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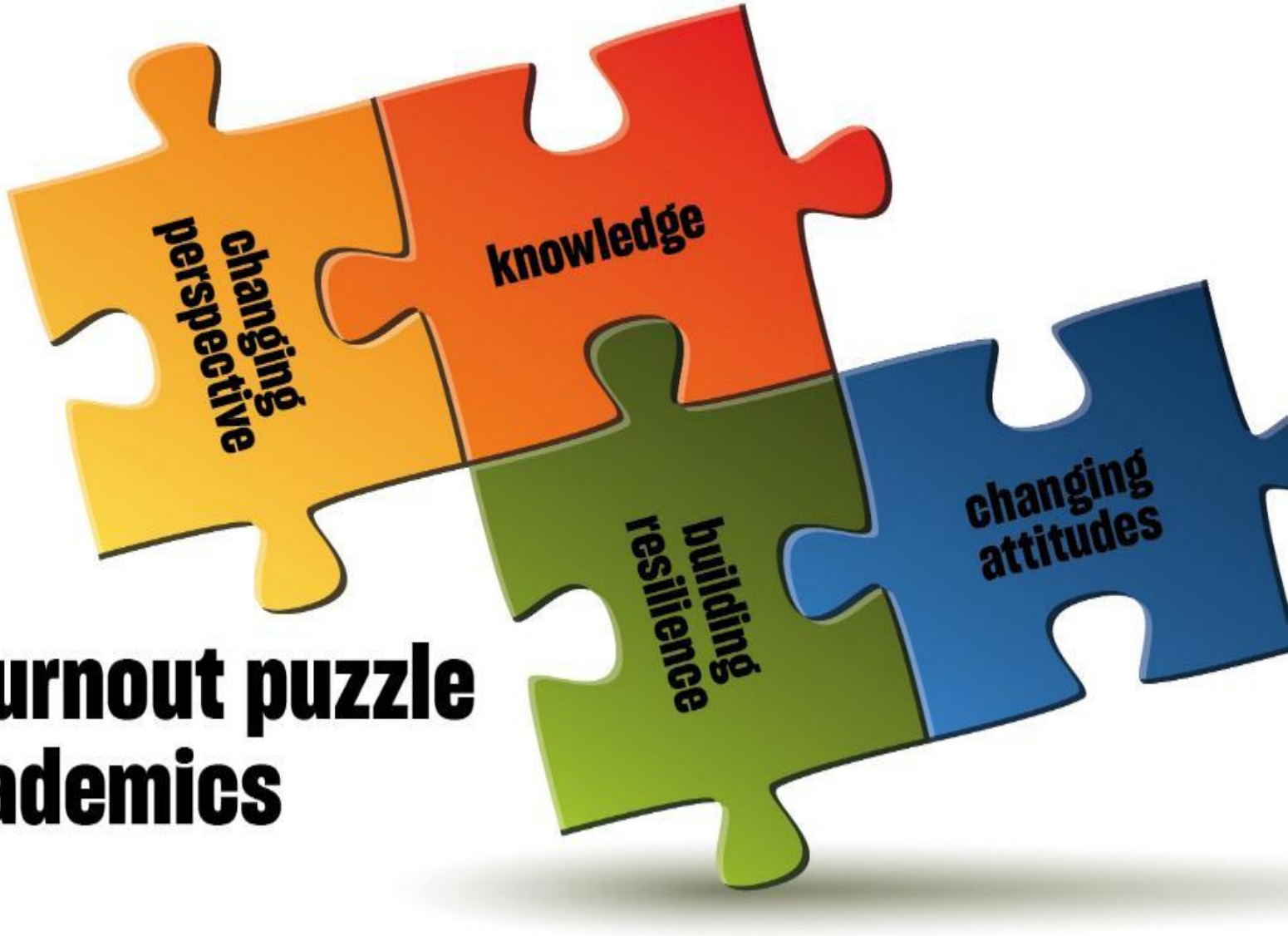
UNIVERSITY of NICOSIA

