

or cancel it and replace it with something better. I found this challenging to remember at first, when I came up sputtering for air, but it was certainly doable. The more I remembered it the better I got at choosing my thoughts.

Life seems to be sending us all some challenging reflections and lessons lately. Those of us who manage to get our heads above the water or even leave the river to sit on its banks, hold an essential example for those still struggling under water. Imagine a bunch of electric eels in the water. The more eels who turn on their lights, the easier it is for everyone in the river to see.

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## Thoughts about thoughts

About 20 years ago, I became a student of my thoughts. I was the mother of two young children, my own mother was suffering through a terminal illness and my husband had been laid off from his job. But, somehow, deep inside, I knew that there was more to life than this stress and struggle. Intuitively, I began to watch my thoughts.

At first, watching my thoughts felt like being caught in a fierce current in a river. Every once in a while, I would struggle to bring my head above the water only to be dragged under moments later. I also remember that, at this time, my river was consumed with fear.

One day, preparing dinner in the kitchen, my head struggled above the water and I screamed this thought to the universe. “Why do we have to feel so much fear?” To my amazement, the universe immediately returned the answer, “To learn not to be afraid.” This thought had just barged into my mind and, in shock I thanked the source and its confirmation that I was indeed not alone. Even though it wasn’t the answer I wanted to hear – maybe a little sympathy would be nice . . . and my head was under water again.

Slowly, I was learning that the trick to keeping my head above water was not to be consumed by my thoughts. Easier said than done. Another thing I learned was that I did not like what I saw. My thoughts were negative and judgmental or escaped completely into fantasy. Things really began to feel ugly when I realized that all of my judgmental thoughts about others were really based on what I disliked about myself. I had reached the point of no return. There was no way I could jump back into the river again and be unconscious about what I was thinking. Now what?

I noticed that there was a light appearing in the midst of the darkness. I was becoming aware that there were two parts of my mind at work when I was watching my thoughts – the part that was stuck in the river and the part that was watching everything. As I began to identify more with the watching part, I felt better. I felt more detached from the river-thoughts and could just watch them for a while, sometimes even without judgment. I also noticed that I could keep my head above the water for longer stretches now.

As I identified more with the watching part of my mind, I felt clearer and more in touch with my intuition. So I began to test, play with, doubt and gradually trust my intuition. One of my favorite games was to enter a bookstore or library with the intention “What do I need to learn today?” I would wander around and as long as I could stay in this part of my mind, invariably, a colour or word on a book would jump out at me. Every single time, what I needed to learn that day was in that book. Once, a book even fell off the shelf behind me as I passed. Must have had my head under water at that moment.

There is an old saying that is something like, “when the student is ready, the teacher appears.” I realized that my teachers have always been around me; I just wasn’t paying attention. When I did pay attention, I learned that everyone in my life was really a reflection of what was wonderful about me (these are nice) or what I needed to learn. When I discovered that within me was the most important teacher of all, I learned to be more gentle and forgiving of myself. Besides, pretty well everyone I knew had their heads stuck under water too. How can I be hard on anybody else when we are all gasping for air?

Gradually, I discovered that the most fascinating thing about my watching mind was that, while I was there, I found out that I could choose what I thought. If I didn’t like a thought, I would stop it