

## Sushi Train metaphor

Therapist (T): Okay, I would like to introduce you to a metaphor about how our mind and our thoughts work. I call it the 'sushi train'. Have you ever been to a real sushi train restaurant before?

Client (C): Yes, I love sushi! **OR** No, I know about them but have never been. (Either way, the therapist will still review the key components of the sushi train restaurant).

T: So, you may be familiar with the sushi train set up. The idea is that you have a cute little train on a track with carriages that have small plates of sushi. The plates travel around the track and the customers who are sitting around the track at tables can select various plates from the train. Is that how you understand it?

C: Yes, that's about right.

T: Okay, so this is a visual concept so I'm going to draw a sushi train for us. First we need a track. Then I'm going to draw the train and three carriages. A difference between this special sushi train and the real one is that the metaphorical train track doesn't loop around in a circle. It can go off into a void.

The next thing I'm going to draw is the sushi chef. So here he is with his little hat, and he's standing inside of the track where all of the food is prepared. Now, I'm not sure if you've ever noticed at a real sushi train restaurant before but there are stacks of empty plates next to the chef. So I'm going to draw these next to our chef. And now I'm going to draw you sitting at a bench on the outside of the track, where you can watch the train and the carriages go by.

Are you with me so far?

C: Yep, it makes sense.

T: So we've got all of our pieces but we need to know their roles. So I'm going to do a little experiment with you to help work it out. Is that okay with you?

C: Sure.

T: Okay, so I'm going to say a line to a specific phrase and I'd like you to tell me the next line. When you work out the next line I don't want you to tell me what the answer is until I say so. Got it?

C: Got it!

T: Twinkle, twinkle little.... (Here the therapist can use any option that would be known to the client, e.g. 'knock, knock' with 'who's there'; 'baa baa' with 'black sheep'; etc.)

(Allow about 5 secs. Notice what expression the client outwardly gives to refer to it with the client)

T: Okay, so the answer is...

C: Star

T: Yes, you got it! Now I noticed that when I said my line of 'twinkle, twinkle little' I could see on your face that there was almost like a millisecond moment that it took your mind to find the answer. It

was like there was a huge filing cabinet drawer that burst open and your mind found the right file that said 'star'. Your mind then had this immediate noise where it said, 'Star! Star! The answer is star!' like a kid fidgeting in her seat with her hand up wanting to say the answer. Is that what it was like for you?

C: Yes! It was just like that!

T: You know, it's like that for me too. This is the *automatic* part of your mind. This is the part of your mind that just pops up with answers, information, comments, judgments, etc. This is that voice in your head that is talking away at you.

Now, there was another part of your mind involved in that little exercise, wasn't there? It was that part of your mind that said to you, 'Hold on. The answer is Star but we haven't been asked to say the answer out loud yet'. It was noticing the thought and deciding what to do with it. Does that sound about right?

C: Yes, that's what it was like.

T: So, that part of our mind is our consciousness. It is the part that is aware of our thoughts. It notices them. So we can call this our *awareness* (Therapists may want to call this something else, e.g. our *noticing self*)

Okay, so we have an automatic part of our mind and an awareness part of our mind. Coming back to our sushi train drawing, the chef that is putting together the plates of food is like our automatic mind. There are different plates of food, like prawns, chicken, salmon, just like there are different thoughts that we have. Each plate of food represents a different thought. It is the sushi chef that decides what plates to put on the train. There is no menu to order from – it is up to the chef. Just like we can control what thoughts our mind gives us. We can get lots of different 'plates' throughout the day. Some thoughts are 'tasty thoughts', some are 'blah thoughts', some are random and so on.

Now that part of our mind that was aware of the thought you had about 'Star' and could notice it but didn't have to respond to it with a behaviour, well that's you sitting here at the sushi train bench in our drawing. You notice the different plates of thoughts on the train carriages moving along the track.

The actual train and its carriages represents your train of thought. Have you ever heard of that saying before?

C: Yes / No (Therapist to provide a brief anecdote of when the expression would be used)

T: So let's start putting some plates on our train drawing here. What would be a plate of sushi or any other food that you would definitely want to eat and wouldn't say no to? (During this process, the therapist can offer food suggestions and/or share their own food choices)

C: Salmon (or pizza, etc.)

T: Great, so let's draw two plates on this first carriage with salmon on it. What would you suggest is an example of a salmon thought? Let's focus specifically on... (therapist to guide client to a specific issue or goal of therapy, etc. for ideas).