BUEM 20 YEARS 2004 2024

UCZELNIA KORCZAKA



Anti-burnout puzzle for academics

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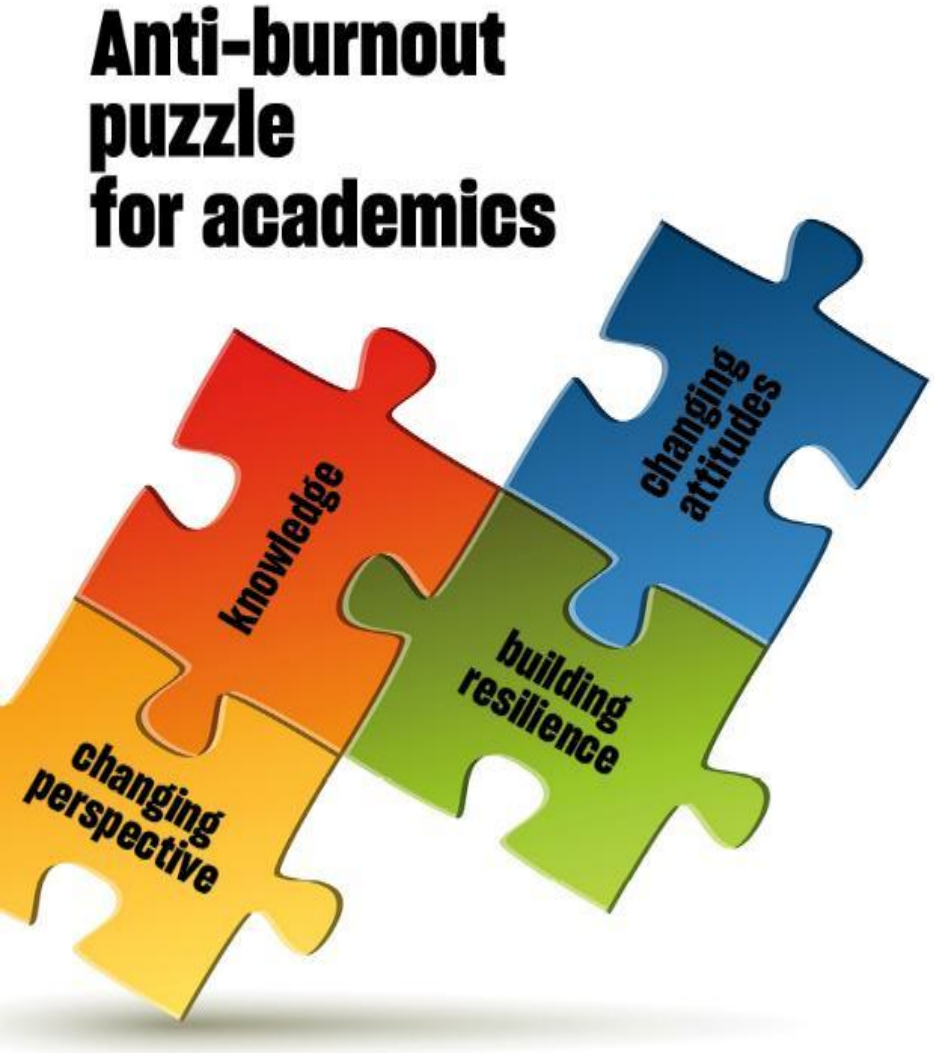

Title: Stoicism in practice

Author: Professor Nuno Ferreira

QUICK RECAP OF THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF STOICISM

- Futility of Control
  Many things in our life are not under our control – E.g. environment, other people
  Stoicism invites us to focus on the ones we do control
- Values and Virtues
  Life's guiding principles of virtues and values that provide a sense of direction and meaning
- Acceptance and Willingness
  Embracing what you can't control in the service of your values/virtues
- Commitment to a valued/virtuous life
  Putting values/virtues into practice and sticking to them

Futility of Control

- Thought control
  - Don’t think of…

- Emotional control
  - Fall in love with…

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Futility of Control

Notice other things that are not under your control:

