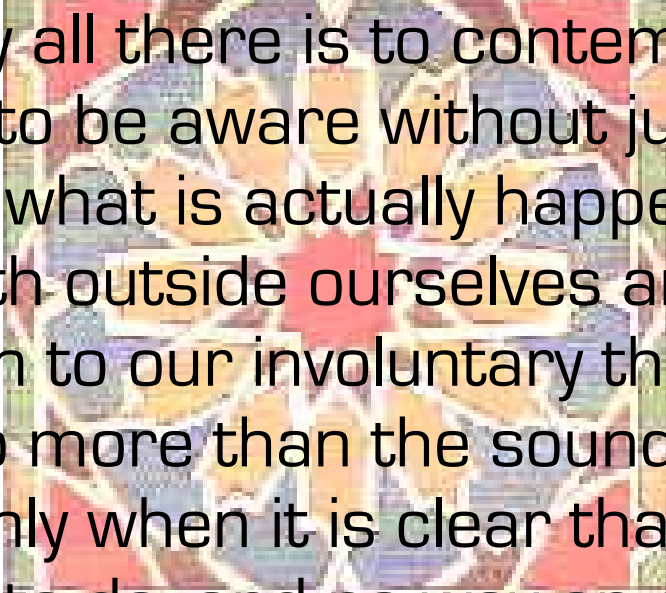


# Awareness Practices



# Introduction



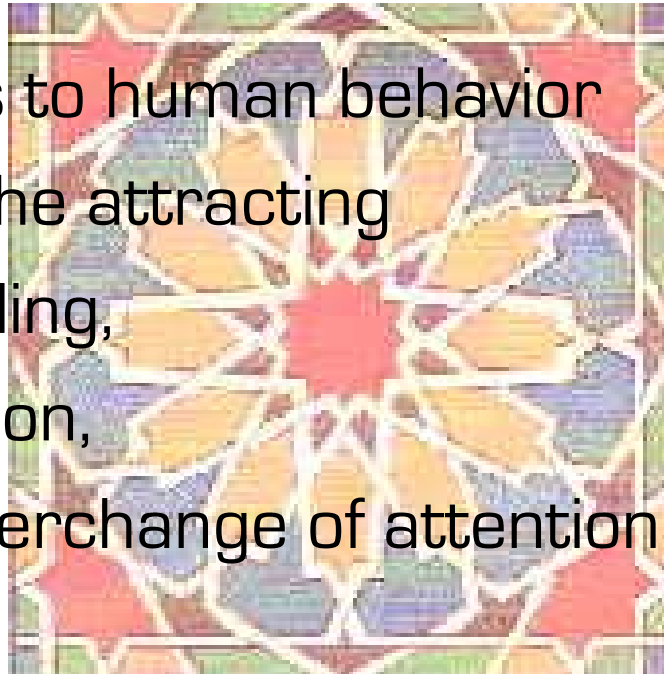
“This is really all there is to contemplative mysticism – to be aware without judgment or comment of what is actually happening at this moment, both outside ourselves and within, listening even to our involuntary thoughts as if they were no more than the sound of rain. This is possible only when it is clear that there is nothing else to do, and no way on or back.”

Alan Watts, Behold the Spirit, p. xxiii.

# 'The attention-factor'

one of the keys to human behavior

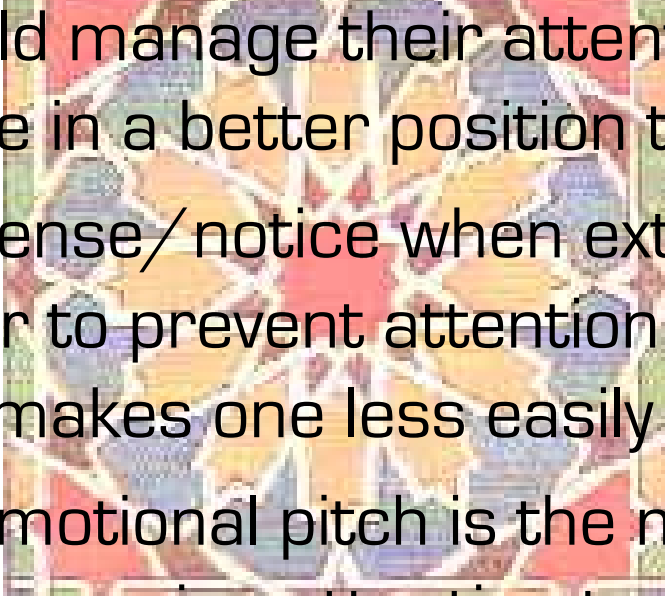
- study the attracting
- extending,
- reception,
- and interchange of attention



