How skillful are you with your own mind? In particular, how able are you to do each of the three fundamental ways to engage the mind, to practice with it? These three are:

1.) Simply be with what's present in awareness – including painful thoughts, perceptions, and feelings – without trying to change it.
2.) Reduce what's negative by preventing, ending, or decreasing harmful thoughts, perceptions, emotions, desires, and actions.
3.) Grow what's positive by fostering, preserving, or growing beneficial thoughts, perceptions, emotions, desires, and actions.

You can explore this by reflecting on and answering the questions below.

For each question, try to find a response in one of these five categories:

1 - strongly disagree | 2 - disagree | 3 - neither agree nor disagree | 4 - agree | 5 - strongly agree

A person's responses to questions like these are often more complex and nuanced than a single number can indicate. But for scoring purposes, for each question please choose the number above that is most accurate (or least inaccurate!).

QUESTIONS

_____ If I feel moderately upset (e.g., anxious, angry, frustrated, driven, hurt, inadequate), I can open to this experience without resistance and feel it fully, letting it be.

_____ If I feel severely upset (e.g., anxious, angry, frustrated, driven, hurt, inadequate), I can open to this experience without resistance and feel it fully, letting it be.

_____ When I am upset about something, I routinely explore my experience, including what is more vulnerable, deeper, central, or younger beneath the surface of the experience.

_____ I routinely make deliberate efforts in my mind to reduce the negative there, such as challenging wrong or harmful thoughts and perceptions, expressing feelings, and regulating harmful desires and actions . . . letting things go.

_____ I routinely make deliberate efforts in my mind to grow the positive there, such as encouraging beneficial thoughts, perceptions, emotions, desires, and actions . . . letting things in.

_____ I'm aware of my strengths and weaknesses with regard to being with and working with my mind.

_____ I can work with my mind while also being mindful of it; I know that working with my mind is not in conflict with mindfulness.

_____ I am able to sustain a completely accepting, "bare witnessing" of the stream of consciousness for at least several minutes in a row, and I have a regular practice of doing so.

_____ I've had clear experiences of moving too quickly into working with my mind and then realizing that I needed to go back to being with it, experiencing the experience more fully, especially its more fundamental layers.

_____ When I am upset about something, I frequently use all three ways to engage the mind: being with and exploring what's there . . . releasing whatever is negative . . . and encouraging what would be positive.
SCORING

Your responses to particular questions can be taken at face value, in their own right, as opportunities for seeing useful things about yourself, for investigating further – perhaps talking about them with others – and for identifying inner resources that would be good to develop further in yourself.

Additionally, it can be helpful to get an overall sense of where you stand. Add up your responses to each question to get your total score. See where your score fits in just below; please hold these descriptions lightly, but in a general sense it could well be true that:

40 - 50  You have a lot of skill and dexterity – even mastery – with your mind. You're comfortable and capable with simply being with your mind, even in states of utterly accepting “choiceless awareness” of the stream of consciousness. You're similarly at ease and skillful with releasing your harmful thoughts, perceptions, emotions, desires, and actions . . . and with replacing these with beneficial ones. You sustain mindfulness whether you are letting be, letting go, or letting in. If something is bothering you, you often naturally start by exploring it and experiencing it fully; next, when it feels right, you shift into letting go of whatever was negative; then, again when it feels right, you shift into letting in what could be positive.

21 - 39  You're currently somewhat skillful with your mind. You could be good at one of the three ways to engage the mind – letting be, letting go, letting in – but not so comfortable or capable with the other two. Perhaps you lean strongly toward either being with your mind or working with it, but you're not so adept with both of these. You could think that making deliberate efforts in your mind to reduce the negative and grow the positive are somehow in conflict with mindfulness. If something is bothering you, you may occasionally deal with it by using all three ways to engage your mind, but this is probably not a routine practice for you.

10 - 20  Currently, you are not very comfortable or capable with the three ways to engage your mind: the three types of psychological practice. There's lots of opportunity here! Start with the first way to engage the mind – simply being with it – because it is the foundation of the other two. Try to cultivate a stability of witnessing your experience through meditation training or similar practices, and try to tune into your experience more, especially your body sensations and emotions; of course, go at a pace that's comfortable for you. Also explore the second way to engage the mind – preventing or letting go of the negative – by challenging wrong or harmful thoughts, relaxing in your body, letting your feelings flow, and disengaging from harmful desires. And of course explore the third way to engage your mind – encouraging and letting in the positive – by looking for good facts, letting them become good experiences, and taking a dozen seconds or longer to really internalize these experiences.

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