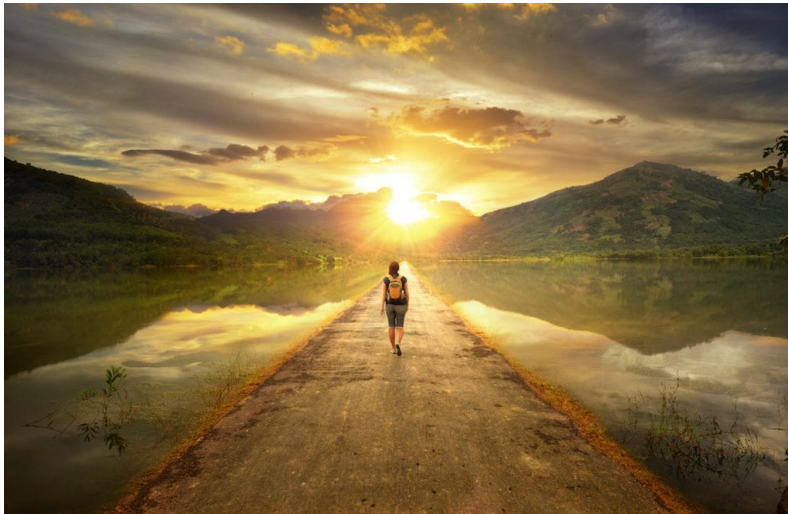


COVID 19 – A MENTAL HEALTH RESPONSE (PART 3)



Spiritual Immunity

We are in danger, if we don't take action now, of facilitating an epidemic of poor mental health. There is already evidence of an increase in depression, familial conflict and domestic violence, as the pressure of lockdown begins to take its toll around the world. If we are to prevent a significant rise in poor mental health leading to another pandemic following swiftly on the heels of COVID 19, then what we need to do is build our spiritual immunity.

In the previous articles, we've focused on the body's immunity, which is absolutely essential if we are to get through this is the best way. But as we've equally made clear, focusing on the body to the exclusion of the mind is like expecting a bird to soar with only one wing.

First of all, when considering our spiritual immunity, it's important that we define what we mean by spiritual. In this context, we're not using spiritual with any religious connotation, because we at Reach believe such matters of faith are best left to each individual to work out for themselves.

Spiritual in this context, is about how you feel at your core, what is the truth about how you feel inside. One of the best ways to conceptualise this is to ask yourself these two questions; 'who are you when no one is looking?' and... 'how do you really feel about yourself when you're not performing to an audience?'

You'll find that the answers to these questions will give you a more accurate assessment of how you really feel about yourself and from our experience there are many who when undertaking this soul searching discover they are not really content with what they find. Why is this important now?

Well, the answer is simple, as explained in the two previous articles, our thoughts, feelings and beliefs influence our genetic and biological systems even more than diet and nutrition, pollution and other lifestyle factors. Therefore, if we are preoccupied with meeting our physical needs, but are not fortifying our minds and improving how we feel about ourselves, then we remain vulnerable to the demands and challenges of life.

So, what is spiritual immunity? Essentially, it is about personal enrichment – positively enhancing how you feel about yourself. It's turning your mind into a sanctuary, a place you really want to be.

Listed below are eight critical components that are needed to create your personal peace palace, your safe haven. Let's take a closer look at each.

1. Safety

We have talked a lot about the effects of fear, discussing how the amygdala (responsible for our emotional responses) hijacks the brain, shutting down the neocortex, which robs us of our common sense and the ability to make the best judgements. At this point the sympathetic nervous system is activated, which takes us into the fight, flight or freeze responses. Energy is withdrawn from non-essential tasks as the body moves into survival mode.

The parasympathetic nervous system, which is the other part of the autonomic nervous system and is responsible for the 'rest, relax and digest' functions, is disengaged. This creates a state of hypervigilance where we are ready to act/react to any threat, real or perceived. This is a simplified summary of quite a sophisticated sequence of events. But the bottom line is, stress, anxiety and fear cause the system to shut down and nothing grows or flourishes under these conditions. The longer we remain in a state of hypervigilance, being on red alert, the more toxic consequences there are for mind and body.

The best way to switch off this response is to find ways to create a feeling of safety. Obviously, one needs to feel safe in one's own space but even if your physical safety is intact, if your mind is being terrorised, you will not feel safe. So, the mind is critical in this equation.

To create that feeling of safety, you need to spend time immersed in reassuring activities. Many of you enjoyed the affirmations entitled: [I am a self-healing organism and I'm wonderfully well](#). This is a great way to create a feeling of safety in the mind.

[The Jug of Universal Love](#) meditation is another activity we would recommend; however, you probably have your own preferred ways of creating this internal reassurance.

Things that we know help include: reading positive, uplifting material and mastering the art of breathing, which helps to cultivate feelings of internal safety and security. Creative visualisation, where we use the mind to create positive scenarios that help us to relax and foster feelings of hope, is another invaluable tool for washing the mind and creating a sanctuary.

You might like to try the [Magic Waterfall meditation](#) as that offers a beautiful lesson in creative visualisation, clearly illustrating how you can harmonise your mind and body.

2. Listening in

If you are to honestly answer the questions we posed above, which would give you a good internal reading of how you truly feel, then you will need to really listen to what's going on inside of you. This isn't an intellectual exercise, it's an emotional one. It's important to feel your way to the answers. Logic is wonderfully useful in sorting out problems, but it can also get in the way of finding solutions, with its insistence that it's always right.

Loosely speaking, about half of the brain is bound up with logic (left hemisphere) and all its related activities and functions. The other half of the brain is preoccupied with the emotional aspects of our existence (right hemisphere). We make the best decisions when we are informed by both. For this to be the case we need to find some time, preferably daily, to consult with our inner world. This is vital to the development of the emotional aspects of the self. Good mental health is where neither hemisphere dominates, allowing us to become 'whole brain thinkers'.

