Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Session Four: Staying Present and Emotional Reactivity in Health and Illness

Summary of Session 4: Staying Present and Emotional Reactivity in Health and Illness

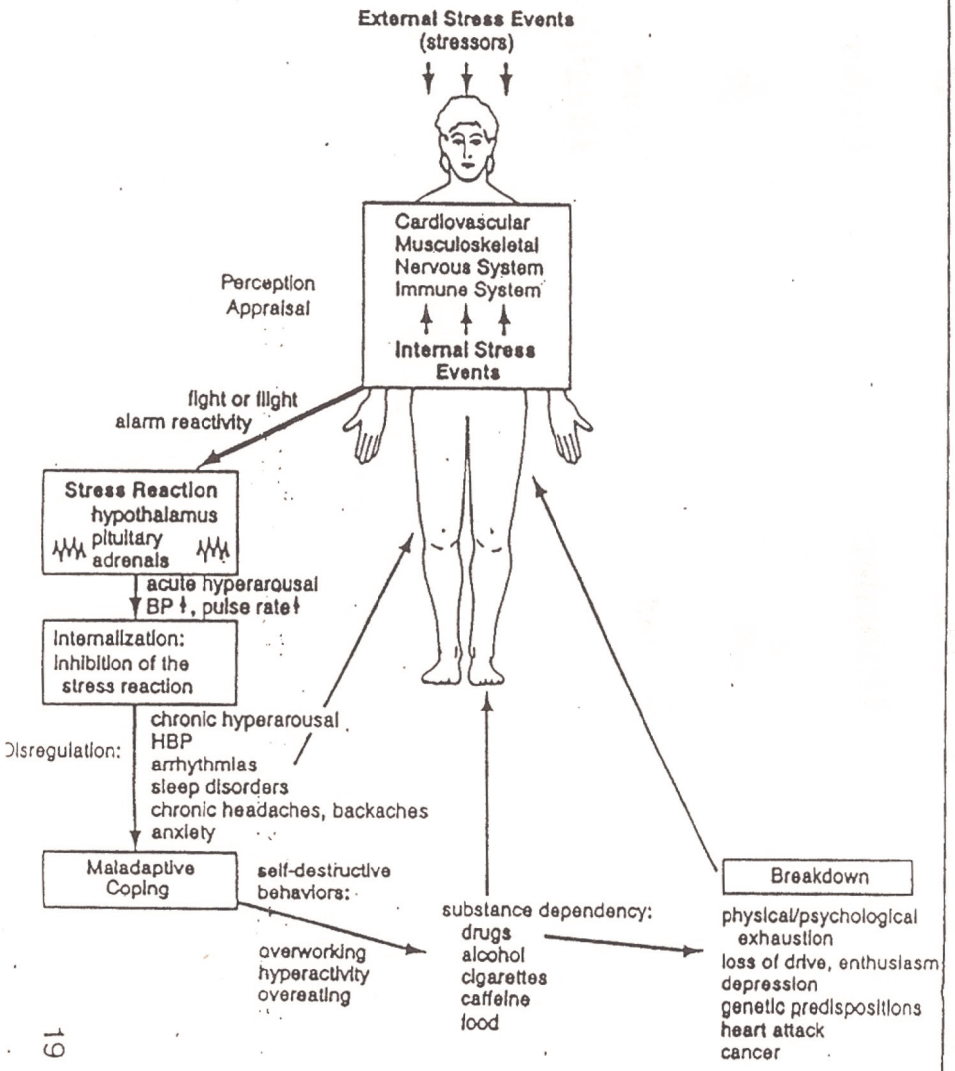
Sometimes we feel stuck in our lives, caught in patterns of thoughts and behaviors and we don't see a way out. It is possible to learn to see more clearly using mindfulness and begin to know the shadow side of our situations and ourselves. Typically we move away as quickly as we can from that which we call painful or negative. We will be learning to move in, closer, to see and understand so that we can work with what is already here.

We will be learning to increase our capacity to hold all that is present in our lives. There is a certain allowing or letting be quality that we can cultivate through practice. When we create space to explore, many new possibilities open up where there were none before.