# Certain principles about attention

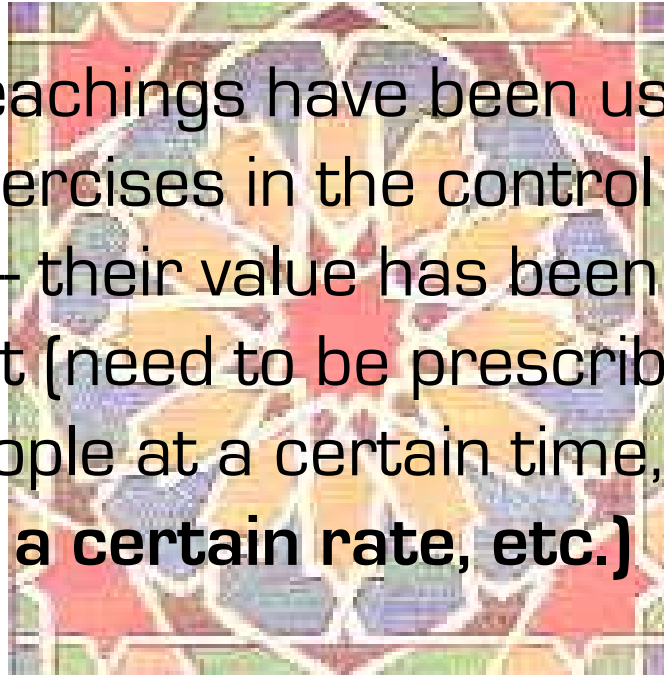
- too much attention can be bad
- too little attention can be bad
- attention may be 'hostile' or 'friendly' and still fulfill the appetite for attention
- when people need a great deal of attention they are vulnerable to the message which too often accompanies the attention coming toward them

# More principles

- 
- if people could manage their attention-hunger they would be in a better position to learn
  - learning to sense/notice when extension is extended – or to prevent attention from being called-forth, makes one less easily influenced
  - raising the emotional pitch is the most primitive method of increasing attention toward the instrument which increased the attention

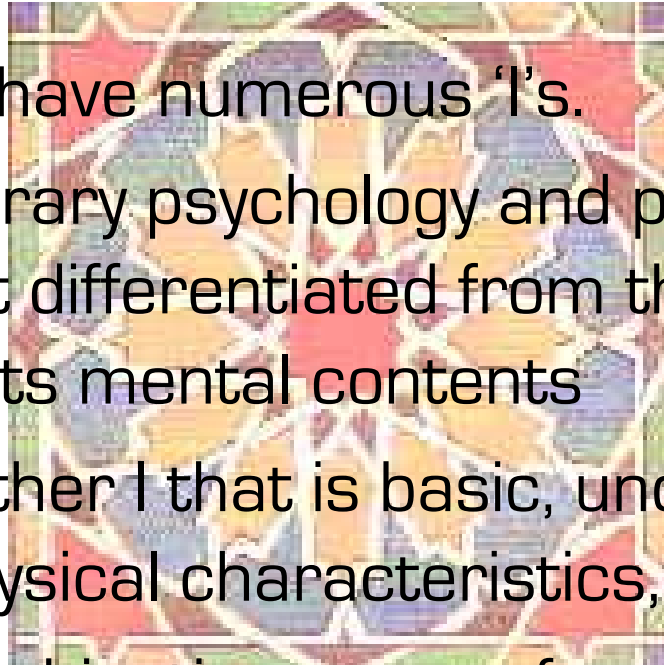
# Traditional teaching about attention

- traditional teachings have been used to prescribe exercises in the control and focusing of attention – their value has been in great measure lost (need to be prescribed for individual people at a certain time, to be practiced **at a certain rate, etc.**)



