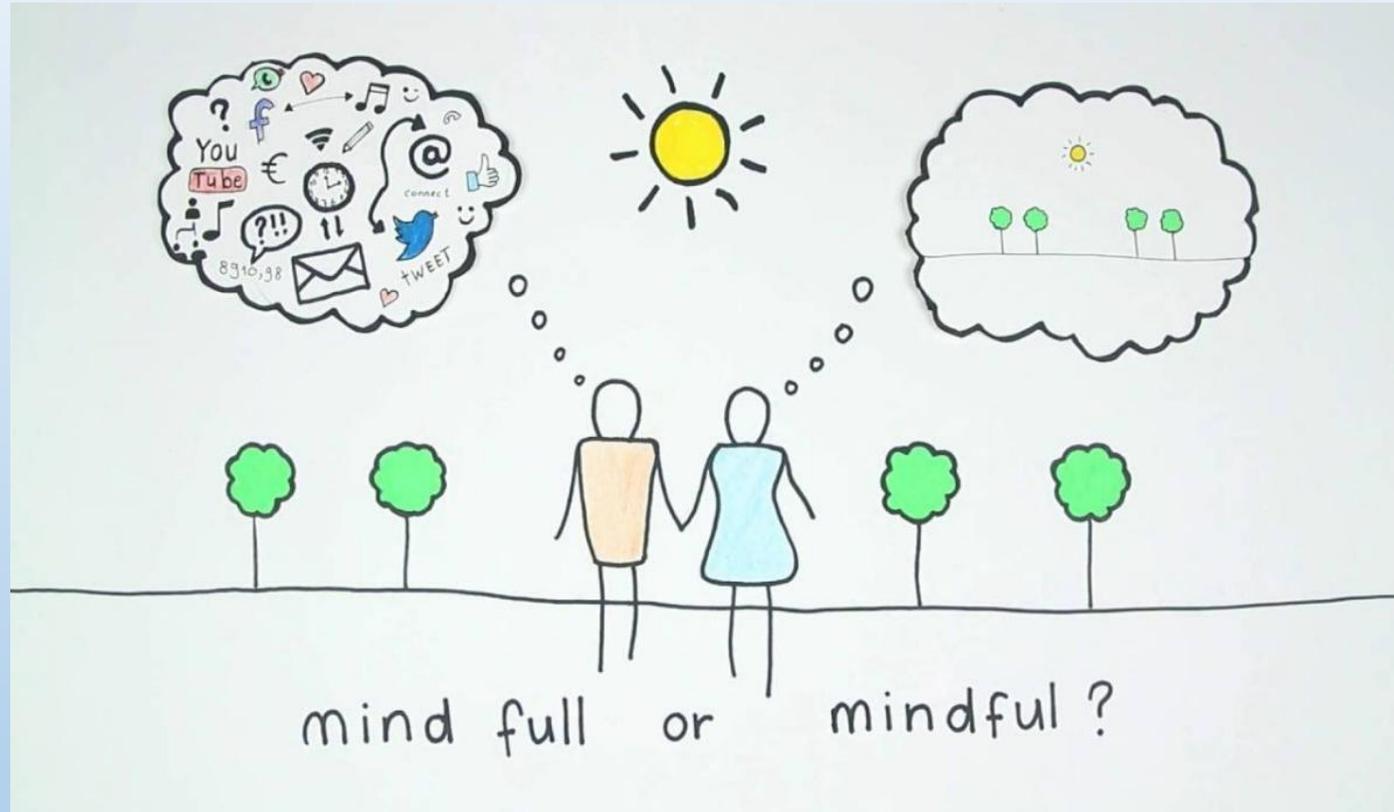


# Mindfulness of Thoughts

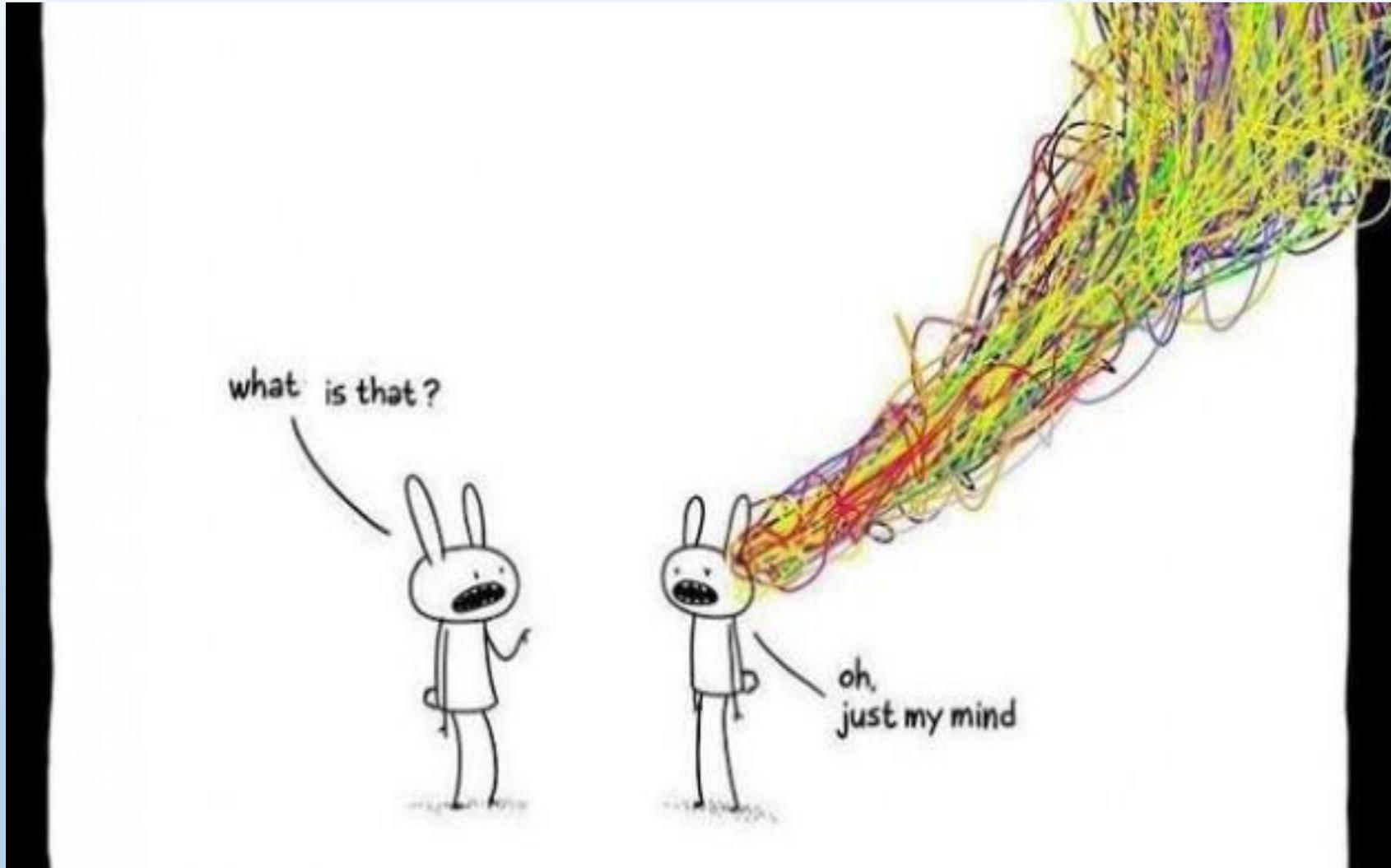


Source: [Olson Marriage & Family Therapy Clinic](#)

What is it? How do I do it? Why might I want to?

