

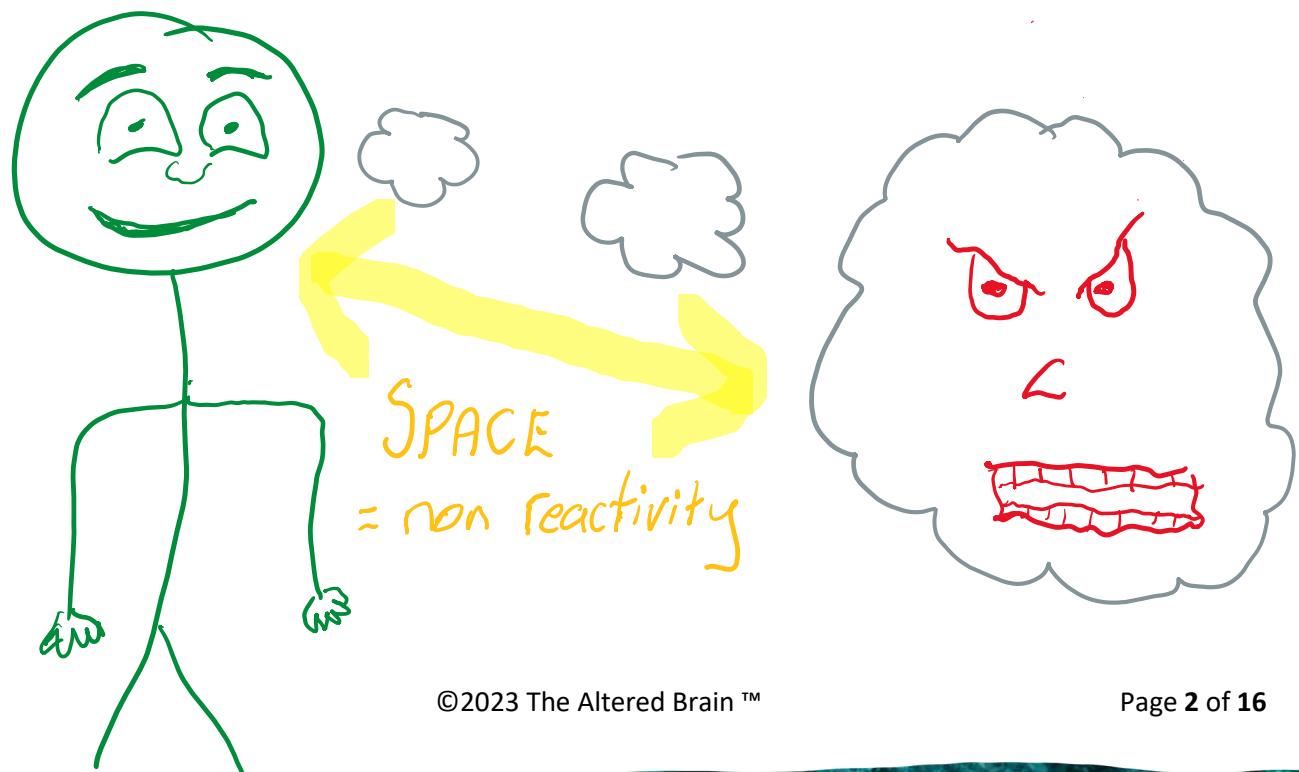
MASTERING MY EMOTIONS

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Since acquiring a brain injury leaving me medically retired at 27, noise awakens an irritation monster inside of me to the state of wanting to punch holes in the wall, yell and scream, and to hurt anyone with my actions or words each and every day. It's why I spend a lot of my time on my own because my brain cannot process much noise and the irritation (monster) is because my brain cannot process much noise and irritation is simply my brain's way of telling me that he is distressed.

Before acquiring a brain injury, I taught eight and nine year old kids, many of whom would be taken over by what seems like an irritation monster, leaving them with zero sense of control over their own brains, as they would lose themselves in irritation and anger, resulting in hurting others and/or themselves. It wasn't until the sound of a mower or birds happily chirping in the trees outside brought out this irritation monster from somewhere inside of me, that I understood what these kids in my classrooms were experiencing.