Weather

Traffic

Prices of goods

What others think of you

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Futility of Control

Notice the things you do control:

How you approach a situation

Decisions that you make

How you present yourself

What you do

Futility of Control

Exercise: In your current work environment reflect on how much control you have

What is up to me?	What is not up to me
How I sit in my chair	The chair
How I relate to my colleagues	Who my colleagues are
…	…

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Values and Virtues

- **Chosen life directions**
- **What is important in life**
- **Unachievable**
- **Motivators**

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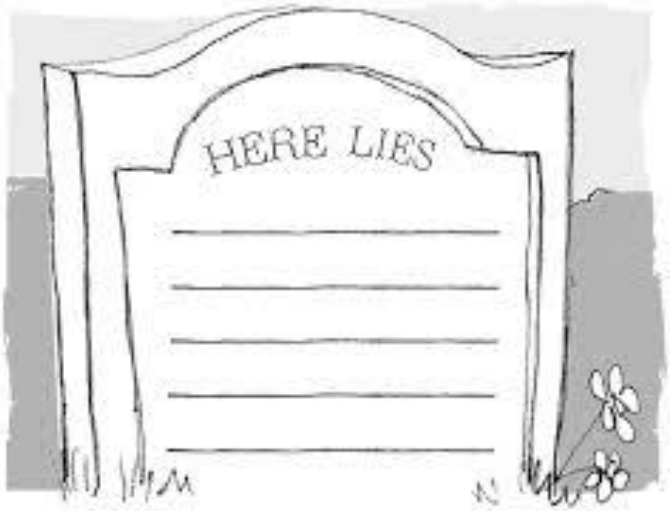
Values and Virtues

Tombstone/Eulogy exercise

What has your life been about so far

What would you like your life to be about going forward

What would you like to be remembered for



Acceptance and Willingness

Finger trap Exercise

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Acceptance and Willingness

Uncle Joe Metaphor

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Acceptance and Willingness

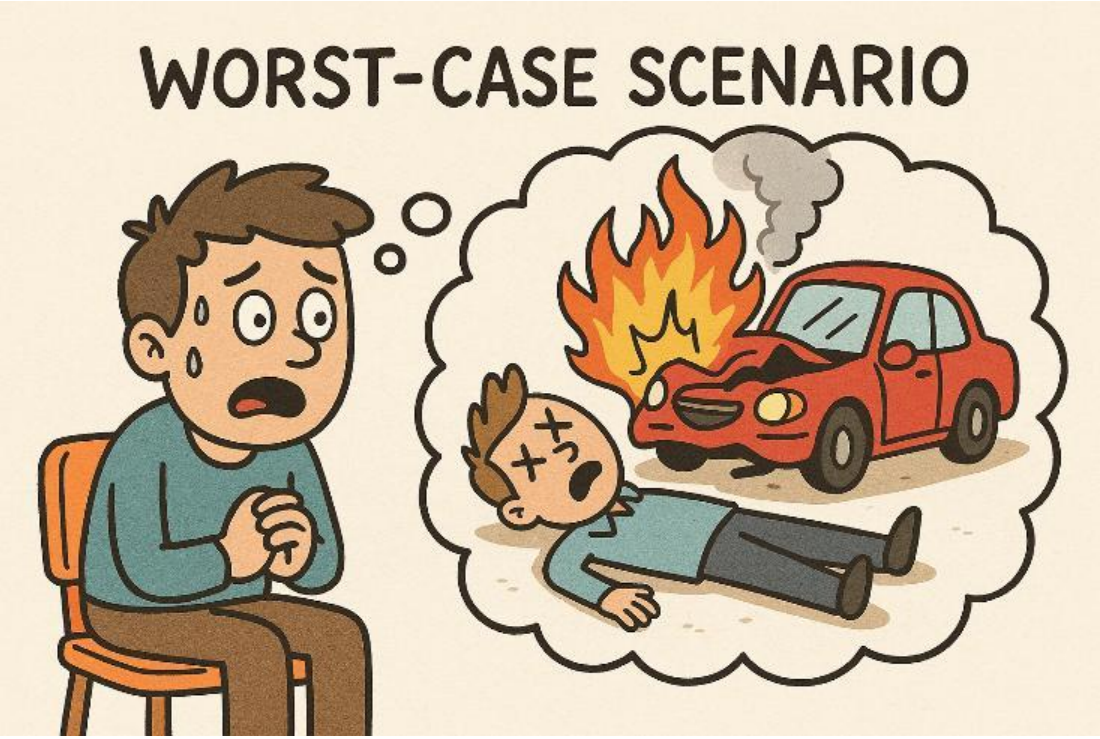
Homework:

