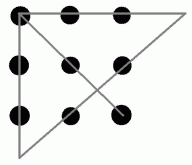
**The 9-Dots Exercise Solution**

If you isolate the nine dots by themselves as the domain of the problem, because of the automatic way in which you perceive things and think about them, you will never find a satisfactory solution. As a consequence, *you may wind up blaming yourself for being stupid or getting angry* at the problem and proclaiming it impossible or foolish. All the while you are *putting your energy in the wrong place*. You are not seeing the full domain of the problem. You are missing the larger context.

The problem of the nine dots suggests that we may need to take a broader view of certain problems if we hope to solve them. This approach involves asking ourselves what the extent of the problem is. We need to seek the relationship between the various isolated parts of the problem, and the problem as a whole.

This is called taking a systems view. If we do not identify the system correctly in its entirety, we will never be able to come to a satisfactory solution of the problem because a key domain will always be missing; the domain of the whole.

The 9-dots exercise can teach us that we may have to *expand beyond our habitual ways of seeing and thinking and acting in order to solve or resolve certain kinds of problems*. If we don’t, our attempts to identify and solve our problems will usually be thwarted by our own prejudices and preconceptions. Our lack of awareness of the system as a whole will often prevent us from seeing new options, and new ways of approaching problems. We will have a tendency to get stuck in our problems, and continue to make faulty decisions and choices.

[](https://mbsrtraining.com/attitudes-of-mindfulness-by-jon-kabat-zinn/)

Rather than penetrating through problems to the point where solutions are reached, when we get stuck, there is a tendency to make more problems, to make existing problems worse, or to give up trying to solve them.

Such experiences can lead to *feelings of frustration, inadequacy, and insecurity*. When self-confidence becomes eroded, it just makes it harder to solve any other problems that come along. Our doubts about our own abilities become self-fulfilling prophecies.

They can come to dominate our lives. In this way, we effectively make our own limits by our own thought processes. Then, too often, we forget that we have created these boundaries ourselves. Consequently, we get stuck and feel we can’t get beyond them.

*You can get a closer look at this process on a day-to-day level by being mindful of your own inner dialogue and beliefs and how they affect what you wind up doing in certain situations*.

Unless we are engaging in mindful pratice, we rarely observe our inner dialogue with any detachment and ponder its validity, especially when it concerns our thoughts and beliefs about ourselves. For instance, if you have the habit of saying to yourself *“I could never do that”* when you encounter some kind of problem or dilemma, such as learning to use a tool or fixing a mechanical device, or speaking up for yourself in front of a group of people or in any other situation, one thing is pretty certain, you won’t be able to do it.

The fact is you really do not know in many situations what you are capable of doing at any particular moment. You might surprise yourself if you took on a problem, just for fun, and tried something new, even if you didn’t know what you were doing and even if you inwardly doubted your ability to do it.

The point is that we don’t always know our true limits. If your beliefs and attitudes, your thoughts and feelings are always producing reasons for not taking risks, or result in a reluctance to take on new challenges, and not looking at what the entire scope of a problem, the real problem might be your *relationship* to that challenge.

The 9-dots exercise shows us what might be possible for you at the limits of your *understanding* and that positive *beliefs* can often be fruitful. You may be severely and unnecessarily limiting your own learning, your own growth, and your ability to make changes in your life.

Whether it is:

* losing weight
* not yelling at your children
* starting your own business
* finding out what there is to live for when you have experienced a deep personal loss

or

* being in the middle of a momentous change in your life that threatens your well-being and that of everything you hold dear.

What you can do will very strongly depend on your beliefs about:

* your own resources
* your beliefs about life itself.

Full Catastrophe Living, by Jon Kabat-Zinn