

ACCCEPTANCE AND **C**OMMITMENT **T**HERAPY

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ACT

(Acceptance and Commitment Therapy)

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ACT (“Acceptance and Commitment Therapy” by Steven C. Hayes)

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The present article has benefited from the ideas of Steven Hayes in “Acceptance and Commitment Therapy” (ACT).

Mohsen Makhmalbaf

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ACT theory:

A thought is usually not real,

Not serious,

Not useful,

A thought is just a thought.

It is not you.

Do not believe it.

Do not do what it tells you.

Just observe it.

And let the cloud pass through the sky of your mind.

Introduction

چون عاقبت کار جهان نیستی است

انگار که نیستی، چو هستی خوش باش

(خیام)

*Because the end of the world is nothing,
As if you are naught, be happy as you are.*

(Khayyam)

In Khayyam's poem, the phrase: "Because the end of the world is nothing, as if you are naught" is Khayyam's worldview and assumption. Because he assumes that the end of this world and human life is non-existence. Based on this hypothetical worldview, he describes his behavioral technique in the following sentence:

"Be happy as you are".

Simply put, Khayyam's hypothesis and behavioral technique is as follows:

Khayyam's hypothesis:

"Because the end of the world is nothing",

Khayyam's behavioral technique:

"Be happy as you are".

Another example from the teachings of Buddha:

The Buddha says: Wanting is the cause of human suffering. Reduce your desires, so that you suffer less.

Buddha's hypothesis:

“Wanting is the cause of human suffering”.

Buddha's behavioral technique:

“Reduce your desires, so that you suffer less”.

Question: In Khayyam's philosophy, why should I be happy?

Answer: Because the end of the world is nothing.

Question: In Buddha's philosophy, why should we reduce our desires?

Answer: Because every desire is a cause of suffering.

We will not know the reason for the behavioral technique of Khayyam's “the opportunity should be used”, or the technique of “not wanting” preached by the Buddha, unless we understand the assumption or philosophy behind their behavioral technique. In fact, as they say:

“Since it is so, it must be done so.”

In psychology, too, every theory includes hypotheses (assumptions) and behavioral advice (techniques). Therefore, without understanding the assumptions of each theory, the techniques of that psychological theory will not be understandable.

The present theory Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, abbreviated as ACT, also includes hypotheses and techniques.

Hypotheses of ACT

Hypothesis 1:

Life is difficult unless our values make life's hardships bearable.

We ask ourselves when experiencing the hardships of life: Why did we come to this world full of suffering and inequality? Is our life in this world worth all the effort? If we respond positively to it, and are satisfied with it, we must seek to trace our values: the values for which we overcome the hardships of life.

In "Man's Search for Meaning", the famous Austrian psychologist Victor Frankl describes how people who were worried about being burned at Auschwitz committed suicide in advance. They did this not only because they could not bear the hardships of this kind of death, but also because they did not have any person or aim to live for. Having a valuable person or aim to live for would have given them the courage to face all hardships in order to survive. "In Auschwitz, there were other people who, despite being burned at Auschwitz, did not commit suicide because of the values and meanings they had in their lives," he says.

According to Steven Hayes, in explaining the philosophical part of the theory of ACT, "life is hard, unless values make the hardships of life bearable."

One can imagine our life unfolding battered by the waves and the wind in a stormy ocean. ACT theory does not promise you a calm and serene ocean to lead a peaceful existence, but only seeks to teach us to live calmly even when engulfed in the storms of this ocean of life. How? By living true to our values, instead of perpetually chasing dreams.

Difference between value and aim

According to ACT Theory, constantly chasing goals is the cause of mental illness. Every time you strive for something and you do not achieve it, you suffer because that is your goal. Every time you lose, but you are not afraid to continue on your way, that is your value.

Example:

Dr. Hassan Hamidpour, a prominent Iranian psychologist, has an interesting example of a family of four, including a father, mother, ten-year-old daughter, and five-year-old son, traveling by family car. Pay attention to their conversation on the road.

Ten-year-old girl: (Out of boredom, she sleeps constantly, and sometimes opens her eyes.) So, when will we reach mom? This girl has only one goal: to reach the next city. The journey towards the goal has no worth for her, so she sleeps during the drive to lessen her misery from the travelling. Just like a depressed person who sleeps to experience less suffering by shutting out the outside world.

The five-year-old boy is overwhelmed with joy from the beginning of the journey. He looks out the window at the scenery along the way. Sometimes he asks about the interesting things he sees. This journey and what he sees is valuable to him. He does not perceive any difficulty in the long journey, because his goal is not just to reach the next city. He enjoys this trip, the journey to reach the destination. As a result, he happily experiences all the moments of the journey with his five senses.

Mother: (to her husband) 'Please can you drive faster; the children are tired'. Although the mother is awake and looks at the road anxiously to alert her husband of potential dangers which could cause an accident, she likes the car to go faster, so that she can reach her destination in the next city sooner. If she did not have the responsibility of having two children, she would not sit next to her husband to watch the road. Rather, it was possible for her to do the same as her daughter and sleep so that she would not experience the long journey.

Father: Now I think we have arrived early, what do we do next? How nice, luckily the rain has also started now.

In this example, the father likes to reach the goal, which is the next city, but life has taught him that the pleasure in these moments is to reach the goal. As a

result, he enjoys the long drive and does not feel the tediousness of the journey at all. In contrast, the mother and daughter see the drive only as a way to reach the next city and suffer from the long journey.

Which member of this family do you identify yourself with in the way you lead your life and in the work you do? Do you enjoy what you are doing, or are you waiting for this long and difficult journey to end as soon as possible so that you can reach your goals at the earliest?

Another example:

“I used to think that reaching the top of the mountain was happiness, but now I realize that going to the top of mountain is happiness,” says the famous novelist Gabriel García Marquez.

If you are miserable attending classes when in University, you do not value the learning that is being offered to you, but you care only about obtaining your degree.

If you suffer from what you do, doing it is not what you value in your life. And if you are overwhelmed with pleasure while doing your job and your focus is on doing it at the moment, you are a lucky person engaged in doing what you value in life. From the point of view of ACT theory, happiness should not be our goal, it should be our way of life. And happiness is nothing but living true to your values.

