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Psychoeducation Series

# ***Mindfulness, Self-observation, and Presence***

Three interrelated concepts vital to your mental health and wellbeing

Sebastian Salicru  
Registered Psychologist  
Board-Approved Supervisor  
**PTS Psychology Canberra**

***Empowering People Through *Insightful Psychology Results****  
[ptspsychology.com](http://ptspsychology.com)

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# Fundamental Premises and Assumptions



Thoughts and feelings **are not facts**.

However, if you over-identify with your negative thoughts, for example, your brain will treat them as reality.



As a result, you will feel fearful or anxious.



## Fundamental Premises and Assumptions (cont.)

There is a big difference between:

Your thoughts and feelings having you

VS

You having (experiencing) your thoughts and feelings

Hence, it's important to be able to identify and observe them for what they are, and to actually befriend them. This will help you to avoid over-identifying with them.

**The purpose of Mindfulness, Self-observation, and Presence is precisely this:**

***To help you distance yourself from your negative thoughts, while – at the same time – allowing you to experience/feel, identify, name, understand, and facilitate, regulate or manage your emotions.***

This matters because your emotions convey important information to you, which can guide your decision-making and behaviour.





# The Capacity for Self-Observation in Psychotherapy

# Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a receptive mental state of attention to the present experience, which consists in observing **(noticing)** attentively what is happening.

It is a simple and practical way to learn to observe **(notice)** your thoughts, rather than be trapped by them and worrying about the past or the future.

Mindfulness helps you to keep your thoughts in the present moment. As you practice, you tend to become better at calming the mind and keeping things in perspective.

Mindfulness is a state of psychological freedom that occurs when attention remains quiet and limber, without attachment to any particular point of view (Martin, 2002).

Martin, J. R. (2002). The common factor of mindfulness – An expanding discourse: Comment on Horowitz (2002). *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 12(2), 139–142. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1053-0479.12.2.139>

# The 'Torch in The Dark' A Metaphor

Mindfulness means noticing with:

1. Curiosity
2. Openness
3. Non-judgement
4. Non-reaction

Like the light emanating from a torch.





**Mindfulness** is the mental training that develops:

1. **Self-awareness:** Ability to notice things about yourself that you didn't notice before.
2. **Self-regulation (self-management or self-control):** Ability to better modulate your behaviour.
3. **Self-transcendence:** Capacity to have more positive relationship between your and others.

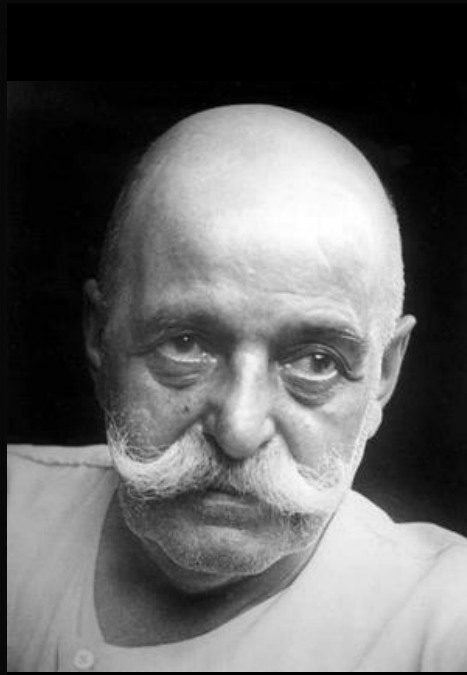
Mindfulness means 'noticing' with:

1. **Curiosity**
2. **Openness**
3. **Non-judgement**
4. **Non-reaction**

Just like Sherlock Holmes does!

('Adopting a Sherlock Holmes Mindset')





Self-observation brings man to the realization of the necessity of self-change. And in observing himself a man notices that self-observation itself brings about certain changes in his inner processes. He begins to understand that self-observation is an instrument of self-change, a means of awakening.