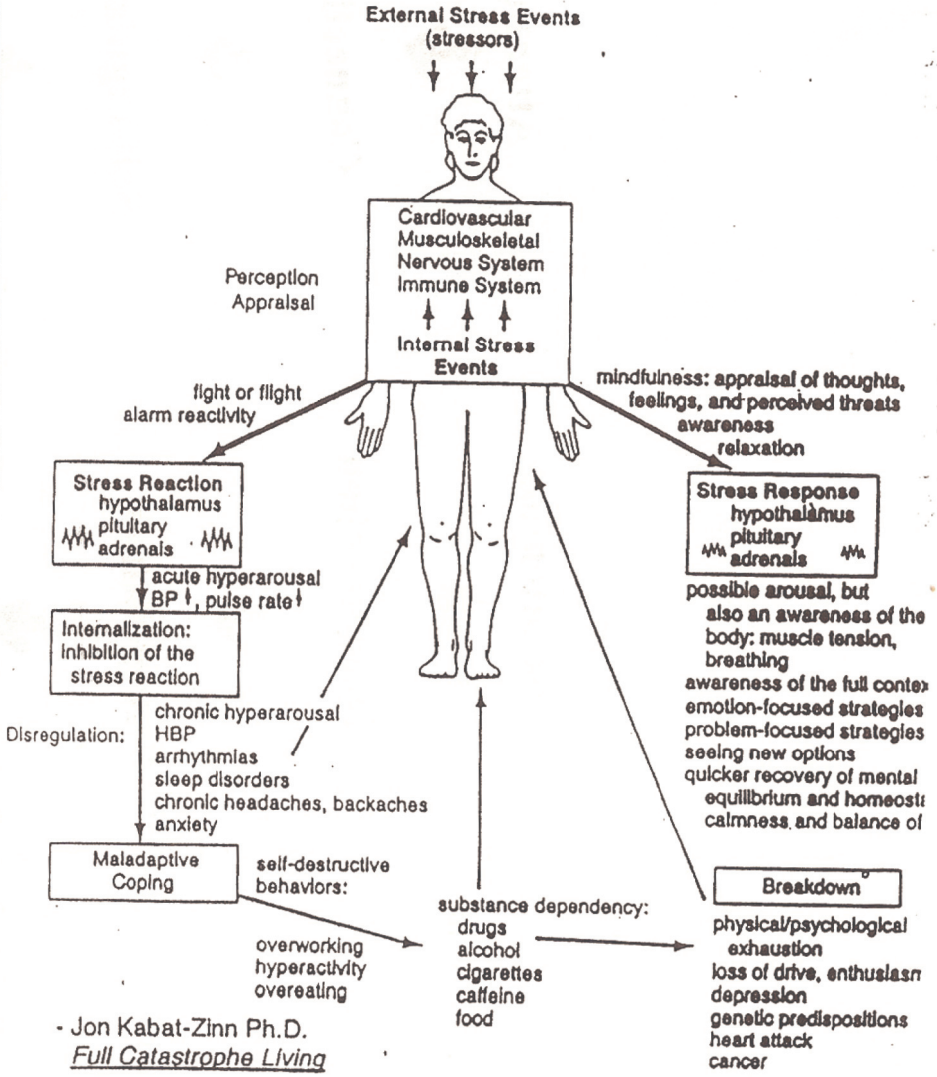
Life can be like a trap, or a fishook. We can fall into that trap or get hooked over and over again and then we suffer. Most often these are reactions of triggers that we can become aware of and choose to respond. There is real freedom in that choosing and a decrease of stress and an increase in joy and happiness.

The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different outcome

THE STRESS-REACTION CYCLE



COPING WITH STRESS: RESPONDING VS. REACTING



- Jon Kabat-Zinn Ph.D.
Full Catastrophe Living

Using the Breathing Space - Extended Instructions

When you are troubled in thoughts or feelings:

1. AWARENESS

Observe **-** Bring the focus of awareness to your inner experience and notice what is happening in your thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations.

Describe, acknowledge, identify **-** Put experiences into words, for example, say in your mind, "A feeling of anger is arising" or "Self-critical thoughts are here."

2. REDIRECTING ATTENTION

Gently *redirect* your full attention to the breath.

Follow the breath all the way in and all the way out.

Try noting "at the back of your mind," "Breathing in... breathing out".

3. EXPANDING ATTENTION

Allow your attention to expand to the whole body - especially to any sense of discomfort, tension, or resistance. If these sensations are there, then take your awareness there by "breathing into them" on the inbreath. Then, breathe out from those sensations, softening and opening with the outbreath. Say to yourself on the outbreath, "It's OK. Whatever it is, it's OK. Let me feel it."

Become aware of and adjust your posture and facial expression.

As best you can, bring this expanded awareness to the next moments of your day.

