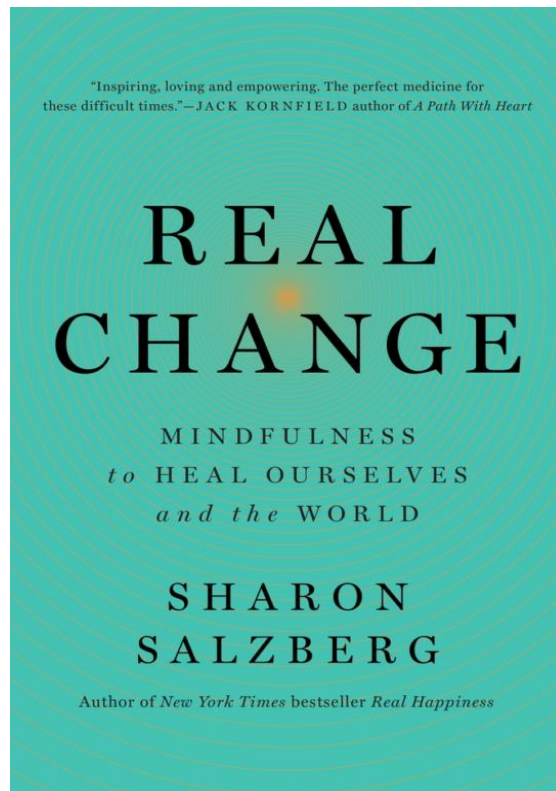


# Contemplative Resilience Tools for Social Change Makers

Participant Course Journal: Week 3

*The Need for Resilience & Building Resilience*



Drawing from elements of the Garrison Institute’s Contemplative-Based Resilience (CBR) Project and from Sharon Salzberg’s book, *Real Change: Mindfulness to Heal Ourselves and the World*, this course invites you to strengthen your resilience and deepen awareness, balance and connection in your work and lives.

**“Be Well, Serve Well”**



# Garrison Institute

Founded in 2003, the [Garrison Institute](#) is a 501(c)3, not-for-profit, non-sectarian organization exploring the intersection of contemplation and engaged action in the world. The mission of the Garrison Institute is to apply the wisdom that arises from contemplation and insights derived from science to today's pressing social and environmental issues to create a more compassionate, resilient future. The Contemplative-Based Resilience (CBR) Project is one of the Garrison Institute's signature initiatives, addressing the psychological and embodied dimensions of resilience for professional service providers.

## Real Change

In her eleventh book, *Real Change: Mindfulness to Heal Ourselves & the World*, [Sharon Salzberg](#) teaches us that meditation is not a replacement for taking action, but rather a way to practice generosity with ourselves and summon the courage to break through boundaries, reconnect to a movement that's bigger than ourselves, and have the energy to stay active.

Consulting with veteran activists and social change agents in a variety of fields, Sharon collects and shares their wisdom and offers the best practical advice to foster transformation in both ourselves and in society. *Real Change* guides us to embody the fundamental principles of mindfulness practice toward greater clarity and confidence, so that we can create a better world.

## Use of the Participant Course Journal

This *Participant Course Journal* is designed as a companion to this course. You are encouraged to have this *Journal* accessible during each workshop and cohort coaching session. Included in the pages of this *Course Journal* are: Weekly Topic Descriptions, Presentation Slides, Social Learning and Personal Reflection Prompts, Practice Resources, and space for notes.

This *Journal* has been set up as a fillable PDF document, so that you may either type notes directly into the *Journal* through Adobe (remember to save your work) or you may print it and handwrite notes throughout.

## Contact

Please direct any questions to the Contemplative-Based Resilience Project team at the Garrison Institute at [CBRProject@garrisoninstitute.org](mailto:CBRProject@garrisoninstitute.org).

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# Table of Contents for Week 3

Week 3: The Need for Resilience & Building Resilience	4
Anatomy of Stress	5
Harmful Effects of Stress	6
Autonomic Nervous System	7
Parasympathetic Nerves	8
Resilience	9
Presentation Slides	12
Video on Anatomy of Stress	21
Meditation	22
Mindful Movement	23
Social Learning: Sharon Salzberg & Holistic Life Foundation	25
Reflection & Community Connection	26
Personal Reflection: Your Stressors & Hot Buttons	27
Personal Reflection: Commitment to Self	28
Practice Resources: Mindful Movement – <i>Self Massage</i>	29
Practice Resources: Meditation – <i>Body Scan</i>	30
Practice Resources: Meditation – <i>SOBER Technique</i>	31
Practice Resources: Garrison Institute Meditation Groups	32
Practice Resources: Care for Caregivers Mobile App	33

# Week 3: The Need for Resilience & Building Resilience

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Every effort to bring change to a system – whether within a family, a workplace, a community – involves navigating ups and down, triumphs and disappointments. This mirrors our experience of trying to change a habit, or make progress in learning something new. Cultivating resilience is the key to longer-term efforts.

