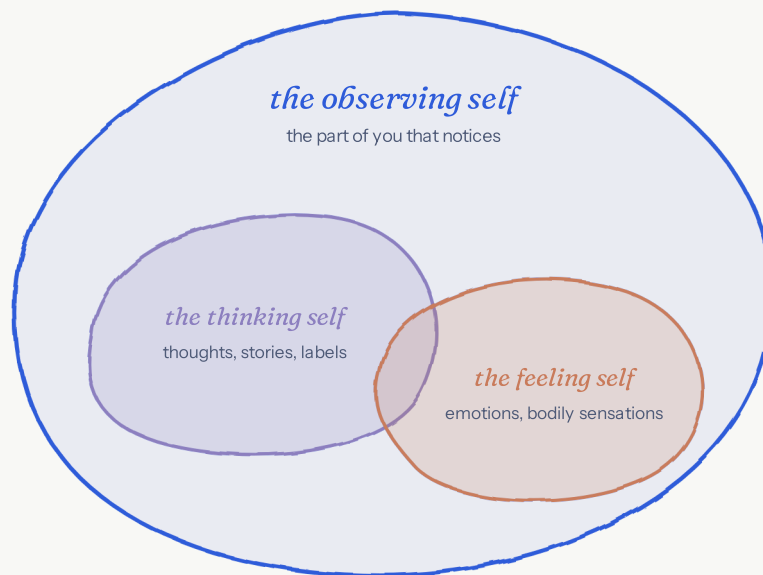


The Three Selves — *and stepping out of the struggle*

A short guide to what we'll be working on together.

The three selves

Most of us describe who we are using two parts of ourselves — what we think and what we feel. But there's a third part that quietly holds the other two.



Thoughts and feelings come and go. The one who notices them stays.

The thinking self

The constant stream of thoughts, stories, judgments and labels. "I'm anxious." "I'm not good enough." "I'm the kind of person who..."

The feeling self

Your emotions and the sensations that come with them — the tight chest, the racing heart, the heaviness, the restlessness. Some people think of the body as its own physical self. Either way, it's the part of you that *feels*.

The observing self

The part of you that *notices* the thoughts and feelings. When you say "I notice I'm having the thought that I'm a failure," the noticer is the observing self. It was there when you were five, and it's here now. This is the steadier, truer ground to stand on.

Why change can feel frightening

When you've spent years defining yourself by your thoughts and feelings, growth can feel like losing yourself. You may not "feel like" your former self for a while. That isn't a sign something is wrong — it's often a sign something is changing.

The catch: the longer we avoid a change we know we need, the more frightening it becomes. Avoidance doesn't shrink the fear. It feeds it.

A different way to win

You've probably been trying to win a war against your own thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations — pushing them down, arguing with them, trying to make them go away. And you've probably noticed that the harder you fight, the stronger they get.

The clever way to win this war is to stop fighting it.

The skills we'll practice aren't designed to make your thoughts and feelings less intense or less frequent. They're designed to change your **relationship** to them, so they lose their grip. In other words, the goal of controlling your inner experience is itself something we can change.

What acceptance really means

Acceptance does *not* mean giving up, liking what you feel, or pretending it's fine.

It means actively making contact with what you're experiencing — directly, fully and without defending against it. Letting the feeling be there. Letting the thought be a thought. Not because you want it, but because struggling with it costs more than allowing it.

We're still going to change things

This approach doesn't give up on change. It aims it at the right target. Your history of thoughts and feelings can't be edited or deleted. But your **behaviour** — what you do next, how you treat yourself, what you move toward — is changeable. That's where our effort goes.

Thoughts and feelings influence behaviour. They don't control it.

Our culture tells us emotions cause behaviour: "I was too anxious to go." "I didn't feel motivated, so I couldn't." Thoughts and feelings absolutely *influence* what we do. But they don't *control* it. You can feel afraid and still act. You can have the thought "I can't" and still take the step.

That gap between what you feel and what you do is where your freedom lives.

Two pictures to keep in mind

Quicksand

When you fall into quicksand, the instinct is to thrash — and thrashing is exactly what pulls you under. The way out is to stop struggling, spread out, and make contact with the surface. Your thoughts and feelings work the same way.

The hole

Imagine you've fallen into a hole with only a shovel. You've been digging and digging, trying to get out. But digging only makes the hole deeper. The first step isn't finding a better way to dig. It's putting the shovel down. Then we climb out together.

None of this happens overnight. Old habits of struggling took years to build, and stepping out of them takes practice and patience. You don't have to do it perfectly, and you don't have to do it alone.

It just takes time.