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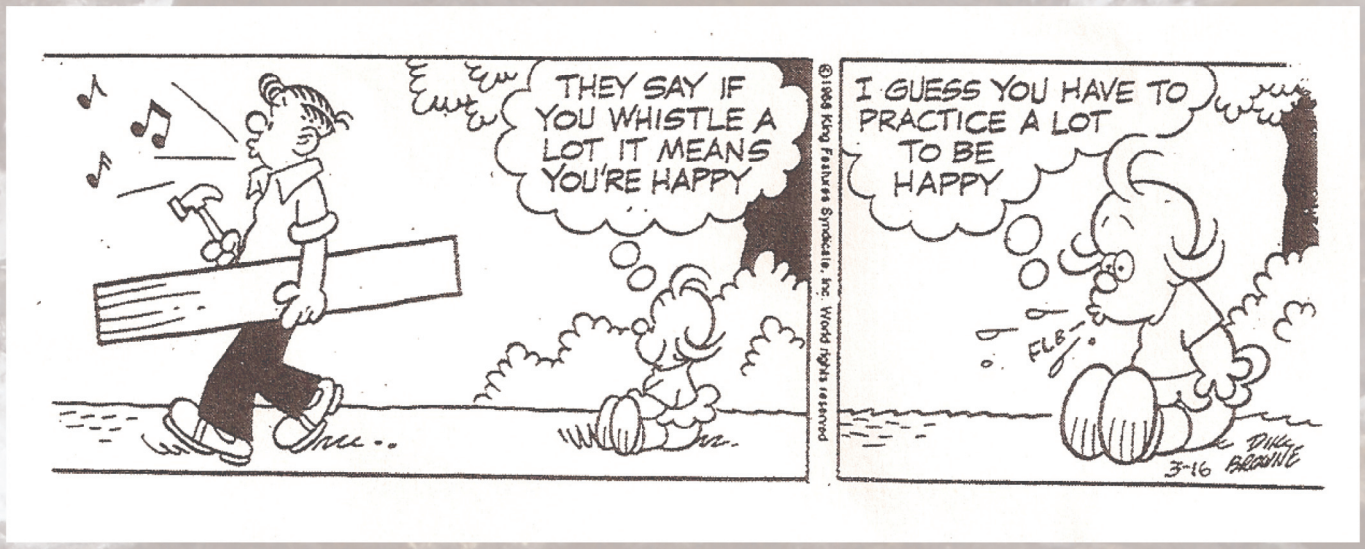
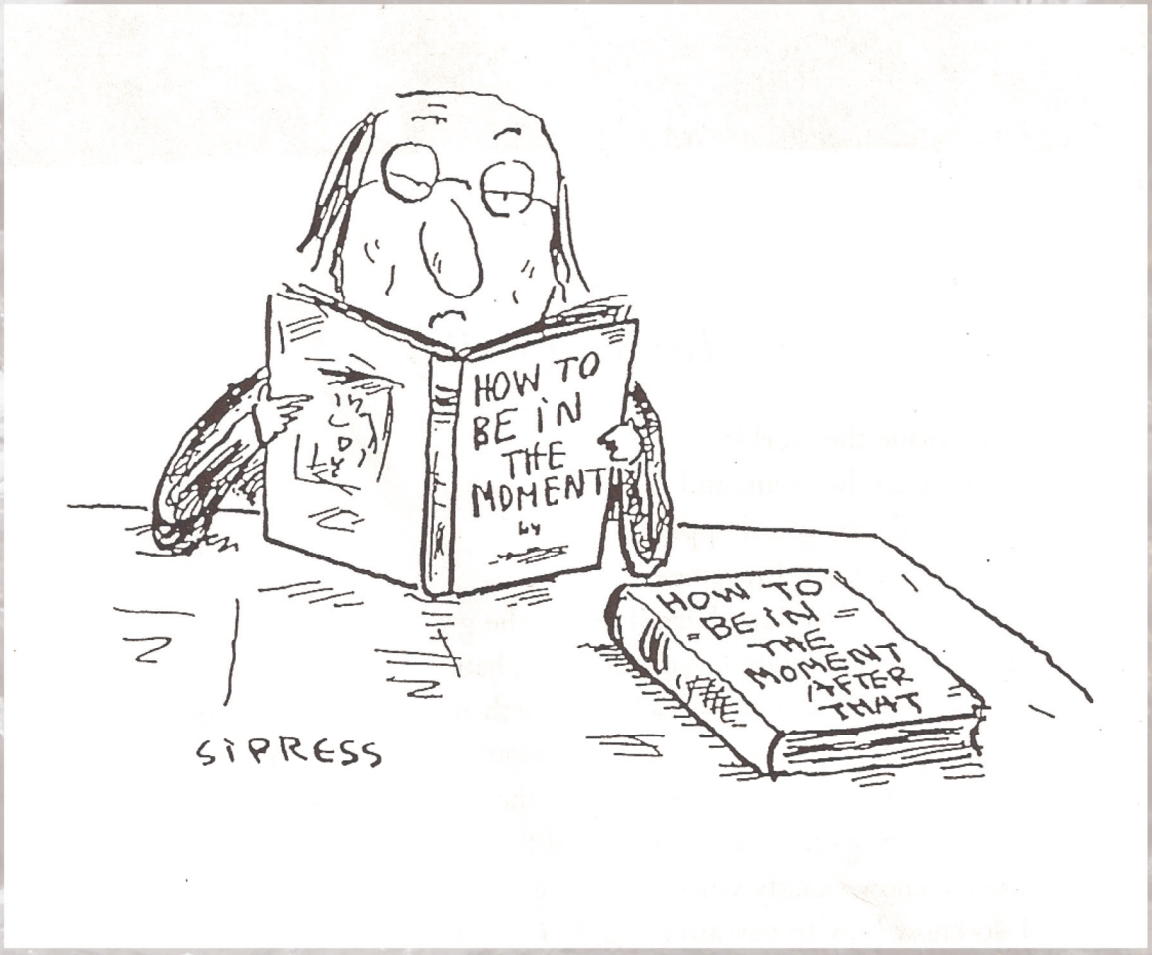