Keep an Amore Fati journal for the next 30 days

Amore Fati Journal Template
Note a situation today in which you have embraced what happened instead of trying to resist it
How was your mood?: 1(extremely bad)-10 (extremely good)
How much energy did you feel? 1(none at all)-10(the most energized)
How much in focus did you feel? 1(completely out of focus)-10(fully focused)
Daily reflection: How did I respond to my fate today

Commitment to a valued/virtuous life

Negative visualization exercise



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Commitment to a valued/virtuous life

- **Committed Action:**
  - **Open behaviour that serves a workable agenda**
- **Creating a values consistent committed action plan**
  - **Identify value being served by action**
  - **Identify specific goals (stepping stones)**
  - **Well defined (space, time-delimited, non-conditional)**
  - **Willing choice**
  - **Identify which difficult experiences will be present**

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FINAL NOTES
ANALYSIS OF INSIGHTS AND EFFECTS

Don’t think of…

I am going to say something and I want you not to think of it after I say it. And I mean it, I want you to think of anything other than what I’ve asked you not to think of.

So, I don’t want you to think of a pink elephant. (give 2-3 seconds)

Are you doing it?

Whatever you do just don’t think of a pink elephant. You can think about anything else just not a oink elephant. (give 5 seconds)

Okay, so let’s go around the room and check in with people. Did you picture a pink elephant? (allow for some people to agree). Was it difficult not to think of it? (allow for some agreement). For those who managed to have a picture of a pink elephant out of their minds…did you notice that in order to do the exercise right you had to at least be thinking something along the lines of “I’m thinking of X, so it’s not a pink elephant”. So even when you didn’t have pink elephants, there they were.

This is just a playful way of experiencing what we call the paradox of control. We think that we can control our thoughts or inner experiences just by wanting them or wishing them away. And yet, as your own experience tells you, even when you are wishing them away….there they are. So, think about all the instances in your work and life in general, when these unwanted experiences enter you attention. Think about whether it’s useful to try not to think of them.

What are some of the situations where you find yourself doing this? Jot them down to yourself.

Fall in Love with…

Maybe you're not very good at keeping the thoughts or memories or urges away but you feel confident that a bit of positive thinking will do the trick. Maybe you think that if I just keep a positive attitude that will counteract the negative stuff. Well, let's put that to the test.

Can I have a volunteer? (With volunteer from now on)

Ok, see that chair (point at any random empty chair in the room)? I want you to fall in love with that chair. (Give 2-3 seconds). Did you do it? When I say Fall in Love , I truly mean fall in love. I asking you to look at that chair as if it's the chair you've been looking for all your life, as if no other chair in the world would complete you in the way that chair does, I want you to have the urge to take the chair out for dinner and a movie, and who knows maybe have some baby chair with it in the future. That is the kind of love I'm asking you to have for that chair. Can you do it?

(allow for some moments)

So, this is what the stoics had in mind as part of this problems of control. There are things we can control, such as how we behave, the choices we make, how we stand towards a problem. But the problem, or the whole inner experiences that come with it, that we cannot control. So let's have a good look at what we can and what we can't control.

Values as a Compass Script

So, what are values? You can think of them as directions in your life that point you towards what is most important. Sometimes that is how people describe them, “it’s what is important to me”. Many people have different values and what matters to one person might not matter to another, and that is fine, we are all different human beings after all. However, values are often confused or mistaken with goals. So I want to take a minute to clarify here what we mean by values. Values have this unachievable quality to them, they are never completed, unlike goals where you can have a definitive end point. So, sometimes I like to talk about values as a direction on a compass.

