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Introduction

Every so often it's a good idea to sit down and ask yourself: How am I going to improve the way I deal with the pressures, complexities, and stressful moments that are now an undeniable part of my life?

It doesn't mean you've been doing something terribly wrong or that you need to turn your entire life upside down in order to improve things. Rather, it's about being honest with yourself and looking for realistic ways to be healthier, more centered, and more effective in your work, in your personal life, and in your family interactions. It's about asking the right questions and coming up with the most satisfying and effective solutions. For example, you can start by asking yourself:

Has my daily schedule become more demanding and overloaded than it used to be?

Do I ever have the feeling that I'm rushing faster or trying harder on most days, but falling behind nonetheless?

Do I sometimes feel pulled and twisted like a frayed rubber band on the verge of snapping because there are unresolved situations in my life right now that are tugging at me with more and more intensity?

Is it hard lately to find a balance between being extremely productive, while at the same time having enough time and energy for enjoying the less-driven and more intimate moments of life?

Is there someone I care about deeply who is also feeling over-stressed or unable to breathe because of too much recent pressure?

In the past few decades, there have been many approaches, workshops, therapies, and books devoted to the topic of stress. Some of them are quite good, but they usually require that you make a large investment of time and money, as well as major changes in your lifestyle, and that you implement a huge number of very meticulous steps and procedures (that most busy people don't have the time or the patience to follow).

Yet what if there was a well-tested solution available at no cost (and more importantly with no bad side-effects) for the numerous moments when you or a loved one are having a stressful day or dealing with frustrating delays, losses, or setbacks? What if there was a safe and effective method you could learn easily for boosting your energy, increasing your creativity, and regaining your strong center exactly at the crucial moments when you are starting to feel stressed or overloaded? What if you could make a huge long-lasting improvement toward being less stressed while at the same time continuing to come through for your loved ones, for your many important responsibilities, and for the creative and compassionate projects that mean so much to you?

This book describes eight easy-to-understand and extremely effective stress-reduction and mind-focusing methods that can dramatically improve how you deal with the pressures and challenges of your busy life. Most importantly, these remedies for stress

don't require that you turn your life upside down or make drastic changes that go against what truly matters to you.

For almost thirty years I've been researching and testing out these eight remedies. In my work as a licensed psychologist in private practice, I meet smart and compassionate people every day who come to my office because they want to have more energy, strength, and effective methods to handle the daily pressures from their jobs, their families, their physical health challenges, or their individual search for meaning and purpose. These men and women are looking for proven techniques that they can count on to provide rapid relief and renewed creativity even in the middle of a very frustrating and tension-filled day.

But to be honest, I first began looking into how to deal much more effectively with stress and personal health challenges many years before I became a trained psychologist. At a relatively young age, I was starting to have physical symptoms from trying to do too much each day—I began to have severe stomach problems, painful back and neck issues. As my beloved grandma from the old country used to say, “Oy, don't ask—you don't want to know.”

At that time in my mid-20's, I began testing out various traditional and non-traditional remedies for healing the body and clarifying the mind right at the moments when your life feels off-track or overloaded. I was hoping to find a reliable and easy-to-utilize way (with little or no side-effects) to stay centered and healthy, especially during busy days and intense weeks.

Yet even though I completed my PhD in Holistic Psychology and explored several different approaches from various spiritual traditions for healing and wellness, I kept

finding that the most effective and profound remedies for stress and overload came from a place I didn't expect—the world of Jewish spirituality. The reason that the source of these remedies surprised me at first is because I had never been told as a child during 12 years of twice-a-week Hebrew school (or in either of the congregations where I was an active member) that my Jewish heritage contained such extraordinary tools and solutions for successfully navigating the stressful moments of modern life. But the more I learned over the past 30 years from various compassionate rabbis and scholars (and the more I tried out these particular methods in my own life and with my counseling clients), the more I realized that these remedies were reliable and extremely useful, especially for those of us who find ourselves juggling multiple responsibilities in our personal lives and our high pressure jobs at the same time.