C: Um, how about 'My hard work paid off'?

T: Great, let's write this next to the salmon plates (therapist can ask for more than one thought to write for each carriage of thoughts).

Okay, so what is a food that you would notice on the train but maybe not take off to eat? Just a regular everyday food that you don't have much of an opinion on one way or the other?

C: Um, tuna and avocado rolls (or apples, etc.)

T: Okay, so let's draw two plates on this second carriage with tuna and avocado rolls on it. Just like we did with the salmon, what could we write down here that is maybe a thought that you would notice but not really feel much emotion about one way or the other?

C: What about 'My shoelace is untied'?

T: Excellent example! Let's write this next to the tuna and avocado roll plates. And last, what is a food that you would think is gross or blah?

C: Eel! Definitely the eel (or broccoli, etc.)

T: Okay, so we will add two plates of eel onto the third carriage. What thought would you like to put here to be represented by the eel plate?

C: Based on what we talked about before, maybe something like 'It's too hard'.

T: Alright, let's write that next to the eel plates. So here we have our drawing complete. We have the sushi chef who represents our automatic mind, just putting random thoughts onto the train carriages. We then have a train of thought travelling along the track and moving past you sitting at the bench. You are there noticing the different plates / thoughts as move past on the track. So we've got all of the bits of our metaphor in. Great work!

Now, let's explore this a bit further. Can I ask, when you are actually at a sushi train restaurant in real life, do you take every plate off of the train?

C: No.

T: Why not?

C: Well, I don't like all of the foods, it is too expensive, and I couldn't eat it all.

T: Exactly, you only want to take off salmon plates. Would you want to take an eel plate off of the train?

C: Ew, no way!

T: But based on what we've been talking about, would you agree that sometimes you've been taking off those eel plates in your mind? That sometimes you have not just noticed the eel thought, like 'It's too hard', but taken the plate off of the train and tried to eat it? Tried to force yourself to focus on it, chew on it and then swallow it? Only to find that you are choking on it, struggling with it?

C: Yes, definitely (Therapist to help client to identify a recent example of client being fused with a thought and the client's resulting experience. Therapist to link back to client's comment re: not taking all of the plates off of the train because it is too expensive (e.g. fused thoughts can cost us in time, resources, etc.), can't eat it all (e.g. can become distracted and/or overwhelmed by our thoughts, etc.)).

T: Okay, so what can you do if you accidentally take off an eel plate from the train of thought?

C: I could just push the plate away.

T: Yes, you could do that. However, the eel is still hanging around stinking up the place and distracting you, or even having you lose your appetite. And you have to pay for that plate later on – both financially and maybe physically. What else could you do?

C: I could just put it back on the train?

T: Yes! Exactly! You could just put it back on the train along with the other plates of random thoughts. We know that once the train carriage moves along the track, it just fades away past where our awareness can notice it.

Now, what about those salmon thoughts? What should we do with them?

C: Take them off of the train and eat them?

T: Yes! So those thoughts we want to savour. We want to enjoy them and connect to them (If client has been taught about values, the therapist can link back to values here). We want to connect with thoughts that are helpful and lead us to committing to workable actions.

Now, as all of this is going on, the sushi chef is going to continually to be adding new plates to the train. For the most part, the plates will be tuna and avocado roll thoughts. They will be just information about things like shoelaces being untied, the weather, the noise of traffic, etc. These just help to narrate our experience of our external world and we can notice them as they go past. We don't really want to get stuck on these either. As you mentioned before, we don't want to fill up our stomachs with too many plates of food and it can cost us. So, just like the eel, allow yourself to notice these tuna and avocado thoughts and return any that have been taken off of the train.

Throughout the day our sushi chef will put eel plates on the train. We can't control what plates the sushi chef puts on the train. Just like we can't control what thoughts our mind gives us. However, by noticing the plates / thoughts as they move past our conscious awareness, we can decide how we are going to respond to those plates / thoughts. We don't have to take them off of the train and struggle with them.

Does this make sense?

C: Yes / No (Therapist to explain any questions and check for client's understanding of each component).

T: Okay, so what I'd like us to practice now is how to notice the plates moving along and how to put an eel plate back on the train when we've taken it off and start struggling with it.

(Therapist to complete a guided meditation exercise that encourages client to notice each plate / thought as it goes past and to imagine placing the thought back on the train).

