

# Name, Tame, and Reframe

We all have an inner critic. We experience this "voice" as a negative internal commentary on who we are and how we behave. Common critical inner voices include *"You're ugly."* *"You're so stupid."* *"You're so out of shape."* *"There's something wrong with you."* *"You're worthless."* *"You're unlovable."* Much of the time this untrue, unkind thinking, which is often subconscious, determines our feelings. For example, if on some level we believe that we are a worthless human being, we will feel worthless.

Try this experiment: Take a few moments to entertain a judgmental thought about yourself and then think about its opposite. For example, *"I am worthless"* and then *"I am worthwhile. I have value."* Notice what you feel and sense with each opposing thought and how they differ. The self-judgment will always generate a feeling of contraction on some level and some corresponding constriction in our body, usually in the heart center and often in the gut.

We then take these feelings and sensation as evidence, confirming that we are worthless, thinking, *"If I feel this way, it must be true."* This is a common misunderstanding. We mistake the impact of our judgmental thinking as proof that something is wrong with us. As we think, so we feel. So often our feelings of deficiency and unworthiness are the body's response to judgmental thoughts about ourselves. They are result of a lack of clear seeing about the truth of who are. Consider how strongly you may react during a nightmare and what a relief it is to wake up and realize that it was only a dream. Our distorted, judgmental thinking creates a similar kind of nightmare during the waking state. The following is a three-step process to help you free yourself from the inner critic.

## Three Steps to Working with Self-Judgment

Try this the next time you notice the inner critic arising in your life.

### STEP 1: NAME THE SELF-JUDGMENT

For example, if the judgmental thought arises *"I am worthless,"* take a moment and name to yourself that a judgmental thought is arising in your mind. Naming it helps to bring the prefrontal cortex back online, which helps you to bring it fully into awareness and disidentify from the judgment, creating a bit of space and objectivity.

## STEP 2: TAME - RELAX, EXHALE, AND LET GO

When you're experiencing judgmental thoughts, your body is also impacted. Self-judgment activates the fight-flight-freeze response and feelings of contraction and tension in the body. Step two is to take a moment to breathe, relax, and soften your body. Take some slow, smooth, deep, mindful breaths, bringing your awareness into your body. You can use your exhale to soften and release any tension you feel in your body, as well as any negative thinking. You might even imagine the judgmental thoughts leaving your body with each exhale.

## STEP 3: REFRAME - NAME A POSITIVE

Now that you have a little space between you and your judgmental thoughts, take a moment and intentionally redirect your attention to something positive. You might ask yourself *"What's going well in my life?"* or *"What is something about myself that I appreciate or value?"* Maybe it is that you have your health, you have some friends or family who care about you, or you have a roof over your head. Whatever it may be, see if you can name a few positive things. Maybe you listened to a friend or family member going through a hard time. Maybe you went the extra mile at work, or you were patient with a difficult colleague. You might think of a quality or skill in yourself that you like or appreciate. Maybe you are a good cook or writer. Maybe you enjoy helping others or have donated money or time to a cause you believe in. See what comes. If you still find yourself caught up in the grip of self-judgment, simply acknowledge that you wish to be free from the suffering of this judgmental voice in your head can help. There is kindness in that. You might recall that all beings everywhere want to be happy and free from inner and out suffering, including yourself. Whatever it is that you name to yourself, try repeating it slowly a few times. Allow these positive thoughts to replace the self-judgment in the mind until you begin to feel the truth of these positive thoughts land in your body. Take a moment and try it now.

1. **Name:** Name a judgment the inner critic has about you.
2. **Tame:** Take a moment to pause, take a couple of slow deep breaths and relax and soften any tension you feel in your body.
3. **Reframe:** Ask yourself *"What's going well in my life?"* or *"what is something about myself that I appreciate or value?"* Repeat it silently to yourself a few times.

In the week to come, I encourage you to run an experiment and set the intention to practice this at least three times a day for the next seven days. What you practice and repeat over time starts to become more automatic. With a little effort, you can install this as an automatic healthy habit for working with self-judgment anytime it arises in your life.