While these eight remedies are from Jewish sources, I've found they consistently result in substantial improvements in focus, health, and clarity for a wide variety of women and men who come from either Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Baha'i, Sikh, Religious Science, agnostic, or non-religious backgrounds. You don't need to be a long-time student of meditation in order to benefit from these particular methods--among the therapy clients, friends, and colleagues who became less stressed and more re-energized from using these techniques are many lawyers, accountants, engineers, writers, artists, actors, directors, marketing professionals, entrepreneurs, non-profit executives, health professionals, rabbis, cantors, teachers, ministers, priests, teens, young adults, mid-life adults, and elders, each of them dealing with a slightly different stressful situation.

What I find most helpful about these specific methods for stress-reduction and re-focusing is that they address not only the physical aspects of stress but also the deeply spiritual and personal questions that tend to arise when you feel constantly interrupted by too many challenging situations on a hectic day. As you probably have noticed in your own life, at a particularly hectic moment when there are numerous frustrations or complicated decisions, it not only can drain your physical and emotional energy but also disrupt your sense of overall well-being. You might find yourself asking, “Why is this happening to me?,” “What is the lesson I’m supposed to be learning here?,” or “How do I get back on track with my higher purpose rather than feeling bogged down repeatedly?”

I first began to see the benefits of combining traditional psychotherapy and an openness to these essentially spiritual questions many years ago when I studied with Dr. Viktor Frankl.[1] He was a Holocaust survivor and a trained physician from Vienna, Austria whose books “Man’s Search for Meaning” and “The Doctor and the Soul” describe how he successfully helped numerous individuals in the concentration camps (and later his thousands of therapy clients) to become more resilient, strong, and healthy by focusing on the daily spiritual search to find deeper meaning and greater purpose even in the most difficult situations.

Instead of looking at people as “very neurotic” or “highly defective,” Frankl discovered how to find and boost a person’s inner courage, inner strength, and growing sense of personal dignity by focusing on how to reconnect with your highest self. He often said that “even in the toughest situations, the one freedom which no one can take away from you is the freedom to choose your spiritual attitude, to clarify your unique

sense of greater purpose, and to pursue your daily quest for human dignity no matter how badly others are behaving.”

When I first began my career as a psychologist, it was considered a bit strange and awkward to explore spiritual questions and concerns with a counseling client. But now as a result of many years of research evidence, it has been shown repeatedly that if you respect each person’s unique spiritual path (and you listen carefully to their particular daily concerns about how to live with meaning, purpose and dignity), a tremendous amount of psychological and physical healing takes place.

Please note that you don’t have to agree with every single one of the spiritual, psychological, or neuroscience ideas that I will be exploring with you as I describe these eight remedies. One of the things I love about the healing methods of Jewish spirituality is that many of the greatest scholars and rabbis say with humility[2], “We don’t insist on one rigid way of believing. There are mysteries about life, healing, and the Eternal One that we humans simply can’t figure out with our limited words or our short-sighted human concepts. So we are always open to questions and respectful disagreements.” In fact, in several Jewish teachings it says that if someone comes along and insists, “I know the one and only answer about what God is like, or what causes suffering, or why a distressing situation is happening to a loved one,” you are advised to politely walk away from this dogmatic individual because he or she is probably a fake.[3]

Living with a humble and awe-inspired appreciation of the “mysteries that are beyond our short-sighted human capacity for explanation” means that there is plenty of room for all sorts of individual interpretations and differing beliefs. In Jewish spirituality you’re encouraged to express your skepticism, to ask lots of questions, and to intelligently

wrestle with these mysterious issues. Even the very name of the Jewish people, “Yisra (to wrestle or strive with) –El (the mysterious Eternal One)” means that like Jacob in the Bible (whose name becomes Yisrael after he wrestles with a dream-like being in the desert), you are encouraged to grapple with the ever-flowing Creative Source that is beyond human concepts.

So please don’t be afraid to debate or respectfully disagree with anything that I discuss in this book. In the very act of wrestling—by engaging in these important questions with your entire mind and your unique personal experiences—is where we find genuine strength and deeper insights.

THE REMEDIES

You may be surprised to discover that you don’t need to master all eight of these meditation and refocusing techniques in order to see huge benefits in your daily life and personal vitality. In fact, you might choose to read and experiment with only four or five of these remedies over the next few weeks or months. Or you might focus on just one or two at first because there are so many other things going on in your life right now.

Briefly summarized, the eight chapters ahead of you will give you a deeper understanding and specific guidelines regarding any or all of the following:

--WHEN YOU’RE FEELING FRAGMENTED OR PULLED IN TWO DIRECTIONS AT THE SAME TIME. The “Re-energizing He-neh-nee (‘Here I am’) Method” will help enormously for becoming far more alive and focused whenever you are feeling stressed, tense, or overloaded.

