



**Can Meditation Change the  
Way that You View  
Your World?**

**By Jerome Stone, MA, RN  
[mindingthebedside.com](http://mindingthebedside.com)**

## **A message to you from Jerome Stone**

**Hi. Thanks for downloading this ebook. I hope that you are able to gain insights from the discussions in this book and experience from the exercises as support for your meditation practice. It is my pleasure to offer you this text as a tool to work with your mind and to gain stability and ease in mindfulness, meditative awareness and compassion practices.**

**If there are other topics that you would like me to write about or that you need additional information on, please contact me at: [jerome@mindingthebedside.com](mailto:jerome@mindingthebedside.com)**

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# Can Meditation Change the Way You View Your World?

## Introduction

The title of this book implies that how we view our world is changeable and that the practice of meditation can change that view. Both of these assumptions may appear bold. After all, we view our world with a mind that remains, to varying degrees, grounded in our experience and in the obvious facts of what we see around us. How then could the practice of meditation change this?

What I hope to offer you in this book is twofold. First of all, I hope to provide enough content through discussion, including humorous self-reflection, to offer you the reader at least the possibility that how you're used to working with your mind might be just one possibility of many. And, that through changing how we work with our mind and how we view what arises within the mind, we can change the way that we view our world. What results from this type of shift is that we are less easily thrown by the world "out there," and find a refuge within a mind less distracted by outer circumstances. As our mind changes, so too do our perceptions of the world and what happens in "our" world.

Second, in order to accomplish this shift in our world view, I will provide you with a number of easy and practical methods for applying the principles described within this book for you to experience for yourself the potentially transformative outcomes of meditation.

What I'd like to encourage you to do is to work with what I'm offering here and really put it to the test. Take a good test-drive of these methods and apply them to your life. See if they can make a difference.

My greatest hope is that you'll come to find, as I have, that the mind is far from "stuck" in what appears to be the normal way of doing things. What you may discover is that the mind and its habits are as impermanent and changing as the clouds and, like the clouds, can clear when even the faintest rays of sunlight penetrate their hazy appearance.

Before I directly thank those who have helped me to practice with these methods, I would like to offer a tip of the hat to those who have encouraged me to jump into the world of virtual media and blogging. Any benefit that you gain through this book is in part due to their encouragement to create this book.

I'd like to offer a special thank-you to [Chris Garrett of AuthorityBlogger.com](http://ChrisGarrett.com) for his guidance in navigating the illusory (virtual) hazards of the blogosphere. It is thanks to his soft-spoken and understated wisdom, and his admonition to offer more content to my reader that I have endeavored on this path of putting my work out into the public. With those thanks, I would also like to offer a deep and heartfelt thank-you to [Laura White-Ritchie of brainyfeet.com](http://LauraWhiteRitchie.com) for her sincere support and words of encouragement when I wasn't quite sure that I could make the transition from hardcopy to virtual media.

I'd also like to thank all of my friends for continuously supporting me and encouraging me to take the leap into presenting these materials to the public and to trusting that what I feel in my heart is the best path to follow. I would never have taken these first few steps without you all. While I cannot list the names of all those to whom I refer, please know that I'm talking about you, to you.

An introduction to a book on these methods couldn't be complete without an acknowledgement of those who have given me, in one way or another, opportunities to learn and to practice these methods. And, while it is the world at large that seems most adept at creating the circumstances for me to learn from, I wish to acknowledge those who have helped me most directly to learn and realize these profoundly simple, yet extraordinary practices, whether through their support, or through actually teaching me.

I would like to offer my thanks, as always and probably not often enough, to my wife, Jill Siegel-Stone for her undying belief in my gallivanting hither and yon in search of the Holy Grail of self-expression. Her ability to bear with me under the stress of my not "working the nine-to-five" was paramount to my being able to stay the course, working long hours in the coffee-houses of Boulder, to complete the practical steps needed to realize my vision of creating this book and the blog/web-sites for my books.

Were I to search the world for the right words to say, for the perfect expression of "thank you," for the proper homage to the personage representing these methods, I would still fall short in thanking my teacher Sogyal Rinpoche, author of [\*The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying\*](#). Without his teachings and guidance in bringing these methods to life, and without his generosity in offering the precious wisdom handed down through the ages, what I have to offer in these pages would be – at best – simple theory, untested by the mind. Instead, what I have seen within him is the mirror-like quality of the enactment of these methods. Without such a mirror, I would have wavered and been left gazing at a muddied reflection, rather than at the clear light of these simple yet profound practices. Thank you.

# Chapter One –

## The Object of Our Emotion is Not its Cause

A funny thing happened on the way to the office one day. Okay, it wasn't really funny, and my “office” these days is [The Laughing Goat Coffeehouse](#). While getting ready to prepare for the day, my wife made a request of me that seemed, to my sleep-deprived mind, unreasonable. Reasonable or not, whether the haze of sleep loss or the actual request was the trigger, the emotions that arose within my mind were ones of frustration and displeasure. Sound familiar? Ever hear the expression, “you’re making me crazy!” Can anyone really make us crazy (or crazier than we already are?!)

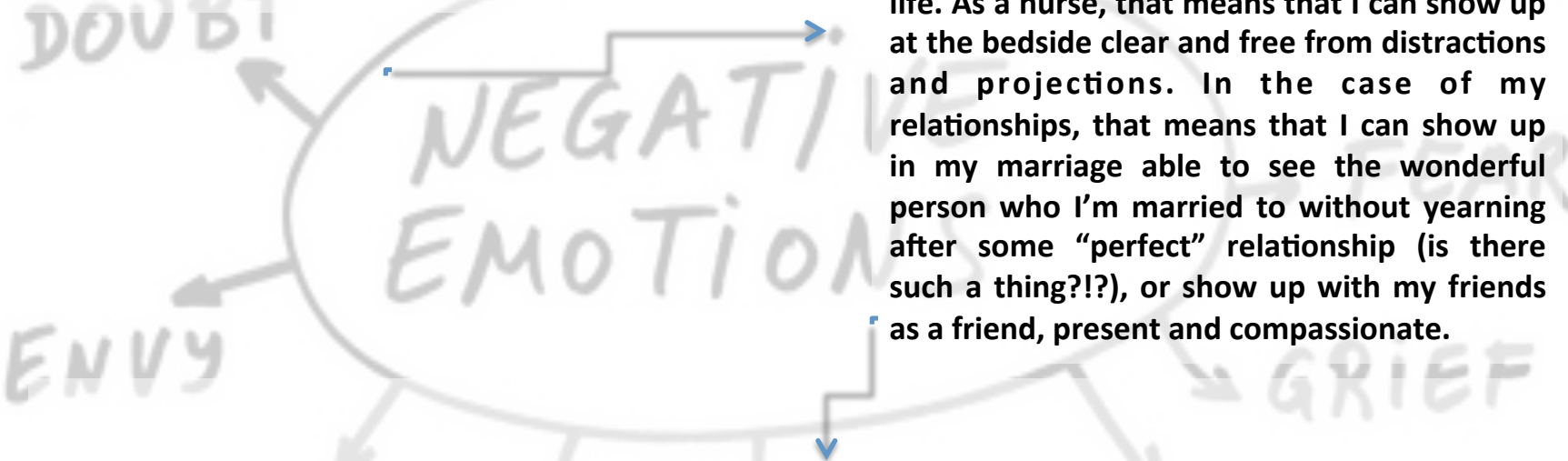
When a positive or negative emotion arises, based on attraction or repulsion, what goes on in our mind? Do we make the situation better or worse? Are we in control of the one thing that matters the most, our mind?