The thought manifests as the word.
The word manifests as the deed.
The deed develops into habit.
And the habit hardens into character.

So watch the thought and its way with care!

-Anthony de Mello



By paying attention calmly, in all situations, we begin to see clearly the truth of life experience. We realize that pain and joy are both inevitable and that they are also both temporary. We remember, more and more often, that struggling causes suffering, and that compassionate, considered responses make life manageable. Sometimes we forget. The long-term goal of practice is to never forget.

Sylvia Boorstein

Break your heart no longer. Each time you judge yourself, you break your heart. You stop feeding on the love that is the wellspring of your vitality. But now the time has come, your time to live, to celebrate and then see the goodness that you are. There is no evil, no wrong in your or in any other. There is only the thought of it, and the thought has no substance.

You are dear, divine and very, very pure. Let no one, no thing, no idea or ideal obstruct you. If one comes even in the name of truth, forgive the thought for its unknowing. Do not fight it, just let it go and breath the goodness that you are.

Kirpal Venanji
Hindu Monk

What Happens

Here are ways in which some key body systems react.

1 NERVOUS SYSTEM
When stressed — physically or psychologically — the body suddenly shifts its energy resources to fighting off the perceived threat. In what is known as the "fight or flight" response, the sympathetic nervous system signals the adrenal glands to release adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones make the heart beat faster, raise blood pressure, change the digestive process and boost glucose levels in the bloodstream. Once the crisis passes, body systems usually return to normal.

2 MUSCULOSKELETAL SYSTEM
Under stress, muscles tense up. The contraction of muscles for extended periods can trigger tension headaches, migraines and various musculoskeletal conditions.

3 RESPIRATORY SYSTEM
Stress can make you breathe harder and cause rapid breathing — or hyperventilation — which can bring on panic attacks in some people.

4 CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEM
Acute stress — stress that is momentary, such as being stuck in traffic — causes an increase in heart rate and stronger contractions of the heart muscle. Blood vessels that direct blood to the large muscles and to the heart dilate, increasing the amount of blood pumped to these parts of the body. Repeated episodes of acute stress can cause inflammation in the coronary arteries, thought to lead to heart attack.

5 ENDOCRINE SYSTEM
Adrenal glands
When the body is stressed, the brain sends signals from the hypothalamus, causing the adrenal cortex to produce cortisol and the adrenal medulla to produce epinephrine — sometimes called the "stress hormones."

Liver
When cortisol and epinephrine are released, the liver produces more glucose, a blood sugar that would give you the energy for "fight or flight" in an emergency.

6 GASTROINTESTINAL SYSTEM
Esophagus
Stress may prompt you to eat much more or much less than you usually do. If you eat more or different foods or increase your use of tobacco or alcohol, you may experience heartburn, or acid reflux.