## Stress Response and Resilience

CBR's Psychosocial curriculum aims to deepen our awareness of how stress functions as an inner process shaping our outer experience. In strengthening our understanding and self-awareness, the curriculum paves the way for us to connect with practices to support our resilience, including Meditation and Mindful Movement.

The Psychosocial journey begins with an exploration of stress; what it is, why it exists and how it manifests. As social change makers, we may experience stress at an unconscious level, remaining unaware of what is happening in our bodies or why we experience certain emotions and feelings. This is a normal, human reaction and one that reflects our body's innate capacity to cope with enormous strain.

Nevertheless, chronic stress and burnout are not inevitable outcomes of social change work. While we cannot control all external sources of stress, there are tools and techniques we can use to better manage our response to these triggers. In this regard, we start by exploring the resources and coping strategies we currently have, while also considering new methods we may be able to cultivate.

To build on this, the Psychosocial curriculum offers practical, self-reflective tools. Through these guided reflections, we are invited to explore more deeply our own experience and activate our inner wisdom:

- *What is my current behavior / strategy / experience?*
- *How does this impact me?*
- *What changes / shifts could I make to support my wellbeing?*

As we undertake these exercises, we are encouraged to practice **self-compassion**; one of the cross-cutting principles within the CBR program. Self-compassion is a fundamental practice for building the muscle of resilience. By approaching the reflections with an attitude of gentle curiosity and letting go of any judgements which may arise in the process, we can create the space for transformation and change.

# Anatomy of Stress

\* Stress is the state of arousal (activation) we experience when we confront a challenge, a threat or a change (the stressor).

\* Stress and trauma lie in the eye of the beholder. The perception of stress depends on how we interpret the demand (the stressor) AND the resources we perceive are available.

\* Stress in itself isn't good or bad: if we aren't challenged enough, we will be bored. But if the demands on us are too great, or we don't have sufficient resources to cope, we can become overwhelmed.

## Types of Stress:

- Normal daily stress
- Cumulative/Chronic stress (ongoing)
- Burnout
- Critical incident stress (life-threatening situation)
- Vicarious stress<sup>1</sup>
- Secondary stress

\* The **fight or flight response** reaction was described by William Cannon: there are both noticeable and hidden effects. His work has been extended to encompass another stress reaction: **fight / flight / freeze**.

\* Why zebras don't get ulcers: when a lion stops chasing a zebra, the zebra relaxes. The zebra doesn't think "What if the lion returns? What if I didn't outrun the lion?"

In contrast, people often continue mental dialogues, such as "What if things were worse?" and continue worrying. Also, people often ruminate, which is when we think about something again and again.

If a zebra acted like a person, the zebra's body would continue reacting to the mental dialogue about the lion, **as if the lion were still really there**.

\* **General adaptation system** (Hans Selye): Our natural state is one of balance and equilibrium. In response to a stressor, the body will first go into a state of alarm, and then attempt to restore balance. But when stress is ongoing, we cannot go back to our baseline. Over time, in situations of chronic stress, we can lose the ability to return to the balanced state.

\* Burnout is a process that takes place over time. Prolonged exposure to occupational stressors, prolonged exposure to emotionally demanding situations, and/or overly high intensity of stress can all contribute to burnout. Burnout can cause people to lose their connection to their sense of purpose and meaning of life. Resilience is essential to preventing burnout.

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<sup>1</sup> **Primary traumatization** = impact of the traumatic incidents on the obvious victim (survivors of all kinds of traumatic events)

**Secondary traumatization** = families of those affected who may suffer from loved ones trauma (i.e. spouse of a rape victim), therapists/helpers who become overwhelmed by what they see and hear in person, witness the effects, casualties, other people's suffering (while not being primary casualties)

**Vicarious traumatization** = impact of the exposure to traumatic experience of the patient on the therapist's nervous system

Definitions after: Babette Rothschild "Help for the Helper: The Psychophysiology of Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma. 2006. Norton Professional Books. W.W. Norton & Co (p.14-15)

# Harmful Effects of Stress

Excess stress is often known as distress.

chronic stress = ongoing

acute stress = overly severe

Stress becomes a risk to your health if it is **too intense, too frequent, or too long-term**. Too much stress over time can lead to exhaustion, ill health, and eventually burnout. Excessive stress also affects our capacity to think clearly, make judgements, or make decisions.