After integrating numerous mindfulness meditations, several different times into my days, I sit or lie down and become aware of my own breathing. This process creates space between myself and the thoughts I experience and the more I practice, the stronger I become at navigating my own attention. Each day, I experience extreme states of irritation, and for 80% of the time, I am able to detach myself from these impulsive thoughts about how irritated I am, simply because things aren't how I'd like them to be. Observing these thoughts and feelings, acknowledging them, and not reacting to them is how I create space between my own pain and irritation.



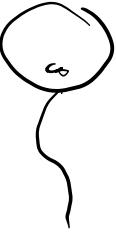
Emotions and feelings are found on spectrums. A spectrum is two opposites and everything in the middle. It's the whole of the experience.

LOSS ←→ LOVE

PLEASANT ←→ UNPLEASANT

CALM ←→ JITTERY

COMPASSION ←→ PAIN



hold empty balloon

Think of this balloon as your mind.



filling balloon with helium

Your brain becomes what you are surrounded by. Think of the helium as what you are experiencing in life - your environments. What you experience becomes processed by the brain, and then your brain compares that experience to every other experience that you've had in the past, flickering through the amazing memory bank to make sure that nothing is a danger, and all this time, searching for pleasure using the least amount of energy, because that's how clever brains are.



stop filling with helium and tie balloon

There gets a point where the mind has had enough of an experience and is ready to move onto the next task. By tying the balloon, we are capturing what we just experienced and storing it within our very impressive memory system.



tie string to balloon

The string represents attachment.

I have experienced life, the helium.

I have moved on to a new experience, the balloon being tied.

And now I am choosing to hold onto it, even though what happened is no longer happening.



let go of balloon string

Oh my goodness, I didn't realise how straining that was to hold onto until I let it go.

I was on the bus recently and it was packed full of people. There seemed to be a beautiful mixture of all types of people, as one finds on public transport. As the bus stopped, a fit, strong looking, young guy paid for his ticket. I could hear his voice rippled with anxiety as he spoke: "how long does it take to get to the shopping centre?" "When was the last time you checked your tyres?" "Do you know if it is forecasted to rain today?" The bus driver graciously answered his questions and encouraged him to take a seat.

Argh! Thump. A passenger to the side of me thumped the back of the chair in front of her. She stormed up to the bus driver and demanded that the people who were sitting behind her be kicked off the bus, because their conversation was intruding on her own world, and she found it hard to manage her own thoughts. The bus driver acknowledged the lady's request, told her to take a spare seat away from the others and she stormed off and sat down, slightly annoyed yet less aggravated than 30 seconds ago.

G'day mate! A middle-aged man greeted the bus driver as he stepped onboard. After some small talk, the bus driver encouraged him to take a seat. As he walked past the anxious man and the agitated woman, he gave them both a large smile, tilted his hat, and asked; "how ya going?" Their rude responses did not even bother the man. I saw many smiles appear on different faces from the 8 seconds it took for him to walk down the aisle and take a seat. Incredible I thought to myself.

After a while, I heard sobbing coming from a person sitting 4 chairs in front of me. The young lady, who would have been in her teens, walked up to the bus driver and poured out her heart to him. He listened. He acknowledged her pain. He encouraged her to return to her seat. And she did.

As I looked around the bus, I saw a beautiful mixture of human emotion, fear; tragedy; happiness; laughter; anxiety; despair; frustration; and anger. I noticed that sitting behind the driver were two people who, when you were near them you felt warm and accepted. It's a strange, yet beautiful feeling to encounter. I was curious and so I asked them; "excuse me, I have noticed that you both have a very peaceful presence. The lady sitting closer to the aisle, closest to me told me that she has experienced many tragedies in her life. "I have learnt that I am completely responsible for my own emotions, just like how everyone is responsible for their own emotions. I do not let other people's emotions interfere with my own inner peace which I work hard each day to maintain a peaceful equilibrium within my own mind and body."

The man next to her went on to say, "pain and suffering are all a part of this beautiful experience that we call life. It's what makes us appreciate the things that we have and grieve those things when they are gone. Yesterday is history, and tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift, that's why it's called the present.

A few weeks later, I asked that same bus driver from that day about the different behaviours that I noticed. He was calm and pleasant. He told me that he had been doing this job for a long time and that he doesn't view people individually, but as different emotions. He told me that all states of emotion simply need to be acknowledged. When passengers come up to complain to him, he understands that they need to get this off their chest to someone. "I don't take it personally." He said to me.

I told him what a blessing he is to this world, gave him a smile, and stepped off at my stop.

I have observed how **water** takes shape of anything that comes its way.

