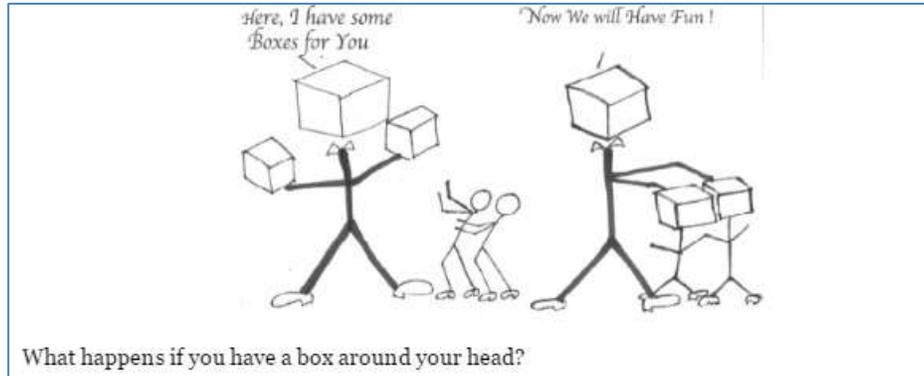
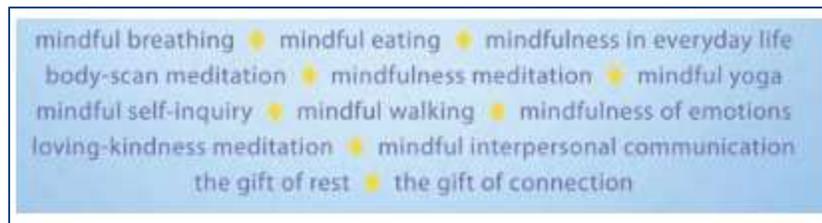


MtM Meditation Series
THINKING THOUGHTS

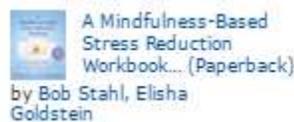


Almost all of us come fitted with a Box. A Box made out of thoughts. Memory has no objective existence. It is existential; it is purely psychological. You always have a choice to respond consciously to the present, or to react compulsively to it.

However, Mindfulness opportunities abound in our daily life. It is just a matter of implementing being mindful throughout our day; particularly, when we encounter situations that raise stressful feelings. Meditation is everywhere.



The following text is from:



mind traps

One major way that mindfulness helps with stress is by enabling you to observe the mind traps that may play a role in your stress or your reaction to stress. Mind traps are common mental habits that tend to exacerbate stress and pain. Once you've come to recognize these traps, you can more easily avoid falling into them. It may be that initially you'll only recognize them once you've fallen into them. But with time and practice, you'll be able to catch yourself before you're entirely ensnared. And eventually you'll be able to see these traps as you approach them—perhaps not every time, but often enough to make a real difference in your stress, well-being, and how you experience your life.

Negative Self-Talk

Self-talk is, naturally, the way you talk to yourself. It also refers to habitual styles of thinking and how you automatically interpret events. Unfortunately, this internal monologue is often negative. It's no secret that each of us is our own worst critic. People are often unbelievably hard on themselves. After doing something that you regret, you're likely to have thoughts such as "I'm such an idiot" or "I'm worthless," or you may even go so far as to think, "I hate myself." Maybe you analyze a single, regrettable action and make global assumptions like "I'll never get this right, no one can help me, and things will never change." Consider this: If a friend said these sorts of negative things about you, how would you feel? You might feel hopeless, sad, or angry, or you might not want to hang out with that person at all.

When feelings of stress, anxiety, or panic arise, it can be like wearing glasses that tend to distort reality and make it more worrisome. This keeps the anxious tape loops spinning in your head, exacerbating fears and possibly leading to panic. Take the internal thoughts "I'm not good enough," "Nobody understands me," and "I'll never find a partner." Mindlessly entertaining these thoughts and buying into them can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and depressed mood. The next thing you know, self-judgments start rising up, like "I'm unworthy and just a bad person," "No one will ever understand me because I'm different and odd and I don't belong," or "I'm the most undesirable person in the world. No one will find me attractive. No one is even interested in me." The beauty of mindfulness is that it can help you learn to treat thoughts, including these kinds of distressing thoughts, as mental events rather than facts.