Comparison of value and goal

- 1- Value gives us meaning in the present. While a goal can be achieved only in the future.
- 2- Value needs no justification. It is inherently justified. While the importance of a goal needs to be justified to merit its pursuit.
- 3- Value is a choice. However, the goal is usually imposed or induced. And if it is inductive, it is usually the parents' intentions. That is why in adolescence we have to review the inductive goals we inherit from our parents and redefine our values.
- 4- Value is process-oriented. But the goal is result-oriented.

5- Value makes facing the hardships of life easy. While the goal usually hurts our psyche. Because if we do not reach the goal, we will be depressed. If we think we may not reach the goal, we become anxious. If it's too late to reach the goal, we get stressed. If someone else achieves that goal, we will be jealous.

How do we find the values of our lives?

Imagine being able to solve all the problems in your life in an instant by shaking a magic wand. If, from this moment on, you are free to do only what you love, how would you spend your life then, to enjoy life and feel happy?

Example:

Sixty-three-year-old man, Reza, an employee, after a period of several years of depression, finally agrees upon his family's insistence to go to a psychologist and seek his help to improve his condition.

Therapist: What is the problem that has brought you to my office?

Reza: Honestly, I came here only after my family's insistence to get some help with my depression.

Therapist: Why are you depressed?

Reza: Because of my family, Doctor. On the one hand, they depress me with their actions and the situation we are in, and on the other hand, they send me to you for treatment.

Therapist: Tell me a little about your situation that is bothering you.

Reza: I don't know, when this misery of my life will end. I work all week to support my wife and children. On holidays, I do not want to get out of bed because I am so unhappy. Unfortunately, my daughter is forty years old and still unmarried. My son is thirty-five years old and still unemployed. At the age of sixty-three, I am still paying my home loan installment. Which will continue for another ten years.

Therapist: Can you let go of your problems for a few minutes and imagine

how you would spend your time in life if you were not depressed and had no family or financial problems?

Reza: Well, I think in this case, I would go to sports in the evenings. To be honest, I used to exercise in my youth and I used to really enjoy it. Not like now, I just like to sleep.

Therapist: If everything were in your control, what would you do at night before going to bed?

Reza: I would like to hang out with my friends and talk, or visit my parents more. Honestly, I always suffer from a guilty conscience for not being able to visit my parents well enough.

Therapist: What else would you like to do?

Reza: I would read books that I have always liked.

Therapist: Sport, exercises, meeting friends, meeting parents, and reading books that you love are the values of your life. Now tell me, how many hours a day, week, month, or year do you spend time on these kinds of values that you just mentioned?

Reza: I do not have time at all, Doctor.

Therapist: During Holidays you do not have time also?! Why not spend some time on these values instead of sleeping in bed?

Reza: Honestly, I am waiting for the day that my problems will be solved.

Therapist: So, you think you need to achieve the values of your life only after achieving your goals or solving your problems completely. Have you ever seen a person whose problems in life are completely solved, and any person who has no problems?

Reza: No.

Therapist: So, if everyone has a problem, why are some people happy in life

and some people sad?

Reza: I do not know.

Therapist: Because happy people spend the time their problems allow for their values. Not just grieving for distant goals, or unfinished problems. At the very least, unlike you, they spend the holidays, or a few hours in the day, for their own values of their lives. Do you know what would be the penalty is if we do not take time for the values of our lives?

Reza: No.

Therapist: Anxiety, anger and depression.

Technique of finding your values

Reza: Now what should I do to get out of depression?

Therapist: Make a list of your life's values. Check to see what or who you would spend your time on if you did not have these problems.

Reza: What is the use of this list when my days are not mine for me to do those things, or to spend my time with those I like?

Therapist: Do you mean that you do not have one or two hours a day, or you do not have time during your vacation?

Reza: I am so sad that I spend all my non-working hours and holidays thinking and grieving.

Therapist: You've tried thinking and feeling sad for a long time, and the result has only been depression. Now take some time for what you value in life and test it in practice. I do not know if it is a miracle, but my experience with other clients shows that their improvement is directly proportional to the number of hours that they have spent on the things they value. We need to strike a balance between goals and life problems, and life values.

Hypothesis 2:**Secondary benefit is the reason for the continuation of problems**

Why do some depressed people go to counseling for years and do not get better?

One of the reasons of their continued illness is the secondary benefit they perceive from being ill. For example, with depression, they cannot go to work, do not do household chores, shrug off their duties, and attract the compassion and attention of others. Depression, anxiety, anger, or any other mental illness that is reinforced by the secondary benefit will not get better.

In the UK, when a patient goes to a clinic and asks a doctor for medication for anxiety or depression or any kind of mental illness, the doctor asks: Do you get financial support from the government for your neurological illness? In fact, through this question, the physician wants to discover the patient's secondary benefit from depression. Because some patients are not really sick, they want to prove themselves incapable of working through this application, in order to be eligible for government assistance.

Example:

Therapist: Madam, how has your husband treated you since you were depressed?

Housewife: After my depression, fortunately he comes home earlier at night.

Therapist: What happened with another woman that he had an affair with, that you told me before?

Housewife: Ever since I got depressed, he has not had an affair with her.

Therapist: Aren't you afraid that if you get better, your spouse will do the same again?

In this example, the therapist points to the secondary benefit of the housewife's illness, which is to get her husband's attention.

Example:

A 15-year-old boy, who does not go to school due to depression has been referred to a therapist by his mother.

Therapist: Since you got depression, what have you been doing with your exams, son?

Mother of a teenage boy: He doesn't go to school at all, Doctor. He says I'm not feeling well. You see, he doesn't answer your questions even now. Last time, when we went home and asked him: Why did not you answer the doctor? He said: Can't you see? I'm depressed!

In this example, this teenager's depression is a kind of escape from lessons and exercises and exams and even answering the doctor's questions.

This type of clients, because they benefit from their disease, will never be treated completely with either medication or counseling, even if the treatment period lasts for years, and even if the medicine they are taking is the best medicine available. They give up their illness only when they no longer benefit from it. Sometimes people choose social fear and anxiety to avoid the struggle of addressing and solving social problems. These types of people stay at home under the pretext of being sick so that they do not face problems outside the home.