I'm trying to be more like **water**, going with what is.

Being the observer of my emotions,
I can create space between myself
and the emotions that ongoingly
move and flow with the ebbs and
flows of life.

Being tenacious is to continue
moving forward, even when it
feels like you cannot.

You can.

Today, I am thankful....
To be alive.
To be how I am.
To be where I am.
To be who I am.
That I can see.
That I can feel.
That I can hear.
That I can move.
That I can read.
That I can communicate.

Staying curious.

How does one deal with the loss of oneself?
It's not a common thing, kinda like finding spare chocolate on the shelf.
It's what we come to know as familiar,
Until it suddenly changes from familiar to unfamiliar.
It's every sound that you hear,
Even if it's not very clear.
It's everything that you see,
Just like in those vivid dreams in which you flee.
It's how you taste the delights of this beautiful world,
It's how you feel that you've been swirled.
It's how you can tell what the temperature is,
It's how you work out an answer to a quiz.
It's how you feel a breeze on your skin,
It's how you move each limb.
It's how you feel when your mum says your name,
It's how you play any and every game.
For our brains are incredibly complex things.
And the choices you make determine whether you live like queens and kings.
When this is shattered by a life changing event,
It is quite the rapid descent.
You are still yourself, yet you're not.
When you scrape the bottom of the burnt pot.
Inside the pot is unlimited potential - the thing we call life,
Where you can find a beautiful wife.
Or a husband or whatever floats your boat, it really doesn't matter,
Because there is no other that can fix the shatter.
The shatter of one's world in which everything they know and believe,
Is turned upside down as you begin to grieve.
What waking up and questioning why you should leave the bed,
As one can go weeks without being fed.
Things you once loved no longer serve you.
And it's ok to do what you must do,
For no one can know what it's really like,
To feel like you've been impaled on a spike.
Because human brains relate with others simply through what they have encountered.
For if one is unaware of that feeling of being surrounded,
One will have no idea,
Unless you catch up for a beer.
It's a scary place to find yourself.
Not knowing your own self.
Try your best to get through each day,
In your own preferred way.
Gratitude is the way out of what feels so constricting and tight.
It's so easy, and results in a feeling of being very light.
To realise that you are enough even when things are hard,
And that right there is the winning trump card.
For gratitude is where one can appreciate the little things wherever they are,
All you need to do is look up to realise you are a star.

Emotional Intelligence

Daniel Goleman received his Ph.D. from Harvard University and reported on the brain and behavioural sciences for twelve years for the *New York Times*, where he was twice nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. He was awarded the American Psychological Association for the Advancement of Science. He has written twelve books and below are some key points that I learnt from reading his book: *Emotional Intelligence*. (3)

- Our worries become self-fulfilling prophecies, propelling us towards the very disaster they predict.
- Good moods enhance the ability to think flexibly and with more complexity.
- **Laughing helps creativity.**
- Hope makes life's misery bearable.
- "hope is believing you have both the will and the way to accomplish your goals."

- C.R. Snyder

- Hopeful people typically:
 - Can motivate themselves.
 - Use resources to find ways to accomplish their objectives.
 - Are optimistic.
 - **Flexible enough to find different ways to get to their goals or to switch goals if one becomes impossible.**
 - **Break down tasks into smaller, more doable parts.**
- **Mode of the rational mind = words**
- **Mode of the emotional mind = nonverbal**
- A child's empathy (understanding how other people feel) can be influenced by how their parents discipline them. "look how sad you made her" vs "you're naughty."
- Optimistic people don't give in to overwhelming anxiety or have a defeatist attitude or depressive approach towards difficult challenges or setbacks.
- Optimism, like hope means that having a strong expectation that, in general, things will turn out all right in life, despite setbacks and frustrations.
- **"It is the combination of reasonable talent and the ability to keep going in the face of defeat that leads to success."**

- Martin Seligman.

Master aptitude naturally of channelling emotions:

- Controlling impulse and putting off gratification, regulating our moods so they facilitate rather than impede thinking, motivate ourselves to persist and try, try again in the face of setbacks or finding ways to enter flow and perform more effectively. Is all the evidence of the power of emotion to guide effective effort.

Mind & Medicine:

- The immune system is the body's brain.
- Central nervous system is an extension of the brain.
- The nervous system is essential for the immune system to work.