I know for that myself it seems much "easier" to place the blame of any strong emotion on something outside of myself. If desire arises, it's easier to say, "that car looks great, I want it..," or, "I wish that I was as fit as that guy." And, if I'm feeling angry it's much easier to say, "If only you weren't so....," or, " If that hadn't happened I wouldn't be so upset."

Although it may seem easier to lay blame on what we believe to be the cause of our emotions, the spouse, car, boss, driver, etc., when we begin to examine what's going on within our mind, what we come to realize - sometimes painfully - is that all of this "stuff" is occurring in our mind and not in the object that we're projecting the feelings and emotions onto. There is no "out there" to blame it on.

If we assume, even for a moment, that this is true, then how do we go about changing the patterns of projection and blame that we've reinforced for years? This is the part that I struggle with all of the time. I mean, seriously, if I have to take responsibility for how I'm feeling - all of the time - then that means that I can't blame any of what I'm feeling on anything or anyone else! I can't blame my panic at being unemployed on the actual loss of a job? Or the desire to be happy on the physical pain that I'm experiencing at the moment?

Before we explore the possible “how” of working with our emotions, let's look at one great benefit of doing so. For me, what keeps me on track with this kind of work is this one, simple, elegant, and liberating thought; if I can really learn how not to blame other people or factors for what I'm feeling, then I can free myself from all of this emotional baggage that interferes with how I am with others people or with circumstances in my life. As a nurse, that means that I can show up at the bedside clear and free from distractions and projections. In the case of my relationships, that means that I can show up in my marriage able to see the wonderful person who I'm married to without yearning after some “perfect” relationship (is there such a thing?!?), or show up with my friends as a friend, present and compassionate.



The very first step that we take in this journey is to just watch what happens within our mind when it begins to project an emotion or feeling that we experience onto something “out there.” Simple? No. But, for now, let's do just that. Let's work with the phrase, THE OBJECT OF OUR EMOTION IS NOT ITS CAUSE. The next time that any thought arises, or that any emotion arises, let's work with it. The next time that something external to ourselves provokes a feeling or emotion, positive or negative, let's just recognize the feeling and just be with the experience of it. How to get there?



Right now, I'm smelling cigarette smoke, even though I'm sitting indoors. And I think, "could that person please smoke away from the building?!" And I feel irritated. Dropping the irritation, I can think, "I'm smelling the cigarette smoke, and it disturbs me that it's coming into the coffeehouse." Wait, I can't smell it anymore! The person is gone. And no strong emotion is left hanging around. It's done with. Kind of like that...

How does this work for you? What happens when you try this? Please feel free to visit my site and leave a comment if you'd like, share your successes, and failures. There's no right or wrong here; we're just learning how to take what arises within our mind a little less seriously.

## Chapter Two –


# Anchoring the Awareness of Emotions in the Breath

When confronted with strong emotions or sensations, there are many options for what we can do and how we'll deal with whatever arises.

Because strong emotions are so powerful in their ability to distract us from the present, plummeting us into a space of unconscious patterns, we need to have tools to bring our mind into a state of (relative) ease, where we won't react to the circumstance, and then react to our reactions.

Without our even knowing it, our breathing changes in response to our emotional state. When we're excited or scared, our breathing may increase or even race. When we're depressed our breath might become shallow. And when we're stressed, we may even hold our breath. All of these changes occur without our even knowing that they're happening.

Many years ago, I had the harrowing experience while rock climbing of blacking out on a climb because of the severity of the climb and because, unbeknownst to me, I'd been hyperventilating. Without my even knowing it, and despite the negative effects that passing out on a rock climb could have had (I was fortunate enough to be on a rock ledge at the time), my breathing had changed. The very fear of falling that led me to hyperventilate could have been the cause of my falling!

A photograph of a birch tree in an autumn field with yellow and orange foliage. The tree is the central focus, with its white bark and sparse yellow leaves. The background is a soft-focus field of tall grasses and other trees in similar autumn colors. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

**Bringing our attention to the present and to our breath is an immediate way of anchoring our attention and preventing whatever is arising from running away with our mind.**

**Before we go any further, it's important for us to remember that even with practice, strong emotions may rip us from our anchor, setting us adrift in a sea of fantasy or fear. So, it's vital not to beat up on ourselves when our methods don't immediately free us from our emotional storms.**

**As I shared in the previous chapter, even though I practice these techniques, there are times when whatever arises knocks me from my equipoise and offers me the chance to practice working with my mind.**

**By coming back to the breath as an anchor during times of emotional of mental turmoil, we can gradually train ourselves to get less caught-up in our habit of following our thoughts and emotions, and learn to find a less reactive state of mind from which to engage with whatever is going on.**

**On the following two pages, I've essentialized the scripts from my book, *Minding the Bedside: Nursing from the Heart of the Awakened Mind*, for you to use. If you'd like a longer script or would like to download any of the audio tracks that correspond to this script, please visit my website: [www.mindingthebedside.com](http://www.mindingthebedside.com)**



Sitting on a straight-backed chair or couch or on a cushion on the floor, allow your body to become still. The back is straight without being stiff; the posture is relaxed, awake, and dignified. The hands can rest gently on the knees or in the lap. The eyes are open, simply resting the gaze on whatever is in front of you, without thinking too much about what you're viewing. Settling into this moment, begin watching the breath.

Become aware of the fact that you're breathing. Become aware of the movement of the breath as it flows into and out of the body. Feel the breath as it comes into the body and as it leaves the body. Simply remain aware of the breath flowing in and flowing out, not manipulating the breathing in any way.

When your mind becomes distracted—and it will become distracted—simply return to the breath. No commentary. No judgment.

Allow yourself to be with this flow of breath, coming in and going out. Notice the feeling of the breath as the lungs fill with air on the in-breath and deflate as you breathe out, the chest expanding and collapsing. Perhaps feeling the breath in the abdomen, rising as you breathe in and flattening and sinking as you breathe out. Allow your attention to gently ride on the sensation of each breath, not thinking about breathing, without the need to comment. Simply watching your breathing.

Allow the breath to naturally breathe itself, not needing to change it in any way, giving full attention to each breath. Observe the full cycle of each breath, locating the very beginning of the breath, as it enters the nose or mouth, and following it as it fills the lungs and expands the chest and the abdomen, then comes to the gap where there is neither in-breath nor out-breath, before it turns around and makes its journey out of the body.