# The Human Condition

- “In 2005, the National Science Foundation. . . .found that the average person has about 12,000 to 60,000 thoughts per day. Of those thousands of thoughts, 80% were negative, and 95% were exactly the same repetitive thoughts as the day before.”  
– [tLEX Institute, “Mind Matters”](#)
- “That is why I don’t believe much in what Mr. Descartes said: ‘I think, therefore I am.’ I think, therefore I’m lost in my thinking. I’m not there.” – Thich Nhat Hanh
- Though we often *are* subject to our thinking, such that *our thoughts think us*, we can choose not to submit to the tyranny of our thoughts. We can change our mind.



Source: Social Communications Specialists, "How Mindfulness Helps Your Child Manage Emotions"

# How Tara Brach Puts It

“Most of the time we are inside of our thoughts thinking ‘This is real’ . . .  
..**Thoughts are a virtual reality.**”

“Thoughts are a terrible master but an absolutely wonderful servant.”

“The primary element in meditation is training to **awaken from the trance of thoughts**. . . .The first [way to do this] is using wise reflection to discern if thoughts are imprisoning us in fear or serving healing and freedom. The second is recognizing when we are in the virtual reality of thinking, and **learning to ‘come back’ to living presence**. It is by inhabiting this non-conceptual presence that we have access to the love, wisdom and freedom that we cherish.”

– Tara Brach, “[Mindfulness of Thoughts—Introduction to Meditation](#)”