If you do not know the secondary benefit of your own and others' problems, you do not know why your problems and theirs become chronic. Or why, no matter how hard you try and pay for the treatment of your loved ones, they will not be cured.

Hypothesis 3:**Creative frustration is a kind of solution**

"Complete despair is the prelude to suicide," some psychologists say. In ACT theory some psychologists say the opposite: "Unless the client is disappointed and desperate, he will not look for a solution".

Example:

Iraj fell in love with a girl who was his classmate. He proposed to her many times, but was rejected by her. But he did not give up this love for years. One day he saw the girl he loved with another man. He followed them to the girl's house, and saw that they both entered the girl's house. The next day it was announced that the girl was going to get married. Iraj got in the way of the girl again and insisted on his love, but the girl announced that she was really marrying the person she loved. Iraj was still hopeful and did not give up. Until the girl got married and left the city. Iraj was sad and crying for two or three days. Then he returned to normal life and three months later fell in love with another girl.

Question: Why was it difficult for Iraj to accept the failure of love?

Answer: Because he was still hoping to reach that girl. Hope always prevents us from accepting emotional failure, and other failures. Unless constructive despair comes to man's aid and saves him from unconstructive hopes.

Another example:

You are hesitant to study at university or get a job. You decide to try your luck at going to university by taking this year's entrance exam. You have been waiting for the entrance exam answer for months. Eventually you will receive a negative response from the university. You become very sad and decide to go to work again. A friend tells you that he also failed the entrance exam, but he decides to take the entrance exam again next year, so that he may be accepted this time. Your friend's words give you new hope. Again, you hope to be accepted in the entrance exam next year. You waste your time for another year until next year. You try again and you fail. Now your hopes are dashed once again. One night you become very sad. Instead, the next day you go to find the job of your life.

Question: What hindered you from finding work?

Answer: The hope of passing the entrance exam.

Question: What made you start your work?

Answer: Constructive disappointment that I gained from being rejected in the entrance exam.

Our lives are guided by hopes and disappointments. Constructive frustrations, meanwhile, are more effective than vain hopes. We know less about the value of constructive frustration because we are caught in dozens of vain hopes. Hopes that have stopped us instead of helping us to move forward.

Hypothesis 4:

Pain is normal but suffering is created by our minds

When we have a cold and our body hurts, this pain is real and natural. It can be relieved by taking painkillers. If there is an injury to our body during a fight, the pain of that injury is real because both the fight and the injury happened in the real world and it is an external experience. But the painful reflections about that fighting are a mental experience, not a real one. When our daily struggles are over, our inner experiences begin in the bed at night when we are alone with our thoughts.

Hassan, 40 years old, from Afghanistan, comes to a psychologist's office for counseling. He has migrated to London several years ago. He thinks a conflict he had three weeks ago is the reason for his recent suffering.

Therapist: How many days ago did you fight?

Hassan: Twenty days ago.

Therapist: Does your fist still hurt?

Hassan: No. It got better.

Therapist: So why do you think and suffer from some kicks you received in the abdomen twenty days ago?

Hassan: I do not sleep at night right until morning, Doctor. I keep telling myself, I should have given him a firm answer at that time.

Therapist: Well, if you can, go now and answer him, but stop thinking about it all the time.

Hassan: Doctor, you understand, some nights I think that I should leave it all behind, so that I do not cause myself any more trouble, but I cannot. Do something please.

Therapist: Well, then finish it and do not cause yourself any new trouble and sleep well at night.

Hassan: In another corner of my heart, I wish to abuse him verbally in front of others and take away his reputation.

Therapist: Do you enjoy these contradictory thoughts, or do you just suffer?

Hassan: I do not sleep through the night, suffering until morning.

Therapist: Look, the pain in your abdomen was real and the cause was his fist. But the cause of your suffering is your mind, not reality.

Hassan: What should I do to sleep well all night and not suffer any more?

Therapist: First accept that pain is real, but suffering is unreal and made by our minds.

Hassan: What is the use of accepting this statement?

Therapist: The benefit is that you understand the cause of your abdominal pain, but the cause of your mental suffering is your own thoughts. In this case, instead of thinking about how to deal with it, you should think about how to deal with your own thoughts, so that it does not cause you so much false suffering.

Hypothesis 5:

Acceptance is the big brother of change

Continuation of the previous example:

Therapist: You cannot begin to regulate your anger until you admit that you become very angry. Until you accept that you are depressed, it is impossible to get out of the bed of depression. Unless you admit to being addicted to smoking, you cannot quit smoking. Unless you realise that you are a dependent person, you

will not take any action to become independent. Unless you accept the cause of your insomnia is not the punch you received twenty days ago from another person, but the main problem is your many contradictory thoughts, you will not be able to effect change.

Hassan: What does acceptance mean, doctor?

Therapist: Acceptance has two interpretations:

- First, you cannot change until you accept that there is a problem.
- Second, if you can, change your circumstances, your thoughts, your feelings, and your behavior, but if you cannot, accept it.

Hypothesis 6:

The solution to the previous problem is itself the next problem.

Any solution we take to control or change our mind and change our preoccupation with our emotions, has the potential to create our next problem. Like our depression today could be the result of the solutions that we have chosen in the past for our anxiety problems.

Example:

Dilovar, a 30-year-old man, who had a love crisis in Tajikistan, now has been brought to a psychologist in London.

Therapist: What's the problem that has brought you to my office?

Dilovar: My depression.

Therapist: What's the cause of your depression?

Dilovar: When I was in Dushanbe, I loved a girl from the bottom of my heart. When she left me, life was over for me.

Therapist: When she left and you felt that your life was over, what solution did you find to your problem?

Dilovar: I took refuge in a secluded place, alone. Even when my friends or family members called, I did not answer them.

Therapist: Don't you think that it is not the failure of love that led to your depression, but the solution you found to your problem that caused your depression? You could fall in love again sometime after the failure of your love or you can focus your attention on something that you value.

Dilovar: You say that if I had not been isolated, and had chosen another path, I would not have fallen into depression?