Trauma and Emotional Learning:

"Say someone is being attacked with a knife knows how to defend himself and takes action, while another person in the same predicament thinks 'I'm dead.' the helpless person is the one more susceptible to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) afterwards. It's the feeling that your life is in danger and there's nothing you can do to escape it - that's the moment the brain changes."

- Dr. John Krystal.

Helplessness is the wild card in PTSD.

What is a goal that benefits my emotional life?

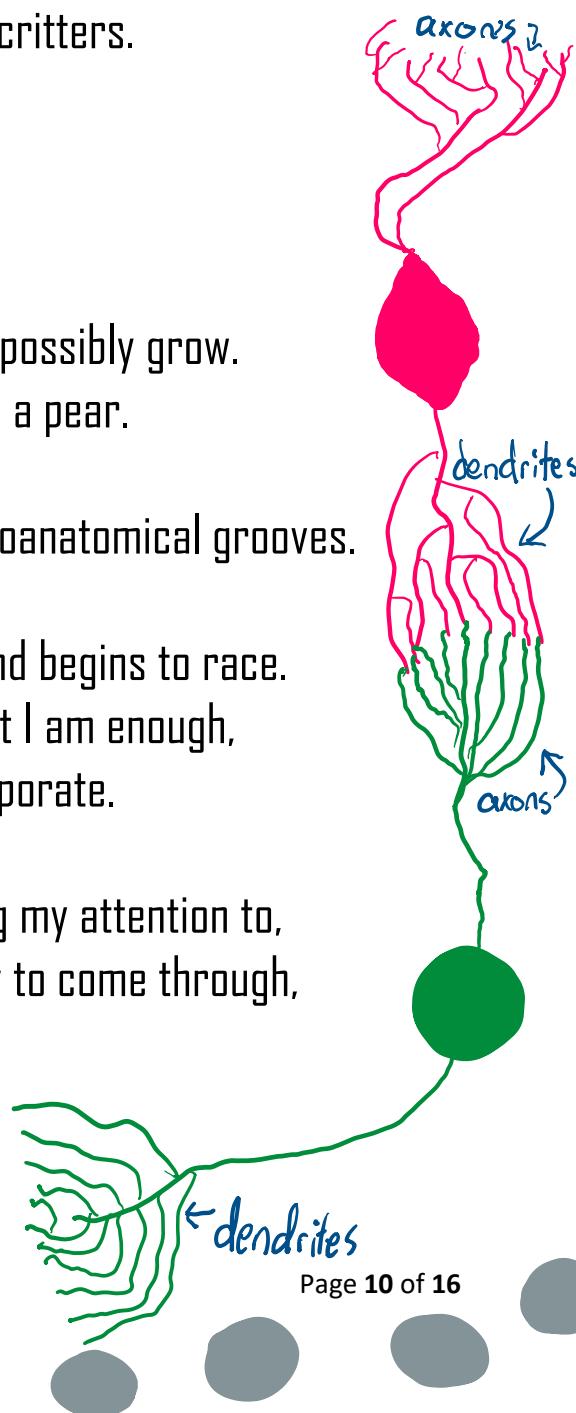
What is my motivation to achieve this goal?

What is my action plan to achieve this goal?

How can I measure my progress?

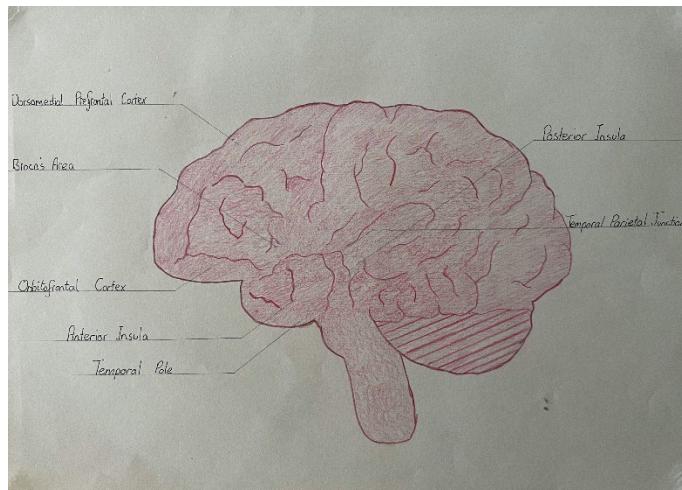
When will I achieve this goal?