(George Gurdjieff)



# Self-observation



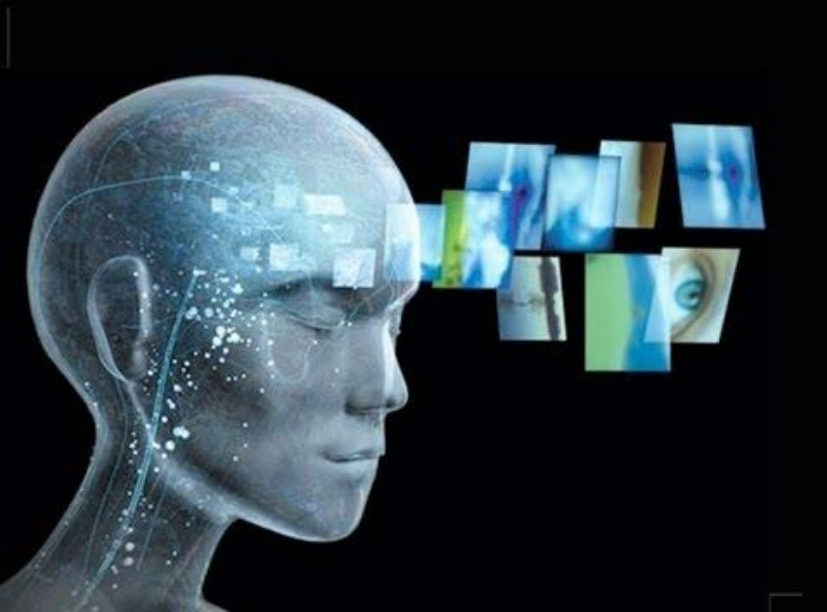
Activation of self-observation is a core psychotherapy process.

Self-observation entails an active scan of your inner landscape (intentions, expectations, feelings, cognitions, and behaviors), the ability to introspect on your own thoughts, and the realisation of the relation of yourself to your social and cultural environment.

This process is collaboratively employed by psychotherapist and client within all psychotherapy orientations to help clients learn about their own functioning, change maladaptive responses, and generate new responses for the future.

Beitman, B. D., & Soth, A. M. (2006). Activation of self-observation: A core process among the psychotherapies. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 16(4), 383–397.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/1053-0479.16.4.383>



**Consciousness**

**Unconsciousness**



# who's in charge?

THE THINKER ("I")  
OR THE THOUGHT? ("ME")

Your thoughts, stories, and beliefs (assumptions, attitudes, predispositions, opinions, assessments, judgements, evaluations, interpretations, expectations, past experiences, learned scripts, etc.)



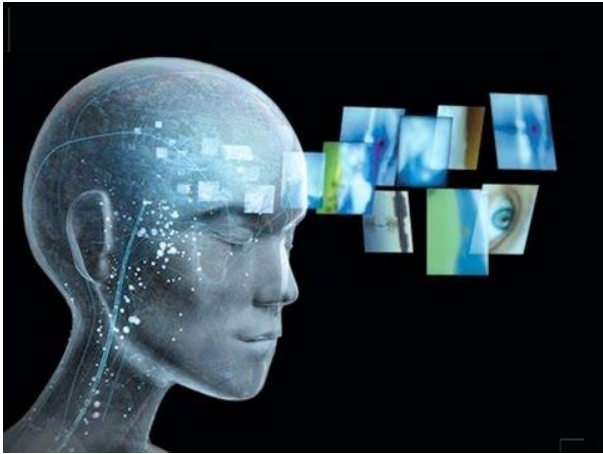
**The 'Me' Illusion:** How your brain conjures up your sense of self

# The “I” (Observer) vs The “Me”(That which is being observed)

The “I” is the thinker that does the thinking, the observer that observes the “Me”  
(The “I” is the consciousness that realises that you are not your thoughts, feelings, or narratives)



# The “I” (Self-as-subject) vs The “Me”(Self-as-object)



The “I” is the subject, causal agent, thinker, observer that does the thinking or observing, which is also responsible for self-awareness and self-knowledge.

