

Overcoming Stress

By Swami Tejomayananda

In modern life we see much material progress and comfort. However, this progress and comfort is accompanied by stress and strain, which provides no comfort at all. Stress and strain is generally experienced in all aspects of daily living. There is competition in business, there is strain in family and social relationships, and ultimately we find expression of stress such as worry, fear and frustration in ourselves.

Objective Stress

A certain kind of stress is normal. Let us call this objective stress. This stress is perceived in challenging situations, for example, when a lot of work needs to be accomplished in a short period of time. Even though we may be efficient, if we have a tight schedule of engagements, we feel stress. In such circumstances we have to "keep cool." We have to figure out ways to accomplish the task at hand efficiently in the given time. This is referred to as time management. If I have to write ten letters in a short time, I should write only a few lines for each letter.

One method of overcoming stress in the objective field is to become more disciplined and organized. The discipline of getting up earlier can help make our lives smoother. When we hurry, we try to do things quickly and often make mistakes, but with planning and discipline we can act with greater efficiency and less strain.

Subjective Stress

Another kind of stress is the subjective stress. In the physical world there are only situations; there is no stress, no tension. The strain we feel, which is exhausting, is not because of the outer situation but because of our inner reaction to that situation.

When does the outer situation become a problem or a threat? Worry and anxiety arise from our inability to face a particular situation and to deal with it effectively. This is the kind of stress that we feel most often and we try to relieve it in many different ways. For instance, we become anxious when we are unprepared. If a student has studied well, the examination is not a problem for him because he is well prepared!

If a student who has studied well goes to the examination and is still anxious, there may be other reasons, such as personal ambition or high expectations from his parents which make him think: "I must do really well, I must get an A." The stress and anxiety he experiences comes from an insistence upon a particular fruit of action, "this and this alone should happen."

Thus expectation, ambition, or desire, instead of being a motivating force, can become a dissipating factor. Stress can be created by expectation. Desire and ambition should inspire us to work, but if too strong, they cause only perspiration, not inspiration!

Professional insecurity, emotional insecurity, strained relationships within the family, or any type of insecurity will cause stress. All the time there is fear. The only certain thing about the world is that everything is uncertain. Accepting the fact that nothing is certain, that all is unstable, itself relieves tension and stress.

The most effective method of avoiding subjective stress is to have faith, call it faith, devotion or surrender. Faith is the clear understanding that the one Lord is taking care of us. Is he not running everything? And still we are worried?

When we travel by plane, the plane flies, we only eat and sleep. We know that the pilot is taking care of us; we have faith in him. When we are seasoned travelers, we are not afraid of anything, we are relaxed.

We should have the same attitude in the voyage of life, remembering Lord Krishna's promise: "Rest assured. Remember Me. I will take care of you. Those who remember Me with single-pointed attention, I take care of, I take care of their entire life."