***“A thought is not a fact –  
a thought is just a  
thought.”***

***—Jon Kabat-Zinn***



# How to Practice Mindfulness of Thoughts

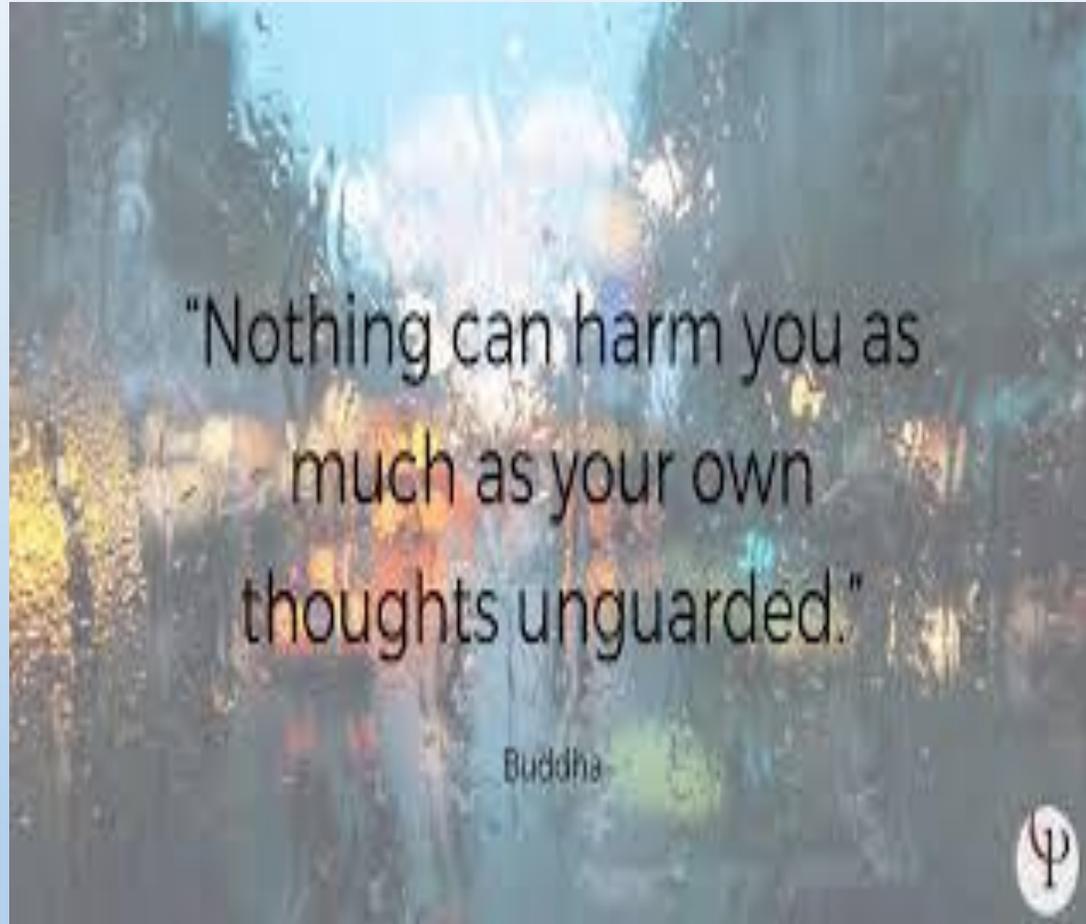


Source: Stefi Vasilopoulou

1. When your attention is relatively stable on the breath, try shifting your focus to **feature the process of thinking itself**. . . .observing thoughts arise and pass away like clouds—allowing the mind to function as a ‘thought mirror’ simply reflecting and registering whatever comes as it comes, and whatever goes, as it goes.

2. See if you can perceive these thoughts as **discrete events in the field of awareness**, arising, lingering perhaps, and then passing away.
