

The Mind is the Source of Our Stress

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As articulated in our previous article, your mind is not your brain, soul, spirit, nor your psyche. It is only a sliver of your consciousness.

It is that portion of human consciousness that assigns meaning to sensory information. These meaning assignments emerge from both what we were taught by our caretakers and from what we decided within ourselves.

We postulate that the mind awakens into neocortical dominance somewhere between 28 months and 4 years of age. Its pre-eminence derives from the increasing ability to combine the newly developed awareness of sequencing (time) with the apparent results (causality) of intention experimentally acted out in the world. This is what is happening during the period our culture labeled as the Terrible Two's.

From conception until the above age range, learning is principally associative, not sequential. During this initial period of development, highly charged emotional events are deeply grooved into the nervous system, but without assignment of cause --- external or internal. The language of "always" or "never" is a clue that our clients have dipped into an experience that is very young indeed.

Once the child has acquired some mastery of the developmental sequences required to navigate gravity within the three dimension of space and has gained a sense of time, it becomes driven to predict cause and effect sequences in the behaviors of others, external events and within themselves. Once in control, and especially with the aid of the later-developing pre-frontal cortices, the mind functions to retroactively assign predictive causality to all of the elements which were part of any highly charged events the infant/toddler experienced before the mind was in charge.

The biological implication of this tendency has an obvious tendrill to our evolution as a species from predator/prey relationships. The tawny flash of the tiger as it circles you in the forest carries with it grave consequences if ignored. Once survival enhancing, now it degrades our capacity to experience "choice" in the present moment. Instead we react to a flicker of a stimulus that vaguely reminds us of a past hurt, but without recognizing the difference of context, people involved and the range of our expanded adult options for behavior.

'What hurt before, will hurt again', is the mind's chief refrain. Pain is bad. Pain is wrong. Thus, the mind actively seeks out information to confirm its predictions of what will hurt and how. It filters information, preferring the negative. It replays recordings of past sensory experience, superimposing what was upon what is happening in the present moment. All of this arouses the nervous system. This persistent state of arousal is what we commonly experience as "stress".

'We are all perfectly adapted to circumstances in which we no longer live'. This is the dilemma of human development: that the models of life and rules for conduct that the mind has created are based on the options that a toddler can perceive. Lacking the ability to clearly distinguish or even experience the separation of self from other, a "separation" which every loving parent does her best to diminish, these building blocks grow largely from the infants energetic and emotional experiences of its caretakers.

This biologically aids our capacity for bonding and survival, yet emotionally and energetically we are often left with a tangle in our perceptions of where we end and others begin.

The mind takes in no sensory data. It predicts. It anticipates. It concludes what is going to happen before present time, or simply more recent, sensory experience can validate or not the predicted outcome. Thus, whenever our minds are in charge, we experience loops of familiar behaviors and emotions, because we are dependant upon these very same mental body models and rules about the world and about what it has concluded is possible or not. Because the mind assigns meaning to behaviors, feelings and events, it also makes the rules about what is good and bad, right and wrong, regardless of the actual present-time reality one senses and feels. Because the mind cannot process the streaming of moment-to-moment sensory data, it is rooted in the past and can only flower in the future.

Current exploration, experimentation and discovery are all of necessity stunted in favor of what is deemed predictable and thus, safe, by the mind.

The mind commandeers the sympathetic portion of the autonomic nervous system as well as longer-acting neurotransmitters such as cortisol, dopamine and epinephrine, to keep us in alert mode seeking out cues and clues which will support its models about what is going to happen. This is a functional definition of stress, often referred to as hypervigilance in psychological circles.

No wonder we hear our clients so often speak of feeling trapped by their life circumstances and feeling as though they have so few real choices.

In our previous article, *Engage Your Brain / Move The Mind*, we endeavored to set a foundation for comprehending the essential truth that the historical belief that the mind reflects either the whole or the pinnacle of human consciousness is far from accurate. Instead, we assert that the mind is a guard dog, indiscriminate in its barkings and preventing us from reaching our vast potential to perceive the possibilities that may enhance our lives. We affirm what you have already experienced, namely that touch may stimulate profound shifts in the quality of your clients lives.

In the next installment of this series of articles, we will be emphasizing how touch can help directly by conveying "The Present Meaning of Life".

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