WORKSHEET 3

OCD DOUBT IS 100% IRRELEVANT TO THE HERE AND NOW

Although the justification behind the obsessional doubt may make ‘sense’, there is a very important difference between the reasoning that characterizes obsessional doubts and normal doubts. The most important difference between the reasoning that characterizes normal and obsessional doubt is not so much a matter of the content of the information that justifies the doubt, but how and when this information is applied. Consider the following examples of obsessional doubts: ‘The door might be unlocked’ or ‘I might have been contaminated with something dirty’. You may have just stepped outside on your way to work and locked the door, or you may have just touched a metal pole in the metro or bus. But was there anything in the here and now that justified these particular doubts? Did you actually sense anything that supported the doubt? For obsessions, the answer to this question is always no.

Obsessional doubt always comes from you and never from the outside. It is almost impossible to overestimate the significance of this fact. It is the basis for all of your OCD symptoms. Ask yourself the following questions for your own obsessional doubts:

1. Was there any information in the here and now to justify the doubt?
2. Did the doubt go beyond objective sense information?

You may readily agree that your doubts have no basis in reality, yet you may wonder why this is so important. The reason why this is so important is because it implies that the obsessional doubt is 100% irrelevant to current reality. It makes obsessional doubts as irrelevant as having doubts about the ceiling collapsing down on you right now.

Like your obsessional doubts, it is easy to back up the possibility of the ceiling coming down with all kinds of reasoning. Yet, ask yourself, why don’t you worry about it? You may say: ‘Well, the chances are small, it’s unlikely.’ However, that is also the case for your obsessional doubts, and yet you take them seriously. The real reason why you don’t worry about the ceiling coming down is because there is nothing in the here and now that supports this idea.

For example, if you see sudden cracks in the wall, and hear noises coming from above you, then the doubt about the ceiling coming down would be relevant to the situation you are in. Yet, with obsessional doubts you have an exception to this rule. You have convinced yourself to doubt without any such evidence. So it is never a matter of the facts or logical calculation that is of any importance in obsessional doubts, but how and when these things are applied. Instead of saying that the obsessional doubt is 0.0001% possible, it would be far more accurate to say that it is 100.0000% imaginary, since the doubt has no basis whatsoever in reality, in the here and now.

The difference between obsessional and normal doubt is that normal doubt always has some basis in reality. This may be very little or a lot, but it continues to be a normal doubt. However, in obsessional doubt (Figure 2), it is almost as if the doubt comes out of nowhere. It may not always feel that way, but there is no overlap at all between reality and the doubt. That is, it always comes from you and never from outside of you.