

Psyche & Soul 18:

PREVENTING AND RELIEVING STRESS THE S-AMRT WAY.

JOSE PARAPPULLY SDB, PhD
sumedhacentre@gmail.com

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Hello, this is Jose Parappully, Salesian priest and clinical psychologist at Sumedha Centre for Psychospiritual Wellbeing at Jeolikote, Uttarakhand, with another edition of Psyche & Soul.

This weekend we shall explore how we can reduce as well as prevent stress.

Stress is common place during these Covid -19 times. Learning to handle this stress is important for our health and happiness.

Managing stress is all about taking charge: taking charge of our thoughts, our emotions, our schedules, our environment, and the way we deal with situations and perceived threats.

Stress management involves changing the stressful situation when we can, changing our reaction when we can't, taking care of ourselves, and making time for rest and relaxation.

The S-AMRT Approach

I am suggesting a 4-S approach to managing stress: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Self-Renewal and Self-Transformation or the (S-AMRT) Approach

Self-Awareness

We need to be aware of what is happening to us and in us.

- Become aware of our daily routine, especially in regard to work and the effect that routine is having on our life and relationships.
- Become aware of the kind of situations and reactions that trigger negative emotions and distress.
- Become aware of changes in our physical wellbeing: of incipient fatigue, headaches, insomnia, gastro-intestine problems, and other physical stresses. Such awareness lets us know that something is wrong and signals the need for us to do something to correct things.
- When we attempt a change of course, we need to become aware of our successful and unsuccessful modes of coping with stress.

Self-Management

The second is self-management. We need to learn to manage our lives better. This we do by bringing about some helpful changes in our attitudinal and behavioural patterns.

- Developing more flexible attitudes towards self and work is a good place to start.

- We need to learn to manage our energy; know how much of it to spend and where and when and how.
- Time management is a great help here. We need to set priorities, and learn to delegate tasks. We need to discern which are the tasks that need our personal attention and time investment and which can be done by others
- Learning to ask for help is another stress-buster. Too often we try to manage things on our own, and get frustrated. Frustration triggers a stress response. A simple way to avoid this needless stress is to ask someone for help -- for advice as well as hands-on help.
- We need to make our job expectations our own and not somebody else's. Trying to reach standards someone sets up for us is a recipe for continued frustration and burnout.
- We also need to make goals and standards we set for ourselves realistic. Setting standards far above our capacity to achieve them will lead to frustration and to stress.

Third, Self-Renewal

There are many ways we can renew ourselves and feel energised.

- Increasing physical fitness and overall wellbeing through vigorous exercise makes us less vulnerable to the negative effects of stress. Proper diet too assists in this.
- It is important that we have time to rest and relax.

Relaxation decreases blood pressure, slows down heart beat and breathing rate and facilitates healing for the mind and body. Techniques such as yoga, meditation, deep abdominal breathing, visualization of serene environments, or even simply sitting or lying restfully with eyes closed thinking of nothing in particular activate the body's relaxation response.

- Creative and meaningful relationships serve as sources of energy mobilization and provide opportunities for healthy relaxation.

Finally, Self-Transformation

- We can bring about self-transformation through cognitive restructuring, that is, changing our perceptions and thought patterns. Changing our perceptions and interpretations, for example, of threatening situations or obstacles we face can help us both to find relief from stress as well as prevent stress.
- Changing the way we see events—as outside our control or within our control—may be the biggest factor in staying on top of stress. Believing we have control over events in our life has great leverage in management of stress. Even when we can't control an event or situation, we can control our reaction to it, we can change our perception about it, and how we think about it.
- It is also possible to change the reality, or the stressor itself. For example, our stress may be coming from an overcrowded day. We can eliminate or at least reduce the stress by creating lighter work schedules. Prioritising and delegating are two important ways to reduce work stress.
- How we appraise events (stressors) is influenced by our self-concept, how we see ourselves. Building a positive sense of self, strengthening our belief in ourselves and our capacity to be in control and achieve desired results can reduce our vulnerability to stress.

- Living ethically, making our private lives congruent with the values we espouse publicly, and pursuing goals consistent with those values, also reduces the stress that results from guilt and fear of exposure.
- Learning to live in peace with those who inhabit our relational world is also important. Inter-personal conflicts are major causes of stress. There are many such conflicts that we can easily avoid with a little effort.

For reflection.

- *What's the level of stress you are currently experiencing? What could be some of the causes of your stress? What insights are you getting from this podcast as to how you can prevent or reduce stress in your life?*

In the Gospel Jesus says: "Come to me all you who are weary and overburdened. I will give you rest." That Jesus is with you here and now, reaching out to you with compassion as he did to so many. You could spend a few minutes with him, telling him how you really feel, sharing your burdens with him and experience the relief he has promised. You could also visualize Jesus, like a compassionate mother, soothing and comforting you with great tenderness.

Have a stress-free weekend. Be well. Be safe. Be blessed.

Thank you for listening/reading.

Jose Parappully SDB, PhD
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