Therapist: I say that our problems today are the result of the solutions we have chosen for our past problems. In finding your solution to the failure of love, you chose isolation, which led to your depression. But it was also possible, to solve this problem you could have immersed yourself in your work to the point of obsession, creating a new problem by becoming a workaholic. That is why we must be careful about the consequences of solving our problems today. I had a client who was very lonely, he would come to me for advice to overcome his loneliness. In a hasty decision, he got married as a solution to cure his loneliness. Now he has been coming here for a while to solve his marital problems.

Dilovar: You are confusing me. On the one hand, you say that after losing my love, I will fall in love with someone else, and on the other hand, you are telling me that if I get married, I may get into marital problems and will be back seeking your help. It's like all the roads lead me to your office. So, what kind of benefit does this have?

Therapist: I forgot to say that I also had a client who had a lot quarrels with his wife and they came to me for a long time to settle their disputes. Finally, to end their quarrels, they decided to divorce. Now, both of them have been coming to me for seeking help for the depression caused by loneliness and the pressure of constantly reflecting the past.

Dilovar: Doctor, I raise both my hands, I surrender. I am completely confused. Even more confused than I was before I set foot in your clinic. If the solution

of loneliness is not marriage, and the solution of family quarrels is not divorce, then what is the solution?

Therapist: Let me give another example. You know that your thoughts hurt you and to distract yourself from your suffering you want to eat something delicious, like an ice cream or a sweet, so that you can have some fun and forget your suffering. You eat ice cream or sweets and say to yourself: 'O you were not bad. I had a good time'. From now on, whenever your mind is suffering, you go for the pleasure of eating sweets. Well, that's a solution in itself, but after a year, you gain 20 kilos and your doctor says if you do not apply the brakes, you will not need me anymore, but will need to see an endocrinologist who specializes in diabetes..

Dilovar: So, there is no single solution to problems, because each solution itself causes the next problem. Did I get it right?

Therapist: Both yes and no. You see, you could distract yourself with exercise, and now instead of diabetes due to eating too much sweets, or instead of twenty kilos of extra weight, you have become thin and fit, and you have now become a physical fitness addict, whose situation will get worse if you do not exercise for at least an hour every day. You see, this solution also has its own problem, but where is this problem and where is that problem! My point is that any solution to the previous problem will inevitably lead to the next problem. So, when choosing a solution, we should not only think about solving the current problem, but also the positive and negative consequences of the solution in the long run.

There is no absolute solution to all problems. But there are always solutions that are more suitable for each person. Let me give you an example to lighten the mood.

There was a man so poor that he did not even know where to go for his next meal. But without losing hope, he worked hard and finally became rich. He no longer had the problem of sleeping hungry every night. But now his problem was how to spend his money, or where to invest so that its value would not diminish.

You see, both poverty and excessive wealth are problems, but can you compare one with the other?

Dilovar: Let's assume that you had been in my place, which solution would you have chosen that would be more useful than problematic?

Technique

Do your job, do not solve your problems.

Therapist: Have you ever heard of the famous example from Steven Hayes' ACT theory about a bus driver and his annoying passengers?

Dilovar: No, I haven't.

Therapist: Imagine you are the bus driver and there are a number of troublesome, irritating passengers in your bus, who are annoying you a lot. Do you constantly bring your bus to a halt to drop off annoying passengers, or do you continue on your way?

Dilovar: I will continue on my way.

Therapist: Why not use the same technique in your life? Why not go ahead with the main tasks of your life instead of arguing with troublemakers and trying to solve everyday problems?

Dilovar: If so, what would happen to my problems? Do they resolve themselves on their own? Won't they accumulate and hurt me more?

Therapist:

First: most of these problems are mental and do not exist in the real world. It is enough if you do not think about them, as some of them will disappear. Some problems have only a life in your mind; as soon as your thoughts about them stop, they no longer exist externally.

Second: some problems have no solution, even if they are real, such as my parents' old age, that no matter what I do, they will not become young again. Problems like this should be put on the acceptance list. Whatever has no solu-

tion, you just have to accept it. If you do not accept it, the penalty for it would be depression and anger and anxiety.

Third: there are solutions to some problems, not now, but in the future. Put them on the waiting list. Nothing can be done about them until the time comes. Such as, the results of an entrance exam. Or the growing up of kids. Or getting a blood test result in three days even if you are worried and want to know if you have cancer.

Fourth: some things are difficult, but they are not your problem or mine, and you and I can do nothing about them. As you read in the news, another earthquake has hit another country and they are looking for living people under the rubble. If this had happened in my city, then it was my duty to go and help in any way I could. But now that I am just a reader of the earthquake news, then either I do not read or hear the negative news anymore, or I say nothing can be done by me, and get rid of it. I turn my attention to something else. And I stop dwelling on these automatic thoughts. Because when I am thinking about the news, I am only pretending to be concerned about humanity.

Dilovar: It's hard for me to understand. For a long time, I could not even get rid of the thought of losing a beloved one.

Therapist: Let me give you another example. You are studying. A neighbor next door to your house is having a birthday party and is playing loud music. Despite the messages you send, he does not reduce the volume levels of the music. What you will do? Are you going over to start a fight with him and ruin his birthday party, or do you ignore him? Annoying neighbors make us anxious. Anxious thoughts should be treated like a disturbing neighbor. That is, you do not need to get rid of the thought, just do not take it seriously enough and it loses its importance. If you are thinking about your beloved one who has left you, you realise that you cannot stop thinking about her, but you can try to stop taking your thoughts about her seriously.

Dilovar: It is difficult for me.

Therapist: Are you coming to the conclusion that it is difficult after having tried, or are you just predicting that you cannot?

Dilovar: After failing in my love, I always worry, I ask myself what would happen to my future? Will I regain the happiness in my life?

Therapist: You are going your own way in life, suddenly an anxious thought comes to you. You do not want to be harmed in this way. I have a mantra that I repeat to myself at these times. I say: The future has always been better than my fears and anxious thoughts that I had about the days to come. In the future, neither a catastrophe nor a miracle will happen. Things will either get a little worse or a little better than they are now.