Rejection is all a part of this thing we call life.
You will encounter it on your journey towards meeting your wife,
Or your husband, or really just anyone else.
A great way to wrap one's head around it is to grab your feels.
And use them to write about just what is really going on,
Of course there are other ways to distract yourself like mowing the lawn,
You could order anything you like to arrive at your door,
There's always watching a screen, with plenty of choices, plus more.
For you see how emotions work is simple cause and effect,
They start chemically as neurotransmitters in the largest of whales to an insect,
It's why I get the shivers from the scariest of looking critters.
It's why I drool at the idea of sweet potato fritters.
Feeling this in your body is called interoception,
Think of it as extra sensory perception.
Start off by taking a deep breath of fresh air,
The slower and deeper you go the more hair you may possibly grow.
Feel how your stomach pokes out, making you feel like a pear.
When your skin stretches and moves,
Dendrites and axons are connecting, resulting in neuroanatomical grooves.
The more aware I become of my own body in space,
The easier it is to identify the emotions before the mind begins to race.
Once the inner voice starts to question whether or not I am enough,
Saying it allows the emotional distress to start to evaporate.
And this is where I have the opportunity to recreate.
I'm careful with what thoughts I choose to keep paying my attention to,
The more I am thankful for, the more I grow my ability to come through,
All the obstacles that fall in my way,
Can be used as stepping stones,
Hip hip hooray!

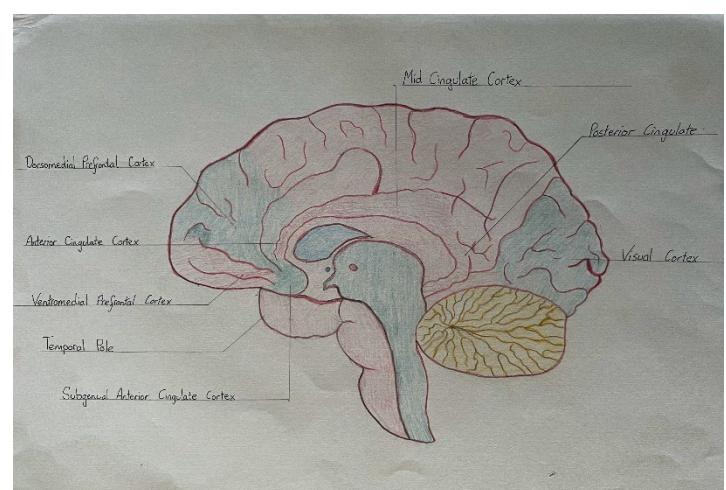


We have a body budgeting system which is a set of brain regions that send predictions to the body to control its internal environment: speed up the heart, slow down breathing, release more cortisol, metabolise more glucose, and so on. When our bodies are moving internally or externally, the body budgeting system is at work sending blood rushing through your veins and arteries. Filling and then emptying our lungs. Our stomachs continually digest food – all of which produces the spectrum of basic feeling from pleasant to unpleasant. (2)

Sitting with, feeling, and acknowledging feelings of pain and discomfort continually has given me such a strong sense of being ok with discomfort. I no longer reach out for external distractions like I once did without second guessing it. I still indulge in the pleasures of this world, but in a very different way. A way where I am aware that this external person, place, or thing will give me a sense of pleasure, but only for a brief amount of time before the original discomfort returns, because I cannot ignore my feelings. I listen to them, as they tell me everything I need to be aware of.



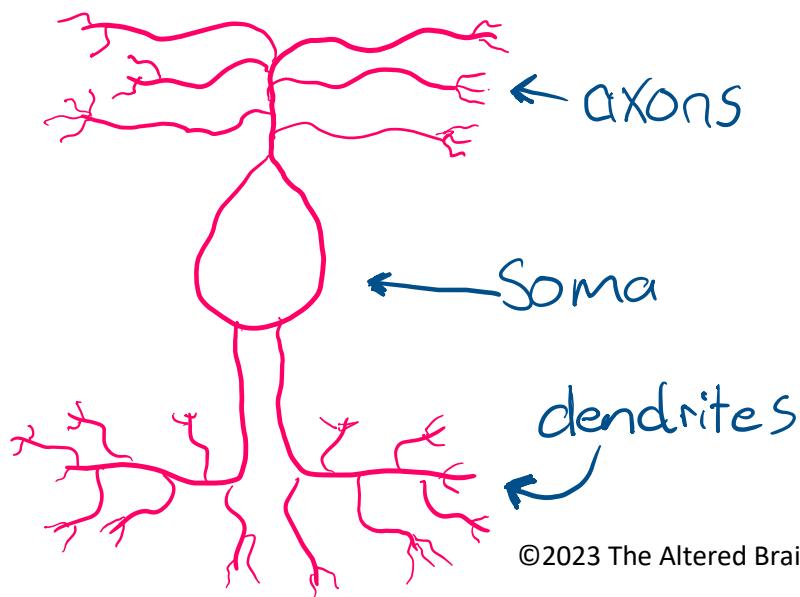
Drawn from *How Emotions Are Made*, p. 68.



