

## Your Mind is Like a Radio

Our mind is a bit like a radio, constantly playing in the background. Most of the time, it's the *Radio Doom and Gloom Show*, broadcasting negative stories twenty-four hours per day. It reminds us of bad things from the past ('*You really screwed up there!*'), it warns us of bad things to come in the future ('*You're going to fail again!*'), and it gives us regular updates on everything that's wrong with us ('*your life is a mess!*'). Once in a while it broadcasts something useful or cheerful, but not too often. So, if we're constantly tuned in to this radio, listening to it intently and, worse, believing everything we hear, then we have a sure-fire recipe for stress and misery.

Unfortunately, there is no way to switch off this radio. Even Zen masters are unable to achieve such a feat! Sometimes the radio stops of its own accord for a few seconds (or even – very rarely – a few minutes). But we don't just have the power to make it stop (unless we short circuit it with drugs, alcohol or brain surgery!). In fact, generally speaking, the more we try to make this radio stop, the louder it plays.

But, there is an alternative approach. Have you ever had a radio playing in the background but you were so intent on what you were doing you didn't really listen to it? You could hear the radio playing, but you weren't paying attention to it. In practising some of the skills we have been talking about (defusion), we are ultimately aiming to do just this with our thoughts. Once we know that thoughts are just bits of language, we can treat them like background noise – we can let them come and go without focusing on them and without being bothered by them. This is best exemplified by the 'thanking your mind' technique: an unpleasant thought appears, but instead of focusing on it you simply acknowledge it, thank your mind and return your attention to what you are doing.

So, here is what we are aiming for with these (defusion) skills:

- If the 'thinking self' is broadcasting something unhelpful, the 'observing self' need not pay attention. The observing self can instead focus its attention on what you are doing in the here and now.
- If the 'thinking self' is broadcasting something useful or helpful, then the 'observing self' can 'tune in' and pay attention.

This is very different from approaches such as positive thinking or challenging our negative thinking styles. These are more like airing a second radio show *Radio Happy and Cheerful*, alongside *Radio Doom and Gloom*, in hopes of drowning in out. It's pretty hard to stay focused on what you're doing when you have two radios playing different tunes in the background.

Notice too, that letting the radio play without giving it much attention is very different from actively trying to ignore it. Have you ever heard a radio playing before and tried *not* to listen to it? What happened? The more you tried not to hear it the more it bothered you right?!