

## The Hidden Power of Thinking: Thoughts and Feelings

### The “Waiting for a Message” Exercise

Adapted from The Mindful Way Workbook by John Teasdale, Mark Williams, and Zindel Segal.



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 out and about in a town close to where you live, when you bump into an old friend that you lost touch with some time ago.

You have a friendly chat and exchange mobile numbers, each agreeing that you should meet for coffee for a ‘catch up’. Later, when you get back home, you send a message to the number your old friend gave you, suggesting a time and place to meet up. You wait for a message to come back. You wait for a whole week.

Imagine that scene now, a week later, looking at your phone and noticing that you have had no reply.

What do you think? How do you feel? Do you notice any sensations in the body? What do you feel like doing?

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. For example:

- 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.