It is the consciousness (or awareness itself) that realises that you are more than your story, thoughts, opinions, or feelings.

This is the part of you that maintains ‘**Executive Control**’.

## Your Historical Self or Entity

The “Me”, as the ‘Narrative Self’, includes:

- Your ‘Known Self’ from a historical perspective
- Your Self-concept
- Your Opinions

When looking at yourself from this perspective, you have no freedom or choices – your are your thoughts, opinions, and feelings (they have you, instead of you having them).

Me as a story includes:

- My name, my age, my gender, my roles in life
- When and where I was born
- Where I have been
- What I have done
- Where I live
- Etc ...





Practicing mindfulness and self-observation will enable you to notice your automatic and unconscious thoughts (schemas) driving your behaviour by bringing them into your consciousness.

Once you have accepted (owned) them, you will be able to change them.

To do so, you need to sit on the 'Director' seat.

Then, only then, you will become the 'Director' of your own life!

# Noticing and being aware of what shows up for you at any given moment ...

Example of activating the 'Healthy Adult' style of self-processing using mindfulness and developing self-awareness by being present to the moment.

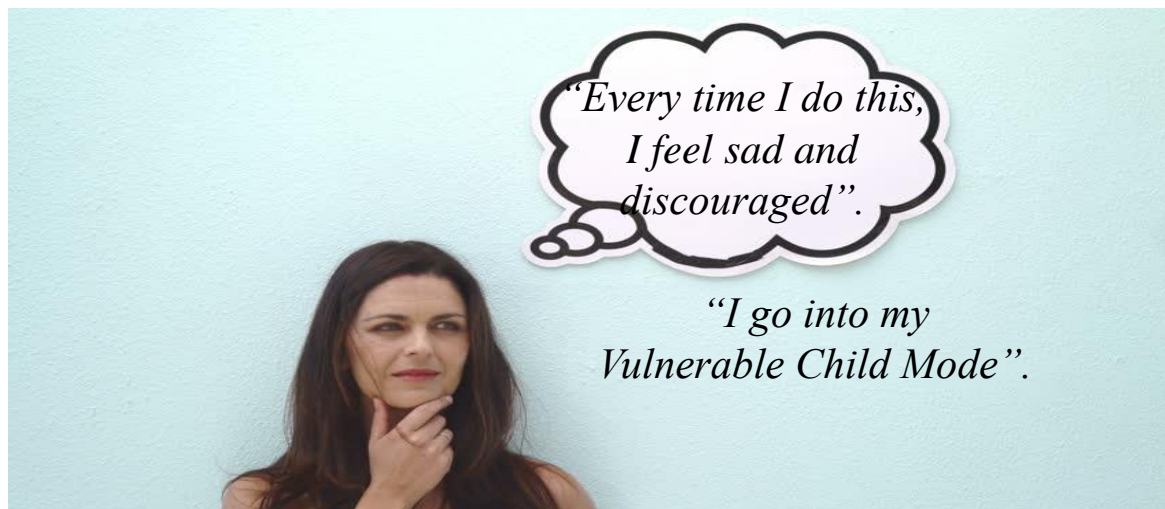


## OBSERVING SELF EXERCISE

- Notice your breath (10 seconds pause)
- Be aware you're noticing (10 seconds pause)
- Notice what you're thinking ...
- Be aware you're noticing ...
- Notice what you can hear ....
- Be aware you're noticing ....
- Notice what your mind is telling you ...
- Be aware you're noticing ....
- Notice what you can feel in your feet ....
- Be aware you're noticing ....
- Notice what thoughts you're having ....
- Be aware you're noticing ...
- So there's a part of you that notices everything
- Optional: Life is like a stage show ... and on that stage are all your thoughts and feelings and everything you can see, hear, touch, taste and smell ... and there's a part of you that can step back and watch the show – zoom in and take in the details, or zoom out and take in the big picture.
- Optional: It's always there, always available. You use it every time you practice mindfulness. It's like a safe place from which to step back and observe your thoughts and feelings, and allow them to freely flow through you – to let them come, and stay and go in their own good time – neither sweeping you nor pulling you into a struggle.

