

Wisdom is the Middle Road

To say the current economic crisis has been stressful for people would be an understatement. When people feel financially squeezed, it can cause mental upset that impacts their health, peace of mind and relationships. In my observation, it seems as though the country is becoming divided. There appears to be a disconnect between Wall St. and Main St. I sense I am not alone in this observation. The culture and social mood is becoming polarized.

The interesting part for me, and my motivation for this article, is in how to advise you in reducing the mental attitudes that contribute to internal stress. My first recommendation is to notice how the mind operates. The human mind is intrinsically dualistic. When it becomes challenged with a stressful situation, it will automatically make a judgment of whether the issue is good or bad, fair or unfair, desirable or undesirable. This can happen in an instant, but it does not have to rule our lives. When you can observe these phenomena, you are one step closer to the solution of resolving mental stress.

We can notice, for instance, how the mind forms an opinion about everything. An opinion, however, does not mean the way you see it, is the truth. The truth often is different than your opinion. Life operates independent of opinions or perceptions. I often will remind myself out of humility that mankind has a history about 200,000 years old, and it progressed just fine, all by itself, without my commentary. All of history took place just as it should have, without my input. Life is just what it is, and not dependent on my views. One of my favorite quotes to keep me aware of this is, "God does not need my help."

Another thing to notice about the mind is how it will create conflict by using the suffix, "ize." When stimulated with stress the mind will polarize, politicize, moralize, criticize, and emotionalize. There is a progression from one to the other. For instance, first we polarize, such as conservative vs. liberal. Then we politicize democrat vs. republican. After this we moralize that we are right which leads to criticizing the other side for being wrong and finally we get angry to emotionalize how we feel. How exhausting.

The solution to mental arguments is to first observe how your mind will instantly judge and polarize issues. Once you step back and watch your thoughts, you can decide to take it less seriously. To make it humorous, will reduce any negative effects. It can be funny to resolve conflict with a simple reference to ice cream. I would say with a bias of humor that you don't have to hate chocolate just because you prefer vanilla. Life has both chocolate and vanilla; one is not better than the other.

Another recommendation is to forgive yourself for being human. We all divide and conquer in our minds. You are neither the inventor nor author of human thinking. We all share the same traits of mental activity. It is therefore healthy to forgive oneself for any human frailty or limitation.

Through self-examination you will discover you have options and choices about what triggers the mind into upset. The mind is not unchangeable. On the contrary, when you honestly pause to scrutinize its processes, you will discover you are not ruled by the mind at all. To undo any of its negative tendencies is to merely choose a better option. All of the various techniques I have written about in these biweekly articles can help you make a better choice. Breathing, mindfulness, gratitude, kindness, and forgiveness are all available for you to choose for the resolution of stress.

All of the articles are available on my website at drmcquaid.com. If you notice your mind becoming polarized into conflict, visit my website and read about a different way to see the world. *A Course in Miracles* has a lesson which is, "I can choose peace, instead of this." Your choice to read this article is a step in that direction. Choose to forgive, be grateful, kind, and happy and the mind will respond with peace. Have a scoop of both chocolate and vanilla. Now that is a good choice!

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