

Psyche & Soul 30

ENHANCING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING: SOME 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 three podcasts I have presented requisites for maintaining mental health and wellbeing. In this weekend's podcast I shall present 7 simple practices that can help us further enhance our mental health and wellbeing.

1. Clearing Away the Clutter

Creating a pleasant environment in the space in which we live and work is important for mental health and wellbeing. Studies have found that when we are surrounded by clutter – meaning untidiness, the visual chaos affects our brain. Research has also shown a cluttered home environment increases the levels of the stress hormone cortisol, thus affecting both physical and mental wellbeing.

Clutter affects our mind. It gets in the way of our ability to process information and affects our cognitive functions – perception, interpretation, judgment, logical thinking etc.. It also brings on needless anxiety and stress when we can't find something that we need badly because it is buried under the clutter. I am sure all of us have had some experience of looking for things needed immediately and not able to find them, and getting stressed out. Clearing away the physical clutter around, will also clear away the clutter in the mind and give us peace of mind.

Clearing up from time to time, as clutter tends to return, also makes us be physically active, and provides exercise which also enhances our wellbeing.

2. Exercise

So, the second wellbeing practice is exercise. Physical activity improves overall health, reduces risk of diseases, and can make us feel better and function better.

Exercise energises mind and body, reduces anxiety and increases feelings of wellbeing. It is also a great boredom buster. Even short spells of physical activity are beneficial.

Yoga, qigong, tai-chi, and simple aerobics, help stimulate and strengthen our immune system, helping us ward off disease. Acupressure - pressing, rubbing or tapping some specific pressure points in the body-- helps release tension, lessen anxiety and improve blood flow. A simple google search can help us know these acupressure points and what can be done.

Dancing is another way to exercise. It relaxes body and mind and creates a good mood. And it is fun.

3. Walking in Nature

Walking in nature helps to keep negative thoughts away. It helps our body produce endorphins -- the neurotransmitters in our brain that make us feel good. It also helps us to focus on the present, helping us forget what's making us anxious.

Walking in warm, sunny weather can boost our mood further. And if we walk briskly for at least 30 minutes, we will meet daily exercise recommendations, and enhance the stress-releasing and benefits of walking even more.

A few minutes in the sunshine raises vitamin D levels, and that's good for our bones, our heart, our mood and our immunity. It is good to choose grass or mud than paved surface on which to walk. One study has found that people who strolled in green spaces were calmer than people who walked in built-up areas. Walking bare foot has additional benefits. Contact with mother earth and elements of nature will refresh our bodies and spirit. Walking with others provides further benefits because the company and conversation also create good feelings.

Even if we are living in crowded city apartments, and don't have the luxury of nature around, sitting in our room and listening to recorded nature sounds and looking at nature pictures can also help. So, it's great idea to have some nature pictures on our walls.

4. Doing Fun Things

There is nothing like doing something that we really enjoy to improve our mood, forget our worries and create a feeling of wellbeing. Having a hobby keeps our mind focused and at the same time relaxed.

5. Engaging in Creative Expressions

Painting, photography, music, knitting, or writing in a journal are all ways we can explore and express our feelings and whatever is on our mind. Besides bringing relaxation and rejuvenation, these creative expressions can also help us better understand ourselves and know how we are feeling.

6. Reading

Settling comfortably in our chair with a favourite book can be both enriching and relaxing. It can also promote mental wellbeing. Studies have linked reading to improvements in depression symptoms, as well as in mental flexibility and brain function.

Reading something interesting also helps us take our mind off useless ruminations which affect our wellbeing.

Make sure it's something pleasurable and enjoyable that we read, not the newspapers with their disturbing content, or how-to-do manuals which can be tiresome and boring.

7. Listening to Music, Singing Aloud

Listening to music has a calming effect on our nerves. So too singing. No matter how out of tune we may be, singing aloud can make us feel happier. No wonder many people love to sing in their bathroom! Well, we could find better and more comfortable places, including outdoors to do our singing.

Once again, here are the 7 practices. 1 Clearing away the clutter. 2 Exercise. 3 Walking in Nature. 4 Doing fun things. 5 Engaging in creative expressions. 6 Reading and 7 Listening to music and Singing loud.

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?

It is good to have a plan – scheduling times and places for these activities.

There is a passage in the Book of Proverbs (8, 22-31) where Sophia/Wisdom delights the creator God through her play, a constant companion in God's creative work. In Hindu tradition, Shiva creates the universe through his dance. Try to visually contemplate either of these images and see what happens to our feelings and mood.

We could then sit quietly for a while with our Creator God, in touch with whatever is evolved in us, and may be engaging in a friendly conversation with God.

Have a delightful and healthy weekend.

Be safe. Be blessed.

Thank you for listening/ reading.

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