

SPIRITS On a Human Path

Stress, it is said, is an “equal opportunity destroyer.”

Regardless of income, education, gender, or how dysfunctional your parents were when they raised you, stress is everywhere present in our world. The World Health Organization goes so far as to say that stress is a “global epidemic.” But as the global village begins to pool its collective wisdom, we see that the stress of life is a natural process of life on earth. It is no secret that we are living in times of tremendous change, and where the winds of change blow, there is stress.

Stress is commonly defined as wear and tear on the body. This definition holds much merit; however, it denies the existence of our spiritual essence. Today, a more apt definition bringing light to this perspective describes stress as “a perceived disconnection from our divine source.” While it is true that we are never disconnected from our divine source, unresolved feelings of anger and fear create a very real illusion of separation. Carl Jung once said that every crisis is a spiritual crisis, and spiritual crises require spiritual cures – thought

Flat tires, alcoholic spouses, and messy divorces may seem like roadblocks, but they are really reflections of our angers and fears, the real roadblocks on the human path.

which holds much wisdom.

If you were to talk to the wisdom keepers, the shamans, and healers of all times, of all cultures, you would hear them speak of three things with regard to human spirituality: relationships (with oneself and others), values, and a meaningful purpose in life. Ask anybody to make a list their top ten

stressors and most likely you will find that each list is comprised of issues, problems, and circumstances dealing with these same three aspects: relationships, values (value conflicts), and purpose in life. At first, it may seem that stress and

spirituality are mutually exclusive terms, but a closer look reveals that they are, quite literally, partners in the dance of life.

Stressors come in all shapes and sizes. The small stressors we can sidestep with little effort. The larger



stressors, those which seem to be insurmountable roadblocks and obstacles, we tend to avoid. And while avoidance may be the coping skill of choice for life-threatening situations, it is not a spiritual cure for stressors involving relationships, values, and purpose in life. Yet avoidance merely postpones the inevitable. Spiritual stressors must be resolved. There is no other way.

Roadblocks or reflections?

Roadblocks are actually part of the human path. They are meant to be dismantled, circumvented, or transcended, not avoided. And we are never presented with a problem that we cannot handle. Throughout my professional career, I have had the good fortune to meet several people who have been through hellacious life experiences. Remarkably, these people are not victims of their circumstances. They are the victors. When I ask them how they overcame their adversity, their answers are almost always the same: A sense of patience, a sense of humor, a sense of faith, compassion, patience, forgiveness, humbleness, imagination and creativity, optimism and love. These are not gifts for a chosen few. They are birthrights for everyone. These are what I call "muscles of the soul." Like our physical muscles, they never disappear, but they can atrophy with disuse.

We are called upon regularly to exercise these spiritual muscles, and whether it is a malignant cancerous tumor or a benign person with 14 items in a nine-item express checkout lane, we must learn to exercise these muscles frequently. In these times of great change which often produce great stress, we are called upon frequently to use our inner resources and come through each situation the victor, not the victim. Our spiritual potential, as expressed through humor, compassion, faith, forgiveness, courage, creativity, and intuition are

there for the asking. Spiritual health, the good race, is flexing these muscles and feeling the strength they provide when needed.

The walls of the ego become so thick that we literally become immobilized and our life force becomes restricted. The metaphor becomes quite real in terms of health and well-being. Over time, unresolved anger and fear can and will disrupt the flow of universal life force, cascading down the layers of the human energy field to cause dysfunction in various organs, from the immune system and reproductive system to the heart muscle itself.

The word "health" comes to us from the Anglican word Hal, meaning to be whole or holy. One cannot speak of health without an implicit understanding of human spirituality, for spiritual health is inextricably linked to our mental, emotional, and physical health. Ageless wisdom also reminds us that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, for health is not solely the optimal functioning of the body's various physiological systems. Optimal health is comprised of the integration, balance and harmony of mind, body, spirit, and emotions. Where there is imbalance and dissonance, ultimately there will be disease and illness – the wear and tear of body organs so often associated with stress.

Gifts to nurture the soul

Ensuring health to the human spirit is ensuring all aspects of health. Herein lies the significant strand that binds stress and spirituality together. As the daily responsibilities of life pile up to an overwhelming clutter, the need for effective coping skills and relaxation techniques is essential to maintaining a sense of mind-body-

spirit equilibrium. Productive coping skills and relaxation techniques do more than calm the body, provide stillness to the mind, and provide clarity of thought. Grounded in frequent regularity, they clear and maintain a pathway to allow the constant flow of divine energy from the highest level of our being down into our deepest body tissue, ensuring and nurturing the health of the human spirit – which is health to mind, body, and soul.

We yearn for and cherish these special moments to give balance to that which so often and so easily becomes off-balance through the

A crimson sunset. A hot bath. A monarch butterfly. A massage. The reassuring voice of a good friend. These are gifts that nurture the soul.

hectic demands and increasing pressures of our jobs, families, and uncalculated events in everyday life. These gifts, a type of divine energy so to speak, filter through our senses to invigorate the human spirit, the essence of life, which seeks to resonate in every cell in our body.

And in cyclical fashion, it is the vibrancy of our inner resources, which like a magnet, continually draws our attention toward these special moments. This awareness that recognizes the unique alchemy of humanity and divinity is that which allows us to best cope with life's problems.

Moreover, this mystical alchemy, which sustains the health of the human spirit, is none other than the most sound strategy for stress management because it acknowledges and honors, rather than ignores the critical importance of the spiritual dimension. Some practical means to ensure the health of the human spirit include but are not limited to:

The art of self renewal, the practice of sacred rituals, sweet forgiveness, embracing the shadow, keeping the faith, living your joy, and putting compassion into action, all of which enhance the life force of divine energy.

Today there is a growing interest in the topic of human spirituality. Indeed, there is a hunger that can be satisfied by neither the dogma of religion nor the promise of science. As human consciousness expands and evolves, as hundreds of thousands of people begin to wake up to the full potential of their spiritual essence, a new spiritual renaissance will

emerge to shape and influence our human potential. Perhaps the winds of change and the winds of grace are one in the same. Nevertheless, divine spirit seeks to breathe life into every aspect of our lives. To repeat the words of Sri Ramakrishna, "The winds of grace are blowing perpetually. We only need raise our sails." **AL**

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STRATEGIES FOR LETTING GO OF STRESS

- **TICKLE THE FUNNY BONE:** Comic relief is essential to the human spirit. Everyone needs to fill their quota of 15-20 laughs per day. Try to find one humorous thing a day and you will be blessed with many.
- **GET MOVING:** Forget about trying to lose weight. Cardiovascular exercise is really meant to rid your body of all the stress hormones produced in the course of a day. If they stay in your body, they become toxic.
- **GOOD VIBRATIONS I:** Turn off the TV. Television is human kryptonite. Limit the number of hours you watch per week, and if possible, learn to live life without it. You will be amazed at how much time you have to really do the things you always wanted.
- **GOOD VIBRATIONS II:** What music do you listen to? Soothing instrumental music (no lyrics) gives the right brain a chance to balance with the left brain for peace and harmony.
- **MEDITATE:** Take five or even ten minutes of personal alone time to calm your mind. Turn off the radio, cell phone, and television, close your eyes and observe your breath.
- **ADOPT AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE:** When things appear to be going wrong, take a moment to counting your blessings for all the things in your life that are going right.
- **FRIENDS IN NEED:** Build a good support system: Friends are essential to good health. Not lots of friends, but a handful of awesome people to whom you can turn for support when you need it.
- **COME BACK TO NATURE:** Take some time each day to get outside, breath some fresh air and warm your face with full spectrum lighting.

