

## Control Your Thoughts - A Meditation Misconception

by Darin Searcy

A common misconception about meditation is that the goal is to learn to suppress, cease or otherwise control your thoughts. You are told that meditation will quiet the mind so this misconception is quite understandable - How can you quiet the mind if you don't stop thinking? It is true that meditation will quiet the mind, however, you don't arrive at a quiet mind by learning to force your thoughts away.

The idea, rather, is to not get involved with your thoughts. In other words, when a thought enters your awareness, you can either observe the thought and allow it to pass or you can allow your attention to follow the thought into an inner dialogue (also called mind chatter). The difference is significant. Suppression of thought will lead to an inner struggle and will surely lead to a frustrating meditation session. Conversely, observing thought is a much gentler practice - it is an allowing rather than a forcing. When you simply observe thought and allow it to pass, there is a natural settling of the mind. This is the key. The mind will settle like a body of water. You've heard the comparison, "That lake was smooth as glass." A lake doesn't become smooth by force - you cannot squash the waves and force them to settle.

An analogy is that of a snow globe - you know, those little glass bubbles filled with a wintry scene, fake snow and water. When the snow globe is shaken, the snow flakes swirl about chaotically. Your mind is normally like this. Thoughts, like the snow flakes, are randomly flying around the mind creating a cloudy environment. Clarity within the snow globe will not come through force. You cannot reach into the globe and push the flakes down. On the contrary, any action you take will likely stir up the chaos further. The only way to settle the contents of the globe is to allow it to settle without action on your part. Similarly, if you allow your thoughts to settle, a stillness will find your mind. Just observe and allow.

Don't try to force away your thoughts. Don't take the bait when a thought enters your awareness - you'll end up following the thought far away from the present moment. Instead, be gentle to yourself. Allow thoughts to come. And just the same, allow thoughts to go.

Darin is a meditator and software developer. He created a free online meditation timer to help others in their meditation practice: <http://www.meditationtimer.net/>

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