



Shake Yourself Free

81 SOMATIC PRACTICES TO
LET GO OF LIMITATION

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CHAPTER 4


BELIEFS AND THINKING

BELIEFS ARE NOT FACTS

It's common to encounter situations where friends or family members recount the same event with differing perspectives. Or perhaps you once believed something happened for a certain reason, only to find out later you were totally off track. Or perhaps you used to believe something about yourself or another that you no longer hold true.

This happens to all of us, but somehow, we still operate as if our beliefs are facts. We don't like it when others challenge our beliefs, and we are drawn to others who think like we do. All is well and good, until it's not. Our world is divided based on beliefs. Wars are fought because of who or what we choose to worship or because we think differently about what is right and wrong. **Decisions about what to do with our lives are based on what we think of ourselves. And sometimes we are wrong.**

Many of our core beliefs arose when we were young and are a product of what we were told and shown about ourselves. In a loving, supportive environment it's likely that a positive self-image was formed. Whereas if raised in a less than loving household, you may believe "you don't deserve" or that "you're not good enough." If you consider how a different environment might have formed a




completely distinct set of beliefs, it's worth wondering if your beliefs are founded in any truth at all. And while I mentioned a straightforward example (loving vs. not loving), it's considerably more complicated than that. I've worked with clients who were raised by self-involved parents and subsequently developed beliefs that they were not deserving of attention. And clients that had problematic siblings and took the path of being the good, perfect child with an accompanying belief, "don't be a bother." Or alcoholism fostered a belief that the world is unsafe, and people are untrustworthy.

We take on beliefs of others to feel connected or safe. We also do the opposite; not believing what others believe because we want nothing to do with them. A fun little exercise might be to spend a day or two questioning your thoughts. Simply ask yourself, "Why do I believe that?" and see what you notice. Of course, you will only catch a few of the thousands and thousands of thoughts you have each day, but that's more than enough.

We have developed points of view about everything under the sun and beyond. Thoughts about the best diet, how much money we need, what happens after death, what constitutes correct moral thinking and behavior, how smart or stupid we and others are, and so on and so on. And we tend to rely on these beliefs often without ever pondering other possibilities.

Thinking in general can be problematic. The desire to know what and why is strong in most people. Knowing provides a false sense of control and security. If we know why something happened to




someone else, we can explain and justify why it will never happen to us. Or we think if we know why we did something silly in the past, it will prevent us from ever doing it again. **We think we can solve all our problems in the mind. If that were true, many of our current problems would have been long gone.**

Beliefs are fickle and letting go of them can be challenging. After all, we've survived as long as we have believing what we do. Even negative self-beliefs serve a purpose. If you believe you're incapable, it gives you a reason not to try. If you are sure you are undeserving, that could make you feel better about not having. Sometimes, beliefs support the underlying goals. If you really like alone time, you might justify it with the perception that people don't want you around. The mind would rather have a reason (even if it's not kind or supportive or true) than not know. More than anything, the mind hates not knowing.

ATTACHMENT AND AVERSION

Both attachment and aversion give our thoughts more power. Whether we think a thought is meaningful and important or stupid and useless, the more intensely we react to that thought, the stronger the hold it has on us.


Another aspect of navigating thoughts is the impact that new age thinking has had on many. Jody came for therapy some years ago because of a skin issue. She had already come to believe the condition was driven by stress. Pretty quickly in our sessions we came upon a major internal stressor. She had learned that she was only allowed to think positive thoughts, but was continuing to experience thoughts



that did not fall into the positive category and was unconsciously but loudly punishing herself for having them. If you have a positive mindset, that's great, but trying to force it upon yourself will never work. Thoughts of all flavors arise, and our work is to let them come and go without holding on or pushing them away. Some have been told that without beliefs there can be no motivation. Instead, we could consider being motivated by passion, fun and curiosity, which tap us into the creative nature of the universe.

Everything we experience is informed by what we believe. We see the world through our individual filter. On a surface layer, think of the time you bought a red convertible and all you saw on the road for weeks were red convertibles. Or you decided it was time to adopt a puppy and suddenly puppies were everywhere. We filter the world through our experiences and our thoughts about those experiences. We look for evidence to support our beliefs. When we think the world is a loving place, we are more apt to be aware of acts of kindness. If our primary assumptions are that the world is unsafe and terrifying, we will notice all the scary events happening in the world. We really want to be right, and our minds will find evidence to make it so. If you want to make your world a more enjoyable place, changing your thoughts and perceptions could go a long way.

Exploring where your beliefs and perceptions come from, wondering if they are true and if they are serving you is a journey in and of itself, and also informs much of what follows in this book. The suggestions in this section are about inviting curiosity about what you believe, trying



different options, and consciously deciding if you want to continue to believe what you've always believed (and you might) or if something else might serve you a little better.

BELIEFS AND THINKING PRACTICES


While the practices in this chapter are directed at thinking and beliefs, you might also notice that they could also help with habits or emotions or relationships. Perfect. Allow yourself to adapt and adjust both the practices and their applications.