Chronic stress has a profound impact on the body. Without the possibility of decreasing activation, cortisol levels become deregulated and damage the body's systems (immune, hormonal, nervous). Instead of staying high in the morning and decreasing throughout the day, the cortisol levels start varying, which affects attention, memory, circadian rhythm (sleep pattern), appetite, and metabolism.

If cortisol levels are elevated over time, they disrupt the functions of adrenal glands (adrenal fatigue), deplete nutrients, and affect the hormonal balance in the body.

Primary Components of Lifestyle Leading to Adrenal Fatigue <sup>2</sup>	Signs and symptoms of Adrenal Fatigue:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of sleep</li><li>• Poor food choices</li><li>• Using food and drinks as stimulants when tired</li><li>• Staying up late even though fatigued</li><li>• Being constantly in position of powerlessness</li><li>• Trying to be perfect</li><li>• Staying in double-binds (no-win situations) Overtime</li><li>• Lack of enjoyable, rejuvenating activities</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Difficulty getting up in the morning</li><li>• Continued fatigue not relieved by sleep</li><li>• Lethargy (lack of energy)</li><li>• Increased effort to do everyday tasks</li><li>• Decreased sex drive</li><li>• Craving for salty foods</li><li>• Increased time to recover from illness</li><li>• Lack sense of pleasure, less enjoyment or happiness in life</li><li>• Thoughts less focused or fuzzy</li><li>• Memory less accurate</li><li>• Decreased ability to handle stress</li><li>• Decreased productivity at work</li></ul>

Do you see any of the components or symptoms in your life?

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<sup>2</sup> James L. Wilson N.D., D.C. Ph.D. "Adrenal Fatigue" 2004 Smart Publications, p.17

# Autonomic Nervous System

Taking care of the nervous system is an important part of ensuring wellness and building resilience. Preventing adverse effects of stress, avoiding toxic build-up of stress, and remembering basic needs (food, hydration, rest, sleep) are all essential. We can also support the nervous system with practices that build awareness, as well as activation of the calming reactions of the nervous system.

The Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) is responsible for regulating body's unconscious functions, such as reactions to danger and the control of critical body functions.

The ANS has 2 branches: the *Sympathetic* Nervous System and the *Parasympathetic* Nervous system.

The <b>Sympathetic Nervous System</b> branch of the ANS <b>activates</b> . It is responsible for the <b>stress reactions</b> and <b>the body's emergency mode</b> .	The <b>Parasympathetic Nervous System</b> branch of the ANS <b>returns the body to normal</b> . It <b>restores balance, recuperation, and key body functions</b> .
“fight, flight or freeze”	“rest and digest”

The Sympathetic Nervous System works like a smoke detector. When stress starts to become too high, the SNS can go off from a single small stressor, like a smoke alarm goes off from a small indication of a fire.

Stress is generally a reaction from the animal brain. The animal brain acts on impulses or follows previously rehearsed plans. Therefore it's important to have a plan, prepared in advance, so that we don't follow patterns that aren't healthy.

The Sympathetic and Parasympathetic Nervous Systems function automatically. They can work without any conscious effort. However, we can support them to work more quickly and effectively. In order to do so, we must be familiar with our personal experiences and reactions to stress.



# Parasympathetic Nerves

## Easy ways to activate parasympathetic nervous system

**Eye nerves** - eye exercises

**Facial and jaw muscles** - face massage

**Sensorial nerves (taste, hear, sight, smell)** - awareness and mindful practices (paying attention to the sensations) that help bringing the attention inwards our body

**Auditory vestibular nerve** - responsible for sense of equilibrium - balance exercises

**Spinal accessory nerve** - exercises involving coordinated movements of head and shoulders

**Hypoglossal nerve** - talking, singing, gargling, yawning

**Vagus Nerve** - breathing exercises

**Vagus nerve - the most important nerve in parasympathetic nervous system.** The vagus nerve is what helps us to face stress with grace. It is the longest nerve in human body, responsible for lowering the heart rate and blood pressure, controls vital internal organs.