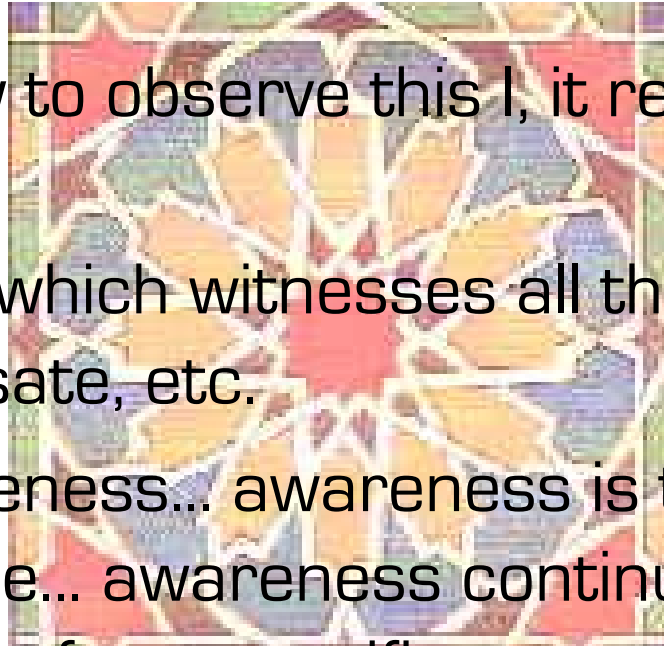
# Awareness

- we seem to have numerous 'I's.
- In contemporary psychology and philosophy, the I usually is not differentiated from the physical person and its mental contents
- there is another I that is basic, underlies desires, activities, physical characteristics, self-image
- this I is the subjective sense of our existence



# Awareness

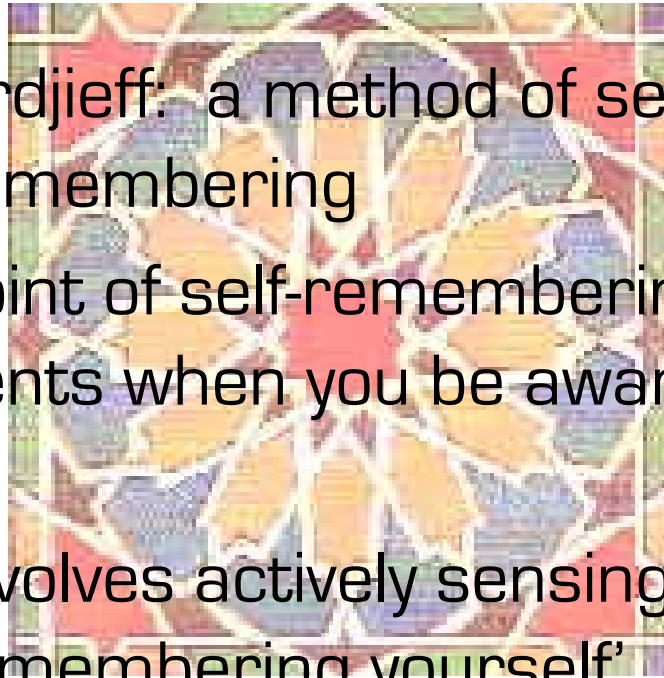
- when you try to observe this I, it remains out of sight
- this I is that which witnesses all the content: mental, sensate, etc.
- This is awareness... awareness is the ground of all experience... awareness continues independent of any specific mental content





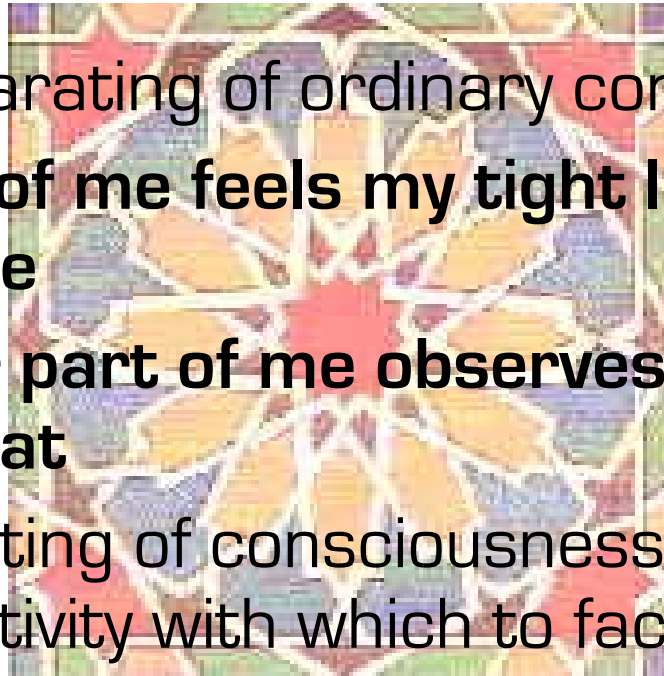
# Self-Remembering

- Georges Gurdjieff: a method of self-awareness called self-remembering
- the whole point of self-remembering is to create some moments when you be aware that you are aware
- technique involves actively sensing oneself in a situation, 'remembering yourself'