Life has ups and downs. Life is like a stormy ocean full of waves. Our minds seek to calm this ocean one day so that we can also calm down. Such a day will never come. Psychological theories teach us to swim in the stormy ocean of life. Or to build a boat of righteous thoughts, which can ride the waves in the stormy conditions of the sea of life and still stay afloat. The problems are the stormy waves. Do not think about eliminating the waves. Build your resilience and with your boat, learn to navigate your life through the stormy waves.

Dilovar: You mean that for every depressing thought and imagination that comes to my mind, I should not focus on them but just accept them and continue my work, and the negative thoughts will automatically disappear? If I dwell on the depressing thoughts and imagination that come to my mind, the penalty will be anxiety and depression.

Therapist: Well done, the theory of ACT that we are now using to treat you, is seeking to sever the relationship between thought and action. There is nothing wrong if the mind thinks a thousand negative thoughts, but our hands and feet do not follow that mind.

Dilovar: At night in bed when I cannot sleep, how can I resist my thoughts?

Therapist: Learn techniques that will reduce the intensity of your thinking.

Dilovar: How?

Hypothesis 7:**The work of the mind is the production of thought**

Therapist: The brain cannot be turned off. Thought cannot be controlled and can only be studied to identify its purpose and to reduce its intensity. According to ACT theory, we always seem to be asleep and in some kind of a dream. Because we do not live in the present. Even when we eat, our senses are somewhere else. Our mind does not accompany our body parts. Our minds are always in other places. Either we think about the past, to see who and what was the cause of our misfortunes today, or we worry about the future and about what old or new troubles I will encounter.

Dilovar: How can I live in the present?

Therapist: By using two techniques:

- **First technique:** Doing one thing at a time. When you focus your attention only on one task, the additional thoughts do not have the opportunity to be present. But several tasks at a time confuse the mind and other thoughts can be found in the midst of the muddle in the mind.
- **Second technique:** Focus on the five senses: Instead of using the five senses to communicate with reality, we all live mentally. That is, we are in thought and we do not see and we do not hear correctly and our touch, smell and taste senses do not operate. For example, when we eat, we do not look at the color and shape of the food, nor do we listen to the sound of food being chewed. We do not pay attention to the smell of food and we do not taste it in the mouth. Because while we eat, our minds are dwelling on other thoughts. It is similar to when we sleep and dream. The difference is that here, thoughts have taken the place of our dreams. But if we practice and eat with our five senses, we will return to the present, and many unnecessary thoughts will not enter our minds. This is true not just when we are eating, but in most situations and we should practice doing everything with our five senses.

Dilovar: When I am working, I only think about the past.

Therapist: Do you know why your mind travels to the past instead of living in the present?

Dilovar: Why do we keep thinking of the past?

Therapist: We go to the past because we believe that our present misery has its roots in the past. So, we are victims of the past and we grieve for ourselves and run away from today's responsibilities.

Second, we go to the past to reflect on the injustices that have happened before. To say, 'I'm good, others are bad'. Or we want to blame others. Or we want to find the culprit.

Third, we go to the past to get insights from previous occurrences. To learn from the past. This is the only reason to reflect on the past, so as not to repeat the mistakes of the past. Other thoughts of the past bring depression.

Technique

Do not avoid

Hassan, the young man, returns next week for counseling.

Therapist: How was last week, could you go to bed earlier at night?

Hassan: I still can't avoid my thoughts. In addition, I've become anxious. Suddenly I think that we are once again fighting and trying to kill each other.

Therapist: Well, honestly, every time we avoid, or try to get away from a feeling, that feeling comes back to us like a yo-yo. You turn away from him, but he turns back to you.

In ACT theory, one should not avoid anxiety, but experience it. When I get anxious, I tell myself to experience the anxiety. Or I say face your fears. Let me give you an example. I had a patient who had an anxiety attack or so-called panic attack, his hand was shaking, his heart was pounding. I taught him to distract his attention by looking at the trembling of his hand. Or to listen to his heartbeat. Do not judge the anxious thoughts but observe the effects of the

thoughts on the body. The thoughts will go away automatically. Remember, pain is temporary, but suffering can be continuous, and then it is called depression, or anxiety.

Hassan: Last week I thought I got away from my problem. For some time I felt a little better.

Therapist: Why did you distract your attention from the problems?

Hassan: I wanted to reduce my anxiety.

Therapist: Was it effective?

Hassan: A little

Therapist: How did you distract your attention?

Hassan: By eating delicious food. We had a little drink with my friends and had a good time.

Therapist: The downside of distraction is that it is not a permanent solution, and your distraction may make you addicted. For example, if you distract your attention by drinking alcohol, you will become addicted to alcohol. The best solution is to invalidate the anxious thoughts! Do you know this technique?

Hassan: No, I don't.

Therapist: You ask yourself what is the use of these negative thoughts? To what extent do they correspond to reality? How logical are they? And do not forget to separate yourself from your thoughts - do not confuse your thoughts with yourselves. Think of your mind as the sky and your thoughts are the passing clouds. You should not take your thoughts realistically or seriously. Always think, a thought is just a thought. And it is not real. That is why our belief in the same thought changes at different times.

Hassan: The problem I have with most of my thoughts is that they do not let me sleep at night. My worst problem is that my thoughts turn into emotions. They make me sad or depressed. Sometimes they scare me. How do I control

these emotions?

Therapist: Emotions cannot be controlled. If you try to control it, it can be suppressed and turned into mental and physical illnesses. If you explode and direct your anger at others, you will harm others. The best solution is to experience the emotions in the body. Tell me, where do you feel the emotions of fear, anger and sadness in your body?

Hassan: When I'm sad, it's here, inside my throat.

Therapist: What does it look like if you want to compare grief in your throat to something?

Hassan: Perhaps like a ping pong ball stuck in my throat.

Therapist: The technique is then to get the ball out of your throat by thinking, by massaging, by scanning the throat.

Technique

Do not take thought seriously, realistically and do not identify your thought with yourself.

Therapist: We take our thoughts seriously and realistically. While perhaps only ten percent of our thoughts are reality. We identify our thoughts with ourselves in vain.