Drawn from *How Emotions Are Made*, p. 68.

These two images show the interoceptive and body budgeting networks of brain activity, whose job it is to predict a motor change, like a speeding heart. They also predict what happens in the body after something changes, like a speeding heart, anything to do with the lungs, kidneys, skin, muscle, blood vessels, and other organs and tissues as they continue doing what they do. (2)

These neural networks are connected by neurons. There are billions of these little things and each one has what looks like a root system of a plant extending out of the top, or superior of its soma – which is its body, so to speak. These branches of connecting fibres are called axons. On the inferior side of the soma, another branch of what looks like a large tree's roots shoot out. These roots are called dendrites. Each neuron has the ability to connect to 10,000 other neurons. With all of this ability to connect with others, the little neurons can pass messages onto each other. Within the interoceptive network, the neurons compare the simulation to the incoming sensory input, computing any relevant prediction error, completing the loop, and ultimately creating interoceptive sensations.



Sensations

I am going through an adjustment period with some pretty intense sensations. There are times when every centimetre of my head is taken over by painful sensations and other times when it feels like someone has cracked every bone in my face with a hammer, repeatedly. All because I use my eyes to see the beauty in all of this world. I feel like I have a cup that fills up slowly over time and that cup holds the amount of pain that my body can handle. There comes a point when I become dissociated from my body, as living with a brain that works like mine takes so much out of me.

It's relentless.



It's ongoing.

The only thing that reduces the unforgiving sensations is slipping an eye pack over my eyes to meet my most favourite thing in this world - darkness.

LB is a name I've given my brain and dissociation is LB's way of protecting me. When I reach this point every few weeks or months, I am completely exhausted and have nothing left as far as energy and motivation. It's similar to when a tsunami wave rolls in and destroys many things in its path; it's possible to survive if you are prepared, but man, it leaves a mess and requires much time and effort to restore to a state that resembles familiarity.

It is all completely brought on by me and the choices I make, which shows me the strength and power of my own default mode network; which are five areas of the brain that create the internal dialogue in my mind. It justifies so many valid reasons as to why I should use my eyes to see different things, even though the more I see, the more pain and fatigue I experience. It's gifted me the ability to find peace in darkness and silence.



Thoughts

The default mode network is an area in our brain around the midline areas of our brain that, when activated, involve a common resting state of brain function that is present when an individual is given no task to perform. The DMN is involved in a range of functions from "mind wandering" to autobiographical reflections and creating maps of the individual's mind for insight and of other people's minds for empathy. Dan Siegel's *The Developing Mind* (4):

The default mode network's function:

1. control and suppress the activity of limbic structures that in turn receive information from subcortical centres mediating drives and motivations.
2. control and modulate information coming from the external world. (4)

What can be seen in people who develop Alzheimer's disease is atrophy to the default mode network, resulting in the person losing their sense of self. (2)