Let’s say that the most important thing in your life is to travel West. You are a West kind of person. If you travel from (Name where you are) to (Name a close town, city to the west of where you are), are you travelling west? (wait for group to agree). Ok, so can you say that you have arrived at West? (wait for group to say no). Exactly, there is always more West to go. If I travel (name another place a bit further west) I will be travelling West, but I still will not have arrived at West. (Continue naming further and further away places to the west, until you are going completely around the globe, 2-3 should suffice, finish with where you are). Now I’m back where I started, is there still more West I can travel (wait for group to agree).

So that’s what we mean by values being a direction and unachievable, there is always something else you can do to travel in that direction. Goals are more like the different destinations we talked about. They are have clear end points, and often they help us keep track of whether we are traveling in the right direction.

One of my favorite examples of how this applies to our lives is the contrast between "getting married" and "being loving". If you want to be loving and caring, that's a value – it's ongoing, you want to behave that way for the rest of your life. And in any moment you have a choice: you can either act on that value or neglect it. But if you want to get married, that's a goal. It's something that can be completed, achieved, "crossed off the list." And you can achieve the goal of marriage even if you completely neglect your values around being loving and caring. (Of course, your marriage might not last too long.)

Values are here and now; goals are in the future. Values are about "ongoing action." In other words, values are about how you want to behave or act on an ongoing basis – what you want to keep on doing… Goals are about what you want to get or have or complete. Thus, if it's not something you can do on an ongoing basis, then it's not a value.

 Happiness is not a value – you can't do it.

 A sense of belonging is not a value – you can't do it.

 Being loved and respected by others is not a value – you can't do it.

 To have a big car, a big house, a great job, a wonderful partner, or a thin body: those are not things you can do – they are goals, not values.

VALUES are statements about how you want to behave, how you desire to act, what matters to you, and what's important to you. They’re not about what you should do or have to do. [Often the things you should do reflect other people’s values.]

Eulogy activity

A eulogy is a speech of remembrance that honors someone and is generally read during their funeral. In most cases, our eulogies are written by others after we have passed. The readers pull together stories and memories and then attempt to paint a picture of the kind of person we were, our accomplishments, and how we made others feel. Through this activity, you will write your own eulogy; what could be said about you up to this point in your life and what you truly want said about you after you are gone. What others remember about you will be your legacy. Writing your eulogy is not intended to be morbid or sad. Rather it's meant to be inspiring and hope filled by giving you a vision of the legacy you want to leave behind. What do you want people to say, feel, and remember about you and your life after you are gone?

• As you prepare, allow yourself to write freely. Don't overthink or edit in the beginning.

• If it helps, imagine that you are at the midpoint of your life, that you have as many years ahead of you as you have behind you. Whatever your age, the idea is to place yourself at a point in time and see that you still have days ahead to change your legacy.

• As you complete the following steps, be open and honest with yourself about your past, present, and future.

STEP 1:

• Write a simple timeline of your life up to this point.

• Write a potential timeline for the rest of your life.

STEP 2:

• List events, people, and places that have been important to you over the course of your life.
• List events, people, and places you believe or hope will be important to you in the future.

STEP 3:

• List the impact you have had on people from your past.

• List the impact you hope to have on people in the future.

STEP 4:

• Answer the question, "What do you want to be remembered for?" for the first half of your life.

• Answer the question, "What do you want to be remembered for?" over the second half of your life.

Once you have examined your life through these questions, you are prepared to write your eulogy, to begin the process of telling the story of the person whose life you described as you answered the second question of each step. This is the future you—the person you want others to remember. This is the story of your legacy.

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1 Finger-Cuff Exercise

This exercise uses a simple woven finger trap to show how struggling with unwanted experiences can keep a person stuck, whereas accepting and "moving toward" the experience can create freedom.

