

## RIPPLES ON THE SURFACE

Stress is probably the most talked about and least acted upon topic in today's society. The sheer knowledge that we need to do something about stress can cause stress! When asked for a definition, most people will describe the sources of their stress rather than define what stress actually is. Try it. Can you define 'stress,' or simply give examples of the way(s) it manifests in your life? It's an elusive yet ever-present entity. However, the solution to the problem, as is often the case, can be found in the same place from which it originates.

Consider the way our sensory mechanisms gather information. Sight, sound, smell, kinesthetic/tactile, proprioception, and even the galvanic responses gathered by the largest organ in the body, the skin, flood our brain with input from the environment to be processed. In addition, consider the information being gathered on the sub-conscious level. The way we process this flood of information depends on the how our 'operating system' has been set up and is being maintained.

The brain is designed to process and utilize information basically for one purpose: survival. Upon closer examination you'll find that any kind of stress can be traced back to some kind of threat to survival. Think about the physiology of the body during stressful situations. This heightened, adrenalin-based state is referred to as 'fight-or-flight', where the body is ready to protect itself from a perceived threat. The operational concept in the previous statement is 'perceived.' That's right, the way you perceive your world, or actually create it based on the way your 'operating system' is processing the gathered data on your 'hard drive,' is the way you will ultimately react and respond to it. It's all up to you. Any situation/event takes on the complexion we assign it based on the cumulative data acquired via life experience.

Let's do a simple experiment. Think of the word stress and then focus on what happens to your body. Chances are you'll recall one of your major sources of stress. Now really focus on that situation. Notice that in doing so, you have begun to alter your body chemistry, and, more than likely, the majority of the physiological changes you will experience are negative. The body can't tell the difference between an actual occurrence and a vividly remembered or imagined one. Your body simply reacts and responds to the interpretations of incoming sensory information based on survival-friendly or -unfriendly outcomes of past similar situations.

Now let's rethink stress. Try viewing a stressful situation as an opportunity to better ourselves. Look at it as a chance for growth and development, a reason to get up in the morning and be a productive part of society. After all, if there were no stresses in our lives, what would be the reason to do anything? I know what you're thinking, "It would be so nice to get rid of all the stress in my life and just relax." But would it? And isn't that mindset simply retaliation to the imbalances of a life allowed to spin out of control? Would you be productive if you had no impetus or reason to be productive? I had a conversation with a friend who was about to leave for vacation, "I am so stressed!" she said clutching her airline tickets in a death grip, "I can't wait to get to the beach so I can just kick back and relax!" Not uncommon statements, but I posed this question: "Why do you have to go somewhere to relax?"

## THREE PURE RIVERS STUDIO FOR THE ARTS

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The point I'm trying to make is that, although some times things happen that are beyond our control (that is a topic of debate for another day), you have 100% control over the way you choose to react and respond to any situation. It's that simple! But as with most things simple, there is a process which entails a certain degree of personal cultivation to achieve simplicity. Watch any accomplished artist perform. They appear to be doing nothing, making their performance look effortless. But try it yourself and you'll quickly appreciate the commitment and dedication involved in making something look effortless.

The solution for stress is balance. Maintaining personal balance and operating from, as I refer to it, the 'eye of your hurricane' will enable you to deal effectively with situations as they arise. Everyone's lives are hurricanes, but remember that the eye of a hurricane is always calm. Once you find, or cultivate your 'eye' you'll begin to regain a sense of control over your life. You will begin to see things as they really are without all the extra nonsense we tend to add to situations. How many times have things that you worried about, almost to the point of nausea or worse, turned out the way you worried they would? Not often, if ever, I'll bet. However there are those who have perfected the 'art of worry' and end up designing, in detail, their disasters. Self fulfilling prophesies? But regardless, the body operates in real time and therefore has to endure the deleterious effects of worry and stress while you are worrying and stressing. Once again, the body can't tell the difference and only does what it has been programmed to do – survive. And it does so with the current information it is being provided.

So what do we do about it? Again, the solution is simple but not necessarily easy. Change your mind! The first step is to rethink how you've been creating your world. But that will require quieting the mind and stepping into your 'eye.' Classical Chinese Healing Arts understand that problems arise from imbalance and offer effective methods to address the problems generated by the out of control mind. Quieting the mind utilizing postural alignment, body awareness, breathing, and visualization is the foundation of Qigong. The only catch is that you have to do it. There is no quick fix, and much like learning to play a musical instrument it takes practice, or the term I prefer: cultivation. Think of how long you have been 'practicing' the way you currently live your life. Remember, no matter what you do, you're getting better at it... right or wrong!

One of the most often used visualizations for calming the mind is picturing the ripples on the surface of a lake quieting until the surface is as smooth as glass allowing you to see the reflection of the moon. The true reflection of what is there cannot be seen through agitated waters.

The Holidays are just around the corner – yet another source of stress for most people. This year, how about trying a different approach? Rather than obsessing over the perfect gift, outfit, dinner, wine, hectic schedule, or any of the other superfluous things we think are so necessary for a joyous Holiday, let's just be totally present with our loved ones. Allow the ripples to calm on the surface of your lake and, from that balanced and peaceful place, you just might be able to see and appreciate the blessings that have always surrounded you. The first step is to change your mind!

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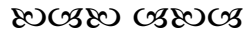
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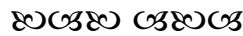
# THREE TREASURES FOR THE HOLIDAYS



## \* FOR YOURSELF \*

– *‘Relax Into the Task’* – Don’t get wrapped up in the momentum of the season; remember what the holidays are actually about and honor those traditions. Enjoy the small things you do as you do them. Try to take things one at a time. Focus on what you’re doing. Know the difference between ‘getting something done’ and getting something ‘over with.’

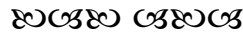
***Below the waves lies calm and peace  
it is there I will reside***



## \* FOR YOUR LOVED ONES \*

– *‘Give the Present of Presence’* – No gift can have more impact on the person you are giving it to than your presence. Try to make it more about the quality and amount of time you spend with the people in your life, rather than the material replacement.

***I give from a center of serenity and balance  
and fill my presents with presence***



## \* FOR THE WORLD AROUND YOU \*

– *‘How Much is Enough?’* – How much do you really need when it comes to material acquisitions, food, clothing, and generally the ‘stuff’ we are constantly being told that we need in order to be living a ‘successful’ life? Rather than acquire more and more, take advantage of this season to get rid of the things you really don’t need. Donate rather than acquire.

***The lesson of ‘enough’ begins with myself  
how much do I really need***



HAPPY HOLIDAYS  
HEALTH, HAPPINESS & PROSPERITY FOR THE NEW YEAR  
MARK R. REINHART