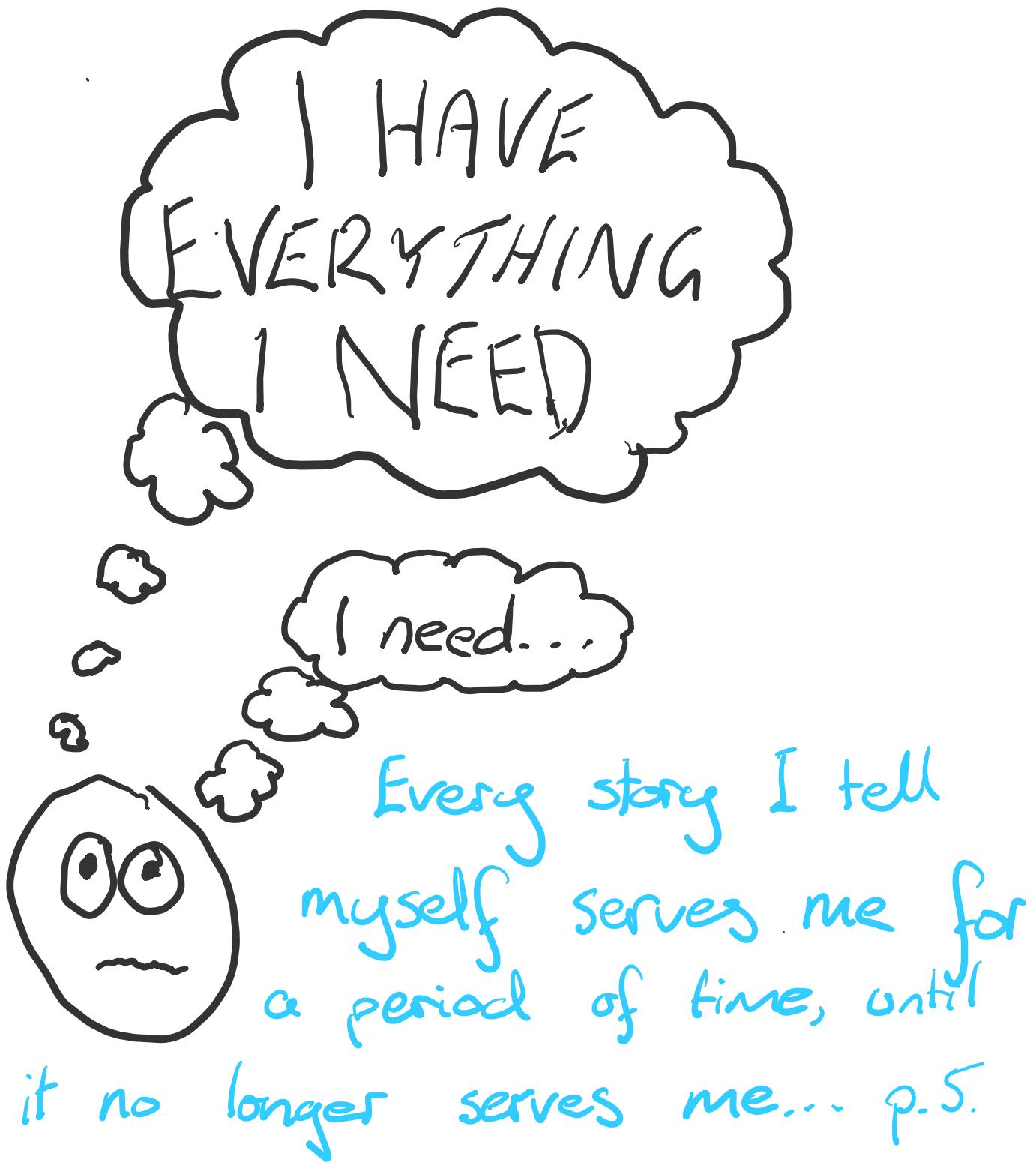
Thoughts in my control

- observe curiously.
- question frequently.
- write them down.
- invest a little time and energy organising thought, and the money will follow.

Thoughts not in my control

- observe curiously.
- question regularly.
- plan for the worst case scenario, hope for the best case scenario.
- share with others. You'll be pleasantly surprised by how many others share similar thoughts.

THE STORY I TELL MYSELF



I have a little video for you to watch,
Sit back and relax, maybe grab a
butterscotch.

This video isn't just going to appear like
any video for your ease,

This video requires your prefrontal
cortex - your powerhouse to preventing
disease.

Open Instagram, which can be done in
many places from the comfort of a chair
to a train.

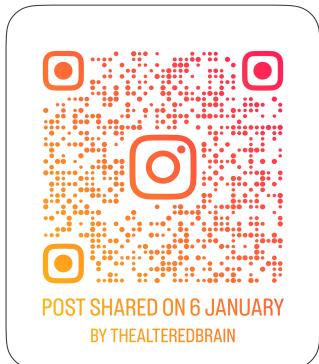
And search for "The Altered Brain."

Then scroll down past eight rows of
different reels,

To arrive at some palm trees - best not
to watch while driving automobiles.

Alternatively, use your camera to scan
the code,

Or just eat cake until you implode.



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