PRACTICE #15: CHANGE YOUR POSTURE

Most know that it's possible to tell how someone else is feeling through their body posture. Before the onslaught of cell phones and their accompanying slumped-over position, when we saw a friend or co-worker looking down with shoulders hunched, we would ask what was wrong.

When the same person walked by smiling or pumping their fists, it was clear they were happy. What we don't recognize is that it goes both ways: **Our thoughts and feelings affect our posture and prolonged periods of time in any posture will affect our thoughts and feelings.** Shifting your posture can support changing your beliefs.

When aware of a negative self-belief, such as *I'm not good enough*, or *I don't know how*, allow yourself to take note of the posture that goes along with the belief. It's likely contracted or pulled inward in some way. Let yourself fully go into that posture and make note of any feelings that




accompany it. When you're ready, shift to a slightly more open position. Notice what changes in sensation, thought and feeling as you shift your body position. Memories might come to mind of when you were good enough or you did know how. It's also possible memories will come to mind of someone telling you that you were doing a lousy job. Just keep allowing whatever comes up. Some incidents will let go quickly; others will inform the next belief to work with. And some recalled events or thoughts will soften slightly.

Keep playing with the new, mildly more open posture for a week, paying attention to any loosening or any added information that may be revealed. When you feel like there's been a shift, try opening a little more, or standing a little taller and continue the exploration. Take your time and go slowly if something big is being revealed. It needs space to integrate.

PRACTICE #16: BOUNCE YOUR BODY AND YOUR THOUGHTS

There is compelling evidence for shaking as a way to move trauma and release stress. Animals shake after surviving attacks, and shaking has been shown to bring cortisol (stress hormone) levels down. Shaking can reprogram physical, mental and emotional holding patterns. I also learned with experience that it's really hard to hold on to a thought while bouncing.

If dealing with intrusive and repetitive thoughts, watch them for a moment and notice the impact on your body and mood. And then allow yourself to start bouncing. Big or little, sitting or standing.




What happens when you allow your body to jiggle? You will likely have more difficulty tracking thoughts. Watch the tendency to go looking for them, because as much as you may want to be free from thinking, there's a part of you that may want to hold on. If so, keep bouncing.

If you are in a meeting or a place where you don't feel comfortable doing out-of-the-ordinary things with your body, it also works to imagine bouncing the thoughts in your head. Perhaps there's a trampoline for them to roll and rebound on. Allow yourself to have fun imagining how the thoughts would flip and fall and roll while bouncing.

If necessary, or it feels like fun, add some music to bounce to. "Love Shack" by the B-52's works for me.¹⁰ Are you bouncing yet?

PRACTICE #17: SWIRL THE THOUGHTS—AND YOUR BODY

Similar to Practice #16, bouncing thoughts, you can also swirl or imagine swirling thoughts. Do some head rolls while thinking about sending the thoughts from side to side. With swirling, you can change the speed and space of the swirl. Perhaps putting the thoughts on a merry-go-round, one thought per horse, and watching the thoughts go up and down and round and round. Or in your mind's eye, you might see the thoughts as a separate entity spinning and whirling as the dervishes do. The Islamic Sufi ritual of self-pivoting, known as whirling, is a meditation practice that supports quieting the mind.



This is also a great practice if you recognize thoughts are already swirling in your head. Leaning into what's already happening, without resisting, will allow the thoughts to soften and shift.

PRACTICE #18: STEP AWAY FROM THE MIND

We can become so caught in thinking that we don't even recognize our thoughts have captured us. (We started exploring this in the deep listening Practice #6 in Chapter 2.) But you might notice, at any moment, that your neck and shoulders feel tight, or that you're holding your breath. Or wrinkling your brow. There may be an accompanying thought about needing to focus and concentrate.

Whether you are caught by one thought in particular, or thinking in general, or obsessing on something you'd rather not be thinking about, and that thought doesn't serve you to stay focused on, it can be helpful to take a step away from yourself. Literally take a step back from where you're standing and imagine you can watch yourself thinking. Perhaps you can begin a conversation with yourself about the thought. Wonder where that thought came from, whose thought it is anyway and if you must believe it.

If you're overthinking a situation, stepping away can also help you to see that you're not getting anywhere with thinking it to death. Maybe imagine another step back. From a distance, you can have compassion for yourself and maybe even say, "There, there, sweetie, how about we take a little break?"

This practice can help you remember that you are not your thoughts, that they come and go and you can choose what to pay attention to.