Simply remain present for the cycle of each breath, being there, letting your attention gently float on the awareness of your breath.

After a short time, you may notice that the mind wanders off to thoughts of the past, fantasies, memories, or regrets. Or it may move to anticipation of the future, planning, wishing, and judging. You may find yourself thinking about what you'll do after this exercise, what you have to do at work, things that you have to do.

As soon as you become aware that the attention has moved off the breath, guide it back to the next breath with a gentle and firm awareness.

There's no need to give yourself a hard time, saying, "How did I become so distracted?" Simply come back to this breath. Watching the breath and the arising thoughts without judgment, simply observing. Once again, bringing the attention to this breath, in this moment.





Breathing in with the in-breath, breathing out with the out-breath. Feeling the movement in your body. The breath anchoring the attention in this moment.

When the mind wanders, bring your attention back to the breath, knowing that you can always use the awareness of your breath to refocus your attention, to return to the present. Whenever you notice that you have drifted from the present—when you become distracted, preoccupied, or restless—the attention on the breath can be a powerful anchor to this moment and to this state of awake stillness.

And now, for the time remaining, let go of all particular objects of attention, allowing yourself to simply be here, simply present. Breath moving, sensations in the body, sounds, thoughts, all of it coming and going...allowing all of it...and dropping into being, into stillness, present with it all, as it unfolds, complete, as you are, whole.

And...relax.

# Chapter Three –

## Viewing Our Thoughts from a Distance

**We've discussed how emotions may not be due to what "causes" our reaction. What this means is that when an emotion or thought arise within our mind, for example a desire for something or an angry thought about something that is said, we catch ourselves and realize that whatever triggered the arising is not its cause. It's not that the thought or emotion isn't present, but instead that the object that triggered this phenomenon is "neutral" in that it did not actually cause the thought or emotion. What causes these phenomena to arise is the meaning that they hold for us.**

**Viewed this way, we can begin to change our mind slowly, becoming less affected by the thoughts and emotions that arise within our mind as being due to something external to ourselves. This concept can be a difficult one to wrap our mind around, mostly because we're so used to blaming our environment – something "out there" – for what we think and feel. I find this one of the hardest practices to do on a regular basis. How about you?**



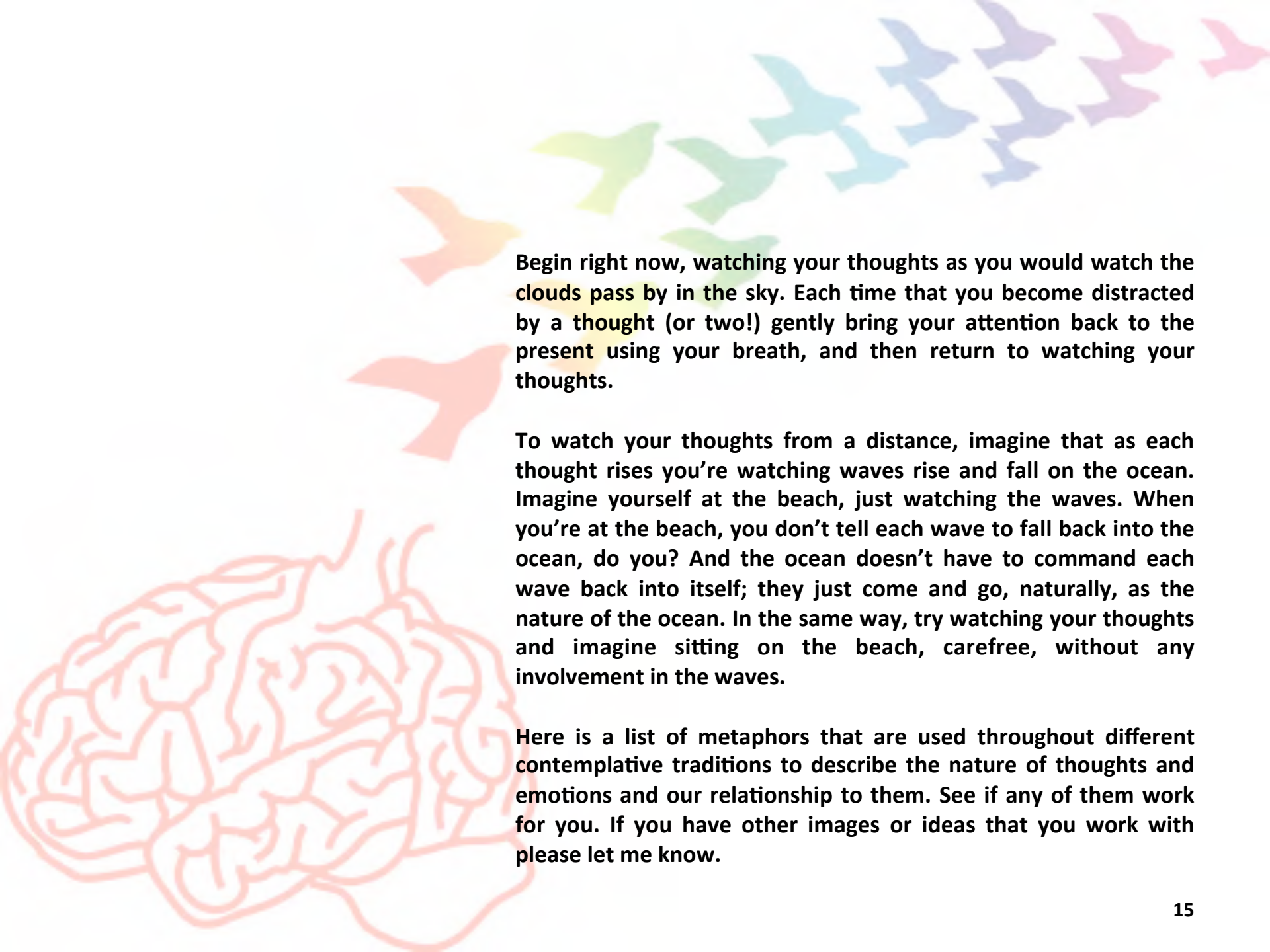


We've also learned that by anchoring our attention to the breath, bringing our mind back to the present moment by using our breath, we can repeatedly return to the present, especially when our mind is blown about by strong emotions or thoughts. This provides us with an antidote to the distraction that can occur when we're confronted with a mind that has been affected by strong emotions or thoughts. It helps us to return to ourselves, to return to our mind.

The title of this chapter, *Viewing Our Thoughts from a Distance*, gives us a clue to how to work with our thoughts. Like the clouds in the sky, when viewed from a distance, that is, seeing them as a phenomenon of the mind, we can gain some space from them. If even for a moment we're able to watch or observe a thought, without getting caught up in it, then we can get some "breathing room" for that thought and let it dissipate.

