

## **Psyche & Soul 31**

### **ENHANCING MENTAL HEALTH: 7 MORE SIMPLE PRACTICES**

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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.

In the last podcast I presented 7 simple practices that can help us enhance our mental health and wellbeing. In this weekend's podcast I present seven more simple but very effective practices.

#### **1. Laughter**

Laughter is an ever available means to enhance our mental health and wellbeing. Laughter and mental distress cannot go together. Every time we laugh, more oxygen courses to our organs, blood flow increases, and stress evaporates. In fact, just thinking about having a good laugh is enough to lower our stress levels.

When we watch some silly videos or comedy films, laughter flows effortlessly. Norman Cousins, American journalist, author and professor, healed himself of a painful and rare form of spondylitis that rendered him immobile, staying in his hospital bed and watching comedy movies and reading humorous books – also lots of vitamin C- rather than taking medication. “Hearty laughter is a good way to jog internally without going outdoors” he wrote.

#### **2. Time with Pets**

Spending some time with pets boosts our energy level and creates good mood. When we play with them, we take our mind off our problems. And when we take care of them, we are focused on something outside ourselves. This can be very therapeutic. Even if we don't have a pet of our own, we can occasionally spend some playful moments with those our friends or neighbours may have.

When we pet our dog or cat, for example, even for just a few minutes, our body releases feel-good brain chemicals like serotonin, prolactin, and oxytocin. At the same time, it decreases the amount of the damaging stress hormones.

#### **3. Time with Friends**

Even if we don't or can't afford to have pets, we can always have good friends. Spending time with friends energises us and fills us with positivity. When we spend time with people or causes we care about, it provides us with meaning and contentment, which boosts our wellbeing.

#### **4. Mindfulness**

Mindfulness can mean meditating or simply stopping to observe or listen to something with love and attention. We can do anything with mindfulness, being fully focused on whatever we are doing or is happening in the here-and-now, including mundane activities like dish washing and sweeping! However we do it, studies show mindfulness reduces stress, relieves pain, and improves our mood.

Meditation is a mindfulness practice that takes us, when done regularly, into the deep place from which all our intentions and activities flow and provides us with self-knowledge, which in turn provides insights about the source of our dis-ease and invitation to make shifts in our intentions, attitudes and behaviour that will enhance our wellbeing. Regular meditation can change parts of our brain related to emotions, learning, and memory.

## **5. Restful Sleep**

Sleep, besides providing us the needed rest, restores and rejuvenates. Good, restful sleep makes our mind and body feel better. It keeps us in a better mood, sharpens our memory and focus, and helps us learn new things better and faster.

It has a positive impact on our health. It repairs our body tissues, boosts our immune system, builds up energy for the next day, and lowers our risk of heart disease. On the other hand, serious health conditions such as obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, and stroke, have been associated with chronic lack of sleep.

Sleep is an inexpensive anti-inflammatory medicine. Sufficient sleep is essential to produce and maintain healthy levels of the hormone melatonin which helps to fight off infections. Recent research has suggested that melatonin may provide protection against Covid-19. Clinical trials are being carried out to confirm the hypothesis. If it does, writes Dr. James Hamblin in *The Atlantic* magazine, "it would be the cheapest and most readily available medicine to counter Covid-19." And there will be no adverse side effects that vaccines may cause.

Working on the computer or watching TV before going to bed, is not a good idea. Both are stimulants. The light and noise from these devices can reduce melatonin levels. Reading a book, instead, would be a better idea.

Some people sleep too much. Others don't get enough sleep. Health experts recommend 7 to 9 hours of sleep a night for adults.

Good regular hours of sleep help. Going to bed and getting up at the same times each day is a good practice. Getting up later on a holiday, does not help us catch up on lost sleep, though many people think otherwise. Instead it messes up our regular sleep rhythm, which is not good for wellbeing

## **6. Healthy Diet**

Healthy meals enhance our physical and mental wellbeing. It is very good to build our meals and snacks around plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Some studies say omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin B12 may play a role with brain chemicals that affect mood and other brain functions. Low levels of these may be linked to depression. Fatty fish like salmon, tuna, sardines and mackerel have omega-3s. Seafood is a good B12 source,

Researchers say vitamin C may help people manage their stress more effectively, in part by lowering levels of stress hormones like cortisol. As an added bonus, vitamin C-rich foods such as orange juice, grapefruit juice, strawberries, can help boost our immune system.

Health and nutrition experts recommend eating a healthy breakfast, not to miss it, even if it is a light one consisting of nuts and fruits. Studies show that adults who have a healthy breakfast do better at work, and kids who eat a morning meal score higher on tests. Interestingly, St. Bernard of Clairvaux exhorts, “Do not forget to eat your bread, or your heart will dry up”!

## **7. Treatment**

Laughter, a healthy diet, good sleep, and other good practices mentioned above may help us feel positive about life and enhance our mental health and wellbeing. But they won't replace need for medical treatment or psychological therapy if we are suffering from some mental illness. This is the minimum necessary care we have to take to restore and enjoy wellbeing when we have lost it. So, don't neglect this important wellbeing requisite and resource.

## **Introspection and Prayer**

May be we are already engaging in some of these suggested practices. If we are, what is their impact on us? Are there any other practices suggested that we could take up? Which?

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In the Book of Deuteronomy (30, 19) God through Moses tells us: “Choose life!” In engaging in these simple practices we are choosing life, and enhancing it. We could spend some time in the presence of this God of life, reflecting over the state of our life, our mental health and wellbeing, and express our desires to God in simple heart to heart conversation.

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Take care and enjoy mental health and wellbeing! Try practising some of these suggested simple measures of health and wellbeing during this weekend. Have a healthy, happy and blessed 2021!

Thank you for listening/ reading.

Pictures: Courtesy Google Images

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