

Less Stress, More Joy

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Where does stress come from?

Example one

Have you ever wondered why, when you decide to shop for a decent used car, you notice cars and think a lot more about cars? Car buyers live in a world of cars. People who sew notice different fabrics more than people who don't. People who sew live in a world of fabric and textures. Roofers notice people's roofs more than the average person does. Roofers live in a world of roofs. A young woman who thinks her "clock is beginning to tick" sees a world filled with adorable little babies.

What about people who think that the world is a difficult place? That people are out to get them? That life is hard and filled with struggle? What kind of world do they live in?

Or what about people who just love others? Or those for whom life is a gift? They want to make the most of every day. For such people, the glass is always half-full. What kind of world do they live in?

Questions for reflection:

- What is the world really like?
- Who is right?
- In any case, what makes people's worlds so different?

Example two

John's family and Roger's family live next to each other. During the wet summer months, both houses flooded horribly. Almost everything was lost, but no one in either family got hurt. Neither family had insurance.

John believed in his heart that this challenge was one he and his family now must face with a good attitude and love in their hearts. John was sad to lose the pictures of his kids growing up and many of his family's heirlooms. But he told his family

that the possessions were not as important as their safety, and he was simply thankful that they were alright.

Roger, too, was very thankful that no one was hurt, but he could not stop feeling devastated at the loss. He became consumed with worry that he would not be able to provide for his family. The stress ate away at his health and good feelings, and he started being short with his kids regularly. He constantly talked about the stress being too much for him.

Questions for reflection:

- What was the source of Roger's stress? Was it the flood damage?
- If the flood caused stress, why wasn't everyone who was flooded reacting the same as Roger?
- What if stress is not caused by bad or stressful events?

Thinking is something we do, not something that happens to us.

We think all the time. Thinking is a power we're all born with, just like our heartbeat and our breathing. That power is like electricity. It brings to light whatever we plug into it. If we start to think a lot about cars, we will tend to notice cars; if we start to think a lot about babies, we will notice babies, and so on.

Our thoughts become our own reality or "world". Cars and babies are simple examples, but what about when our mind is filled with upsetting thoughts like Roger's was in the example? Rather than living in a car-filled world, Roger's thinking was causing him to live in an upset-filled world. The only difference between the two is how the power of thought was used differently.

While a thought is on our mind, it creates our experience of our life right then. That experience looks so real to us that we can "blame" the situation we are in for causing us to feel the way we do. It can be even more upsetting when a co-worker, family member, or neighbor is not upset by the same things we are. It is easy to think, "What is wrong with them?" or worse, "What is wrong with me?"

The good news is that there is nothing wrong. People think all the time. Thinking looks real and feels real to us. Our feelings come from our thinking, not from our circumstances, which explains why two people in the same situation can feel so differently about it.

Principles

Three very simple principles explain the power of thought. The terms themselves are not important, but for now let's refer to them as Mind, Consciousness, and Thought. There's an energy always flowing through us. We can call this energy Mind. It doesn't have any form. Our heart is beating, our blood is circulating, our mind is thinking – these processes all use that life energy. Thought is our ability to continually use this energy to think about our life. Consciousness means we are aware of our life and aware of the fact that we can think. In other words, Mind, Thought, and Consciousness work together and boil down to the simple idea that we are alive, we are always thinking, and we know it.

These principles cannot be figured out in the way that a complicated problem or a detailed map can be studied and figured out. In fact, trying to figure them out is not at all helpful in understanding them. The best way to see how our thinking creates our experience is to relax and not think too much about it. Not thinking about thinking is easier than it sounds, and it usually brings about a relaxing, calming feeling. The quieter our minds are, the more we can understand the true nature of the principles and experience helpful discoveries that make them applicable to our own lives.

How can stress go?

Example one

Think about breathing. Do you notice that when we begin to concern ourselves with our breathing; breathing becomes harder, almost a hassle? Usually we don't worry about our breathing, it's a constant fact. It regulates itself depending on what our body needs. Shallow breathing might suffice during a nap; heavy breathing might be needed after running up a flight of stairs. We don't have to make ourselves breathe harder; our body takes care of this for us. When we forget about it altogether, it is no big deal – just a fact of life.

In fact, we don't have to worry about our thinking, either. It too is a constant fact. If we leave our thinking alone, no matter what we're thinking, our thoughts will continually flow and change. Thoughts come and go and don't have to be a big deal. Even upsetting and stressful thoughts pass. It is the nature of thought to do so.

Questions for Reflection:

- When are you more likely to remember something that is “on the tip of your tongue”?

- A. When you are struggling to remember it.
 - B. When your mind is not on it at all (you are in the shower, driving, talking about something else).
- Why?