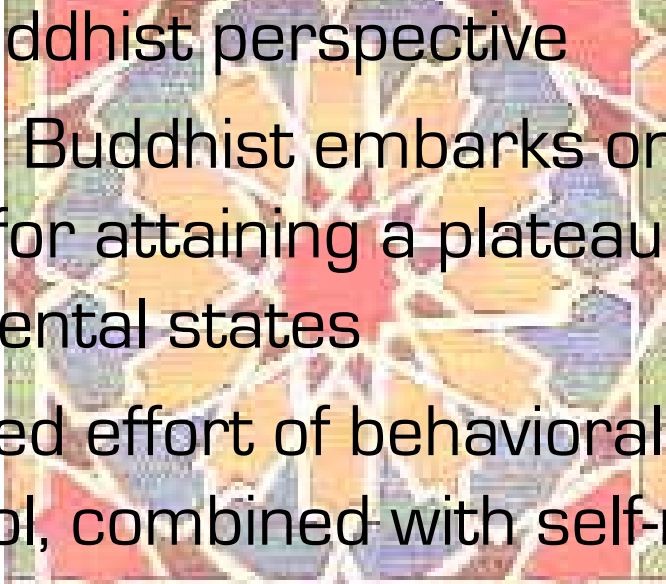


# Self-remembering

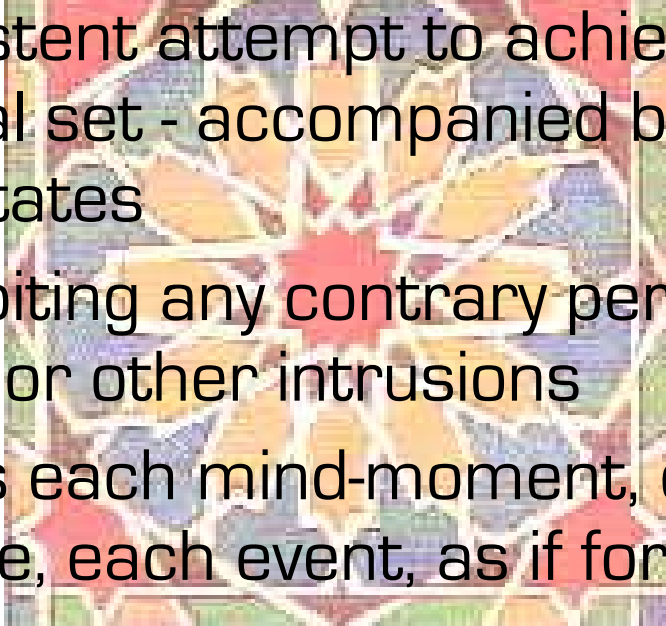
- this is a separating of ordinary consciousness
  - **one part of me feels my tight lower back as I type, while**
  - **the other part of me observes that I am feeling that**
- such separating of consciousness provides a kind of objectivity with which to face life, helps you keep from being totally absorbed and identified with your present experience, as one is with routine day-to-day life



# Meditation

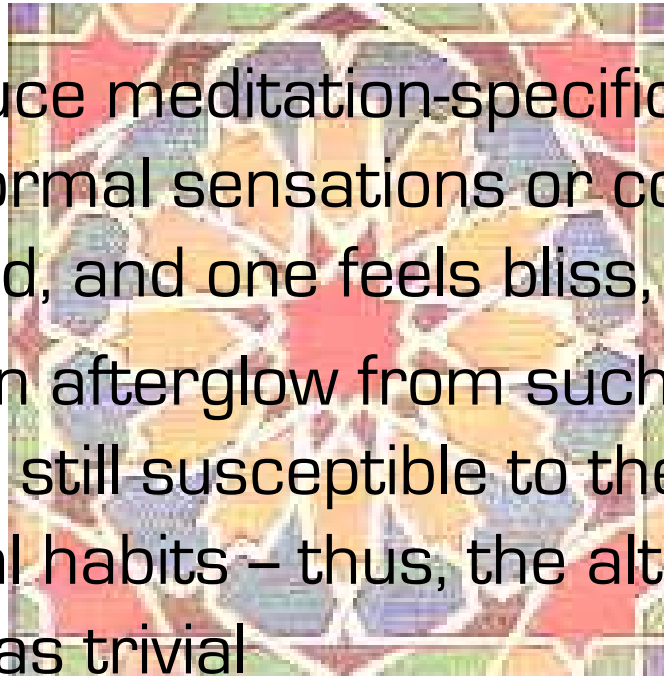
- 
- from a Buddhist perspective
  - practicing Buddhist embarks on a multilevel program for attaining a plateau of purely healthy mental states
  - coordinated effort of behavioral and affective self-control, combined with self-regulation of perceptual and cognitive processes, particularly attention

