



Just a thought

Rabbi Idit Solomon

You are at work, out to dinner, or at the beach and all of the sudden you are not there. Your mind decided it was time to remember the loss, how uncomfortable the doctor appointment was, the negative pregnancy test, the disappointment on your partners face or some other experience that was unpleasant. Now your body is tense, your throat constricted, or your stomach is upset and you are feeling sad, despondent, hopeless or outraged. Your mind sends more thoughts... this will not work, things could get worse, nobody else understands... and you are now fully upset. You look around but are not really there. The world is now tinged with sadness.

Wait, what!?! Just a moment ago, you were living life, and now you are the embodiment of a bad infertility experience. What just happened and is your day ruined? The short answer is only if you decide it will be.

If you want to be generous, you could say that the challenging thoughts are the brain's way of protecting you (Ignore the real world and consider all of these terrible scenarios that *may* happen!). But just because your brain decides to toss you a scary thought or tell you how horrible something is or could be, does not mean you have to react to it. That is a road paved to... being overwhelmed.

Because infertility and other family building challenges touch so many aspects of our life, you are bound to hit reminders on a pretty regular basis. Someone talks about benefits and you think about family benefits that you aren't getting. The TV show focuses on a family and you don't have children. You are out for dinner and you see the kids' menu. You are at the beach and you are not playing in the sand with the kids you dream of having. Forget about the full-on triggers that directly hit you, when you want to have children and are facing big barriers, your mind's nature is to bridge where you are to where you want to be. That is normally a good thing. It motivates us and helps us solve problems. But it can also bring in so not good reasons to explain why and tell your body to prepare for disappointment or get ready for a fight. Before you stop to notice what is happening, you start experiencing the world as if that that thought is reality right then and there.

You can take some simple steps to address those thoughts when they feel overwhelming. Simple, but not easy. If you want to maintain some sense of wholeness and take care of yourself as you move through the experience of trying to build your family, however, they are essential. You have nothing to lose by trying. Just know it is not a one-time fix. It is a tool to have on hand. All. The. Time.

Ready? Here comes the thought: I am never going to be a parent. I can't handle this. I will lose it if I have to hear more of this. (Anyone of these may come with a dose of unpleasant physical reactions.)

- 1) First notice the thought - You might resist and argue with it (But what if... or but it's true!). Dig in and pull the higher level you out, and notice that the idea was the



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machination of your mind. You are not here to say if it has any validity or not, just to notice that it is a thought, to separate your “self” from that thought. The thought is not real. It’s just your brain doing what it does.

- 2) Pay attention to your body – Once you can separate from the thought, notice if your body is also sending you messages. Did your shoulders tense? Your hands clench? Stomach turn? If so, breathe into whatever sensation is happening and just feel it physically. You don’t need to label it or explain it. Just feel it. You can follow it with your breath. Or you can just focus on your breath. Put your hands to your chest or belly and focus on the physical sensations that are happening in your body. That is for real, right here, right now. Spend thirty seconds or a minute or two here. Ground yourself in your body in this very moment.
- 3) As you do this, more thoughts very likely will pop into your head. Just keep noticing them as thoughts and returning to your body. Stay here as long as you can. Don’t try to stop them, but try to let them pass and hold your focus on your body. You are not trying to change anything, but by acknowledging what the body is doing, it often naturally recognizes you got the message. It knows you are paying attention now.
- 4) The last step is to send a message back to your brain to tell it how you want to focus. When we have thoughts like “This is going to break me” or “I can’t deal with this,” they can be self-fulfilling. So, say something you *want to happen* and it has to be believable to you. You are not trying to convince yourself of anything (be honest) or set an unrealistic expectation (don’t deny reality). You are trying to rewire towards helpful messaging. You *will be* okay. For example:
 - I will live in the present (and soak up my time at the beach).
 - I am grateful for the blessing in my life (enjoy being with friends).
 - I choose how I am going to respond to my situation (and when).
 - I can take care of myself (Give yourself some good self-care!).

The focus on breathing and your body is not entirely about breath or your body. It’s about adjusting your focus to where you really are in the moment. Our bodies, like our thoughts, are sending messages. Unlike thoughts, the body is something that you can physically experience right now and notice it is really safe. The body brings you back to real world.

When you are in the right space, you can choose to process whatever is on your mind. It may be that a thought comes to you at a time that is worthy of consideration and you are in a place to address it. But the stress of infertility can sometimes lead to unhelpful negative thoughts and overwhelm can sneak in. Overtime and with practice, you will get better at noticing. Maybe one day you will catch yourself thinking, that was just a thought.