To view our thoughts from a distance takes some practice. We're so used to taking our thoughts as something "real" that to begin with, we need to just watch them and realize that they come and go spontaneously. Left to their own nature, thoughts and emotions are self-limiting, that is – they arise and dissipate just like the clouds in the sky. It's only due to our grasping after them and creating more thoughts about our thoughts that they persist.





**Begin right now, watching your thoughts as you would watch the clouds pass by in the sky. Each time that you become distracted by a thought (or two!) gently bring your attention back to the present using your breath, and then return to watching your thoughts.**

**To watch your thoughts from a distance, imagine that as each thought rises you're watching waves rise and fall on the ocean. Imagine yourself at the beach, just watching the waves. When you're at the beach, you don't tell each wave to fall back into the ocean, do you? And the ocean doesn't have to command each wave back into itself; they just come and go, naturally, as the nature of the ocean. In the same way, try watching your thoughts and imagine sitting on the beach, carefree, without any involvement in the waves.**

**Here is a list of metaphors that are used throughout different contemplative traditions to describe the nature of thoughts and emotions and our relationship to them. See if any of them work for you. If you have other images or ideas that you work with please let me know.**

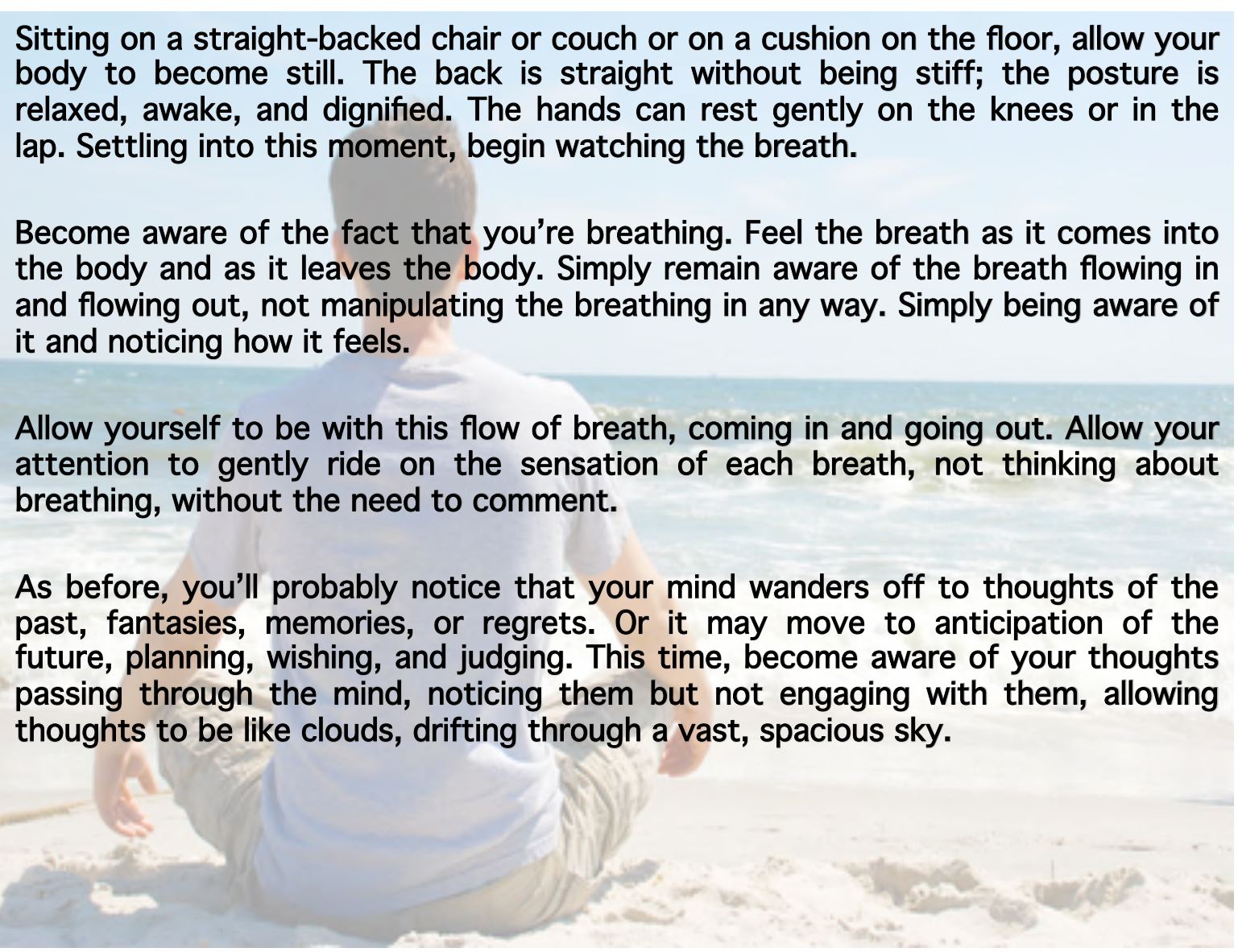
In the book *The Joy of Living*, author Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche writes, “Just as space isn’t defined by the objects that move through it, awareness isn’t defined by the thoughts, emotions, and so on that it apprehends. Awareness like space, simply is.”[i]

In *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, author Sogyal Rinpoche writes, “So whatever thoughts and emotions arise, allow them to rise and settle, like the waves in the ocean. Whatever you find yourself thinking, let that thought rise and settle, without any constraint. Don't grasp at it, feed it, or indulge it; don't cling to it and don't try to solidify it. Neither follow thoughts nor invite them; be like the ocean looking at its own waves, or the sky gazing down on the clouds that pass through it.”[ii]

There’s another metaphor that can be used which is to view our thoughts like trains passing through a station. The station is not the trains, nor is it particularly pleased or saddened by which trains pass through it. Trains come and go without affecting the station.

On the following two pages, work with the script that I’ve provided for working with your thoughts. Remember to return to the breath as your anchor if your attention wanders.



A person is sitting on a sandy beach, viewed from behind. They are wearing a light blue t-shirt and khaki shorts. The person is looking out at the ocean, which has gentle waves. The sky is clear and blue. The overall scene is peaceful and serene.

Sitting on a straight-backed chair or couch or on a cushion on the floor, allow your body to become still. The back is straight without being stiff; the posture is relaxed, awake, and dignified. The hands can rest gently on the knees or in the lap. Settling into this moment, begin watching the breath.

Become aware of the fact that you're breathing. Feel the breath as it comes into the body and as it leaves the body. Simply remain aware of the breath flowing in and flowing out, not manipulating the breathing in any way. Simply being aware of it and noticing how it feels.

Allow yourself to be with this flow of breath, coming in and going out. Allow your attention to gently ride on the sensation of each breath, not thinking about breathing, without the need to comment.