Hassan: Doctor, all these, what you have said I cannot remember. Is there any easier way?

Therapist: I explained this in detail, so that you can understand the main point. Now that you understand, the way is to say mantra, so that these sentences are recorded in your brain and whenever you have a lot of thoughts and mistakes, remembering these mantras will prevent you from being negatively affected by your thoughts. These are some of the effective tips:

- Do not take your thoughts seriously and realistically.

- You are not your thoughts.
- Tell yourself that it is just a thought.
- Ask yourself, what is the use of this thought?

Hassan: What is thought? Why does it bring so much fear, anger and sadness? Why do we think?

Cognition of thought

Therapist: Thoughts are related to situations and arise in special circumstances. For example, when you go to a certain place several times, the same thought occurs repeatedly.

Hassan: Sometimes when a thought comes to my mind, it seems to capture me totally. How can I free myself from such thoughts?

Therapist: When the mind is involved in negative thoughts, it cannot shift easily. You need to learn about the four types of attention styles.

Four types of attention styles

Our mind has four type of attention styles:

- **First.** External and concentrated: When the mind is focused on the outside and concentrates on something, such as finding an address.
- **Second.** External and unconcentrated: when the mind is focused on the outside, but not concentrated on something specific. Like when we look everywhere in nature. Or we go to the street and look around without any particular intention and we are not looking for anything special.
- **Third.** Internal and concentrated: When our mind is focused on the inside and concentrated on something specific. Like when we focus on a particular memory, or a particular problem.
- **Fourth.** Internal and unconcentrated: Like when our mind is focused on the inside, but not concentrated on something specific. And the mind constantly goes from one thought to another. Like a bird that jumps from one branch to another.

In summary, the four types of attention styles are:

1. External and concentrated (looking for an address or location)
2. External and unconcentrated (nature and landscapes)

3. Internal and concentrated (Thinking about a misfortune / answering a question in an exam)

4. Internal and unconcentrated (fantasy and imagination)

In mental illness, there is usually a problem with the ability to shift the mind from one thought to another. That is, the mind cannot shift from one mental problem to another. Or divert your attention from an internal focus to an external focus. Therefore, locking in the span of attention causes depression.

First: know that thoughts and feelings cannot be controlled, but attention can be controlled.

Second: know that the problem of thought cannot be solved by thought; the problem of thought can only be solved by behavior and action. You need to keep your senses away from your thought by engaging in physical activity.

Third: know that the mind is not capable of solving several problems at the same time, so if you focus on one external task, your mind will be less able to turn its attention to your grief.

Hassan: What should I do when a thought comes to me? Whatever I did last week, I could not stop my thoughts from coming.

Two ways to deal with thought

Therapist: Because it is not possible to shut down the brain that produces the thought factory, there are two ways to think about it:

1. One, believe whatever your mind tells you, accept it as the truth, identify it with yourself, be influenced by that emotion and follow the advice of your thoughts.

2. Or, you can recognize it as only a thought and not reality, and you can understand its purpose and not do what it wants you to do. And you can ask yourself, what is the use of this thought?

Your thought is another thing, You are not your thought.

Hassan: As soon as a thought comes to my mind that someone is a bad person, and he intends to hurt me, I get angry. If he hurts me, I get angry or sad.

Therapist: Do you know why? Because you believe in your thoughts. Because you unite your thoughts with yourself. If someone grumbles a lot, you stop paying attention to him until he gives up. Similarly, when your mind wanders too much resulting in unwanted thoughts, you should not pay attention until they disappear. Many of the techniques that are good for dealing with other people are also good for dealing with your own thoughts. In fact, thoughts are not you and you are not your thoughts.

Why do we think so much?

Hassan: Why do we think so much?

Therapist: Because in our culture, we value thinking. Unfortunately, too much thought is a sign of depression.

Although everyone's brain is an intellectual factory, not everyone is the same. We have two kinds of people:

1. Thinkers who give importance to their thoughts
2. Observers who give importance to what they see, feel, hear, taste and smell with their five senses

Who do you think you are? Do your five senses work harder or your thoughts?

Hassan: Thinker. If not, I would not come here. And I would not be bothering you. My mother always told me not to think too much, as too much thinking would make me a philosopher. Now I realise that instead of being a philosopher, I have gone into depression.

Therapist: Do you like jokes and make fun?

Hassan: Sometimes.

Therapist: When.

Hassan: When I'm in the mood, I like to joke and have fun with my friends, ridiculing each other.

Therapist: Why not do the same thing with the thought that is constantly creating nonsense in your mind?

Hassan: Do you make fun of your own thoughts?

Therapist: Too much. Like suddenly, I have a thought that I am wasting my time in vain. At these times, I go in front of the mirror and speak like a TV news reporter: Dear viewers, pay attention to the news headline. In London today, at eight o'clock, it occurred to me that I am wasting my life in vain for clients, who do not seem to have any intention of improving their state of mind.

Or I say: Attention, Attention! I am very miserable and this is the fault of others. It is better to cut ties with everyone and leave them to their own devices. This is the latest nonsense thought in my mind. Until the next nonsense news bulletin of my mind, I will leave you to the nonsense thoughts of your own mind.

Why do we go to the future with our thoughts?

Hassan: I am always worried that something bad will happen.

Therapist: Because we are anxious that something bad is happening, we want to prevent it. In this case, too, the same thought-reduction techniques worked:

- Do not believe that your thought is real.
- Do not take your thought seriously.
- Distance yourself from your thoughts; observe them as if you are a bystander.
- Make fun of your thoughts, through singing, through pretending to be a TV reporter.
- Do not identify yourself with your thoughts.
- Stay in the present tuned by:

1. Focusing on your breathing.

2. Focusing on what you are doing: Live in the present, focusing on what your hands and feet are doing. Or your five senses are involved. Focus on food if you are eating. Focus on your lesson if you are in class.

- Live by your values, not your goals.
- Change and control what you can, what you cannot, accept.
- Do not look for the cause.
- Do not look for the culprit.
- Face your anxiety, do not run away from them.
- Continue your work and do not stop working due to problems. (Example of driver with annoying passengers.)
- Recognize the secondary benefits of your problems to know why your problems have become chronic.
- Make the treatment of your mental problem your first priority

Impossible goals in ACT

Hassan: I want to decide never to be upset, sad, or angry again.