**Heart rate variability (HRV)**<sup>3</sup> – is the variation in the time interval between heartbeats. A typical heartbeat is not constant, the heartbeat keeps on changing, slightly increasing the heart rate when inhaling and decreasing when exhaling. We can also consciously slow down our heart rate by extending duration of the exhalation compared to inhalation.

High HRV reflects healthy vagal tonality and **we can improve it through mindful practices**<sup>4</sup>

## Additional ways to activate vagus nerve:

- Mindful movement (such as tai chi, yoga, walking meditation) and regular physical activity
- Breathing exercises, especially deep breathing involving diaphragm, or resonant breathing exercises (equalizing in- and out-breath)
- Massage, especially neck, shoulders and foot massage (including self-massage)
- Singing including steady repetition of a prayer, mantra, calming word or phrase, sound<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The Clinical Handbook of Biofeedback: A Step-by-Step Guide for Training and Practice with Mindfulness, Wiley-Blackwell; 1 edition (April 22, 2013)

<sup>4</sup> Use of loving kindness meditation proving effective in improved vagal tone: "How positive emotions build physical health: perceived positive social connections account for the upward spiral between positive emotions and vagal tone" Kok et al. Psychol Sci., 2013

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23649562>, retrieved on 5 April 2017

<sup>5</sup> Research findings confirming positive clinical results: "Effect of rosary prayer and yoga mantras on autonomic cardiovascular rhythms: comparative study" Luciano Bernardi, BMJ. 2001,

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC61046/>, retrieved on 5 March 2017



# Resilience

- Resilience is the ability to maintain balance, endurance and agility - responding flexibly to challenging situations and the stress that they cause. Resilience can be learned and strengthened through contemplative practices.
- We are not static. Our ability to handle a given level of stress will differ at various points throughout our lives and in differing contexts
- Resilience encompasses a variety of traits, including cognitive reappraisal (recognition of one's negative response to a situation and reinterpretation of the situation in a more positive light) and metacognitive awareness (awareness of one's thinking process).
- Resilience traits are not innate talent—they **are learnable skills** and **can be built up and strengthened**. The resilience building practices are evidence-based, that means their effectiveness has been scientifically proven through growing field of research encompassing psychology, neurobiology, and psychotherapy.
- We can't prevent all trauma and stress, but we can change how we respond to those actions.

## Characteristics of Resilience

- effective problem-solving skills
- optimism & confidence
- ability to cope with stress in a healthy manner
- helping others
- seeking help
- belief in one's own capacity to cope (internal locus of control)
- social support & connections with others
- spirituality
- sense of meaning
- identity as a survivor (vs victim)
- ability to be self-aware & regulate emotions

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# Presentation Slides

## Week 3 – The Need for Resilience & Building Resilience



- Building Community & Intention Setting
- Meditation Practice
- Awareness of Stress & Building Resilience
- Mindful Movement Practice
- Live Teaching and Meditation from Sharon Salzberg
- Social Learning: Sharon Salzberg in conversation with Co-Founders of the Holistic Life Foundation
- Question & Response
- Meditation Practice
- Closing



"Resilience is something that accretes [accumulates] over time as we develop a habit of courageously responding to or being with pain without freaking out. At some point, you notice you bend, but don't break."

~ Sharon Salzberg, *Real Change*

## What is Stress?

Stress is the state of arousal (activation) we experience when we confront a challenge, a threat or a change (the stressor).



Stress takes on different forms:

- Normal
- Acute
- Chronic
- Critical Incident
- Secondary
- Vicarious

Prolonged exposure to stress can lead to burnout.