As before, you'll probably notice that your mind wanders off to thoughts of the past, fantasies, memories, or regrets. Or it may move to anticipation of the future, planning, wishing, and judging. This time, become aware of your thoughts passing through the mind, noticing them but not engaging with them, allowing thoughts to be like clouds, drifting through a vast, spacious sky.

If you find yourself carried away by a stream of thoughts or you notice that you are no longer observing right here, right now, in this moment, return to the breath, anchor yourself in the awareness of the breath, coming now to this breath. When you feel steady in the present, you can return again to witnessing the thoughts in the mind, allowing whatever is there to be there. Thoughts of fantasies, desires, likes, dislikes, memories, judgments, pressures of obligations. Aware perhaps of feelings or emotions: sadness, fear, joy, peace. Allowing all of your thoughts to simply emerge, as they are.

Witnessing. Observing. Thoughts coming. Thoughts going. Not being drawn into analysis of those thoughts. Not pursuing them. Not rejecting or engaging the thoughts but seeing them as clouds in the vast, still sky of the mind.

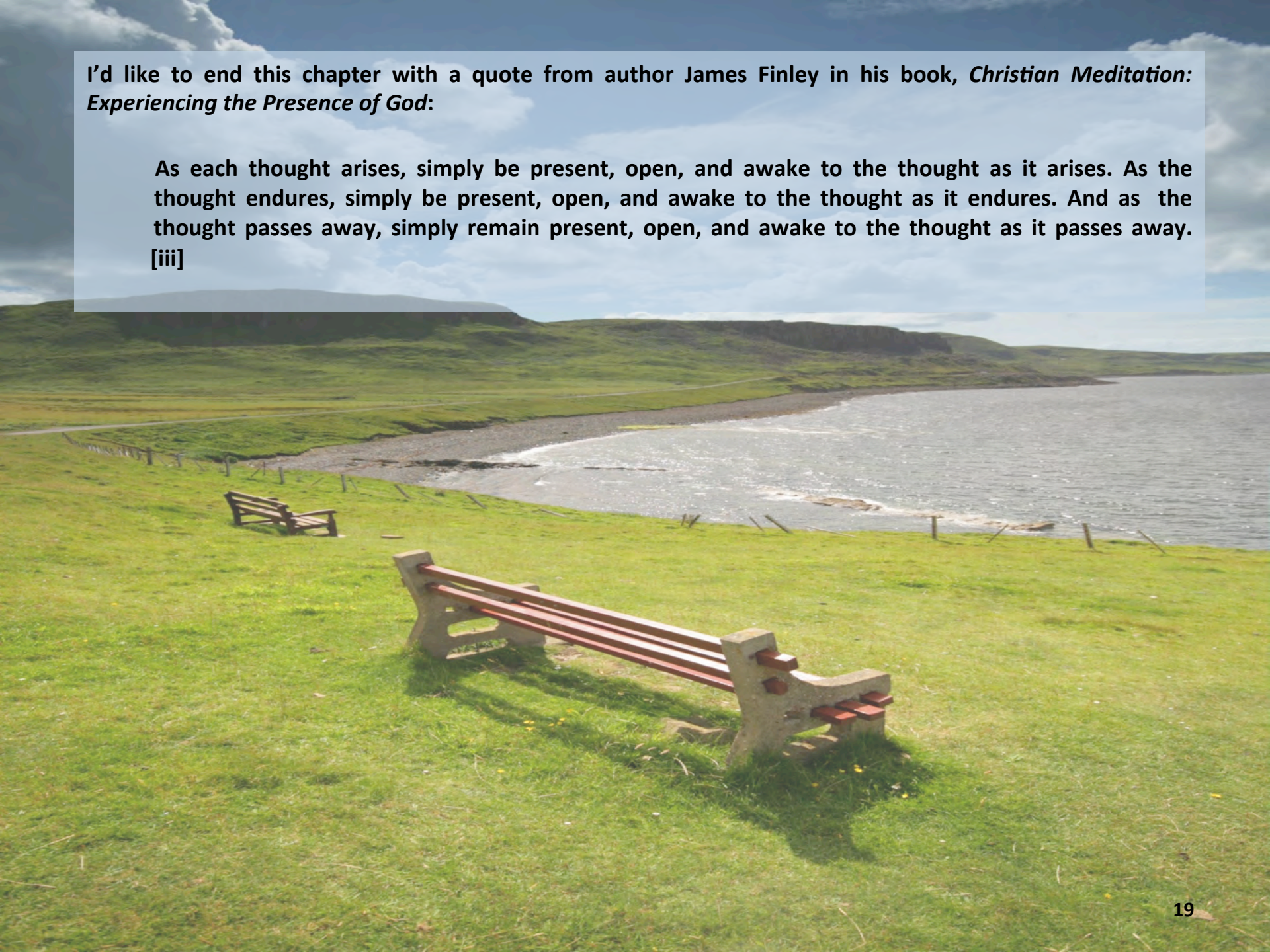
Don't think about thinking. Watch the thoughts as an old man watches children at play—observing without being involved.

And now, drop all methods. Drop all thoughts. Just...relax.



I'd like to end this chapter with a quote from author James Finley in his book, *Christian Meditation: Experiencing the Presence of God*:

As each thought arises, simply be present, open, and awake to the thought as it arises. As the thought endures, simply be present, open, and awake to the thought as it endures. And as the thought passes away, simply remain present, open, and awake to the thought as it passes away.  
[iii]



## Chapter Four –

# Getting Swept Away and Coming Back Again

Meditation is about getting used to not being distracted. Or, inversely, meditation is about being in the state of non-distraction and getting used to that state.

When we begin the practice of meditation, we can become pretty disheartened to learn that our mind is everywhere else but on the object of our meditation. Even after years of working with these methods, there are times when instead of meditating, I find myself caught up in a sea of emotions and thoughts, unable to do anything but try desperately to ride the waves and not get swept away.

What is most wonderful about this whole process is that even getting swept away and coming back to our meditation is in fact our meditation practice. That is, the practice of meditation is just that, getting used to meditating. And getting used to it means getting used to practicing even as thoughts and emotions arise.





Meditation is not about trying to block or prevent thoughts from arising. Nor is it about trying to cultivate some absolutely still, blissful state. Both of these efforts are actually antithetical, in direct opposition, to what we hope to achieve from our meditation practice. That's because what we want to achieve is a state of non-distraction, allowing our mind to rest in ease, in the face of whatever arises. As such, we do not practice by trying to prevent whatever arises from arising. Instead, we work on returning to our mind, restful in its own nature, each time that we find ourselves swept away.

Returning again and again to a state of calm abiding can feel like "hard work." And, in a way, it is. It's hard because we're not used to being undistracted. We're so used to being swept away by the mere arising of a thought or emotion, that we find it difficult not to do so.



Have patience, have persistence, and have...**a great sense of humor!** And, when you do get swept away, and you remember that you've been swept away, and you return to your practice, congratulate yourself. You've succeeded in changing the way that you normally have worked with your mind, and that's success!





