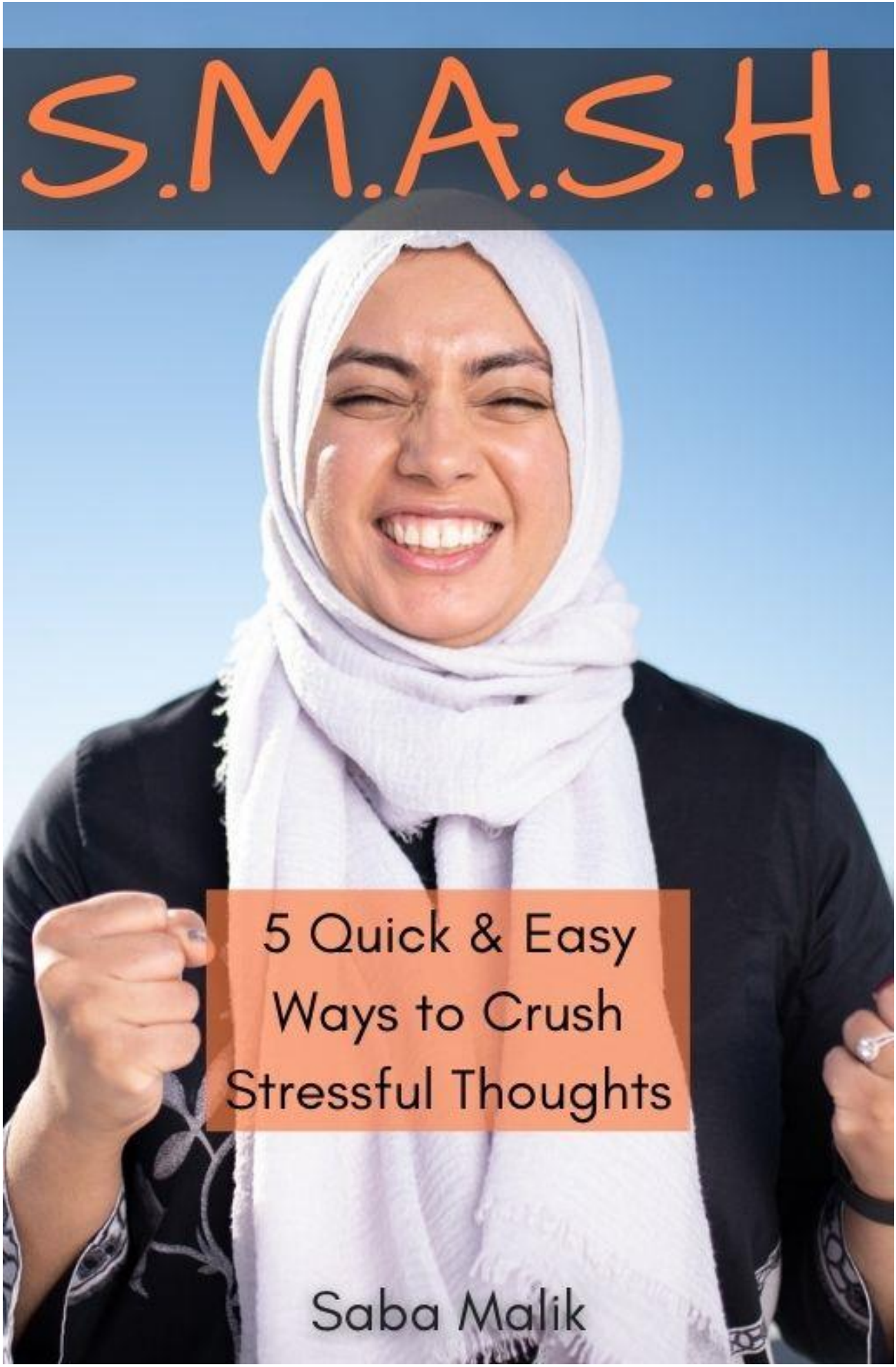

Contact: saba@sabamalik.com www.SabaMalik.com

A pen is the leash you put on monstrous thoughts.

Pencils. I love pencils. It's not just because I'm a teacher. This simple writing tool has so much power, more than you can imagine. To pen your thoughts with this little stick gives you strength to conquer the mental storms that plague all of us at one time or another.

