine what it would be like without our habitual thinking. So it's completely normal that you might struggle a bit at first, it's just practice. It's great because it teaches your brain a new option and it brings us back to the present moment where we have power (we don't have any power in our imagined future because we are not there yet, so we can't do anything about the imagined threat but our fight or flight centre gets activated more and more). Imagining the same situation in a new way is like mental rehearsal that already can start making new connections in the brain.

Example: Without any of the thinking above, I see that I am sitting in a room with colleagues, some of whom are my friends. I hear a question being posed and I notice in myself that I have an answer I would like to share. I say it once there is a chance for me to talk. I feel calm, connected and interested in our discussion and excited to find a solution to our our joint challenge. I can see that it is just a meeting about a challenge we have encountered which has nothing to do with my worth. I can see that I am not the only person involved in this and that we can solve this together. In fact the more I become engrossed in the process the more excited I feel.

Turn it around: the idea here is to make your brain work by looking at the same thing from different perspectives, specifically from the opposite perspective of the original thought.

E.g. I am failing

I am not failing.

I am doing well.

I am succeeding.

My thinking is failing me.

My thinking creates the experience of failing.

Find 3 specific and true examples why the turnaround is true for you for each of the turnarounds. Once you have found your three examples you check if the turnaround could be just as true or truer than the original statement. It's a genuine inquiry.

Example:

I am not failing.

- *There is a lot that I am doing right in this situation.*
- *Nobody has said that I am failing.*
- *I am still working on this and have more clarity now that we have discussed it.*

Is this just as true, 'truer' or less true than my original thought?
Maybe the same.

I am doing well.

- *X just told me that I did this part of the job well.*
- *I know that I am much better at some of my job than my colleagues.*
- *I have already been able to solve a big part of our problem.*

Is this just as true, 'truer' or less true than my original thought?
Same.

I am succeeding.

- *I have just gotten a promotion and very good review.*
- *I am finding my feet in a new area and learning very quickly.*
- *My client has told me that he is very happy with what I have done so far.*

Is this just as true, 'truer' or less true than my original thought?
Truer.

My thinking is failing me.

- *I am in a negative thinking spiral which is causing me anxiety.*
- *I am not being objective because I am scared.*
- *My thinking in this state is circular and not helpful.*

Is this just as true, 'truer' or less true than my original thought?
Truer.

My thinking creates the experience of failing.

- *It is showing me only what could go wrong.*
- *It makes up meaning for other people's facial expressions (that they are smirking and that they are thinking that I am a failure).*
- *It completely jumped to conclusions and old 'evidence' to make its point.*
- *It doesn't let me think properly so that I can show up as the competent person that I am.*

Is this just as true, 'truer' or less true than my original thought?
Truer.

Once you have inquired the thought properly you will be able to see how your thinking became distorted and was made up.

If the thought that distressed you involved another person, something like 'He thinks I am stupid', the turn arounds can look like this:

He thinks I am stupid.

I think he is stupid. When it comes to other people, it is worth turning it around this way because we project on others what we believe.

He doesn't think that I am stupid.

He thinks that I am smart.

I think that I am stupid.

My thinking is telling me that he thinks I am stupid.

My thinking is telling me that I am stupid.

You can find more about Byron Katie's process on her website www.thework.com, on YouTube, as well as in her books.

Which thought do you want to inquire?

1) Is it true?

2) Can you be absolutely certain that it is true?

3) Who do you become when you buy into this thought?

How do you feel? How do you behave? How do you treat yourself and others? What sort of images come into your mind? Any memories or future projections? How do you feel in your body?

4) Who are you without the thought?

Imagine no longer being able to think and experience what you described in question 3, what would be left?

Turning the thought around (at least 3 times):

1. Turnaround:

Evidence for this thought:

1

2

3

Is this thought less true, the same or more true?

2. Turnaround:

Evidence for this thought:

1

2

3

Is this thought less true, the same or more true?

3. Turnaround:

Evidence for this thought:

1

2

3

Is this thought less true, the same or more true?