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# Presence

Presence is a state of consciousness that transcends thinking.

You probably have noticed that, most of the time, you have a voice in your head (your self-talk) that never stops speaking.

To be present you need to break the conditioning of your mind (your automatic thoughts).

**If you identify with the voice in your head, you will be the voice in your head.**

Presence is the raising of consciousness from where you can become aware that there is a voice in your head.

That awareness is beyond thinking.

And it allows you to be the observer of your own mind.

It is the awareness behind your thought processes.

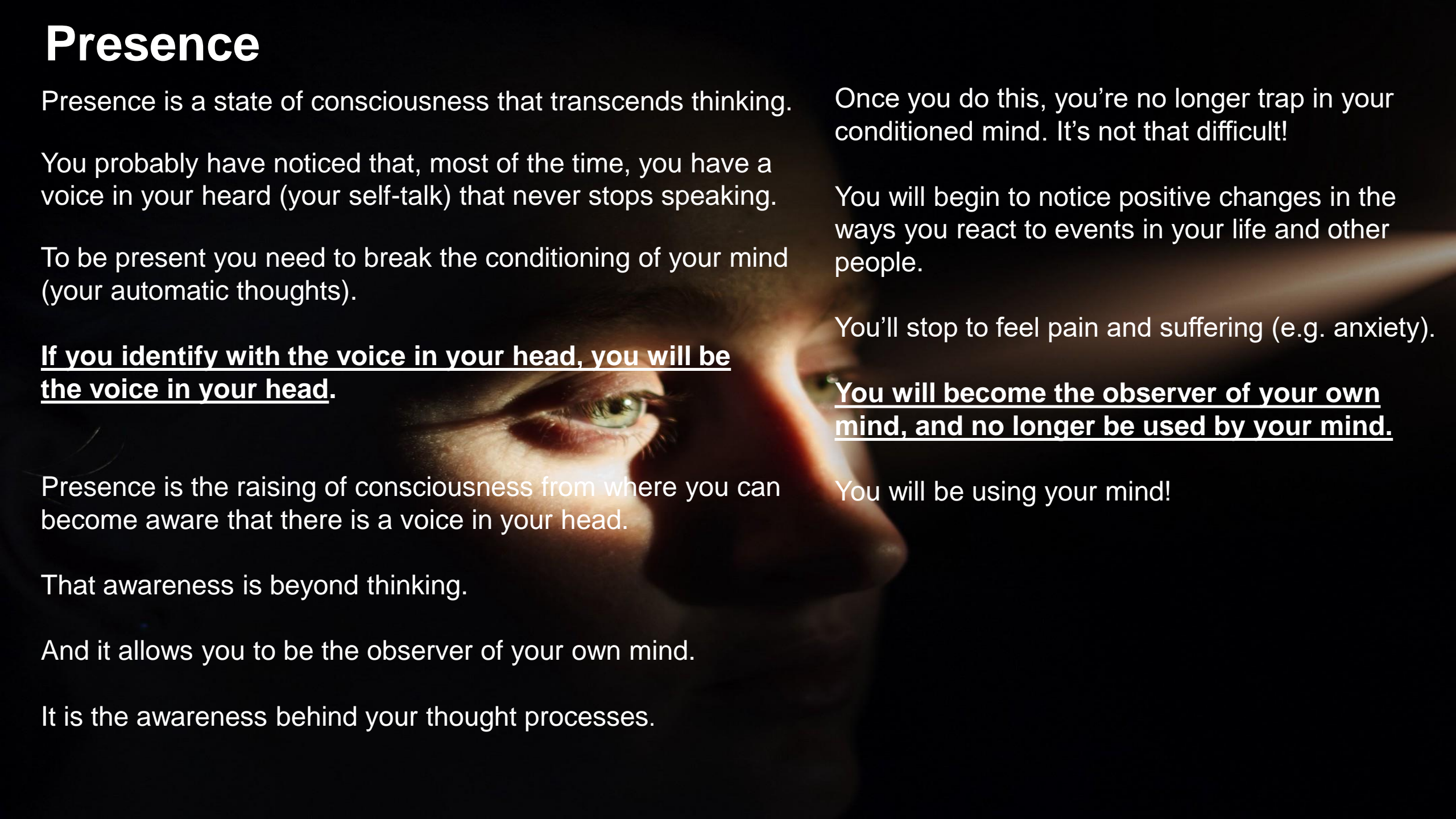
Once you do this, you're no longer trapped in your conditioned mind. It's not that difficult!