When a thought pops into your mind, you can think of it as an event in the mind. You can become aware of it even as it arises and also notice as it eventually passes. In the same way that you can sit by a stream and watch leaves float by or look up at the sky watching the clouds come and go, while practicing mindfulness you'll learn to become more aware of all the stuff that's in your mind without attaching to it—just being aware of it as it comes and goes.

Habitual Styles of Thinking

In addition to letting negative self-talk run rampant, it's easy to get caught in habitual styles of thinking that can keep you feeling stuck and moody, which is obviously detrimental to your well-being. Because these thinking patterns often occur unconsciously, it's helpful to become familiar with them so you can be mindful of when you might be falling into these traps. Read the following descriptions of various negative thought patterns below and check off any that you might engage in. The purpose of this exercise isn't to judge yourself for the number of check marks, but simply to increase your awareness of a style of thinking that may be operating to keep you stuck. With this increased awareness comes the opportunity and the ability to choose to look at the situation differently or to view your thoughts as simply events, rather than as facts.

- Catastrophizing** is a style of thinking that amplifies anxiety. In challenging situations, it expects disaster and automatically imagines the worst possible outcome. It's a what-if game of worst-case scenarios. An example would be telling someone that it's raining pretty hard, and they respond with "Yes, it seems like it will never stop. It's going to flood, and we're going to lose all our crops."
- Exaggerating the negative and discounting the positive** go hand in hand and contribute to anxious and depressed moods as positive experiences are downplayed or not acknowledged while negative details are magnified. An example is when you say something positive, then use the word "but" to lead in to a negative statement, such as "I'm doing better at work, but I'm still making mistakes." This discounts the positive and gives more power to the negative. Experiment with replacing "but" with "and" to give both aspects equal weight.
- Mind reading** involves convincing yourself that you know what other people are thinking and feeling and why they act the way they do, *without actual evidence*. For example, you may incorrectly assume that someone doesn't like you or is out to get you. Such interpretations tend to cultivate anxiety or depression.

- **Being the eternal expert** is a recipe for heightened stress, as it necessitates being constantly on guard. When being wrong isn't an option, you're continually on trial to defend your opinions and actions.
- **The "shoulds"** are an all-too-common thought pattern that can lead to guilt or anger in addition to stress. Shoulds involve having a list of unbreakable rules for yourself or others. If you break your rules for yourself, guilt often arises because you haven't lived up to your own expectations. If others break these rules, you're likely to become angry or resentful.
- **Blaming** involves holding others responsible for your own pain or holding yourself responsible for the problems of others. With blaming, there's always someone or something outside of yourself that's the cause of your suffering and pain. However, you generally can't change others, and you may not be able to change circumstances—you can only hope to change yourself. If you perceive that the solution lies outside of you, you deprive yourself of the power to effect change.

Exercise: Here is a way to help instill an informal mindful practice

Take a few moments to be still. Congratulate yourself for taking some time for meditation practice.

Bring your awareness to your breath wherever you feel it most prominently in your body. It may be at the nose, neck, chest, belly, or somewhere else. As you breathe in normally and naturally, be aware of breathing in, and as you breathe out, be aware of breathing out. Simply maintain this awareness of the breath, breathing in and breathing out.

There is no need to visualize, count, or figure out the breath; just be mindful of breathing in and out. Without judgment, just watch the breath ebb and flow like waves in the sea. There's no place to go and nothing else to do, just be in the here and now, noticing the breath—just living life one inhalation and one exhalation at a time.

As you breathe in and out, be mindful of the breath rising on the inhalation and falling on the exhalation. Just riding the waves of the breath, moment by moment, breathing in and breathing out.

From time to time, attention may wander from the breath. When you notice this, simply acknowledge where you went and then gently bring your attention back to the breath.

Breathing normally and naturally, without manipulating the breath in any way, just be aware of the breath as it comes and goes.

As you come to the end of this meditation, congratulate yourself for taking this time to be present, realizing that this is an act of love. May we be at peace. May all beings be at peace.

Reflecting on Informal Practice

Take some time every day to reflect on at least one instance of informal practice. You can use what you learn from these reflections to deepen your daily informal practice.

Practice	What was the situation?	What did you notice before?	What did you notice after?	What did you learn?