# Skills in Meditation

- 
- the consistent attempt to achieve a specific attentional set - accompanied by sought-after internal states
  - while inhibiting any contrary perceptions, thoughts, or other intrusions
  - one 'faces each mind-moment, each experience, each event, as if for the first time
  - rather than allowing perception to become habituated or overridden by cognitive coding<sub>12</sub>

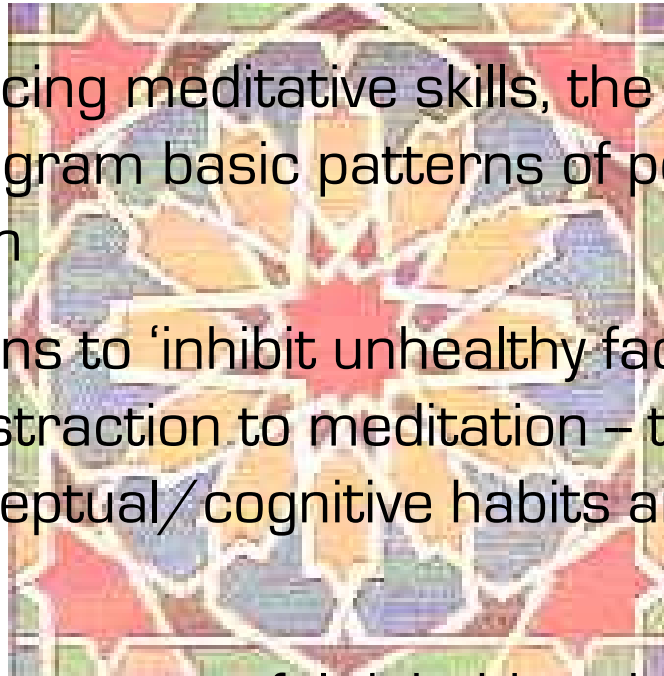
# Results of meditation

- can produce meditation-specific altered states (where normal sensations or cognitive activity is excluded, and one feels bliss, rapture, etc.)
- there is an afterglow from such an experience, but one is still susceptible to the patterns of old mental habits – thus, the altered states are seen as trivial



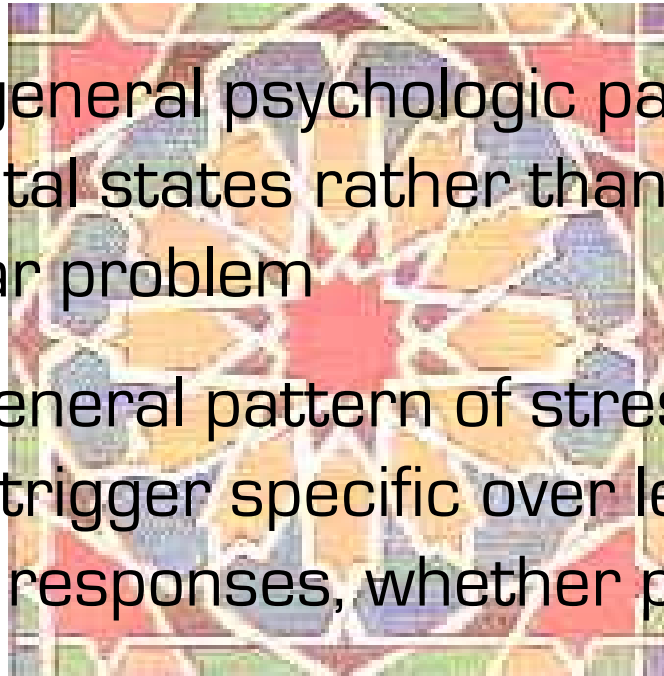
# Results of meditation 2

- in practicing meditative skills, the meditator seems to reprogram basic patterns of perception and cognition
- one learns to 'inhibit unhealthy factors,' all of which are a distraction to meditation – thus one unlearns old perceptual/cognitive habits and acquires new ones
- there is a purposeful dehabituation of stereotyped patterns of perception and cognition