You will begin to notice positive changes in the ways you react to events in your life and other people.

You'll stop to feel pain and suffering (e.g. anxiety).

**You will become the observer of your own mind, and no longer be used by your mind.**

You will be using your mind!







Once you have had a glimpse of awareness  
or Presence, you know it firsthand.  
It is no longer just a concept in your mind.

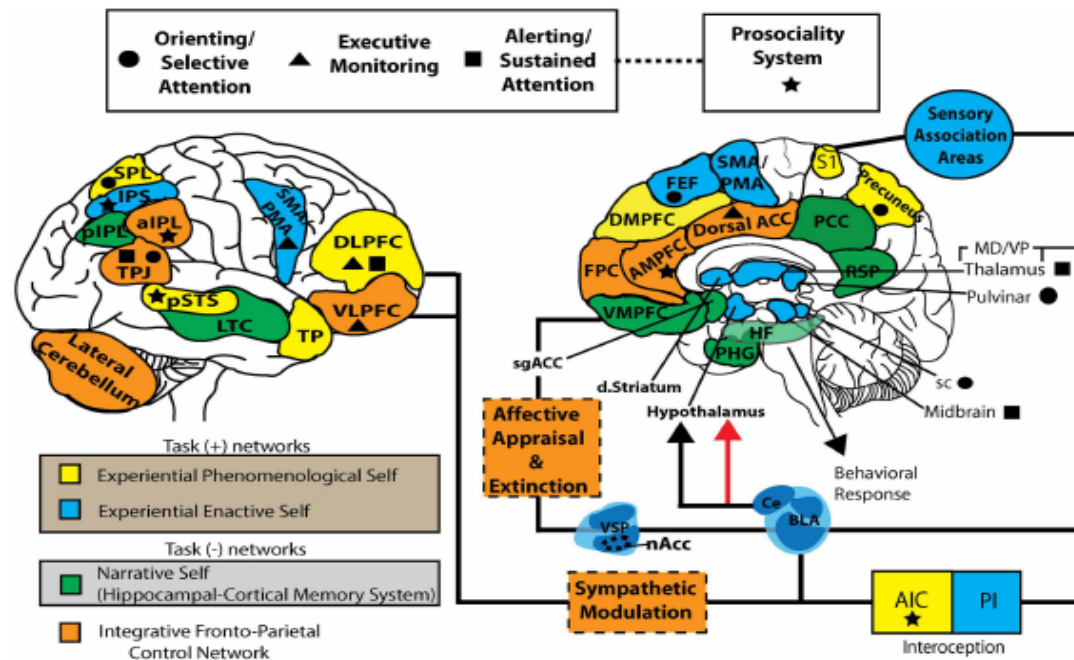
– Eckhart Tolle



# Self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence (S-ART): a framework for understanding the neurobiological mechanisms of mindfulness

