

# Inner Voices

Carl Fooks · Tips of the Day · 3 min read

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So, I have this thing where I give character to somebody's inner voice when I mimic them. Typically, this is Rene (she who must be obeyed), and usually results in us falling about in fits of laughter. (I can't even hint at what these are like as it'd give you too much of an insight into our private lives!) Anyway, so there I was, talking to Rene, and mimicking her inner voice while explaining something. Thus ensued aforementioned hilarity, followed by: "I don't sound like that! I don't have an inner voice. At all.!" ... Mind: Blown. Well, I confess it did take several minutes of checking we were talking about the same thing before my mind finally settled on being blown. I mean, we've only been together for 26 years, and never has she mentioned to me that she has no inner voice. She talks about thinking this or that, and I always assumed she meant, well, thought. In the way that I think! With a voice! So to find out that she has no inner voice really did blow my mind. Now, there are many ways in which we "think", and only some of these involve a voice, but I had always assumed that everyone has one. I even Googled it, and sure enough ... some people have no voice. Anyway, with a spooky synchronicity, a few days later an article appeared in The Guardian on the variety of our inner voices, including those who have no voice whatsoever. Some of the people in the article describe some remarkable ways of thinking, including one person who hears "a belligerent Italian couple ... like the family in the Dolmio pasta sauce adverts [who] passionately argue" in her mind! Now, I'm not sure why this should be so surprising to me, I don't get any images whatsoever. So, that this would manifest for the voice is entirely reasonable. Still, I was surprised! I'm 51; it's not often you learn something so fundamental for the first time so late in life. But there you go. This all played out shortly after I had taught a weekend retreat during which somebody asked about thoughts. I had been referring to the vocal kind, considering them a universal. This new knowledge had rendered my answer void. I found myself marvelling about the infinite malleability of the inner space. That ultimate emptiness (in the Mahāyānic sense) of the mind. We tend to think of things as "real" as "universal"; that an "orange" is the same to all of us, but this reminded me that, to some, an orange is a gustatory delight, while others' tastebuds curl up in horror. But it also got me thinking about how those of us who teach may need to adjust our teachings to accommodate the different ways people experience the mind. We can't talk about "seeing" things, or "listening" to the tone of the inner voice with any certainty. And yet, somehow Rene and I managed to get along fine without her knowing about my aphantasia, or me her missing inner voice. What this made me realise is that, of course, everything happens within our own internally consistent versions of "reality". I don't "see" things in my mind, yet I do still "imagine," Rene "thinks" without words. This also made me realise the importance of playful experimentation in our practise, and how we need to interrogate our experience to adjust and adapt to the instructions. Our inner world does not exactly match anyone else's, we need to engage and experiment with the instructions to make them fit

our own model. So, don't worry about "getting it wrong", or "messing up". Play! Enjoy your practice. Relax into it in a playful way, and see how you can make the instructions work for you. Engaging in this way is the only way. There is no single reality. It does have to make you wonder, though: how does Renenote "thinking thinking" without words?

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