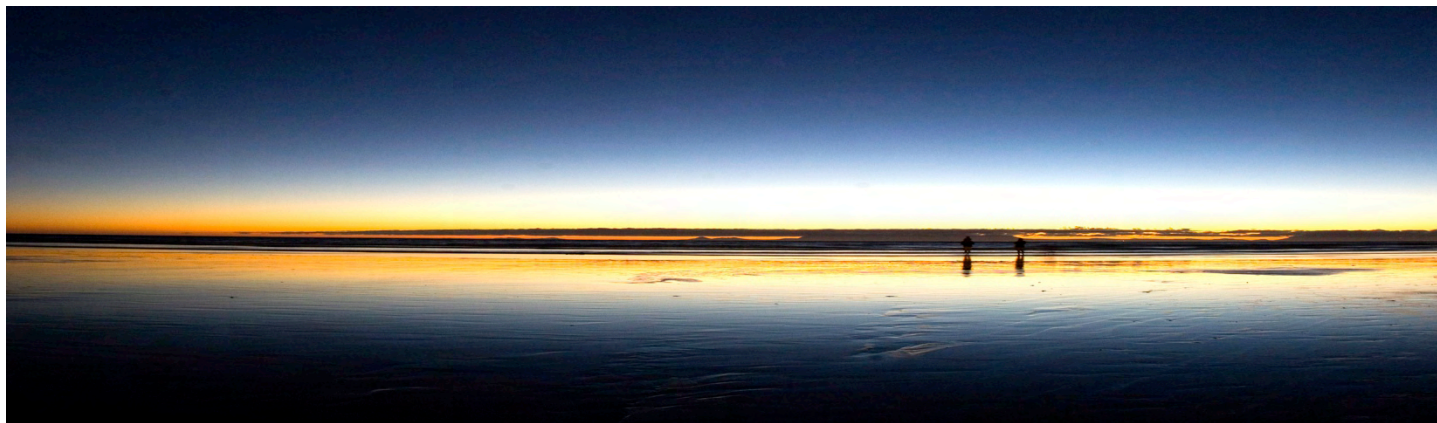
**Remember this: each time that you are distracted, it is an opportunity to practice non-distraction, so that even your distractions are practice. Each time that you return to your practice of non-distraction from a state of distraction, your meditating. Failure is impossible if you stick with it!**

**To practice returning from distraction, use either one of the previous scripts provided in this ebook, working with the breath as an anchor or viewing thoughts from a distance. Don't worry about "getting it right," since that's not what these practices are about. If anything, they're about learning to be with whatever happens, whether that appears to be right or wrong, correct or incorrect.**

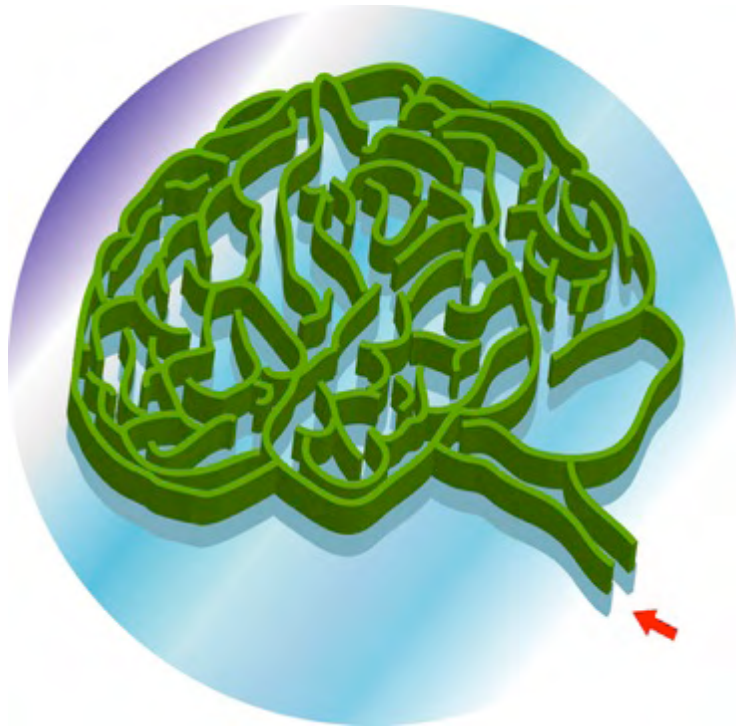
**What's most important is that you learn to use these methods frequently, in short periods, to familiarize yourself with how to practice.**

**And now, as you've done before, use the following exercise as a way to work with your thoughts, bringing yourself back repeatedly to your breath when you find yourself distracted by your thoughts.**

Just as we've begun our previous exercises, begin by sitting on a straight-backed chair or couch or on a cushion on the floor. Or, if you're taking a few moments during the day or time out of work, simply rest in whatever environment that you find yourself. Since we will eventually want to practice in any situation, ultimately it doesn't matter where we are as much as where our attention is. Allow your body to become still. The back is straight without being stiff; the posture is relaxed, awake, and dignified. The hands can rest gently on the knees or in the lap. Settling into this moment, begin watching the breath.



Now, as in the previous exercise, become aware of the fact that you're breathing. Become aware of the movement of the breath as it flows into and out of the body. Feel the breath as it comes into the body and as it leaves the body. Simply remain aware of the breath flowing in and flowing out, not manipulating the breathing in any way. Simply being aware of it and noticing how it feels. Allow your attention to gently ride on the sensation of each breath, not thinking about breathing, without the need to comment. Simply watching your breathing.



Now, turn your attention toward your mind and toward any thoughts that may arise. Simply watch your mind. When you become distracted, bring your mind back to the breath as an anchor, and then when you've refocused, return your attention to your thoughts. Do this, repeatedly, in short sessions, turning your attention toward your thoughts, watching your mind, and then return it to your breath whenever you become distracted.

Once you've watched your thoughts, "drop" the need to watch them and simply rest in the atmosphere that you've created without particularly trying to "do" anything. Allow your attention to simply be supported by your mind watching its thoughts, without particularly doing anything.

What happens as you watch your thoughts? Just notice. Do they get stronger or weaker? Do they seem to fade away? Maybe you experience a kind of clarity without thoughts? Whatever happens is fine. Just be in the place of watching your mind, watching your thoughts, without following them.

Once you've tried this for a while, simply let go of everything and rest in the space that you've created for a while.