David R. Vago\* and David A. Silbersweig

Functional Neuroimaging Laboratory, Department of Psychiatry, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston, MA, USA

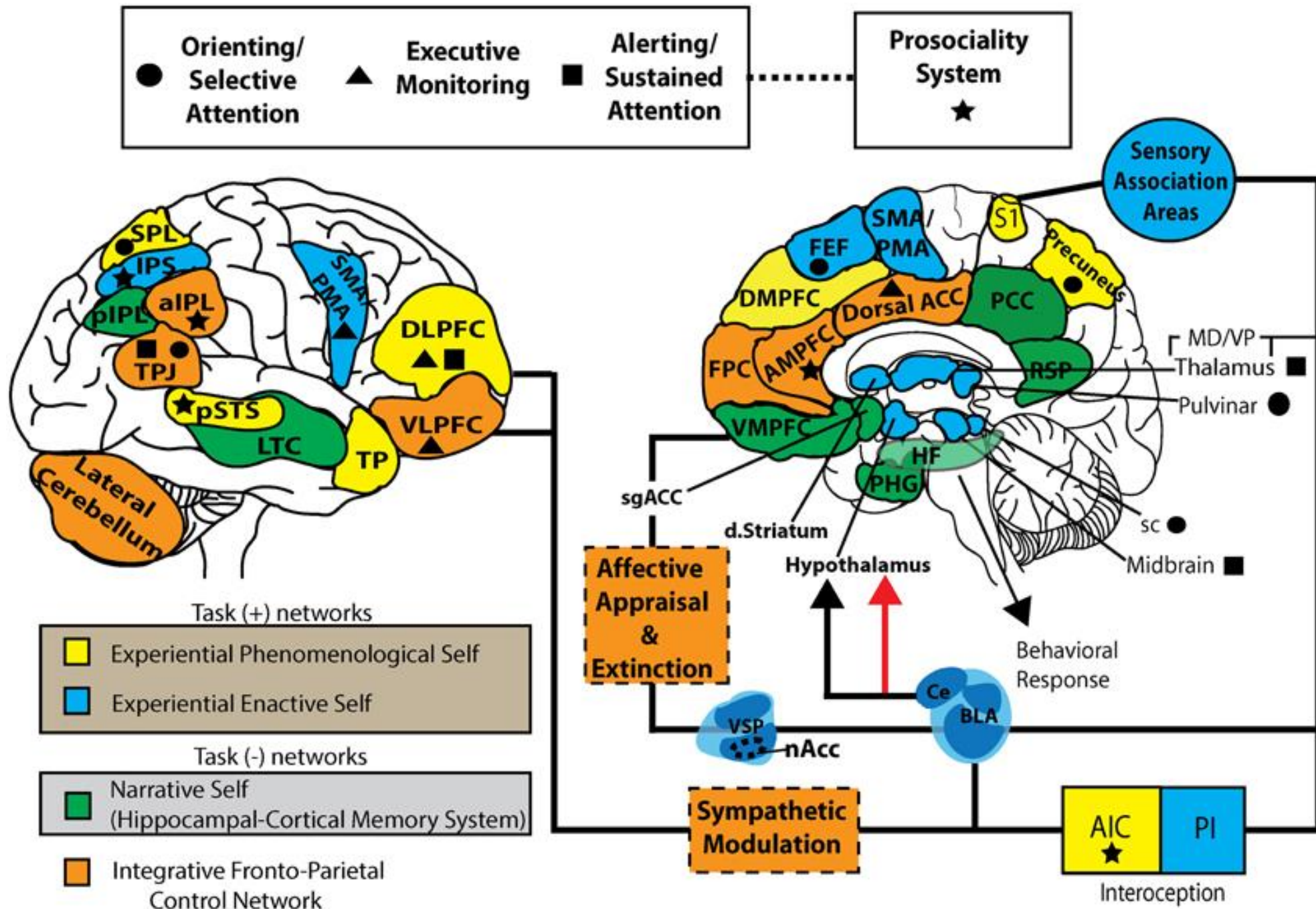


**FIGURE 2 | Self-networks and neurocognitive systems supporting S-ART.** This working model represents a parcelation of task positive (self-specifying: EPS and EES), task negative (NS), and integrative fronto-parietal control networks. It also represents the individual components of the attentional systems and prosociality network purported to be modulated by mindfulness. The substrates for six component mechanisms of mindfulness within a framework of S-ART are also represented. EPS, experiential phenomenological self; EES, experiential enactive self; NS, narrative self; FPCN, fronto-parietal control network; FEF, frontal eye fields; DMPFC, dorsal-medial prefrontal cortex; AMPFC, anterior medial prefrontal cortex; VMpFC, ventromedial prefrontal cortex; PHG,

parahippocampal gyrus; HF, hippocampal formation; RSP, retrosplenial cortex; PCC, posterior cingulate cortex; Dorsal ACC, dorsal anterior cingulate cortex; DLPFC, dorsolateral prefrontal cortex; VLPFC, ventrolateral prefrontal cortex; TP, temporal pole; LTC, lateral temporal cortex; TPJ, temporoparietal junction; sPL, superior parietal lobe; pIPL, posterior inferior parietal lobe; aIPL, anterior inferior parietal lobe; nAcc, nucleus accumbens; VSP, ventrostriatal pallidum; dStriatum, dorsal striatum; S1, primary somatosensory cortex; AIC, anterior insular cortex; PIC, posterior insular cortex; sgACC, subgenual anterior cingulate cortex; VMp, ventromedial posterior nucleus; sc, superior colliculus; BLA, basolateral amygdala; CE, central nucleus.

Mindfulness has proven to be beneficial across a diverse group of psychological disorders as well as for general stress reduction.

Relevant perceptual, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral neuropsychological processes are highlighted as supporting mechanisms for S-ART, including intention and motivation, attention regulation, emotion regulation, extinction and reconsolidation, prosociality, non-attachment, and decentering.





