



Introduction

- As we live, work and act in the world we inevitably play particular roles which can end up being stressful, depending how we identify with them.
- Note down for yourself now: some of the roles you play in the different relationships in your life. Which do you find most stressful?
- Role stress is typically a problem of identifying; the essence of the practice of mindfulness is that we dis-identify, we allow ourselves to realize that we are more than a particular role, the person is not the mask.
- Time pressure, or lack of, can also be a major source of stress. Typically, people who practice meditation and mindfulness are far more able to access and stay with “flow states” than untrained people. Flow states refer to those times when time is no worry, “time flies; the ego falls away.”

In this session

In this session we have introduced the following concepts:

- Role stress - developing fixed views about what’s appropriate or not appropriate in our roles, which may or may not harmonize with how we really are. We become imprisoned in a particular role when we can’t allow ourselves to be who we really are.
- Our relationship to (or identification with) our roles causes the stress. Meditation and mindfulness helps us to dis-identify with the role. We are more than the role - the person is not the mask. It takes time to see our identifications deeply and clearly, and begin loosening the bonds.
- Time pressure is an almost universal problem. Type A people suffer from ‘hurry sickness’. Tend to be impatient and or aggressive under time pressure. Opposite of this is being in the moment (state of flow), when time is no problem.
- Flow - “flow is a state of consciousness in which a person is completely absorbed in his or her actions and experiences a unity of the mind and body”. State of flow entered when there’s a balance between the challenge of the task and the skill of the performer. (Csikszentmihalyi 1990)
- Ways of dealing with time stress - (1) downscale your expectations; (2) take some time for timelessness (meditation, relaxation); (3) simplify things

Commitment

Committing to 20-30 minutes of practice every day for the duration of this course, including still meditation, writing a meditation diary, movement practices, and daily mindfulness exercises.



Homework

Practice following the breath meditation once a day and note your experiences in your meditation diary. Take some time for walking meditation. In addition choose each day a mindful activity such as washing the dishes, cleaning etc. Practice it mindfully every day and write about your experience.

Following the breath reminder

First finding your comfortable sitting position, with your stable triangular base, spine upright and erect, eyes lowered and either open or closed, hands in your lap, tongue relaxed.

In the Zen school we particularly become aware of our breathing in the abdomen as this helps us to remain grounded. So, breathing through your nose, become aware of your breath as low down as you can in the body, ideally in the belly. Notice the sensation of the in and out movement of your belly. Allow your body to relax and begin to just follow your breath with your attention. Grounding your awareness in this movement in your belly. Your awareness is riding on the breath, anchored on the breath. But doing your best not to exclude anything or suppress anything. Allowing thoughts, memories feelings, sights and sounds to just arise and pass. Any time you feel yourself getting involved or carried away with thoughts or feelings anything at all just coming back to the breath.

Remembering the image of a busy road with a bridge. The traffic is our thoughts. Any time you find you've climbed up onto the bridge and started hitchhiking off on one of the cars then all you do is just come back under the bridge. Coming back to the breath.