3. As best you can, note their content and their emotional charge while, if possible, not being drawn into thinking about them, or thinking the next thought, but just **maintain the ‘frame’ through which you are observing the process of thought**.
4. Note that an individual thought does not last long. It is impermanent. If it comes, it will go. It is helpful to be aware of this observation and let its import register with you in awareness. . . . [and there’s more]

– Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living*



Be empty of worrying.  
Think of who created thought.

Why do you stay in prison  
When the door is so wide open?

Move outside the tangle of fear-thinking.  
Live in silence.

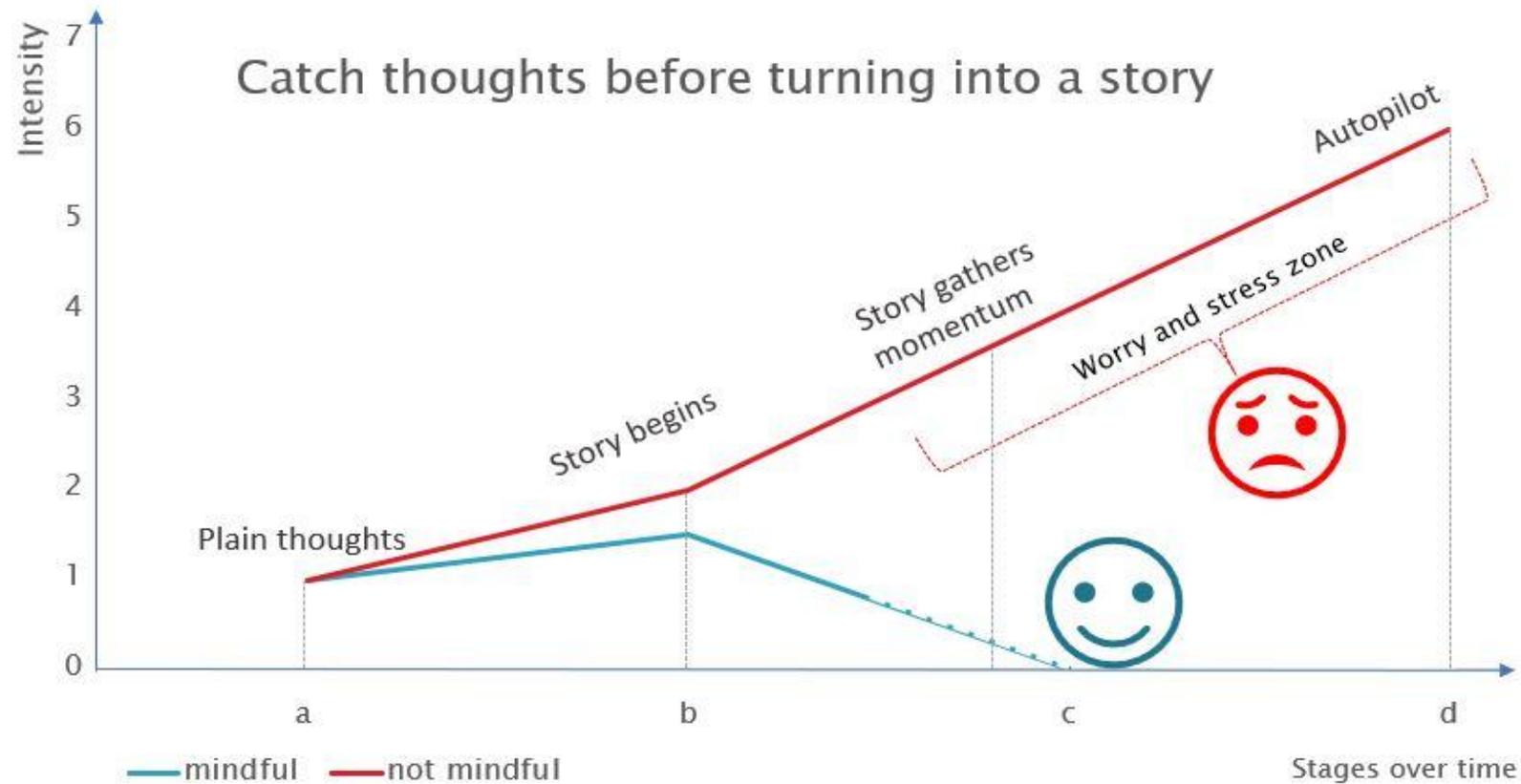
Flow down and down  
In always widening rings of being.