Therapist: These are **emotional goals**. It is not possible to set a goal for emotions.

Hassan: I want to be comfortable forever. To be in peace. Never have a problem with others again.

Therapist: This is possible only when we are dead. I want total peace too. If we are patient, when we die, both you and I will be relieved of all life's problems!

Hassan: You know, I came to you, I want to know the cause of my problems.

Therapist: These are **insightful goals**. If you are looking for the cause of your

problems, you should go to psychotherapy. Act theory does not work for you in this regard. But do not you think that the search for the cause of the problems is an escape from the present to the past? Don't you think that instead of accepting responsibility for solving problems, you are looking for the culprit?

Hassan: I want to always be successful.

Therapist: This **goal** is **unrealistic** and one cannot always be successful.

Outlook of three psychology generations on thought

First generation:

Pavlov: (Conditioning) about 30 years (mid 20th century)

Classical conditioning is a type of learning that had a major influence on the school of thought in psychology known as behaviorism. Discovered by Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov, classical conditioning is a learning process that occurs through associations between an environmental stimulus and a naturally occurring stimulus. And Pavlov's theory of classical conditioning was very actively considered and continued for 30 years. This is the first generation in psychology.

The first generation said: Our reactions are to external stimuli and we become conditioned by them. Like bells and dogs and food. It is the situation that creates problems such as anxiety, depression, anger, and illness.

The first generation said: Stop your thoughts. The result got worse. Because the mind is like the sea, thoughts like waves cannot be stopped voluntarily.

Second generation:

Aaron Beck: (CBT Theory) About 30 years (from 1960 to 1990)

The second generation said: We are caught in the cycle of thought, emotion, behavior. So, they advised us to change our thought.

Albert Ellis: Our beliefs are especially important.

We must invalidate our beliefs.

The second generation used to say: distract / replace bad thoughts with good thoughts.

Third generation:

The third generation emerged from the heart of the second generation in the year 1990 to correct the flaws and shortcomings of the second generation of psychology.

The third generation, like **Steven Hayes** in ACT Theory, says: Thought does not matter. Our response to thought is important. The content of the thought does not matter. Our approach to thought is important. Thought cannot be changed, you have to look at the thought and see when it started, and what body shape it took, and how it ended.

The third generation says: The mind is an archive. Everything one has seen, heard, experienced, is recorded there. Each memory is remembered based on the similarities and associations of meanings with its emotions. They cannot be destroyed. How we deal with these thoughts and memories is important.

The role of language in emotions

Hassan: I will try to forget the episode of that confrontation I had with that man. But when I hear his name, my blood boils. Why is that so?

Therapist: If you say lemon juice a thousand times to a newborn baby, does the baby salivate?

Hassan: No.

Therapist: But when the baby gets older, as soon as he tasted lemonade and became familiar with the name lemonade, this taste is connected with the word lemonade. Now, whether he drinks lemonade or hears the name of lemonade, he secretes saliva in both cases. This is called conditional language. Its function is similar to that of the bell and the creation of hunger in the Pavlovian dog test, which you must have read in school. With the difference that in the case of Pavlov's dog, conditioning is related to the environment, but in ACT theory, conditioning is related to the tongue. Our thoughts are our linguistic conditions. For example, when we hear a certain word associated with a specific memory, this word begins to influence our thoughts. By focusing on them, it is as if our thoughts become reality, and they give us the same feeling of facing reality. That is why when you hear the name of the person that punched you in the abdomen, you feel the same pain in your fist, and the same fear or anger or sadness comes alive in you. Do you understand?

What is a language condition?

Therapist: Do you speak Persian well, where are you from?

Hassan: I am from Afghanistan.

Therapist: How long ago did you migrate to UK?

Hassan: About five years ago.

Therapist: Why did you migrate?

Hassan: Doctor, I have been insecure since I was a child. I grew up in an unsafe and unfavourable environment. Ten percent of our families and relatives were killed in the 40-year war in Afghanistan. Almost thirty percent of them also emigrated to Iran, or Pakistan, or elsewhere in the world. I also faced thousand problems before I finally reached England.

Therapist: Now that you are not in Afghanistan, how do you feel about hearing the name of Afghanistan?

Hassan: I'm sad.

Therapist: Why?

Hassan: I do not understand.

Therapist: Because the word Afghanistan in your mind has the same role as the reality of Afghanistan. You left Afghanistan, but Afghanistan did not leave your mind. The word Afghanistan, whatever you may hear of it or remember it, suffers the same real insecurity in Afghanistan. This is why the third generation says: conditioning in relation to human beings is a linguistic condition, not an environmental condition.

**Avoiding the source of pain,
Be closer to the source of pleasure.**

Hassan: I miss my homeland very much, its mountains and plains ... the streets and alleys of Kabul ... but I feel scared of going back there.

Therapist: In a laboratory, a number of mice were thrown into a dark cage. After a few minutes, they turned on the light and opened the door, which was connected to another cage. When the mice entered the new cage, they saw the cheese moulds in front of them and began to eat. This experiment was repeated several times. From now on, every time a light came on, even if there was no cheese, the mice would run to another cage.

In the same laboratory, another group of mice was thrown into another dark cage, and after a few minutes the light was turned on, but as soon as the mice entered

the new cage, they trembled with electric shock and returned to the previous cage in fear. This experiment was repeated several times. From now on, whenever the light came on, even if they had put cheese in the new cage, the mice in the second experiment would not leave their cage for fear of electric shock.

This experiment shows that living things gravitate towards pleasure and avoid pain. Man is no exception to this rule.

Basis of Act Theory

Hassan: Does it mean that I should not return to my country under any circumstances?

Therapist: ACT recommends that:

- Life is hard and sometimes it hurts, experience the pain, do not turn it into suffering.
- Do not internalize pain, define it on the surface of the body and do not interpret it as suffering.
- Valuable living is associated with real physical pain, but not with suffering.
- Moving in the direction of values requires commitment, otherwise you will abandon your values.
- Disappointment is not always bad, sometimes it is constructive and will help you to find a new way.

