

## Responding in the midst of a storm

Today is the fifteenth in a series of articles on mindfulness. To review, mindfulness is a form of stress reduction. In the simplest terms, mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment without judgment. It focuses our attention on the only moment in which we are alive, which is right now. Paying attention in this way can reduce stress, depression, anxiety and even potentially bring about healing. At times a more detailed discussion on a mindfulness principal is beneficial. This week is one of those times. Therefore today I will continue to expand on the theme of responding rather than reacting to stress.

Before I do that, I have two quick announcements. First is that my web site at [www.drmcquaid.com](http://www.drmcquaid.com) has been updated to include the most recent articles on mindfulness. There are now over 40 articles posted on stress reduction and 13 dedicated to mindfulness. I would encourage a review of the articles as they can help integrate the lesson discussed today. The second announcement is to let readers know that I will be interviewed at 2:00 pm Dec. 15 on local radio station KPFZ 88.1 FM. This will be a great opportunity to gain clarity on all of the stress reduction ideas covered in my articles.

In my last article in this series I examined responding in more healthy ways to stress. I explained that all potential triggers are actually opportunities to practice mindfulness. Stressful events can be seen as invitations to respond instead of react. This way of handling stress can lead to its resolution. The attitude to cultivate is responsibility. When you encounter a stress situation you say to yourself, “Yes, I can navigate through this without losing control.”

When we take a stand and say yes to any situation, we are being in the present moment. Responsibility means we meet each moment as it arises and we try as best as we can to drop resistance. Simply stated, we begin to see the next moment not as a treat, but just as the next moment. With this attitude we can respond with energy, imagination and clarity. Responding in this way is preferred to reacting and being overwhelmed.

As I suggested in the last article, you can look at this process as homework. The next time you get triggered you say to yourself, “Hey, this is just my latest stress reduction training exercise.” You step into it; you breathe into it, and be with it. Whatever it is that causes upset we try to respond and respond, and then respond. Over time, responding instead of reacting to stress reveals to us that many of our perceived problems are self-created. We tend to put the cart before the horse. It is true that most of our worries never happen.

A good metaphor for stress is that it can be viewed as a storm at sea. Imagine yourself as the captain of a ship at sea during a storm. Your first realization needs to be that the storm is impersonal. You are not responsible nor can you control the waves, wind, and rain. Your job is to navigate your ship to safety. To survive, you must respond with anticipation in the moment. As a sailor, you must understand the wind and how to use the wind to your advantage. You can't react with fear and lower the anchor; you must keep

your cool and navigate from moment to moment. Bravery and courage are not options in steering the ship, they are requirements.

My challenge to you is to see your life in this way. You're the captain, be responsible. Navigate your ship through the storms of life. The storms are not personal, they come and go like the seasons. It would be unwise to try to control them. As the captain, the better decision is to respond and not react to them. Mindfulness teaches you these skills. Your willingness to take responsibility will give you the courage to navigate through any challenge. The process can be very simple if you are willing. Take a moment and go to [www.drmcquaid.com](http://www.drmcquaid.com) and you will find many ways to be still and present with life, no matter what storm confronts you.

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