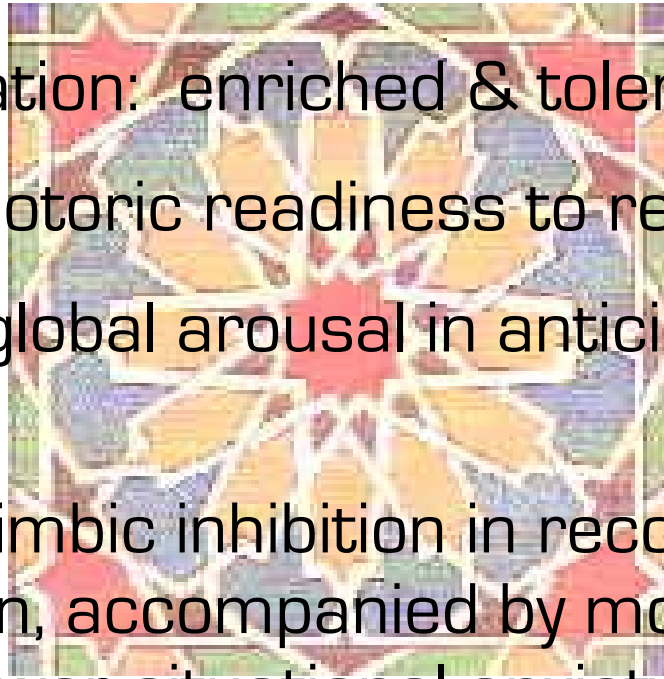
# Clinical utility of meditation...

- provides a general psychologic pattern of positive mental states rather than a response to any particular problem
- provides a general pattern of stress-responsivity less likely to trigger specific over learned maladaptive responses, whether psychologic or somatic



# More clinical utility

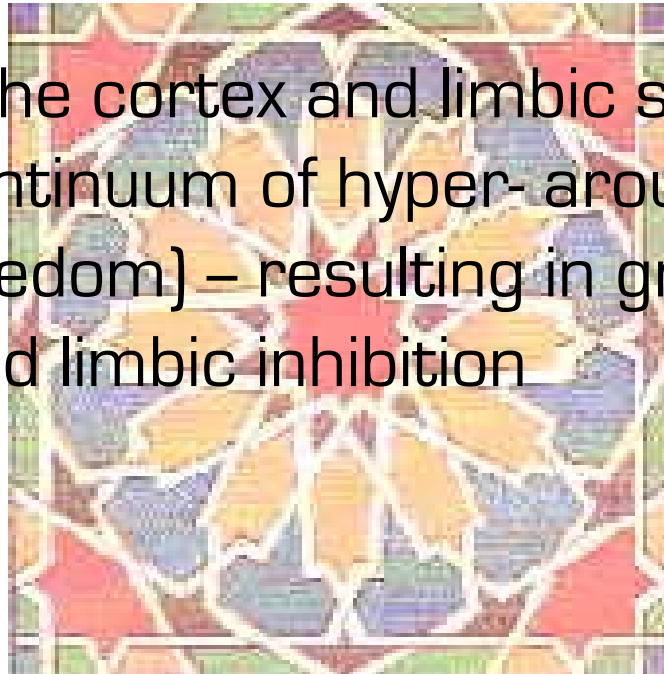
- Free association: enriched & tolerated
- increased motoric readiness to respond
- heightened global arousal in anticipation to a stressor
- more rapid limbic inhibition in recovering from confrontation, accompanied by more positive affect and lower situational anxiety throughout the situation





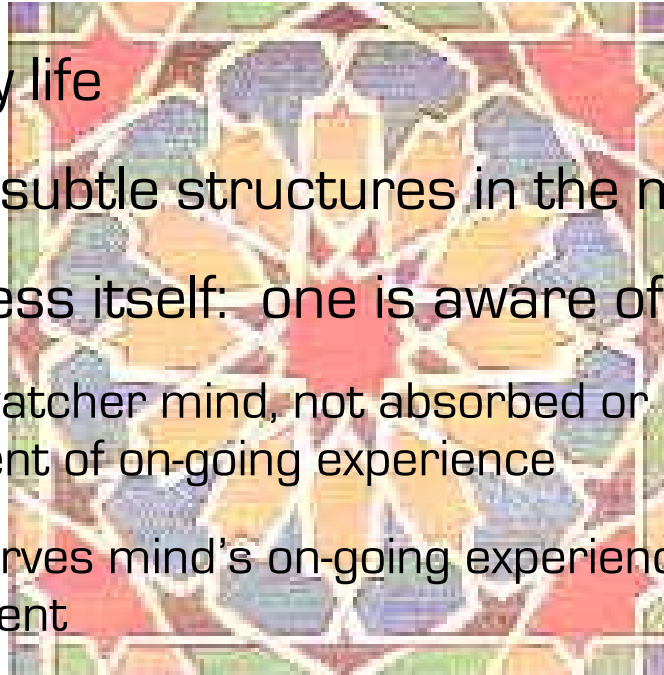
# Speculation

- may de-link the cortex and limbic systems, which vary on a continuum of hyper-arousal to hypo-arousal (boredom) – resulting in greater cortical alertness and limbic inhibition