I use writing to alleviate much of my mental suffering and isn't that where all pain starts? Our perspective and the story we tell ourselves. Thus, using writing tool to express your emotions and pen your narrative can not only be using a pencil to write your own narrative can be a great stress crusher but actually therapeutic. Elizabeth Schaefer in "Writing Through the Darkness: Easing your Depression with Paper and Pen" is the basis and inspiration for this S.M.A.S.H. report.

MYTHS ABOUT WRITING AND JOURNALING

The main problem we face is that we try to do everything in our head.

- "I don't have to write it down. I got this."
- "Oh, a diary? That's so "girly."
- "Journal is just not for me."
- "I can't afford to write my thoughts on paper or my phone. What if someone sees them?"

While you are busy rehashing the above statements, crap just adds up in your head like the dishes in the kitchen sink. You come a week later and it actually does smells like the washroom.

When we try to function from a polluted and chaotic mental space, we stressed and miserable. How can we crush and conquer the ruminations in our head? S.M.A.S.H. 'em. Crush your thoughts and let the pencil be thy hammer. S.M.A.S.H. is an acronym I conjured up while penning this guide. It stands for a **S**tupid **M**ethod that can help you deal with the "**S**orrys" in your life and bring you **A**mazement **H**appiness.

BENEFITS OF JOURNALING

There are many ways to release stress and crush stressful thoughts. Some are easy and quick like journaling and running. Others are tough and expensive. This S.M.A.S.H. guide focuses on simple practices that can not only tame crappy but help you work through them as you come to terms them. This brings immense joy and gratitude and that goodness is literally a page away. Moreover, when you release yourself from the negative mental energy, there will be a void and that must be filled with something better and more worthwhile so the letting go is like removing a hair from a stick of butter. a page away.

The five methods for crushing your stressful thoughts are as follows:

1. **S**tupid First Draft
2. **M**ethod Byron Katie
3. **A**mazing L.I.E.
4. **S**orry and Forgive
5. **H**appiness with Gratitude

Let's start with the first quick and way you can conquering your stressful thoughts.

1. S: SFD or Stupid First Draft

There are a lot of different names I hear for this first technique. I recommend doing this first before you practice any of the other methods. If you miss this part, it's like going to a buffet with a dirty plate and putting your food on it. You would never do that. Hence, a brain dump is a purge. This step is about getting a clean plate, slate and date with your friends.

Brené Brown calls this method "SFD" which stands for "Sh** First Draft." Cognitive Behavioral therapist Haleh Banini calls it "Detox." Whatever the name, it's basically dumping your thoughts on paper not when you are all calm and reflective but right when some sh** hits your life and you *need* to get it out. It's like your five-year old talking.

Moreover, you know you've done a good detox or brain dump when you would be mortified if someone read it. Thus, don't censor yourself and definitely don't try to sound nice and polite. Just dump everything that comes out. You can do this on a napkin, your cellphone or send an email to yourself. Do it wherever you can whenever you need to. I've done it on shopping receipts too when I'm stuck in the car with someone and my phone is dead. After the crap comes out, rip up the paper and throw it out.

What does a detox do? It frees your mind. You take your thoughts from your brain on to paper and you gain control over them. It's just something you have to try for yourself to experience it. Many therapists and authors write about the therapeutic effects of writing through depression and challenging times. That's one of the main reasons I write and work especially on my upcoming memoir.

2. Method: 4 Questions and "The Work"

The "4 Questions" from Byron Katie's work changed my life. This technique is very structured and requires active work. After some effort, this method becomes second nature. Byron's book "Loving What Is," is great at explaining this. I must be honest because this tip is not quick and easy for the average person. However, it is naturally comfortable for the more pensive and cerebral person who doesn't mind getting a little dirty digging in the trenches of their mind. I add this part in so that my S.M.A.S.H. guide appeals to a wide array of people, the novice and the seasoned writers.

She poses four questions to ask your thoughts. It's all about challenging what's in your head to get to the truth or to the reality. This she calls "What Is." Byron's work really helped me come to term with reality and meet my thoughts where they are, not where I would like them to be.

Here are the four questions and the turnaround to put your thoughts against:

1. Is it true?
2. Can you absolutely know that it's true?
3. How do you react, what happens, when you believe that thought?
4. Who would you be without that thought?
   Now, turn around the thought.