Find some time to 'listen in' each day and your internal world will be strengthened.

3. Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a complicated subject, too big to tackle here. What's relevant to our theme however, is until we forgive ourselves for our mistakes our minds can be troublesome places... at their worst, even hell.

Self-forgiveness is not about letting oneself off the hook nor it is offering justification for one's wrong doing. It is the realisation that one can never become a better version of oneself whilst shackled to the mistakes of the past. Forgiveness is like a detergent; it clears and cleans the mind and helps heal the body.

Once we have forgiven ourselves, we have a greater capacity to forgive others, which for many of us is not an easy thing to do. However, forgiving someone else frees your own spirit, because the lack of forgiveness blocks the mind and heart with resentment, anger and even hatred.

So, as hard as it may be, try to forgive yourself and those who have trespassed against you.

There are many different ways to engage in forgiveness work. Prayer is for many a means of doing this. There are various meditations that guide you along the path of reconciliation. What's important is that you find something that resonates with you. Here's an exercise that we have found very effective over the years, so you may wish to consider this amongst your options.

<https://www.thereachapproach.co.uk/2017/06/19/forgiveness-and-gratitude-2/>

Another forgiveness and reconciliation exercise that many have found beneficial is: [Ho'oponopono](#). Whatever you do, please take action, because a lack of forgiveness weakens your spiritual immunity and it denies you healing and growth.

4. Self-validation

As you read this 'mental health response' series you will see there is an emphasis we keep placing on certain activities, such as: exercising, making time to pamper yourself, enjoying music and dance, connecting with loved ones, getting deep restorative sleep and where you can, pursuing things you love. Humour and laughter are crucial pieces of the jigsaw too.

Positive self-talk is a central character in this community of self-nurturing activities. Ultimately you become what you believe about yourself. At the end of this article, there is another set of affirmations we would encourage you to either record or write as per our previous suggestion. If this does not appeal to you, find another way to change your internal monologue. It's critical for your spiritual well-being to have a flow of kind, generous, self-validating thoughts.

The importance of positive self-talk is covered well in this piece:

<https://www.thereachapproach.co.uk/2019/04/26/how-to-change-your-self-talk/>

You may also be interested in Dr. Shad Helmstetter's work in this area.

5. Gratitude

The grateful mind has no room for complaint. The more you can create a grateful mind, the more you build your physical immunity, through the brain and central nervous system. The joy of the mind also enhances your spiritual immunity i.e. how you feel about yourself.

The easiest way to build a grateful mind is through the power of thank you. The more we complain the more we will find to complain about. The more we give thanks the more positive things come our way.

Start by giving thanks for those aspects of your life you most take for granted. We all have 'things' that we've got so used to that the true value of them now passes us by. It might be a person, an opportunity, an experience, material things that are now easily accessible. The more you look at your life the more you will find such examples.

When you turn your attention to being grateful, your life becomes richer, your perspective changes and your relationships improve.

6. Knowledge plus application = personal empowerment

The Reach Approach is built on this philosophy. Knowledge takes you to the door of understanding but it's only courage and application that will get you through that door. It really doesn't matter what you know, it's what you do with what you know that counts. As the French proverb says, the road to hell is paved with good intentions, so it's not sufficient to plan to do something, we actually have to follow through in order to enjoy the fruit of that intention.

In order to create a safe sanctuary which immunises you against the roller coaster of internal and external events, then you have to take what you know and believe, and put it into practice in your life. This is the surest way to reach your desired destination.

So, whatever your beliefs, find ways to actualise them in your life. Living in this way is such a wonderful, uplifting and liberating pastime.

7. Meaning and purpose

Awareness around mental health difficulties was increasing before COVID 19 and as a result a concerted effort was being made in developed countries to prioritise our need to talk about our troubles and challenges.

This need has not gone away because our attention is now on coronavirus – because for many the problem is now more acute. So, where you can, talk and connect with those who can help.

A lack of meaning and purpose has been identified by the World Health Organisation as one of the key factors in the rise of mental health problems around the world. With the current pandemic, many feel that they have lost a sense of direction and reason for being. Even if that is how it currently feels for you, try your best not to sit in that feeling for too long because it will eat away at your well-being.

Find other ways to connect with your own innate value and how you can best use your energy, time and resources. It's important to state that one does not need to engage in grand, overt gestures to find meaning and purpose. There are many ways we can ignite our spirits.

Sit, reflect and make a plan... it's worth underlining that miracles are made. So, don't sit waiting for one, go and create your own.

8. Acts of charity

Everybody wins in a charitable world. The evidence around kindness and compassion is overwhelming. The giver, the receiver and even the observer of an act of charity, all benefit. There are biochemical benefits such as the release of oxytocin, serotonin and dopamine, all of which elevate the mood.

Added to this, the brain creates those wonderful neural pathways, which are reinforced with every act of kindness. Remember, neurons that fire together, wire together.

So, it's not just our brains and bodies that feel better – how we feel about ourselves is warm and glowy. We are then lifted up out of any negative mood state we might find ourselves in – as feelings of bliss take over.

For no reason at all, perform at least one act of kindness each day and you will immunise yourself against life's insults.

Each of these points is powerful and can stand alone, but when combined, they create a fortress and resilience that will protect you. Spiritual immunity is not about a life free from problems, it's about having the right consciousness and response to those problems. It's about conserving your energy and channelling it in constructive ways.

We hope this is a subject you will now immerse yourself in because the more you practice these elements, the more they will become second nature.

Stay safe, stay strong, stay well  