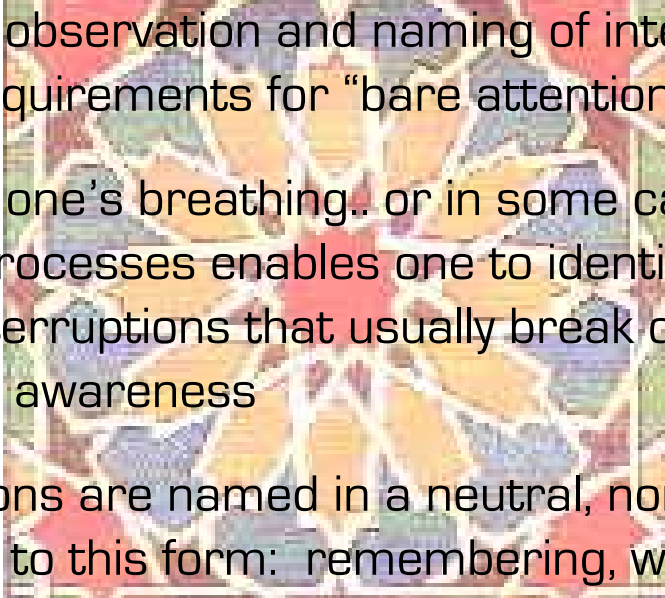


# Mindfulness means awareness applied to:

- everyday life
- deeper, subtle structures in the mind
- awareness itself: one is aware of being aware
  - the watcher mind, not absorbed or identified with the content of on-going experience
  - observes mind's on-going experience in this present moment
- the processes of the mind (thinking, fantasizing, perceiving, feeling, fantasizing)

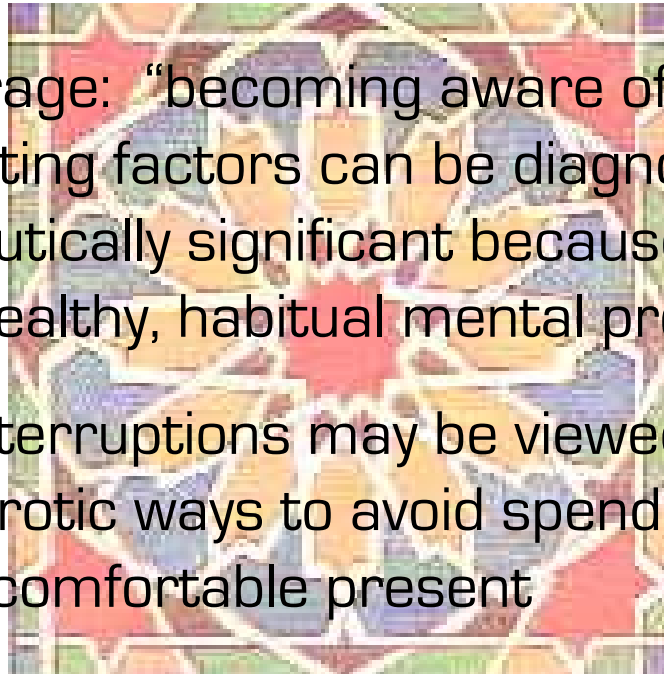


# Mindfulness techniques

- 
- breathing observation and naming of interruptions: these are the requirements for “bare attention”
  - observing one’s breathing.. or in some cases some other physical processes enables one to identify the constant mental interruptions that usually break concentration without conscious awareness
  - interruptions are named in a neutral, non-judging fashion according to this form: remembering, worrying, hearing, imagining, fantasizing, [I add: expecting] (the individual tends to use one more than the rest)

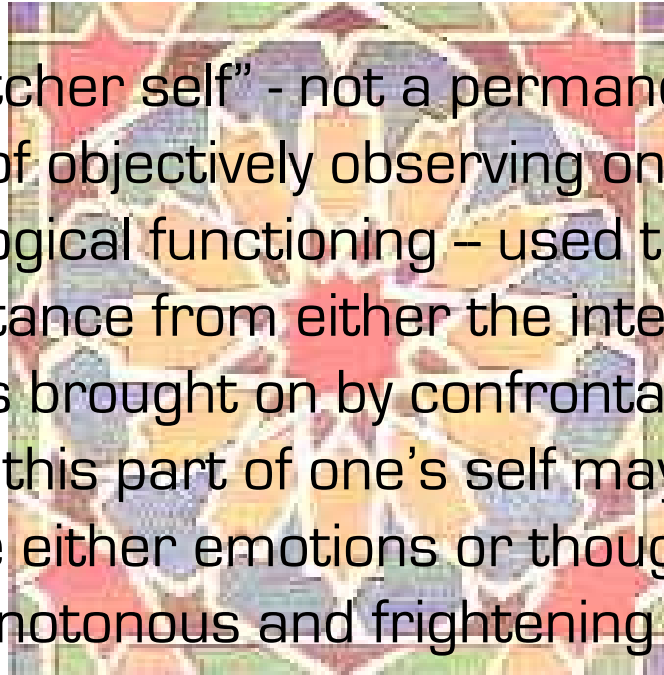
# Disrupting mindfulness

- Deatherage: “becoming aware of one’s primary interrupting factors can be diagnostically and therapeutically significant because one can clearly see unhealthy, habitual mental processes”
- these interruptions may be viewed as successful and neurotic ways to avoid spending energy in the not too comfortable present