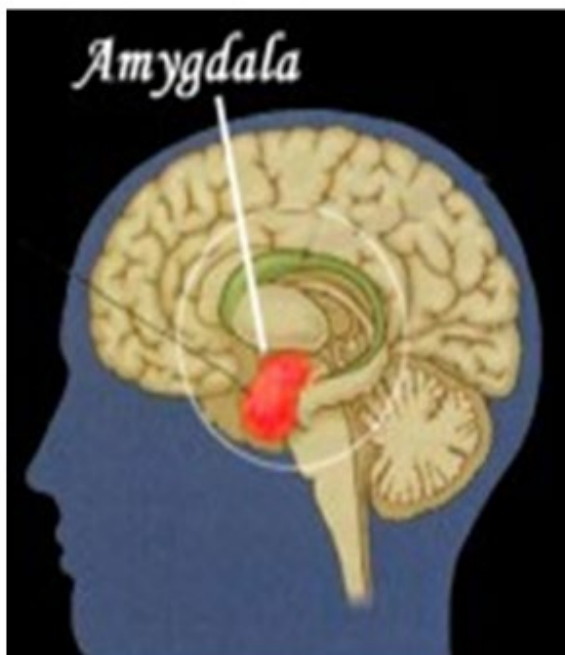
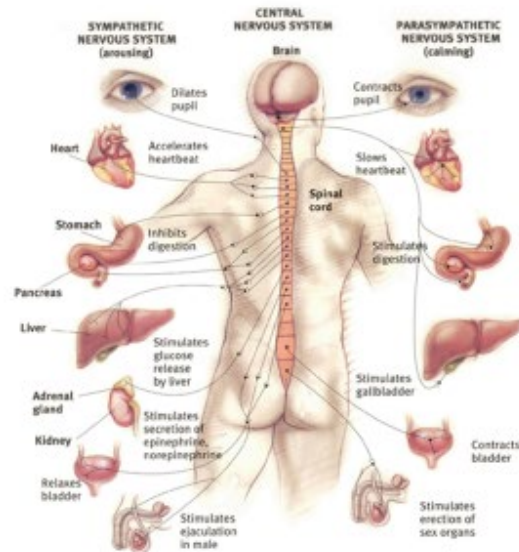
## Two Interconnected Nervous Systems

### 1. Central Nervous System (CNS)

- Brain
- Spinal Cord
- Coordinates WHAT we're doing

### 2. Autonomic Nervous System (ANS)

- Sympathetic and Parasympathetic
- Nerve nets and hormones
- Maintains homeostasis
- Monitors HOW we're doing



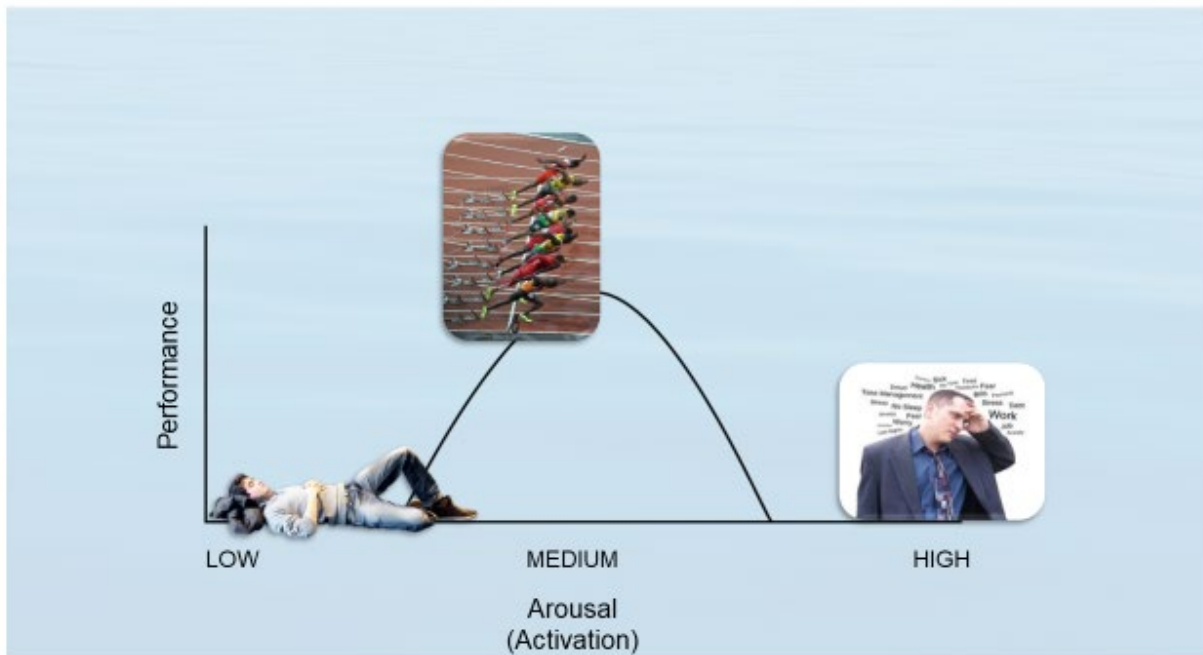
- The amygdala automatically activates the stress response: fight, flight or freeze.
- Body then attempt to restore balance (homeostasis).
- If stress is ongoing, we can lose the ability to return to a balanced state.