--WHEN YOU CRITICIZE YOURSELF OR OTHERS FOR WHAT'S NOT PERFECT. Practicing the "Power of Radical Amazement" method will help you make sure that each day you outsmart your problem-obsessed brain so that you can notice and feel renewed by the many blessings, solutions, and positive supports that you would otherwise miss or forget to breathe deeply into your heart and soul.

--WHEN YOU'RE TOO BUSY TO LISTEN TO WHAT YOUR BODY REQUIRES TO STAY HEALTHY. You will get tremendous benefit from a method that is over 2,000 years old for taking a quick, mindful moment each morning to clarify what is working and what is not working on a physical level for boosting your overall health, your digestion, and your daily ability to deal with the stresses placed on your fragile but miraculous physical body. Using this quick daily moment of meditation can significantly change the way you appreciate and respond to your body's crucial needs and vulnerabilities.

--WHEN IT'S HARD FOR YOU TO DELEGATE OR FIND OTHERS TO HELP LIGHTEN YOUR LOAD. The profound Tzimtzum ("Pulling Back" or "Making a Space to Empower Others") method will give you creative ways to make sure you don't use up your precious time and energy on doing "too much", so that you will instead have extra energy for those moments and situations where you want to be more fully present and highly effective for challenges that truly need your personal attention and creativity.

--WHEN THERE ARE ONE OR MORE HIGHLY-DRAINING PEOPLE OR SITUATIONS IN YOUR LIFE. You will benefit from discovering a wonderful method from the Pirke Avot ("The Sayings of the Ancestors") for how to be strong,

compassionate, and wise, even when you are dealing with a person or a situation that is harsh, abrasive, or highly irritating.

--IF WE HAVE BEEN HIT RECENTLY BY A LOSS, A SETBACK, OR A TRAUMATIC SITUATION. I'm hoping you will benefit from a fascinating approach on how to deal more creatively with losses, setbacks, tragedies and traumas. It's called "Gahm Zu L'tovah" ("Even This Might Possibly Be Turned into Something Good") and this chapter will explore how to honor the genuine sadness and frustration first, but then how to gradually open up to the eventual possibility of some hidden wisdom or positive opportunities that might emerge during the healing process.

--WHEN YOU MOMENTARILY LOSE SIGHT OF YOUR INNER STRENGTH OR YOUR HIGHER PURPOSE. There is a beautiful "Pure Soul" meditation in Jewish spirituality that has proven to be quite transformative on any stressful day during which you feel agitated or overwhelmed, because this meditation method can quickly help you boost your inner resilience and strength (that you might otherwise fail to connect with on over-filled days).

--WHENEVER YOU FEEL STUCK IN A RUT OR TIRED OF THE SAME OLD CHALLENGES. You will enjoy a rich teaching and daily centering technique called the "SHEH-HEKH-EE-YANU" (which means seeing the newness and greater possibilities in each unique moment) that will help you and your loved ones discover a more enjoyable daily state of curiosity, renewed passion, and positive energy even when there are recurring tension-filled challenges in front of you.

My goal in exploring with you these eight remedies is not to overload you even further or to impose on you a bunch of additional “shoulds” to do each day. Rather, I’m hoping that you will choose carefully and wisely to approach this book and its teachings as an enjoyable activity so you can experiment with these holy techniques in a life-affirming way.

Possibly because I am the child of a Holocaust survivor, I’ve always been fascinated at how Dr. Viktor Frankl and many other Jewish teachers, health professionals, and creative individuals have been able to use Jewish spiritual techniques to find purpose, dignity, and special moments of joy even during the toughest times. I’ve found that if you deeply study Jewish spirituality (both the ancient and modern teachings), you will find that most of the Jewish spiritual practices are primarily about finding the joy, the healing, and the repair that are possible in life even when you are facing enormous challenges.

I hope that this book will spark a wonderful amount of happiness, strength, and goodness for you or for anyone with whom you share these compassionate teachings. These eight focusing methods have certainly been a source of great benefit and healing for me and for many of my clients and loved ones. Every day of my life I am grateful that someone shared these helpful tools with me precisely when I needed to learn them.

