



## WALKING DOWN THE STREET

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### THE HIDDEN POWER OF THINKING: THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Settle into a comfortable position. When you are ready, read through the scenario described below. Take a minute or two to imagine the scene as vividly as you can. You may find it helpful to close your eyes. Take all the time you need—see if it is possible to engage fully with the imagined scene.

You are walking along a familiar street . . . You see someone you know on the other side of the street . . . You smile and wave . . . The person makes no response . . . just doesn't seem to notice you. . . walks past without any sign of recognizing your existence.

Imagine that scene now.

What thoughts and feelings went through your mind?

Exactly the same situation can bring a wide range of thoughts and interpretations. The interpretations, rather than the situation itself, shape the way we feel:

- if we think someone is ignoring us because we have done something wrong, we feel upset
- if we think someone is deliberately ignoring us, we feel angry
- if we think the person is preoccupied with his own worries, we feel concerned, and so on

We are often unaware of our interpretations of situations.

The fact that people have such different interpretations means these thoughts cannot all be accurate reflections of the same reality—they cannot all be right. Our interpretations are often based on preconceived notions and prior experiences.

Mindfulness can help us become more aware of our thoughts and interpretations. This gives us the freedom and choice to respond differently.



How do I distinguish my thoughts from my feelings?

Thoughts are what we often experience as words and sentences going through the mind, or as pictures or images that are fairly easy to describe with words. Feelings are more like sensations or shifts in our emotional state that are experienced directly.