--Rumi, "A Community of Spirit"

# How Joseph Goldstein Puts It

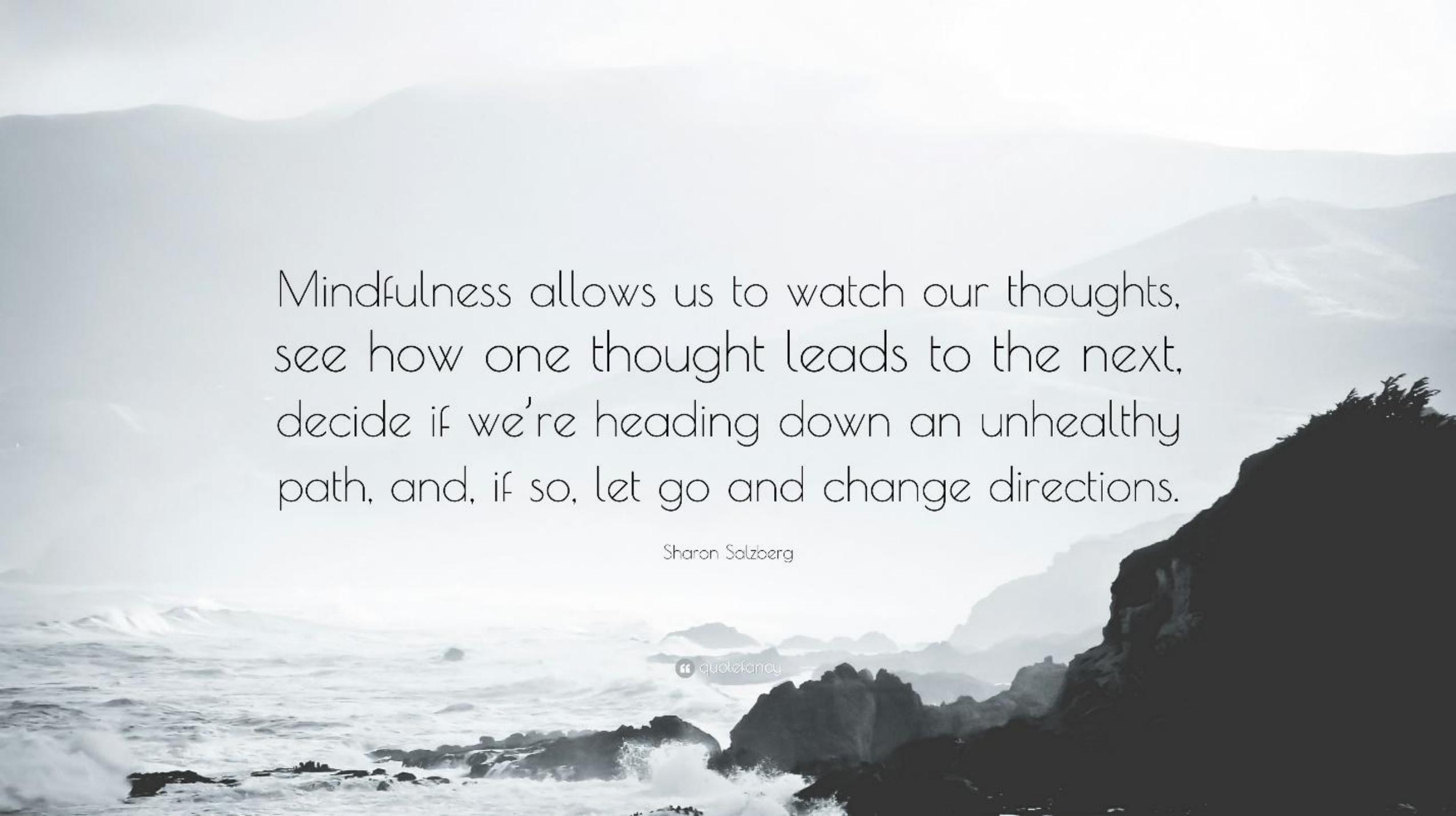
“It is important to make thoughts the object of mindfulness. If we remain unaware of thoughts as they arise, it is difficult to develop insight into their impersonal nature and into our **own deep-rooted and subtle identification with the thought process**. This identification reinforces the **illusion of self**, of some “one” who is thinking. **To meditate upon thoughts is simply to be aware, as thoughts arise, that the mind is thinking, without getting involved in the content:** not going off on a train of association, not analyzing the thought and why it came, but merely to be aware that at **the particular moment ‘thinking’** is happening. . . .

# Ordinary Thinking vs. Mindfulness



. . . .It is helpful to make a mental note of ‘thinking, thinking’ every time a thought arises; observe the thought without judgment, without reaction to the content, without identifying with it, without taking the thought to be I, or self, or mine. The thought is the thinker. There is no one behind it. **The thought is thinking itself.** It comes uninvited. You will see that when there is a strong detachment from the thought process, thoughts don’t last long. As soon as you are mindful of a thought, it disappears, and the attention returns to the breath.”

– Joseph Goldstein, [“These are Not ‘Your’ Thoughts”](#)