When the threat is over, animals return to a balanced state of rest and repair.

But humans often continue to think and ruminate about the stressful event and the "what ifs."

This perpetuates stress and harmful inflammation.



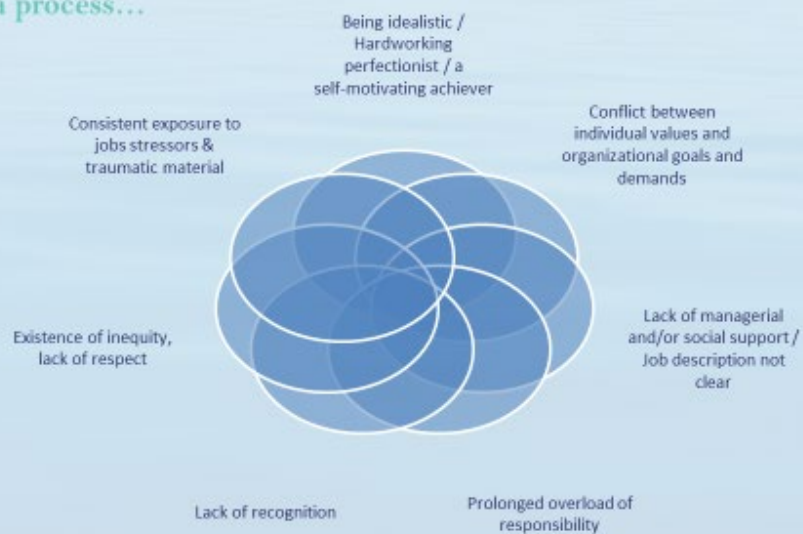


"Many of us are familiar with the spectrum of depletion: we just can't catch up, we feel overwhelmed and exhausted, we no longer find meaning in what we are doing, we burn out or we are actively traumatized as we absorb the trauma of those we work with or live with or deeply care about."

~ Sharon Salzberg, *Real Change*



## Burnout is a process...



**We can transform overwhelm and build resilience.**

# Resilience



Resilience is the ability to maintain balance, endurance and agility - responding flexibly to challenging situations and the stress that they cause.

Resilience can be learned and strengthened through contemplative practices.

## Characteristics

- Effective problem-solving skills
- Optimism & confidence
- Ability to cope with stress in a healthy manner
- Helping others
- Seeking help
- Belief in one's own capacity to cope (internal locus of control)
- Social support & connections with others
- Spirituality
- Sense of meaning
- Ability to be self-aware & regulate emotions





- Taking care of the nervous system is an important part of ensuring wellness and building resilience.
- We can support the nervous system with contemplative practices that build awareness and activation of skillful responses.
- Hyper-arousal
- Hypo-arousal
- Vagal tone

We can't prevent all stress, but we can change how we respond to it.

**Change in behavior =  
Change in brain.**







- To deal with stress, we draw from the well of our personal resources.
- We need to allow space and time for the well to fill back up.

What fills your well?



**Reflection & Community Connection:**  
*Creating flexibility for the long haul*

Think of a moment in which your resilience was tested.

- How did you maintain flexibility and enduring energy during that time?
- How can meditation and mindful movement strengthen your personal resilience?