Goals of ACT

Hassan: Can you please summarize the goals of the ACT treatment for me?

Therapist: The purpose of the ACT is not to prevent annoying thoughts and feelings. Its purpose is to strengthen acceptance and flexibility of those thoughts and develop the ability to adapt.

“A significant part of our fear, anger and sadness is part of human nature,” says ACT.

“Avoidance and distraction provide relief in the short term but exacerbate problems and cause distress in the long run and prevent a meaningful, purposeful, and passionate life,” says ACT.

If there is too much avoidance, meaningful and passionate life is lost.

If a person wants a valuable job, but does not cope with his stress, then it turns out that the job is not his value, it is his goal.

ACT wants us to accept our thoughts without judgment, without interpretation, as it is, but not as reality, only as the thought of the moment.

ACT does not seek to reduce the feeling of suffering; it seeks another way of experiencing it.

ACT wants to introduce us to the values of life and make us committed to it.

Practice

Hassan: I get angry every time when I think about that person with whom I had a confrontation.

Therapist: If this anger were an object, what would it look like?

Hassan: Like a ping pong ball.

Therapist: Where is that ball in your body?

Hassan: Stuck in my throat.

Therapist: Remove it from your body and throw it away.

Technique of defying pressure of language

We are caught in a language trap which makes us believe in things which may not be true. Everything is not as simple or straightforward as the multiplication table: two multiplied by two becomes four. For example, in the famous Iranian proverb, our belief is as follows:

Question: What happens if there are two chefs in a kitchen?

Answer: The soup becomes either too salty or without salt.

Question: Would it not be more accurate to say that if there are two chefs the food gets better?

Not replace, repair

The ACT model's view of therapy is repair, unlike CBT, which focuses on replacing.

ACT: Repair your thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

CBT: Change your thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

There are no qualitative differences between healthy and sick people, there are small differences. Everyone thinks, but healthy people think less. Everyone becomes anxious, but healthy people become less anxious. Everyone gets angry, but healthy people get less angry.

The difference between ACT and Schema¹ Therapy

ACT deals with effective communication with oneself. "Most of the clients' problems are due to the way they relate to themselves," it says. That is, it is an internal problem.

On the other hand, Schema Therapy says: Chronic problems are related to interpersonal relationships. That is why CBT and ACT cannot treat disorders.

From the example above, we see that attitudes and techniques differ in psychological theories. What is our criterion for measuring their accuracy?

To prove themselves, theories first go to war with each other at the level of reasoning. But in the end, empirical statistics show us the healing power of each. Because intellectual reasoning may convince us at first, but where experience is possible, there is no need for philosophical reasoning. If we agree on an intellectual level, my mind and yours will deceive both of us. Where possible, we should agree on the level of experience and experimentation.

Client: (to Aaron Beck) I do not believe in your theory, CBT.

1. A **schema** is an organized pattern of thought and behavior. It can also be described as a mental structure of preconceived ideas, a framework representing some aspect of the world, or a system of organizing and perceiving new information.

Schema therapy is an integrative psychotherapy combining theory and techniques from previously existing therapies, including cognitive behavioral therapy, psychoanalytic object relations theory, attachment theory, and Gestalt therapy.

Aaron Beck: You do not need faith. Test my theory about yourself, if response is positive and your symptoms decrease, go ahead, if the response is negative, let it go.

Bad and good, right and wrong do not and should not exist in psychology. These are about ideologies. The truth of a psychological theory is its effectiveness in treatment.

For example, clients who have experienced a period of overeating, addiction, and withdrawal come to the therapist.

Therapist: What did you do to solve the problems of your life?

Client: I cried, I stayed away from everyone for a while and I slept constantly, I overeat, or I sat in front of the TV from morning till night, or I had mental reflection in bed, or I thought of suicide, I searched for a long time for the cause of my misery, I blamed myself and others and finally I got addicted.

Therapist: To summarize, you seemingly reduced your suffering by distraction, but were not actually cured because of these misconceptions:

1. Eating, which at the moment acted as a painkiller for you, but the result was your gained weight.
2. Substance use: smoking, alcohol or drugs. They temporarily calmed you down, but the result was your addiction.
3. With mobile phones, televisions, you distract yourself from your suffering, the result of which is a waste of your time and energy.
4. You have long sought refuge in isolating yourself from others, which seems to have alleviated your problems with others, but has resulted in your depression.

Client: What other effective ways do I have to alleviate my suffering?

Therapist: There are many ways to alleviate your suffering. Let me give you a few of them as examples:

1. Do not equate yourself with thought.

It means that:

- Do not say 'I believe that' ...
- Do not say 'I think that' ...
- Do not say 'I am certain' ...

● **Say:** I have a thought now ... I mean I may not have this thought for another hour. And the pain of thinking that you did not take it seriously will diminish.

2. Mindfulness:

Example: Billboard: Think you are sitting in a car and traveling on a road, and your thoughts are on street billboards, look at your thoughts. Don't be serious. Let it be said and done. Look at them from behind.

3. Acceptance:

Change anything you can. Accept whatever you cannot.

4. Body scan:

Tighten your body from the tip of your foot to the part of your head, piece by piece, for five seconds, and then relax there, to relieve your muscle cramps, and distract your body from your thoughts.

5. Work towards values.**6. Live in the present.****7. Practice not judging:**

How much have you judged since this morning? What were the reasons?

8. Joking Thoughts:

By Turning Thoughts Into Singing, or Mocking Through A TV Reporter;

9. Regular desensitisation:

First relaxation, then dealing with anxiety.

10. Problem solving training.

11. Modeling:

Observing people who behave adaptively.

Conclusion

How to deal with thought, in psychological theories

CBT: Your thoughts, your beliefs need to change to get rid of depression, anxiety, obsession.

Schema therapy: Your schemas need to change to get rid of depression, anxiety, and obsessions.

ACT: Neither the content of your thoughts, nor your beliefs, nor your schemas are important. Your thoughts do not matter at all. Rather, it is important to be serious, to be realistic, and to respond to your thoughts. It doesn't really matter what you think, it's important how you think.

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