# Chapter Five –

## Resting in Whatever Arises

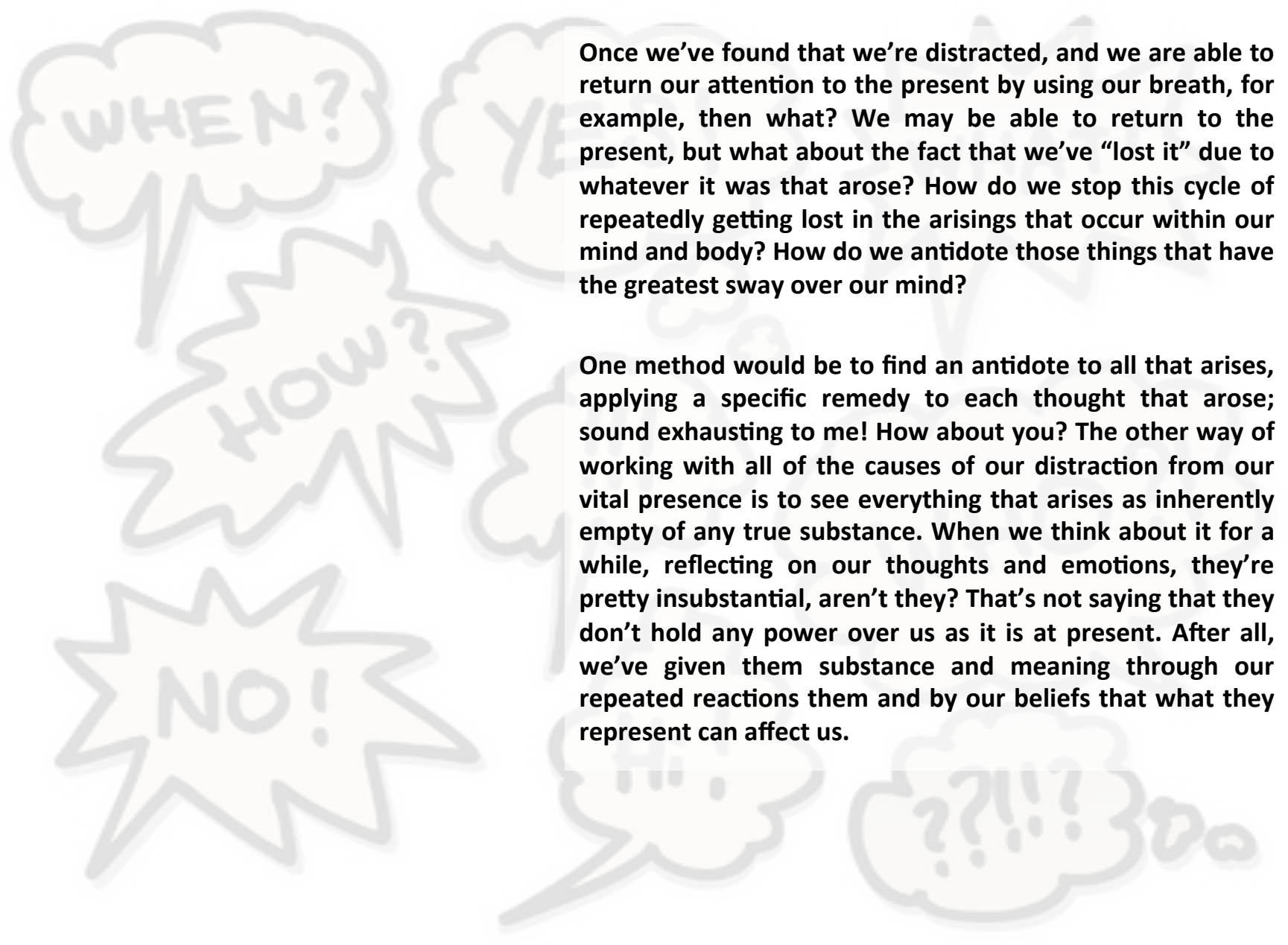
We've already discussed how meditation is a process of getting used to meditating. And getting used to it means getting used to practicing even as thoughts and emotions arise.

We've also touched on how to use our breath as an anchor when an emotion or thought to arise within our mind, for example a desire for something or an angry thought about something that is said, we catch ourselves and realize that whatever triggered the arising is not its cause.

So, what this means is that when we practice meditation, we remain undistracted in the face of whatever arises within our mind. And, what we've discussed and what we come to realize is that doing this can be a lot harder than one would imagine. While it may be relatively easy to remain undistracted when faced with the constant flow of the mundane thoughts that arise when we're practicing meditation, doing so when a strong emotion or feeling arises can be quite a different story.

What happens when we don't remain or rest in the face of whatever arises? Ahh; that's the magic. What we do is to realize that we've lost our attention and that whatever it was that arose was enough to knock us off of our center and throw us...wherever it threw us.





Once we've found that we're distracted, and we are able to return our attention to the present by using our breath, for example, then what? We may be able to return to the present, but what about the fact that we've "lost it" due to whatever it was that arose? How do we stop this cycle of repeatedly getting lost in the arisings that occur within our mind and body? How do we antidote those things that have the greatest sway over our mind?

One method would be to find an antidote to all that arises, applying a specific remedy to each thought that arose; sound exhausting to me! How about you? The other way of working with all of the causes of our distraction from our vital presence is to see everything that arises as inherently empty of any true substance. When we think about it for a while, reflecting on our thoughts and emotions, they're pretty insubstantial, aren't they? That's not saying that they don't hold any power over us as it is at present. After all, we've given them substance and meaning through our repeated reactions to them and by our beliefs that what they represent can affect us.

**So often, we get most thrown when what we're hearing or what we're seeing contradicts who we believe ourselves to be or threatens that sense of who we are. So, the next time that you experience the bodily sensations, the mental muddling, or turmoil of the mind that accompanies a reaction to something within your mind, after you've had a chance to return to your mind, reflect on what it was that caused you to lose yourself in yourself. What was it that created an inability to remain in your most compassionate or present state of being. Was the cause an actual threat to your bodily integrity? Was the cause of your distress external to yourself, or was it mostly in your mind? Work with this for a while and think about this, where are our thoughts anyway? Think about the fuzzy nature of where our thoughts really are...until then, abide in peace, and have fun with it all!**



## Chapter Six –

# Where Are Our Thoughts Anyway?

In this series, we've covered using the breath as an anchor for our attention and meditation practice. We've also discussed how to get some distance from the immediacy of our thoughts, viewing them "from a distance" instead of getting caught up in their incessant murmur. Additionally, we've discussed how to return to our present state of mind when we're swept away by thoughts and how to remain in a state of present awareness regardless of whatever arises within our mind.

From our practice, and from what we've experienced so far, we may begin to wonder where our thoughts are anyway? Are they "located" in the mind? Do they remain anywhere after they've arisen and, if so, where do they "go?" When I'm most caught up in my mind or in the stream of thoughts arising within my mind, I find it hard to remember that my thoughts are nothing but very impermanent, and fairly illusory phenomena within the mind. It's not like there's anything that I can hold on to and say, "this is real."

When we begin to look at our thoughts, we find them as fleeting and insubstantial. They lack any true or valid existence. They lack any form. When we reflect on it, they lack any true power to control who we are or what we do. And yet, how often do we react to our thoughts? How often do we say something that we wished we hadn't said, or do something that we regret? How do our thoughts go from being mental phenomena within the mind to powerful, physiological experiences within our body?



