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Traveling between Our Own Fear and Courage

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Abstract: There is a hidden power inside us that helps us overcome all the obstacles. We just have to learn to get that unmaned power and energy out. We can do it through body discipline, breathing, senses, concentration and meditation. When breathing wanders so does happen with the mind, when the breath is quiet, so is the mind. To reduce stress, breath control is the most relevant tool to calm the mind. When we are scared or nervous, breathing is shallow, fast and irregular, when we are relaxed or in a deep state of thinking, breathing becomes slow. Since our state of mind reflects in this way, it results that we can also control our mood. By regulating breathing, not only increases oxygen intake but prepares us for exercising concentration and meditation.

Keywords: Breathing; meditation; mind; stress; body discipline

It's frightening, it's bad. It is evil. It sneaks in all aspects of our lives. We have known it all in depth since childhood. It influences our thoughts, choices, decisions, reactions, behavior, relationships, squeezes into discussions, forces us to do things we do not intend to do. It's contagious ... it's pungent ... it's implacable ... It's her, the fear! We know it. We feel it. We all suffer because of it; it's part of the human condition.

But what are we afraid of? Anything! Whatever happens to us or may happen to us in a lifetime. In fact, we are afraid of life itself, and we feel it daily, because every day we need something, and fear is based on the idea that our needs cannot be satisfied. Everything we do, our thoughts, the choices, have the objective of meeting these needs.

The most important thing, on the other hand, is what we do in such a situation, the way we react to the needs that are not fulfilled, what we do think, how we react to ourselves and others. The quality of our lives is reduced to how each of us chooses to react when his needs are met and the way he behaves when those needs don't find their fulfillment.

How do we get rid of this fear? The solution would be that whenever we feel fear, let us ask ourselves what do we want to get? Are we sure we need that? In a deeper analysis, we may conclude that we do not necessarily need that in our lives. We could dare to see our lives unfolding without that. This is the first step on the road of courage, fearlessness. No one says it's easy, the world is in a continuous go-come, we oscillate and we turn between fulfilled needs and unfulfilled needs. We want things to slow down a little, to breathe deeply, longing for a clear and objective view, to make the best decisions, to be

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proud of the choices we make, to talk and to act spontaneously and right to us and others. But ... stupor! We wake up on a hurricane of fears, worries, confusion, thoughts, acting regretfully, spontaneous emotions and uncontrollable reactions. We are invaded by thoughts like I will not get something that I really need or I will lose something that I already have and which I cannot miss.

If we managed to screen ourselves correctly, we would understand that whenever we believe that happiness comes from outside, we live in fear. When we realize that the source of happiness is not outside of us, but comes from within us, fear will just disappear. Nobody says that it would be an easy process to become aware of the perfection of our being, the revelation that we have everything we need to be happy with and that the source of our happiness it's only within us. This awareness is a real act of courage.

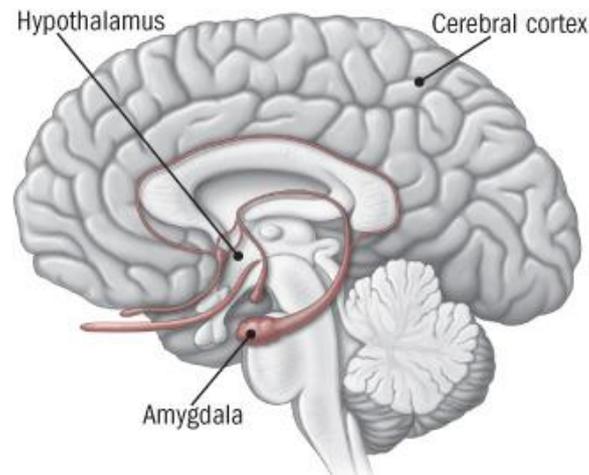
Currently, fear has acquired another dimension and another name – It's the stress! So, I'm going to start this journey trying to describe how the biological and emotional reactions we have to stress explain, scientifically, trying to build the foundation of a life beyond stress.

According to Paul Popescu Neveanu- Dictionary of Psychology (1978) stress is defined as a “*situation, stimulus, that puts the body in a state of tension*”

Therefore, from a scientific point of view, stress is any kind of change, causing physical, emotional or psychological pressure. It is the way we react when reality no longer meets the expectations and scenarios we have built, and even more, the changes that are emerging are irreversible and we are forced to accept them. Acute short-term stress occurs when an unforeseen event occurs, which takes us unprepared and forces us to react immediately, such as an accident, a break-up, the loss of a loved one, health, etc. The way we react when we receive the news and how we manage it in the short term is decisive, we can remain in a state of shock where we can no longer master the thoughts, feelings, physical reactions, and then we have to deal with stress term, of which it is much harder to get out, very likely only with the help of a specialist. When confronted with a devastating event, it is so deep that all physiological and emotional suffering remains alive in us; we close ourselves down, become depressed, isolated, nervous, and overwhelmed. In those moments we feel that we swim in place, desperately trying to stay on the surface, while the waves strike us unceasingly until we succumb, exhausted. From that moment on, our health is compromised.

The stress effects on the mind are disastrous. When we feel a physical or emotional threat, the biological reaction activates to stress, fight or flight. The “fight-or-flight” response evolved as a survival mechanism, enabling people and other mammals to react quickly to life-threatening situations.

The stress response begins in the brain. When someone confronts an oncoming car or other danger, the eyes or ears (or both) send the information to the amygdala, an area of the brain that contributes to emotional processing. The amygdala interprets the images and sounds. When it perceives danger, it instantly sends a distress signal to the hypothalamus. (Understanding the stress response-Chronic activation of this survival mechanism impairs health-Harvard Health publishing/Harvard Medical school).



Source: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/understanding-the-stress-response>

Under pressure, our nervous vegetative system raises its engines, activates the egocentric reaction to stress, and either prepares to fight back in force or to run. The reactions that are triggered are of the most diverse and include obstructed and mechanical thinking, confusion and postponement, feelings of restlessness or depression, impatience, hostile attitude or self-closing, rejection or withdrawal. Along with these emotional manifestations that are triggered by the vegetative nervous system, physiological reactions of self-preservation occur, namely, breathing becomes faster and more superficial, blood pressure and pulse overload the heart, blood is pumped into the muscles of the arms and legs, start to digest, stop digestion stops because the digestive tract remains bloodless, increases secretion of stress hormones, namely, adrenaline, cortisol and glucagon, stops the secretion of growth hormone and sex hormones, the blood coagulates because of thrombocytes that thicken and become viscous, in other words, our immune system ceases to function.

Every day we struggle with some disappointments, we have expectations from us and especially from those around us, expectations that we often remain unfulfilled. In such situations, we react in different ways. If instead of thinking, choosing a more thoughtful reaction, we react from the instinct, entering the most primitive state, which includes the fight or flight response imprinted in our DNA, then we become the slaves of the chemicals and hormones, behaving after the same long term conditioned template.

However, recent research indicates that stress is not as bad as it may seem at first glance, and that there is also a beneficial side to it. This applies to the situation where we feel that the stress is not a threat but a positive challenge that demands our capabilities, such as overcoming physical limits, practicing a sport, possibly extreme, or fulfilling a dream you thought of a lifetime, but you have not found the courage to do it. So beneficial stress is an emotion we have when we feel enthusiastic, but not threatened, when we propose an objective beyond our limits at first glance, but we can aspire to succeed if we strive. It is true that we need time, energy and will, but also perseverance, courage, determination and strong motivation. The positive stress may even improve our lives. It has been shown to increase performance, concentrate and push us towards our goals with increased efficiency as well as great satisfaction. Also, the severe

stress left by a trauma can be at the origin of the moments of revelation in our lives. The death of a loved one who overwhelms us with sadness, despair, depression can also make us aware of our existence, to try to find answers to questions such as who I am?, why am I here? What can I do with my life?

The way we choose to react to such a strong stress factor can make the difference between life and death. The long-term implications of stress go from our perceptions. There was a study conducted by an American university for eight years on the perception of stress and its impact on mortality. This study was attended by more than 25,000 subjects who assessed their level of stress and the way they think it influences their health. After the eight years, the state archives were used and it was found that those who claimed that stress affected their health had an increase in the risk of death by 43 percent, and those who said that although they are stress-stricken but do not interpret its effects as negative had fewer deaths in the eight-year period.

According to a paper entitled “Rethinking Stress- The Role of Mindsets in Determining the Stress Response” published in 2012, the stressful experience causes the release of anabolic hormones that rebuild the cells, synthesize proteins and strengthen immunity, making the body stronger and healthier than it was before the stress-provoking experience. “These studies change our perception of stress and cause new discussions about the hard-to-understand and paradoxical impact that it has on our lives. And so the term PTD post-traumatic development appeared. Science now confirms the notion that what does not kill you makes you stronger, namely, the fact that we are facing the storm of extreme stress, we can cultivate our internal resistance, becoming more mentally stronger; establish deeper relationships and connections with the others. We come to see the world with other eyes; we get a deeper understanding of our existence and the purpose we have, while becoming deeply grateful”.

This does not mean that stress is always good and does not affect us negatively, does not hurt us, does not make us vulnerable, but we need to realize that there is a subtle difference of interpretation during and after the critical moment when we have the possibility to choose whether we perceive stress as a beneficial or harmful one. This paradox is the reason why stress release methods have proven to be so effective. These methods involve educating mentality, changing the lifestyle in depth, and not just managing effectively the maximum moment of stress, but radically changing how we receive, react and interpret what is happening to us, our ability to adapt easily with stressful situations without feeling the physical and emotional repercussions of stress. Recent studies have shown that those who perceive stress as a challenge, rather than as a threat, can manage major crises more easily, mature after experiencing stress and gain more clarity, strength and superiority. If we follow some stress release or relaxation techniques, we will get calmer in the face of changes and surprises.

Usually, relaxation and stress release techniques are simple, involve some lifestyle changes, changing perceptions in positive perceptions, and the use of day-to-day tools to gain control over awareness, emotion, purpose in life. Even if temperamentally we are more sensitive, more vulnerable to stress, practicing these techniques every day, we will surely be able to get away with it. This stress releasing process activates on several levels:

- Physically it is considered the state of health through diet, care, rest, practicing physical exercises that provide flexibility, strength, balance and;
- Emotionally we refer to our ability to manage emotions, control our extreme reactions, perfect our emotional intelligence, and protect our soul from anything that could hurt it;
- Mentally it is about our ability to find solutions to imminent problems, to increase the level of concentration and attention;
- Spiritually, we develop our intuition, we wake up, and becoming aware that divine perfection exists everywhere. Having managed to decipher the puzzle of our lives, we would be able to reach a deep peace of mind.

The stress itself does not really affect us if we resort to methods of relaxing right after the stressful moment. After the first impact with the element that causes the shock, we have to bring our body back to a state of homeostasis, or at least before we produce the disturbing event, in order to regain our balance. Unfortunately, although the shock itself may last only for a moment, we remain anchored and after that, wearing in our head an endless dialogue, marked by anxiety, frustration, pain, helplessness, which may last a few hours and reach a few years. We conscientiously rebuild that stressful moment in our minds, asking what we said, what we did, how things happened, we blame that we could have said or done otherwise, so the agitation continued indefinitely. Moreover, we are concerned about what others think about how we reacted, how we interpret our attitude, and torture our soul by making assumptions about how it would end. And although the event is already history, the state of agitation and pain caused by it is perpetuated by turning into chronic stress. For these reasons, in order to reduce the effects of chronic stress when it occurs, we must think beyond the momentary solution, namely, to think proactively. Therefore, relaxation techniques change the way we relate to stressful situations in life, change our perception and attitude during and after the event. It changes our perspectives substantially but acts upon our whole being until we reach a state of self-actualization where we consider that our needs are met; we capitalize on our potential, and become the embodiment of peace in the midst of the storm.

A stress release and relaxation technique is the meditation that assumes a holistic approach that will transform us, help us rise above stress and overcome it, changing our way of seeing, interpreting and reacting to everything that surrounds us, so we can go through fewer moments of crisis. This approach will help us to control our awareness, needs, emotions, potential, and the goal of life. Meditation guarantees the elimination of stress in the purest sense of the word. The transformation is as real as possible and guarantees for a moment that we do not perceive life situations as stressful, we become stronger, the feeling of fulfillment will last longer and our mind will calm down. An ancient wise said “We are what we think and create the world through our thoughts”. No matter how unbelievable it seems, we also create a state of stress by the way we interpret and carefully analyze every thought, physical sensation and emotion, trying to link them to our needs and aspirations. We apply and act in this way both on the way we perceive the stress and the way we relate to life.

Meditation is a technique that has passed the test of time and which has proved scientifically to heal emotional trauma, quiet the mind and restore the balance of the body. We begin every morning with our minds filled with obsessive thoughts and unceasing talk, turn the possibilities we have on all sides, dream with open eyes, remind us of moments of the past, imagine and build scenarios that we hope will become reality. We continue this way until we overcome our sleep at the end of the day. According to a study since we are born and until we give our last breath., every day we think of between 60000 and 80000 thoughts, that is, a thought every 1.2 seconds, a continuous process, day by day. If, on the other hand, we introduce some peace and quiet in the turmoil of our thoughts, we can interrupt this continuous mental activity by slowing it down. If we do this regularly, these short and constant interruptions of thought flow will change the way our brain works. If we exercise frequently, the pace at which our life is attained will be composed of thoughts-peace of mind-activity-peace of mind-thoughts-peace of mind, and so on. What follows afterwards is truly amazing, another source is formed from which our thoughts, words and deeds spring. Life enters a whirlwind altogether and totally different, though it seems to be the same, but some of the noise and talk in our minds has been quiet, and the turmoil of confused thoughts has subsided. We begin to change slowly, evolving daily and bringing into our world a touch of tranquility, a soul of peace, a moment of our self. Over time, we would begin to see the world with other eyes if we immerse ourselves on a daily basis repeatedly for a short time in a state of peace and silence, which is undoubtedly a radical rupture in relation to our templates and conditioned behaviors. Each leaking second brings with it a touch of tranquility in addition, so that life seems to be slow, we begin to regain the naturally native and unconditional balance that helps us connect to the core of our creativity and intuition, because of fact, true intelligence is that of intuition. This intuition that has its sap in the fruitful garden of peace of mind and peace opens us the door to absolute clarity and to infinite possibilities. From this garden we draw the moments of maximum inspiration, the most intuitive ideas and first of all the deep sense of connection with ourselves and the world around us.

The daily practice of meditation helps us integrate the feeling of peace and peace into the mind and body, acquiring more compassion and feeling more fulfilled.

If stress is our reaction when our needs are not met, then meditation can be considered an antidote to stress. It is not so easy to accept, and it has not been easy to reach this conclusion, there has been much speculation and the world has been skeptical, but it has now been scientifically proven that meditation reduces heart rate, stops the secretion of cortisol, glucagon and adrenaline, slows down the rate of breathing and causes it to be deeper, which leads to better oxygenation of cells, stimulates the secretion of growth and sexual hormones, strengthens the immune system, helps us to react better to pain and suffering, stimulates concentration, wellness, quenches the endless joy of thoughts.

Numerous studies have demonstrated, with the help of MRI investigations, that meditation leads to changes in the physical structure of the brain. Also, after a period of 60 days when the subjects meditated every 30 minutes daily, focusing on breathing, there was an increase in the size of the hippocampus, the brain region responsible for learning, memorizing and orienting in space, by such a reduction in the size of the amygdala, the region in the brain responsible for

stress, and the sensation of fear and anger. Fortunately, today, by improving imaging techniques, it can penetrate into the mysteries of the brain and see what happens during meditation. Although meditation is associated with a state of peace and relaxation, the followers of this practice also claim beneficial effects at the cognitive and psychological level, effects that last over time. These encouraging results emphasize the way conscious meditation works that not only reducing the stress, but also relates to structural changes in the amygdala. This method of reducing stress through awareness can be used to prevent stress-related disorders such as posttraumatic stress syndrome.

But what does awareness mean? Obviously, be aware. Unfortunately, we are not aware of the wonderful things that happen to us, we react negatively if the light or heat of the sun is disturbing us, but we do not enjoy it when it only warms us with its warm rays, or at most we do it unconsciously, we get bothered about too much music, but we do not consciously live the happiness caused by the musical arrangements that we like, passionately blaming the chemicals in the food, but we do not enjoy the incredible benefits of eating a simple apple. Conscious and constant meditation raise our awareness, and then we would know how to enjoy and be aware of the privileges of sunlight, we would feel how all our cells feed and lighten us, we can see and feel how musical arrangements invade us actually the organs, healing them, waking them, we would also be able to enjoy all the benefits from just eating a single apple. Food contains some totally magical elements that are capable of preserving or restoring mental and physical health, but it is imperative to know under what conditions we can extract these elements, and the answer is that we can do all this through awareness through the power of thought.

The practice of meditation is like a journey that we've been waiting for all our life. It's a pleasant and relaxed journey to the center of our being, whose destination is the emotional freedom and self-awakening. If we meditate every day, we would feel that the way we interpret stressful situations is changing, we would get a constant state of tranquility that would not change, we would become more productive in all aspects of our lives, and relationships with others will flourish. We would embody the silence in the midst of the storm ... the order in the midst of chaos ... the imperturbable calm ... the happiness ... the gratitude.

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