Example two

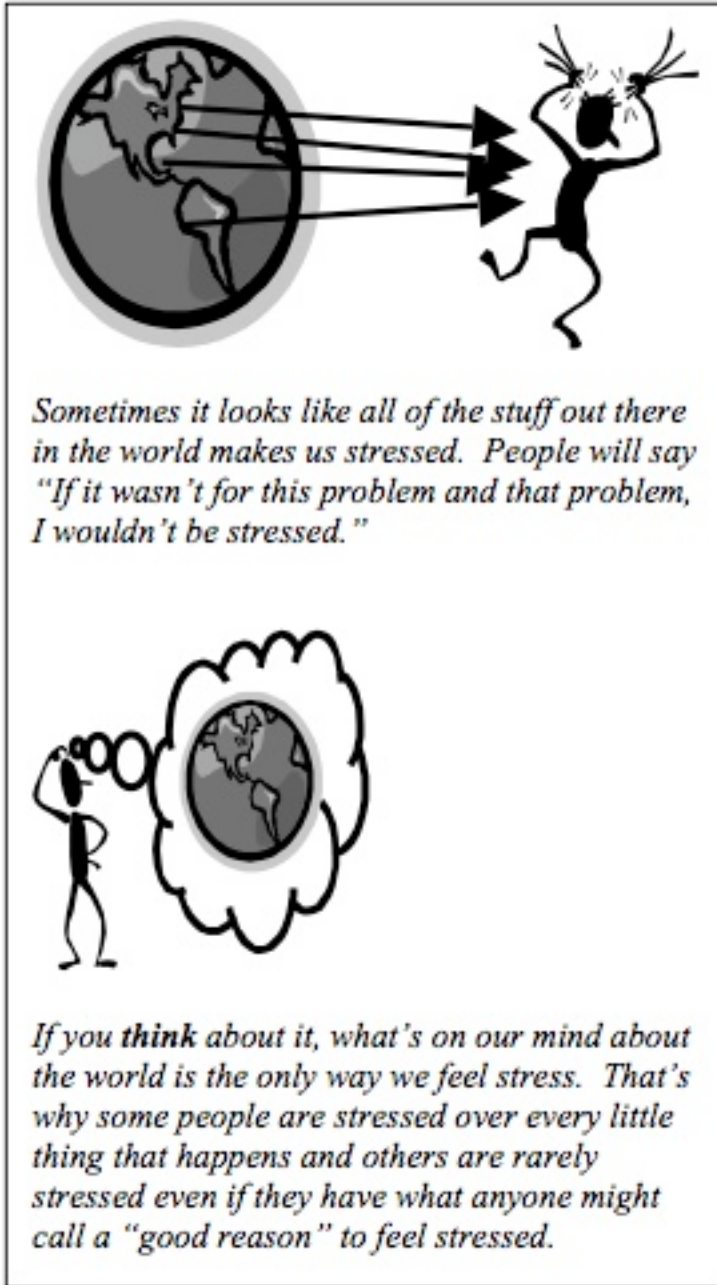
Marissa has been arguing with her daughter-in-law, Barbara, for years about how to discipline children. She believes Barbara doesn't listen at all to her point of view. Now, Marissa tends to get flustered before she even talks to Barbara. She tries to plan what she is going to say to get her point across. The conversations never go as planned, and Marissa finds them very stressful and difficult. Often, she thinks of the perfect thing to say in the car on the way home from Barbara's, but by then it is too late. She tries to remember to bring it up the next time they talk, but by then the timing is off. Thinking of the perfect thing to say in the car surely isn't as helpful as thinking of it during the conversation, and Marissa is down on herself for not being more on the ball. The kids are important to her, and she just wishes that Barbara would listen and that she could get her point across.

Questions for reflection:

- Why are Marissa's perfect things to say so delayed?
- What if Marissa was less tense during her conversations with her daughter-in-law? How could that help her?

Best ideas come when we're calm.

Stress doesn't feel good. It's tiring and time-consuming, and it takes our energy away from enjoying life. Oftentimes people seek ways to relieve stress—some healthy, some not. For example, people exercise to relieve stress. Or people may drink alcohol to relieve stress. Either way, people often feel the need to DO something to get rid of their stress. But what if there was an easier way? The principles of Mind, Thought, and Consciousness imply that thinking is a constant, energized process. Our thinking is designed to move and be responsive to the moment. Too much thinking, especially too much thinking about ourselves, can work against the natural way thought flows. But if we don't work against it, healthy thinking is always available. This concept is called innate health.



Have you ever noticed how young children get over things quickly, don't hold grudges, don't worry excessively, and simply enjoy having fun? Serious adults often become light-hearted and relaxed around kids, whose spirit is often contagious. Kids naturally have a healthy, responsive thought process.

The thought process we all shared as young people is still available to us when it's not covered over with stressful and upsetting thinking. It is often surprising that the answers we need are available to us once the stressful thinking passes. Like Marissa in our story, we have better ideas and are more

likely to solve problems once our head clears and our tension drops. This happens naturally when our thoughts move on and change, after we leave them alone.

Leaving our stressful thinking alone and having faith in the idea of innate health, coupled with a simple understanding of the principles of Mind, Thought, and Consciousness, provide the know-how to rid yourself of chronic stress. The rest is up to you.

Is being upset going to help solve problems?
Is worry worth it?
What are you willing to trade for your peace of mind?

Knowing that we are the thinkers of our thoughts means that rather than circumstances having the power, we do. No one is perfect, and everyone loses his or her bearings from time to time—that's just part of being human. But being able to see where the stress is coming from allows us to regain our sense of balance. We don't need to DO anything to rid ourselves of stress. When our thinking shifts, our feeling state will follow.

Like children, we are resilient, fun-loving, and surprisingly wise. This is our true nature. The experience of stress is a side track down a path of thinking that is working for us at the moment. Thinking can and will change if we simply leave it alone and wait for it to pass.

Finding ways to accomplish this is done by the individual. When people reflect on the principles, they will get ideas for what works best for them. Notice how you feel. If your feeling state is positive, it is a good time to trust your ideas. If your feeling state is rushed, tense, or otherwise negative, it is best not to make hasty decisions but simply to relax and trust that thinking can and will change.

Bibliography

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