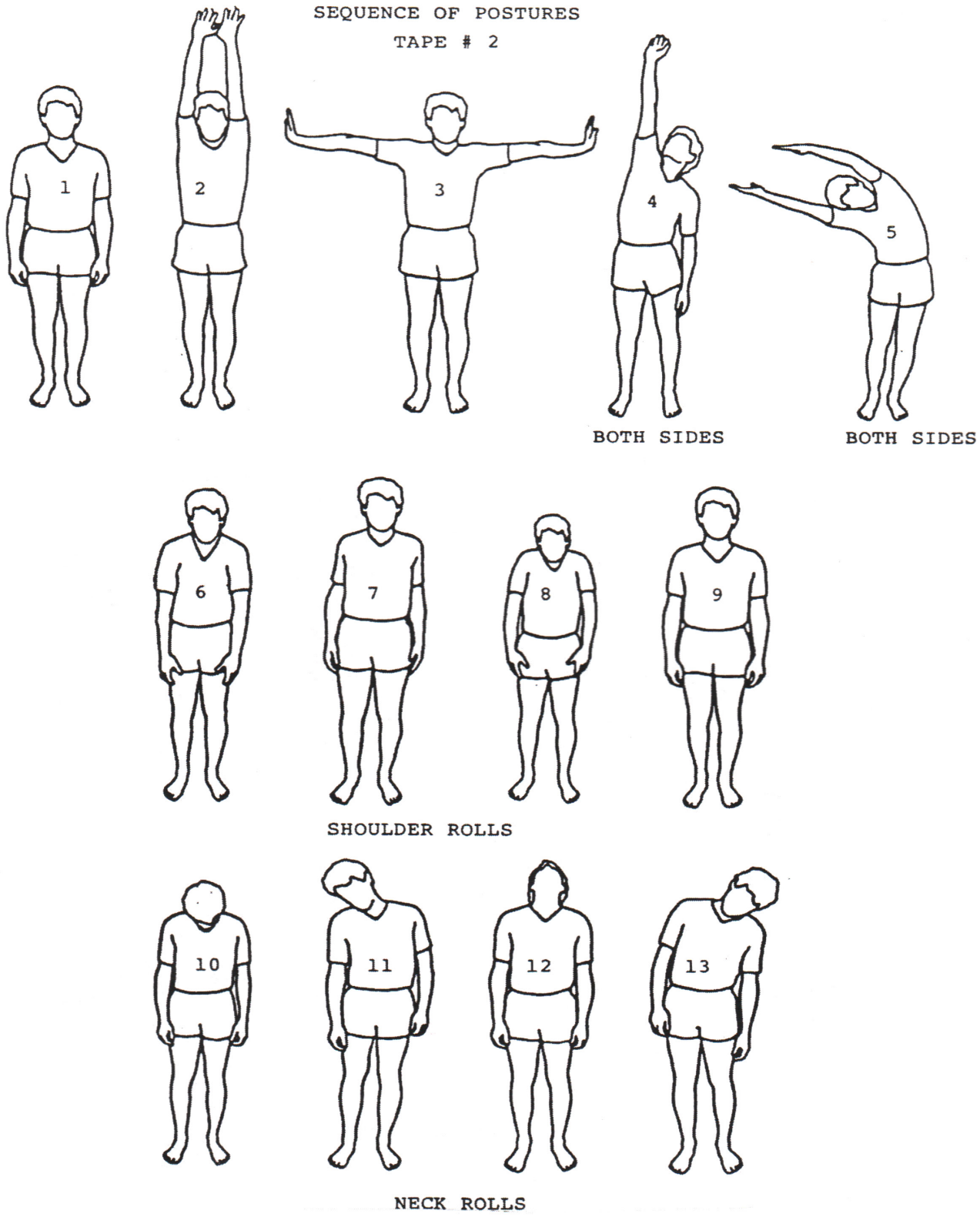
Stomach
Your stomach can react with "butterflies" or even nausea or pain. You may vomit if the stress is severe enough.

Bowels
Stress can affect digestion and which nutrients your intestines absorb. It can also affect how quickly food moves through your body. You may find that you have either diarrhea or constipation.

7 REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM
In men, excess amounts of cortisol, produced under stress, can affect the normal functioning of the reproductive system. Chronic stress can impair testosterone and sperm production and cause impotence.

In women stress can cause absent or irregular menstrual cycles or more-painful periods. It can also reduce sexual desire.

SOURCE: American Psychological Association | PHOTO: iStockphoto | GRAPHIC: The Washington Post - January 23, 2007



Adapted from *Full Catastrophe Living* by Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D

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HOME PRACTICE FOR WEEK FOUR

1. Alternate the body scan and yoga daily so for example Thursday yoga, Friday Body Scan.

2. Sitting meditation 20 minutes per day with the CD.

3. Be aware of feeling stuck, blocking, numbing, and shutting off to the moment when it happens (fish hooks).

4. Practice the extended 3 minute breathing space three times a day.

5. Be aware of stress reactions and behaviors during the week, without trying to change them.

DAY/DATE	PRACTICE YES/NO	COMMENTS
Wednesday Date: Thursday Date:		
Friday Date:		
Saturday Date:		
Sunday Date:		
Monday Date:		
Tuesday Date:		