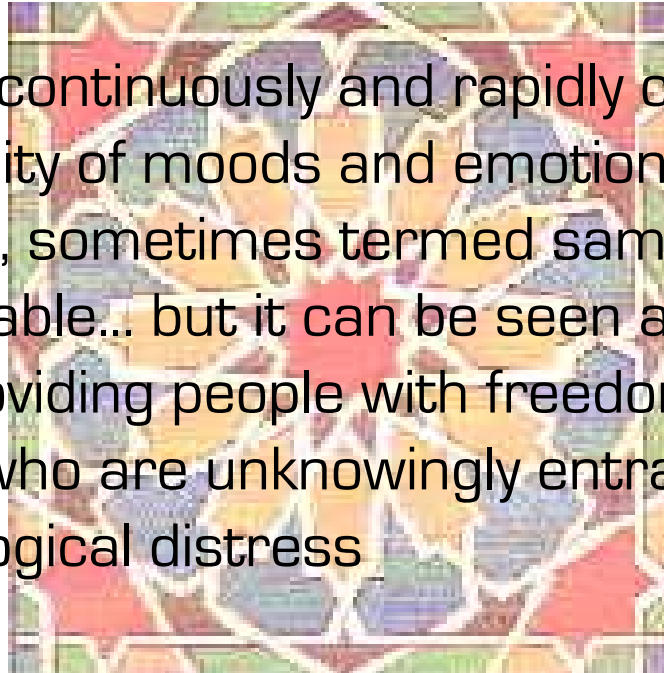
# Mindfulness technique: the watcher

- “the watcher self” - not a permanent fixture but a means of objectively observing one’s own psychological functioning – used to help the client gain distance from either the interruption or the neurosis brought on by confrontation with present reality – this part of one’s self may be used to examine either emotions or thoughts that occur with monotonous and frightening regularity



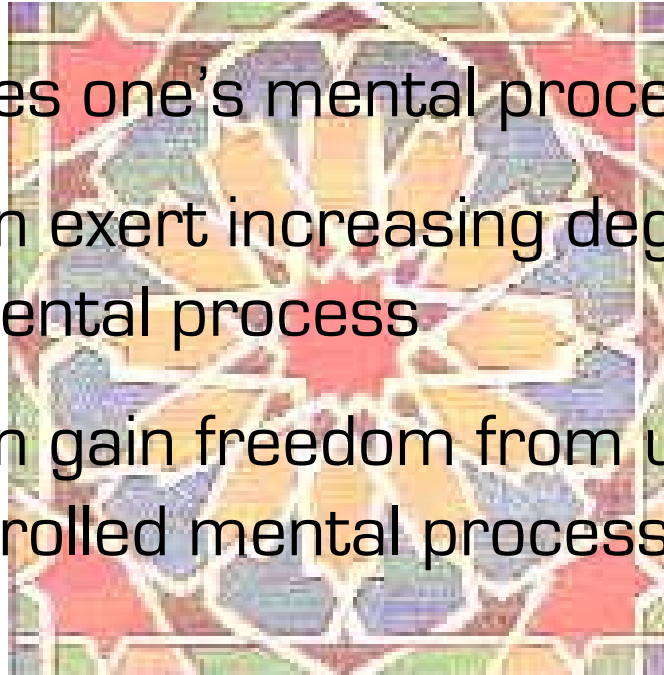
# Samsara

- “people continuously and rapidly cycle through a multiplicity of moods and emotional states – this process, sometimes termed samsara – is inescapable... but it can be seen and accepted, thus providing people with freedom unavailable to others who are unknowingly entrapped in states of psychological distress



# Repeated mindfulness practice: thus

- one sees one's mental processes
- one can exert increasing degrees of control over mental process
- one can gain freedom from unknown and uncontrolled mental processes



- Presentation By:  
Carlton F. “Perk” Clark,MSW, ACSW  
Adjunct Lecturer, University of Arizona  
Course: “Psychology of Spirituality and  
Religion”, September, 2000  
Phone: (520) 519-8475