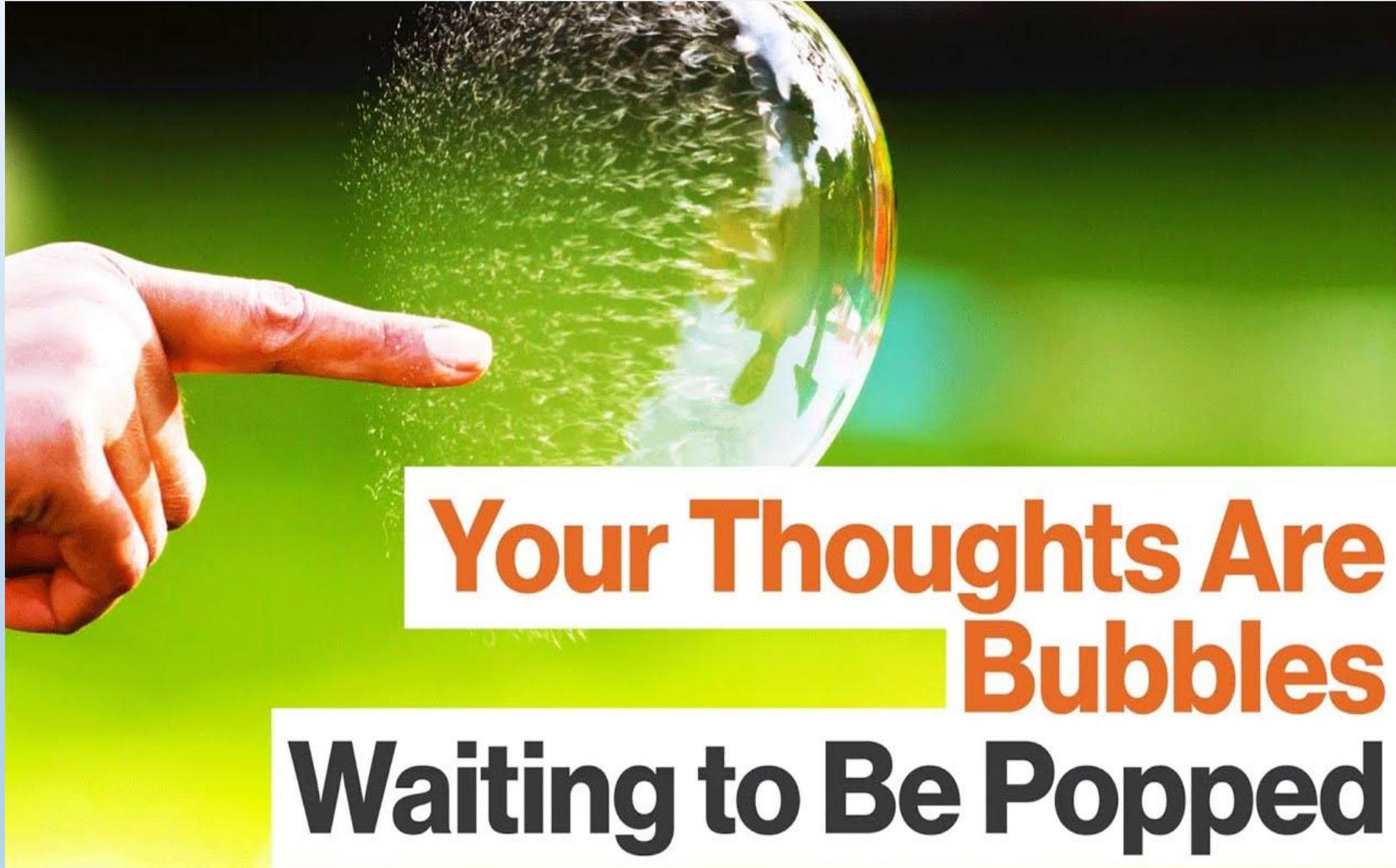


Mindfulness allows us to watch our thoughts, see how one thought leads to the next, decide if we're heading down an unhealthy path, and, if so, let go and change directions.

Sharon Salzberg

“ quote fancy





**Your Thoughts Are  
Bubbles  
Waiting to Be Popped**

# When Negative Thoughts Arise

1. Hold them in awareness, with an attitude of gentle interest and curiosity. . .
2. Perhaps expanding awareness to include one or more of the following (go back to the breath after each one):
  - Perhaps I am confusing a thought with a fact?
  - Perhaps I am jumping to conclusions?
  - Perhaps I am thinking in black-and-white terms?
  - Perhaps I am condemning myself totally because of one thing?

# When Negative Thoughts Arise (cont.)

- Perhaps I am concentrating on my weaknesses, forgetting my strengths?
- Perhaps I am blaming myself for something that isn't my fault?
- Perhaps I am judging myself?
- Perhaps I am setting unrealistically high standards for myself?
- Perhaps I am expecting perfection?
- Perhaps I am overestimating disaster?

-- Source: Segal, Williams & Teasdale, *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression*