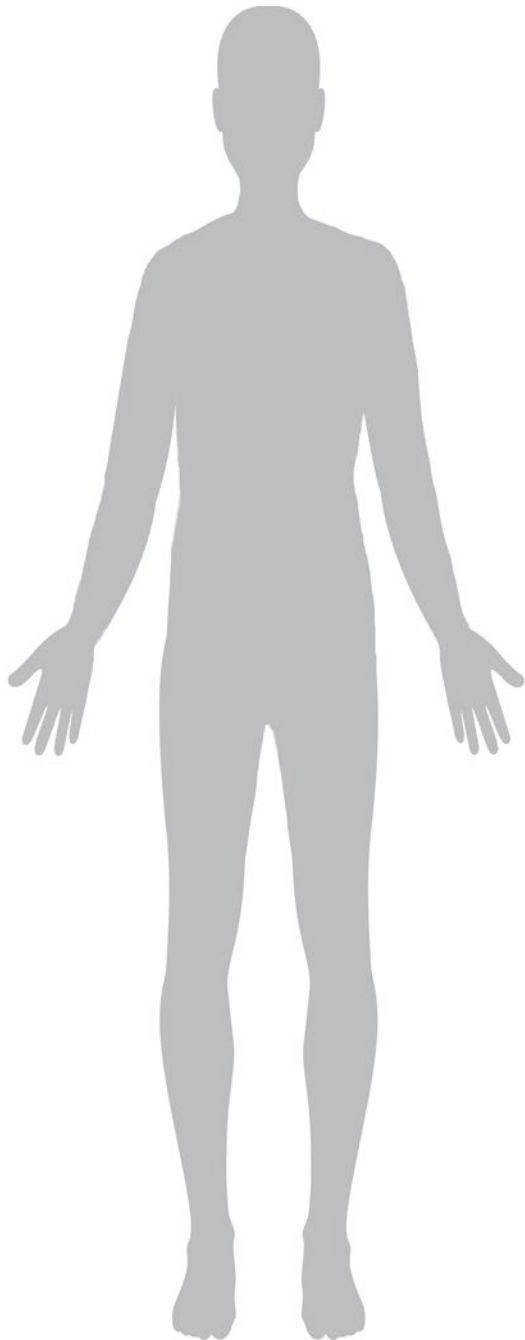




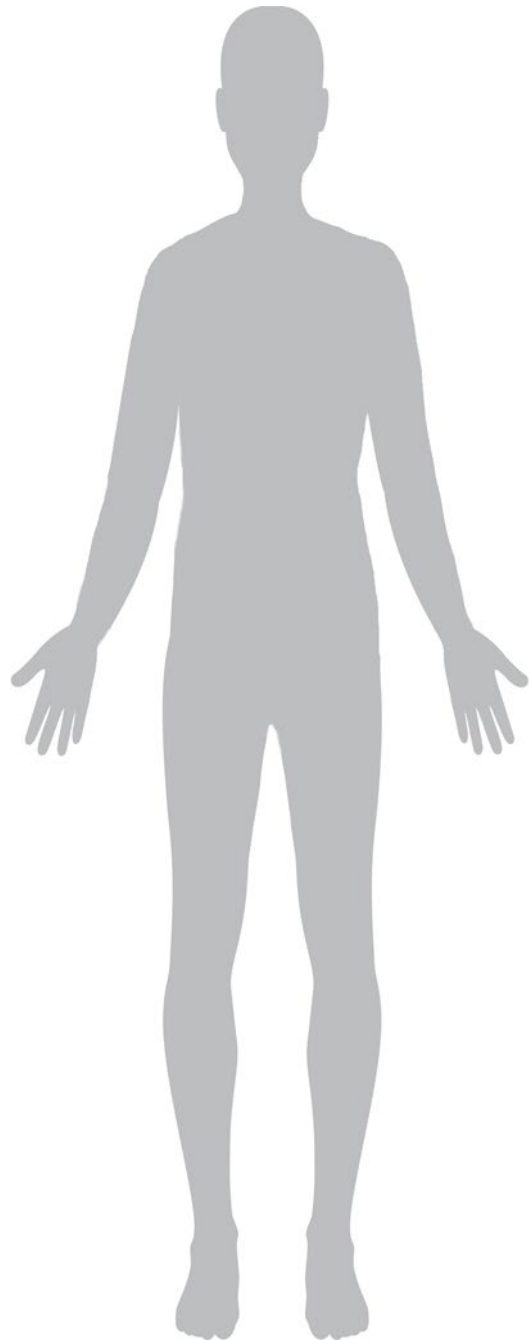
# Mindful Movement

## *Silhouettes*

Before



After





# Social Learning

*Sharon Salzberg & Ali and Atman Smith & Andres Gonzales ~ Holistic Life Foundation*



*“Getting back up quicker & stronger.”*

To learn more about the Holistic Life Foundation, [click here](#).

## Notes

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# Personal Reflection

## *Your Stressors and Hot Buttons*

What are your sources of stress?

*Use + to mark things you believe you can influence to some degree.*

*Use - to mark things you believe are beyond your control.*

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On your list of stressors, which are your top 3 **hot buttons**<sup>6</sup>? Hot buttons are reactions or situations that make you react with a lot of emotion or have difficulty managing.

1

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2

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3

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What provokes those hot buttons?

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How do you usually react?

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<sup>6</sup> Adapted from the book "I am here now - a creative mindfulness guide and journal" Ebury Press 2015



# Practice Resources

## *Mindful Movement: Self Massage*

Click to view a video of Gayla Marie Stiles leading a mindful movement practice: [Self Massage](#)



Massage has many benefits: it eases tense muscles, helps to relieve stress, encourages the nervous system to re-set into the relaxed parasympathetic state and out of the 'fight, flight or freeze' sympathetic state; it brings awareness into the body.