# Mindfulness, Self-observation, and Presence enable Transformational Learning

Mindfulness fosters transformational learning by increasing your awareness of, and openness to experience.

Mindfulness helps you to overcome constraints to openness to experience, such as staying engaged within challenging life experiences, reducing defensiveness to new information about yourself, maintaining greater emotional regulation during stressful events, and disidentifying with negative thoughts and emotions

Transformational learning is the process of deep, constructive, and meaningful learning that goes beyond simple knowledge acquisition and supports critical ways in which you consciously make meaning of your life.

It is the kind of learning that results in a fundamental change in your worldview as a consequence of shifting from mindless or unquestioning acceptance of available information to reflective and conscious learning experiences that bring about true freedom or liberation.

Transformational learning means becoming critically aware of your implicit or tacit assumptions and expectations, and assess their relevance for making interpretations.

Transformational learning often leads to profound changes in your thoughts, feelings, perspectives, beliefs, and behaviors because it is a radical shift of consciousness that permanently alters your way of being in the world.

Barner, R. W., & Barner, C. P. (2011). Mindfulness, openness to experience, and transformational learning. In C. Hoare (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of reciprocal adult development and learning* (pp. 347–362). Oxford University Press.



# Transformational Learning: 2<sup>nd</sup> Order Learning

## Observer, Action, Results

In 1<sup>st</sup> order learning, I change my actions to create a different result, without considering the type of observer that I am.