Here's the rub, here's where the rubber meets the road, here's where the thought gains its power: a thought is a mere arising, a mere phenomenon of the mind until we assign a meaning to it. That may sound like a no-brainer, but that is at the root of why our thoughts affect us to such a significant degree.

Because I believe that I'm a great dad, if someone tells me that I've done something that was really bad parenting, or even if I think that I've done something that was really bad as a father, the thought "that was really stupid! How can I do such a stupid thing?!" has such power that I can immediately feel - physically - horrible. Why is that?

It's not the thought that matters, it's what I make of that thought, how I judge myself against it, and whether I harbor beliefs about myself in relation to that thought. As soon as I associate something about "me" with a thought, I experience a feeling or an emotion about it. That's where the trouble begins. Okay, so how do I stop that habit, how do I interrupt the cycle of - for instance - thinking that I'm a bad dad when that thought arises?

One way is to have a handy bag of antidotes available for each thought that arises. That way, when the thought, "you forgot to practice soccer with Noah [my son]" arises, I can think, "but I did last week," or "it's not such a big deal," or "I did practice guitar with him," or.....That can work, but it's also exhausting because it means that we always have to antidote thoughts that are either threatening to us or that we dislike. There is an easier way.



**When we work with our thoughts as fleeting phenomena based upon our way of thinking about things and when we practice meditation, mindfully aware, without following our thought and emotions, then our tendency to take our thoughts as something substantial will gradually - ohh, ever so gradually! - diminish.**

**With time, patience and practice, we can come to see our thoughts as no more substantial than the clouds in the sky. This doesn't mean that we'll stop relating to our thoughts at all, and that when some brilliant stroke of genius comes to our mind we'll simply ignore it and allow it to fade into the landscape of the mind. In fact, we may find that true inspiration comes more easily when our mind isn't cluttered by the process of out thinking about and trying to manage all of the thoughts that are arising.**



# Chapter Seven –



## Summing it All Up

To restate what I wrote at the beginning of this ebook, the title *Can Meditation Change the Way You View Your World?* implies that through the practice of meditating, you can change how you view your world. Why is this important? Why *would we want to change how we view our world?* After all, how we view our world is how the world is...isn't it?

What begins to change as we practice meditation is that our belief that the object of our emotion is somehow “out there,” that it, that something external to ourselves causes our emotional reaction. What we find as we become more engaged in the practice of meditation is that we are able to locate the emotion within our body's stream of changing phenomena and that, left to its own, an emotion can dissipate as easily as a thought that is left to its own impermanent nature.

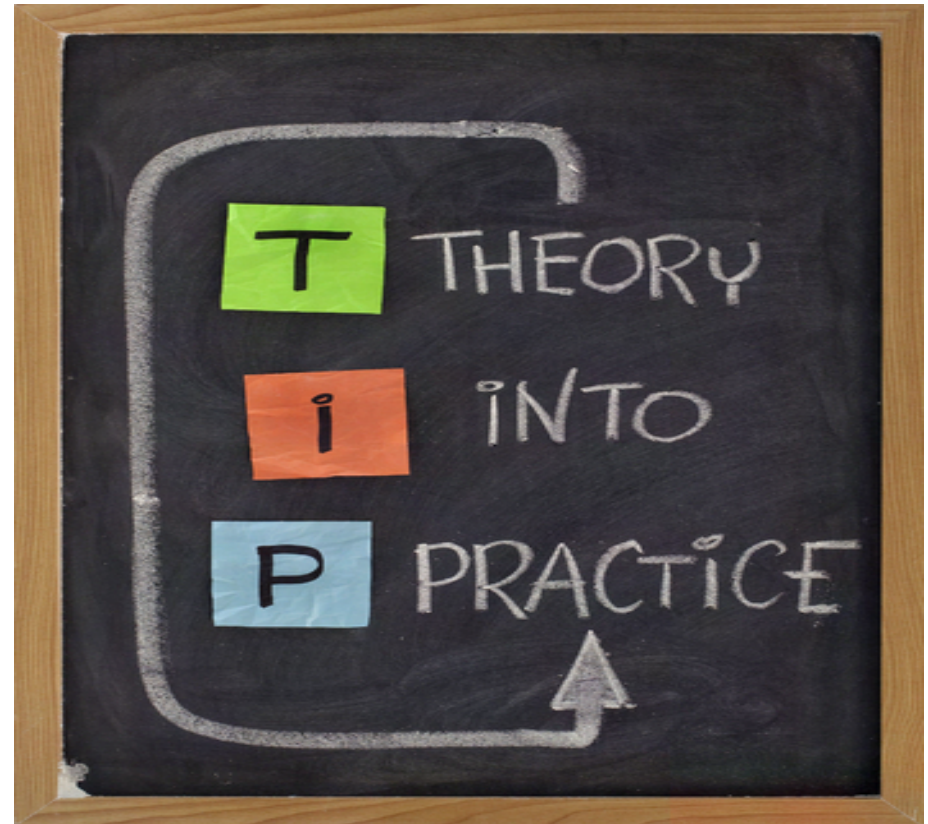
When we view our thoughts and emotions from a distance, getting ourselves unstuck from the believe that we are our emotions, or are our thoughts, we find that they are very impermanent and that, in the same way that we work with our emotions, when the thought is left in its own state, it will dissolve back into the mind that it came from. Working with our thoughts this way, we can use the breath as an anchor against distraction and not get swept away when strong thoughts or emotions arise. This allows us to rest in whatever arises, recognizing that our thoughts don't exist anywhere and soon disappear back into the nature of our mind.



**While the practices described within this short text take anything but a short time to master, and while we may experience a variety of feelings and emotions which seem to contradict the view that we can change the way that we view of the world; once we begin to allow these practices to work on us, allowing them to lessen our grasping at thoughts and emotions as inherently powerful and real, we come to discover the true power and realness of the nature of our mind.**

**Far removed from the ordinarily distracted nature of our mind, yet no further than underlying all that we perceive, the undistracted and calmly abiding mind is easily within our grasp...as soon as we stop grasping. Easily within sight, as soon as we turn our sight within. Easily within our practice, as soon as we give up hoping for anything within our practice...and learn to simply, be.**

What do we do next? Take time to formally practice mindfully, spaciously, with awareness watching the breath. Use the breath as an anchor to bringing the mind back to the present. When you're comfortable doing this, begin working with watching the thoughts as they arise, allowing them to simply rise and fall without becoming attached to them. As a support, you can download the scripts for watching the breath and thoughts from my website. You can also download audio files which have these and other scripts recorded to listen to. Then, please drop me a line or comment and let me know how this works for you. Is it easier than you'd thought it would be? Do you get stuck in certain thoughts?



May this short ebook bring you some benefit and may it help you along your path. May any good that comes from you having read these words ripple to others within your life and those you come in contact with and may that good spread.

# Credits and Acknowledgements

## Citations:

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