When done mindfully, massage is extremely valuable in helping us to maintain a relaxed body and mind.



# Practice Resources

## *Meditation: Body Scan*

Click to hear audio of Sharon Salzberg leading a meditation:  
[Body Scan](#)

In a comfortable place where you're not likely to be disturbed, lie down on your back on a mat or pad on the floor, or on a bed. (Use an alternative position, if lying on your back is not comfortable).

Use a pillow underneath your knees, a thin pillow underneath your head to help align your neck and spine, and cover yourself with a blanket to keep warm if you like.

Gently allow your eyes to close.

With kind and caring attention, take a few moments to feel your body as a whole, from head to toes – feeling the envelope of your skin – noticing the sensations associated with touching their places that are in contact with the surface beneath you.

Feeling your whole body breathing, bring awareness to the love that you have for yourself or to the intention to love yourself – breathe with this love and caring – let it gently and slowly expand, filling your entire body.

Let love and caring fill your entire being. Breathe in and out with this feeling for a few minutes.

With this sense of love and caring, bring a kind, gentle attention to each region of your body in progression, focusing on each area in turn, releasing any tension or holding as you breathe freely:

- beginning with the toes, feet, ankles, knees, and legs
- moving up to the pelvis, buttocks and hips
- moving along to the lower back and belly
- to the middle torso, diaphragm, and the front and back ribs
- to the chest, upper torso back and front
- up through the shoulders and down to arms, wrists, hands and fingers
- through the neck, back of the head, scalp, and the top of the head
- to the jaw, chin, mouth, cheeks, nose, eyes, and forehead

Bring your awareness back to your breath rising and falling in your belly

When you are ready, slowly open your eyes, aware of any thoughts.

# Practice Resources

## *Meditation: SOBER Technique<sup>7</sup>*

Click to hear audio of Sharon Salzberg leading a meditation:  
[SOBER Technique](#)

This is a mindfulness practice you can do almost anywhere. You can think of it as the mindfulness version of first aid. It can be particularly helpful in challenging or difficult situations. It can help you move from being triggered by a person or situation with the urge to respond in a reactive way or to comfort yourself in ways that are not helpful (for example, using food, drink, drugs, cigarettes, or other unhealthy habits to comfort yourself when you are anxious or stressed).

The meditation follows the acronym SOBER and comes from Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). It can be a very helpful practice to step out of automatic pilot and respond to a person or situation more mindfully.

If you feel pulled towards responding to a situation or person in a reactive way or towards acting out an unhealthy habit, you can take these steps:

**Stop** - Slow down, and bring awareness to this moment. Check in with what you are experiencing.

**Observe** - What is happening in your body, emotions, and thoughts? Observe with acceptance and without judgement.

**Breathe** - Take a few deeper breaths. Focus simply on the sensations of breathing.

**Expand your awareness** - Include your whole body and the overall situation and context with a kind and accepting attention.

**Respond mindfully** – Make a choice to respond in a way that supports your deepest intentions. Whatever is happening in your mind and body, you have a choice in how you respond.

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<sup>7</sup> adapted from Segal, Williams, and Teasdale, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression, 2002 © Mindfulness Training Institute of Washington, [www.mindfulnesstraining.org](http://www.mindfulnesstraining.org), used with permission

# Practice Resources

## *Garrison Institute Meditation Groups*

### *BIPOC Meditation Sangha*



The Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) Sangha is a weekly gathering of self-identified BIPOC practitioners that provides a safe place to meditate and explore contemplative practices. [Click here to register.](#)

### *Noontime Virtual Meditation Group*



In the spirit of holding space for community and connection, the Garrison Institute offers a Noontime Meditation Group, every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Meditators of all levels are welcome. [Click here to register.](#)

# Practice Resources

## *Download Mobile App*

Care for Caregivers: Skills for Resilience  
through Meditation & Mindful Movement

Led by Sharon Salzberg and Gayla Marie Styles



The Care for Caregivers app provides eight guided meditations that you can watch any time, anywhere, and at your own pace, each between 5-6 minutes long.

**“Nothing has to take a long time. You don’t have to explode your to-do list. Just short moments...will transform your day.”**

**–Sharon Salzberg**

Be well, Serve well.