Finger cuffs can be easily obtained on Amazon, Temu, Shein, etc…

Materials

- One finger trap for each participant (in-person)

Script

Workshop leader:
"Today we will use a small toy called a finger cuff. It will help us explore what happens when we fight against painful thoughts, feelings, or memories, and what happens when we relate to them differently."
"Please slide your index fingers into each end of the tube until they meet in the middle. Notice how loose it feels right now."

Give everyone a moment to comply.

"Now, try to pull your fingers straight out, as if your goal is to escape as fast as possible."

Pause while participants struggle.

"Describe what you notice."

(Allow brief sharing: *'It tightens,' 'I'm stuck,' 'It hurts,'* etc.)

"The harder you pull away, the tighter the trap becomes. This is the natural urge to get away from discomfort."

"Instead of pulling out, slowly push your fingers toward each other, moving further into the trap."

Wait as they push in.

"What happens now?"

(Participants report the cuff loosening.)

"While keeping gentle inward pressure, pinch the very ends of the cuff with your other hand and slide it off. Notice how moving toward the center made space for release."

Debrief and Linking

Use open questions; pick those that suit the group.

1. "When you were pulling away, what thoughts or feelings showed up?"
2. "Can you think of a time you tried hard to get rid of anxiety, sadness, or pain, and it seemed to tighten instead?"
3. "What might 'pushing in' look like with those experiences?"
   - allowing the feeling to be present
   - naming it mindfully
   - noticing thoughts as thoughts
4. "Once the cuff loosened, you still had to choose to slide it off. In your life, what actions could you take that move you toward what matters, even while the feeling is present?"

"The finger cuff shows us that struggle often tightens the grip of discomfort, while willingness can loosen it. Our goal is not to like the pain, but to make enough room for it so we can move our hands—and our lives—toward what we care about."

Invite final reflections, then transition to the next agenda item.

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Negative Visualization Exercise

Negative visualization is a Stoic practice that invites you to picture the loss of people, situations, or comforts you presently enjoy. The goal is not pessimism; it is to cultivate gratitude, resilience, and calm acceptance of change.

When to Use
Daily, at the start or end of the day (5 – 10 minutes)
Before a challenging situation (2 – 3 minutes)
Weekly review (15 – 20 minutes)

Preparation
Find a quiet space where you will not be interrupted. Sit upright, feet on the floor, hands resting on your thighs. Take three slow breaths, counting four on the inhale and six on the exhale. Remind yourself: "Everything I care about is on loan from nature and can be called back at any time."

Guided Script (read silently or record and play back)
Close your eyes. Feel the weight of your body on the chair. Notice the natural rhythm of your breath.

Choose ONE item for today:
A relationship (partner, child, friend). A material comfort (home, phone, ability to walk). A future plan (vacation, promotion)

Visualize Loss
Picture life tomorrow if this item were absent. Let scenes unfold: how your morning starts, how you move through the day, what emotions surface. Acknowledge any sadness or fear without judgment.

Observe Your Mind
Where does resistance arise in your body? What thoughts try to pull you away from the image? Label them softly: "thought," "feeling," then return to the scene.

Return and Reframe

Release the image. Breathe in and notice the item is still present in your real life—for now. Say to yourself: "I am fortunate to have this at this moment. I will act today with appreciation and without attachment."

Reflection Journal (2 – 5 minutes)
After the visualization, write brief answers: What item did I contemplate losing? What emotions did I experience? How did my body react? What new appreciation or insight arose? One concrete action I will take today to honor this item or person.

Anti-burnout puzzle for academics

Committed Action Form

Day:__/__/_

The value I want to pursue is:

What I have been doing that is inconsistent with my value is:

This has cost me (e.g. relationships, health, time, money, distress):

The goal I want to achieve is:

I commit to take the following actions in the following circumstances:

In order to perform my valued action I am willing to make room for the following sensations in my body:

In order to perform my valued action I am willing to make room for the following thoughts or images:

In order to perform my valued action I am willing to make room for the following feelings or emotions:

In order to perform my valued action I am willing to make room for the following urges: