

Some people
make problems
out of nothing.

Some people
make problems
into nothing.

More people
are killed by
worry than
by hard
work.

Freeing Ourselves from Stress

Recent medical and scientific studies have proven that stress is closely linked to many physical diseases and mental disorders. Though most of us experience stress in one form or another, many of us are not aware of how we create stress, or how we can overcome it.

How We Create Stress

When we are under stress, we tend to blame our difficulties on someone or something outside of ourselves. But, in fact, we cause our own stress. When we develop unreasonable goals, look for recognition, or want life to turn out exactly as we planned, we set ourselves up for disappointment. With disappointment come frustration and stress. We become impatient, we react, or we take too many things personally. We let our feelings and emotions rule us.

If we constantly bombard our minds with anxiety, useless analysis, or complex thinking, we develop stress fractures of the mind. Unattended, these fractures can turn us into nervous wrecks. When the mind cannot handle the pain any longer, it passes it on to the body.

The body, in turn, develops chemical imbalances which can lead to a host of diseases. We may get headaches, stomachaches, backaches, high blood pressure, ulcers or heart problems.

These ailments are merely symptoms of the problem; they are not the root of the problem. The root of the problem is that we forget that we are souls. Instead, we begin to identify with our body, mind, or status. We give importance to that which is temporary, rather than to our soul which is truly important. If we learn to break this identification with our temporary nature, we can actively break free from the grip of stress.

Getting Rid Of Stress

Getting rid of stress entails weakening our identification with our body, mind, and gross accomplishments. If we look at our life from the point of view of eternity, we can see that all these things that we are proud of, or cling to, are insignificant. As we continue to reinforce this outlook, we free ourselves from the anxiety of gross existence.

To weaken gross identity, there are things we can do. We can read inspiring thoughts and incorporate them into our lives. We can train ourselves to be less self-centered, and more aware of the needs of those around us. We should also remember that the body is the temple of the soul, and not destroy it with bad habits.

By practicing wisdom and having good habits, we can make the body a fit instrument for experiencing our higher nature. When we live in that connected state all the time, we are automatically freed from stress.

When we are balanced, we take care of the needs of the moment, cooperate graciously with others, live consistently by the highest principles, and stay even-minded.

When we are in a state of balance, the mind is automatically subdued. It stops giving us trouble.

If we are balanced, we are always energetic.

One who has
self-control is
the master of
his own
destiny.

Overcoming the Reactive Mind

Every day, life presents us with countless situations in which we must make choices. The choices we make are dependent upon our mental state. We can make each situation a success or a disaster, depending upon our ability to drop our ego-centered images in the moment, and instead, choose the vibrant energy of higher consciousness.

Without our connection to higher consciousness, we become reactive, because we cling to old familiar ideas that clash with reality. But if we remember that we have an unlimited reservoir of constructive and creative energy within, we can tap into that energy and experience self-confidence.

Why is it important to stay in touch with this higher state? Because we may think that we know a lot, since we have gone to school and learned a few things. We may even think we "have it all together" because we are succeeding on the material level or functioning well on the job.

But if, in spite of all this, we are identifying with our images and expectations, rather than our higher consciousness, we are bound to fall prey to our reactive

mind. When we do things from the ego-centered point of view, even if they are good things, we are easily victimized by our reactive mind.

What Are the Signs of a Reactive Mind?

The reactive mind has its own agenda, and does not want anyone or anything to stand in its way. Sometimes it becomes hostile, arrogant, abusive, or even violent, because it cannot have what it wants, when it wants it. At other times, the reactive mind becomes haughty, retorts, and has to have the last word. It is ready to argue and make excuses for its faults, rather than correcting them. The reactive mind angrily walks out, sulks, and hopes that someone will come and placate or pamper it. If nobody does, it goes into self-pity.

Looking for appreciation and recognition, and having feelings of self-importance are symptoms of the reactive mind. The reactive mind becomes resentful when it does not get the attention it seeks. It becomes very individualistic, and refuses to let go of its images or cooperate with others.

We need to operate in this world from a state which is beyond ego and the reactive mind if we want to have a happy, peaceful, and stable life. The following suggestions will help us attain the rewards of overcoming the reactive mind.

Ways to Overcome the Reactive Mind

Take Charge of Our Attitude

What does a positive attitude do for us? When we are positive, we can put others at ease and bring out their best qualities. We can create solutions instead of succumbing to the conflict that follows reactions. Whenever we discover that we are reacting, we should make mid-course corrections, and tune back into our inner peace and depth. We are the producer and director of our attitude, so it is our responsibility to make it the best.

Set Realistic Goals and Expectations

Sometimes we set unreasonable goals for ourselves, or we think other people have expectations of us. Then we frustrate ourselves trying to fulfill those expectations. As a result of that frustration we can easily trigger the mind to react.

We can overcome this reactive state by being more realistic in our expectations, and by letting go of those expectations where necessary. We should ask ourselves daily, "What kind of unreasonable demands am I creating that are making me react to situations and people?" Then we can create priorities that reflect more realistic expectations for ourselves and others.

Slow Down Inside

When we worry about how to accomplish our "to do" lists, we build a mental pressure cooker inside our mind and fuel it with more and more tension. It does not take long for our hyperness and tension to spill over into mental reactions.

To overcome reactive mental states, we need to learn to slow down the racing mind. To accomplish this, we can slow down our breathing, making each inhalation and exhalation deep and full. We can also put a brake on the racing mind by practicing hatha yoga poses with full concentration.

Practice Self-Improvement

If we really want to free ourselves from the reactive mind, we have to make a solid effort to do good actions and think good thoughts. Every day we should do something to improve our inner and outer environment. For example, we can start a new exercise program, go on a diet, or learn to meditate. By building confidence in our higher consciousness through self-improvement, we can learn to go beyond the reactive states.

Communicate Patiently

Whenever we are having difficulties, we should keep our communication channels open. Closing in and giving others the silent treatment, or blowing up and "letting

off steam" is a false mental release which does not resolve any problems. By making an effort to be more patient with ourselves and others, and using a tremendous amount of love and care, we can explain things without reacting. We can learn to patiently tell others what our difficulties are, rather than expect them to know what is going on with us.

Give Encouragement

Sometimes we immediately react or criticize our loved ones without remembering our love for them. To avoid alienating our loved ones we should encourage them to be the best they can be instead of constantly criticizing them.

We should use kind words in abundance with our loved ones. Be quick to praise and slow to criticize. Good will and encouragement help everyone. In addition, we should avoid reacting or being critical at home, while at the same time, being overly friendly with outsiders.

Become the Observer

We can halt the reactive mind in an upsetting situation by becoming an objective witness. No matter how dire the situation is, we should remain calm, cool, and collected. Then we can take the necessary action from the perspective of inner clarity rather than outward panic. By becoming an observer rather than a partici-

pant in reactions, we can disassociate ourselves from the reactive mental state. We can calm down, listen carefully, and dissipate our own reactions while we let the other person have their say.

Be Compassionate

If people are trying to fight with us, we should give them help, rather than giving back our negativity. We should show them that there is a way out of their difficulty. We should be compassionate to help, and at the same time tough-minded to avoid reacting. Controlling our reactions to people who are reacting is very hard to do, but it becomes easier the more we draw upon our inner reservoir of compassion.

Beyond the Reactive Mind

Overcoming the reactive mind is not a one-time effort, it's a daily practice, a lifetime process. We should never give up on ourselves, nor should we underestimate the goodness we have inside. Even one good practice can start to free us from the reactive mind. We should keep working to develop that deep, intuitive, compassionate perception that comes from learning wisdom and practicing wisdom in our daily lives.

As our intelligence becomes established in wisdom and our practices reflect our higher consciousness, the mind automatically identifies with our real nature and our reactive tendencies are eradicated.

If we are strict
with
our mind,
we can be
at ease with
ourselves.

No negativity
will ever take
us to the best
of our potential.