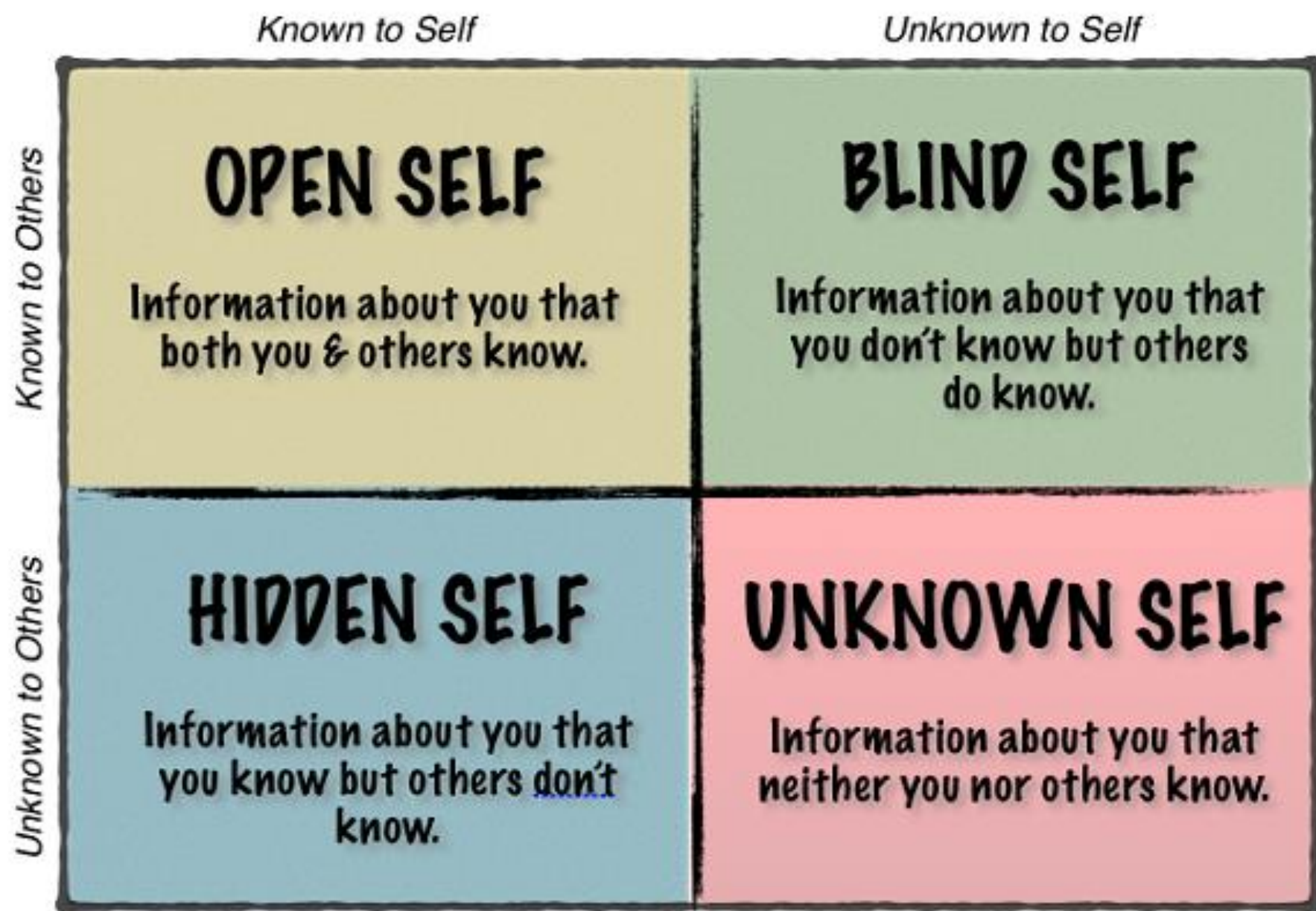
*1<sup>st</sup> Order Learning*

Observer + Action = Results

*2<sup>nd</sup> Order Learning*

2<sup>nd</sup> order learning entails reflecting upon myself (the observer that I am) and the way I view myself (Observing myself as an observer).





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