PRACTICE #19: BE ALL THE THINGS

Most of us learned from our caretakers how to behave in the world. What behavior is expected and what behavior is not allowed. What we learned, observed and absorbed gets translated into beliefs about ourselves that we can notice if we step outside their parameters. Often, even well-meant interventions by our parents get translated into a complete system of thoughts. For example, maybe you didn't want to share your food or your toy with your sibling (which, by the way, there are times developmentally when being selfish is exactly what you should be supported in doing), and you were accused of being selfish. You may have taken this one incident and made it into a standard—"Selfishness is bad." And then when you perceive others as being selfish you feel judgmental. Sound familiar? It's what we do. What we do not allow in ourselves, we do not accept in others. You may also have learned you cannot be mean, lazy, judgmental or crabby. But guess what? **Sometimes, we are all those things. Whether we show it to the outside world or not.**

Permitting yourself to be selfish for an hour, judging people like crazy for ten minutes, or in your mind's eye, being as mean as they come, will allow the energy to move. You might even combine this with Practice #15 and assume the posture that goes with selfishness, being judgmental, mean, crabby or lazy. Maybe you cross your arms or frown and wrinkle your forehead when judging. Selfishness might be turning your back or stomping your feet. Or think of a cartoon character that represents those qualities and be that character. Cruella de Vil or Tony the Tiger might have something to teach you.



PRACTICE #20: TURN THE THOUGHTS INTO BUTTERFLIES

Imagine the negative or stuck thought as a butterfly (or hummingbird, dragonfly or lightning bug) and let it flit and fly around. Let yourself flap your wings (arms) fast and slow. Let yourself go slow, speed up, pause and so on. Imagine it moving in a small space and then let it expand outward. Play with changing the colors on the butterfly. Let it be dark, light, iridescent, rainbow colored.

And pay attention to what shifts in you. Perhaps you are no longer wrinkling your forehead, maybe your shoulders are relaxing and maybe you are noticing you don't have to listen to that thought.

PRACTICE #21: LET GO OF DEFENDING YOUR THOUGHTS

Because we feel so identified with our thoughts, we are in the habit of defending them, even if we don't like them. We justify and explain why we think the way we do, and that adds energy and strength to our thoughts. This goes along with looking for evidence to support our beliefs. The tendency can occur independently of others. We spend plenty of time justifying our thoughts to ourselves.

Imagine yourself in a boxing match and your thoughts are a precious object behind you. Feel the movement of protecting and defending and fighting off your opponent. And notice how much energy this takes and how much more attached you feel to your thoughts. And then, drop your arms, step aside and imagine saying to your opponent,




“Here, you can have them.” Wouldn’t it be lovely if we could give some of our thoughts away?

PRACTICE #22: FOCUS ELSEWHERE

When caught in a thought, we are pulled into our own world. Returning to one of the universal practices in Chapter 3, you can shift your focus to help step out of repetitive thoughts. Pausing to look out and see what’s happening outside of you may serve to remind you there is a lot more going on in the world than what you are thinking. You can play with this by oscillating your attention—first become aware of what you’re thinking and then become aware of what’s happening externally, going back and forth for a while. You might want to drop your head to your chest as you go inward and lift your head as you notice what’s beyond. You can even wonder what others might be thinking about. And it’s probably not you or what you’re thinking.

PRACTICE #23: TURN YOUR THOUGHTS INTO A SILLY SONG

Especially when dealing with limiting thoughts, such as “I’m not good enough,” “I don’t have enough time” or “I’ll never get it done!” creating a song using a familiar tune can be fun and support release. The songs “I’m a Little Teapot,” “Merrily We Roll Along” and “The Wheels on the Bus” come to mind as being especially conducive to this practice. Allow yourself to put the words in your head to the



music of the song and see what happens. For bonus points, create some movement to go with it. When my client Melissa sang (to the tune of Teapot), “*I’m a little stupid on some days, can’t think straight in any clever way...*” she was quickly able to recognize and release the old thought and move on with her work.

PRACTICE #24: PERMISSION TO SPACE OUT

For most people, overthinking happens. Many of us were trained to rely more on our thoughts than our emotions or sensations. But often, as Eckhart Tolle says, the mind winds up using us, rather than us using the mind.¹¹ Meditation is often the prescribed fix, but not everyone likes to meditate. Here’s another practice to get some distance from overthinking. Give yourself permission to be spacey.

Spacing out tends to be an unconscious activity that has gotten a bad rap. It often happens when we’re stressed, overwhelmed or lack sleep. But conscious spacing out can be a respite from busyness and a way to reset the system from prolonged periods of focused thinking. While spacing out can happen in stillness with eyes closed, it’s also a lot of fun to move with it.

In this practice, begin by finding movement (walking works) that matches your current state of mind. Busy thinking might move quickly or frantically. And then let yourself imagine you’ve had a glass of wine or whatever substance you might associate with relaxing. Notice if and when your movement starts to shift. Perhaps it slows, perhaps it softens. And then do that again—take another



imagined dose of your preferred relaxant and let yourself be very spacey in your movement. Can you luxuriate in not knowing what's going on? In loosening your thinking?

I had a pin many years ago that said, "*I stopped to think and forgot to start again.*" And you probably don't need to worry about that, thinking tends to quickly find its way back on board.

So, for now, allow yourself to enjoy the break.