When you have distressing thoughts or ruminations that don't leave you alone, the work is a great way to deal with it. If you have a thought like, "I feel so ugly" then you can inquire about it and see if it really holds true. You might logically know that it doesn't reflect reality but your emotions could be overwhelming so you can't let that anxious go. In her books and website, Byron Katie has worksheets for these questions that you can use to question your thoughts.

3. AMAZING L.I.E. TECHNIQUE

I learned this technique from shaykh Muhammad AlShareef. It is an extension of the first SFD technique. Basically, you list three things you **L**earned today, **I**mproved upon and lastly **E**njoyed. Hence the acronym L.I.E. This technique is also deeper version of tip number five: **H**appiness through gratitude. This method helps you highlight the good in your day. It feels good to do this on a pretty average day where you are not stressed but where you also felt that you didn't get much done. Telling yourself a L.I.E. can help you see things in a more meaningful and uplifting way. This isn't something you can do in your head but it isn't something as vigorous as The Work and the four questions either.

4. SORRY AND FORGIVENESS LETTER

This is a very powerful skill I learned from Louise Hay in her book, "You Can Heal Your Life." In her work, she talks about writing a letter to a person who really hurt you. In your letter, tell them how you feel and how did their actions impact you. This technique is especially powerful for people who have left your life and you can't connect with them again. It's also a great technique for when you keep rehearsing a convo in your head over and over again. Someone hurt you and you keep ruminating over smart a** comments and responses in your mind that you would spit out at them if you ever saw them again. You want to shoot sharp stabbing words that would slay them to their grave.

This forgiveness letter is never about the person who wronged you. It is about freeing yourself from the miserable emotions that are holding you back and weighing you down. You can also write "forgiveness lines" in your journal. Instead of a whole letter, you can write something like, "The person I need to forgive is _____ and I forgive you (addressing the person) for _____."

5. HAPPINESS FROM GRATITUDE

This activity is especially useful when you are frustrated and annoyed. Moreover, this technique is very easy because you don't have to write it down if you don't want to. Lastly, this gratitude practice is perfect for kids. It's not merely an attitude but an active scout for things you are thankful for. When your kids are complaining or you are stuck in traffic for hours and you just want to scream, this is a great time to use this method.

Start by saying, "Thank God for _____." Then, keep going and pick out tiny and meaningful things not just general things like air and water. "Thank you, God, for a car engine that works" pulls your focus to the good. Mind you, it won't get you out of the traffic jam but it does help you shift your gaze to the up side even in the tough moment. The more you keep going, the more joy and contentment you invite into your life.

Even after reading these five ways to crush and smash stressful thoughts, you might still be ambivalent about whether these techniques really work. If that is the case, try them out for yourself and see what happens. Maybe you can pick one tip that resonates with you and take it for a spin. The other great thing about the S.M.A.S.H. method is that it is completely free! Unlike therapy, which can cost anywhere from 100$ to 500$ a session, these techniques are right at your fingertip, quite literally.

Moreover, it's my experience that therapy comes in need when I've let mental gunk add up for years and years and now, I need professional help. Just to be clear, therapy is wonderful and I actually think we should all have a therapist. However, I think you need daily practices that strengthen your mental muscles.

Thus, think of these five tips as your daily workouts. Choose a different technique depending on your mood and circumstance. If you've gotten into a big fight, take a leave and write a forgiveness letter. Instill a daily gratitude practice.

TAKE THREE ACTIONS NOW

In conclusion, here are three concrete and tangible actions you can take right now to put the S.M.A.S.H. method into high gear.

1. ***List three*** *small and specific things you are thankful for right now or tell yourself a L.I.E.*
2. ***Set a daily reminder*** *in your phone to automate the above gratitude practice.*
3. ***Don't to text****, email, call or talk when you are angry or tired. Do your SFD then go back to the situation.*

For more on mental health, visit my website www.SabaMalik.com or email me at saba@sabamalik.com. You can also get my eBook "Divine Depression: How to Manage Depression With Islam" or "Blessed with Bipolar: The Muslim's 3 Step Guide for Mastering Bipolar" on www.SabaMalik.com. Check out my podcast at www.MentallyFitMuslims.org. Lastly, follow me on social media @MentallyFitMuslims

Copyright © 2021 by Saba Malik All rights reserved. This eBook or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the writer.