Session 4: Reacting and Responding to Stress

“I've had terrible misfortunes in my life, many of which never happened.” ---Mark Twain

Letter to a Young Poet by Rainer Maria Rilke
We have no reason to harbour any mistrust against our world, for it is not against us.
If it has terrors, they are our terrors.
If it has abysses, these abysses belong to us.
If there are dangers, we must try to love them, and only if we could arrange our lives, in accordance with the principle that tells us that we must always trust in the difficult, then what now appears to us to be alien will become our most intimate and trusted experience.

How could we forget those ancient myths that stand at the beginning of all races – the myths of dragons that at the last moment are transformed into princesses?
Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are only princesses waiting for us to act, just once, with beauty and courage.
Perhaps everything that frightens us is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that wants our love.

So you must not be frightened if a sadness rises before you larger than any you've ever seen, if an anxiety like light and cloud shadows moves over your hands and everything that you do.
Life has not forgotten you.
It holds you in its hands and will not yet you fall.
Why do you want to shut out of your life any uneasiness, any miseries, or any depressions?
For after all, you do not know what work these conditions are doing inside you.

Foundations of Mindfulness: Non-striving

Practice after Session 4
1. Formal Practice – Alternate Sitting Meditation with mindful movement (yoga) or body scan
2. Informal Practice
   • Notice when you find yourself getting caught in reactivity. See if you can shift out of the stress reaction and into the stress response.
   • Reflect on your experience thus far. Complete your Mid-Course Reflection handout and bring it to class.
   • Use the S.T.O.P. practice once a day.
   • Choose another routine activity (see handout in session 2).
3. Other handouts in the binder
   • Standing Yoga Poses
   • Coping With Stress—Responding vs. Reacting