

COVID 19 – BRAIN WASHING (PART 8)



We began this series by inviting you to wash your mind as well as washing your hands - and as the challenges around mental health are increasingly taking their toll, this maxim has become even more important.

The notion of brainwashing generally carries a negative connotation. One might think of a cult or some sinister institution or a process that is striving to bend our minds to its will – and there is no doubt that distasteful forms of brainwashing do exist. However, we are using the term in a more literal sense, that is, engaging with those positive activities that keep our brains clean, allowing our minds to fully express themselves.

In this edition we are offering insights, tools and resources to help you wash the dirt (negative thoughts and feelings) from the brain... and the mind. As we explained in Part 7, when you engage in mindfulness, contemplation, prayer, meditation, in fact any positive, uplifting activity, then the dirt (pain, trauma, loss etc.) will find its way to the surface. This is a natural phenomenon, which we should welcome, because it means we're moving towards a better state of being.

Our philosophy is based on synergy, simply put, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We do not believe that any one thing in isolation can fix us. The human condition is multi-dimensional, made up of three primary characters, each with many characteristics.

There is the physical body with its various organs, systems and a web of complex activities keeping us alive. Then there is the mind, bursting with thought energy and emotional energy; a realm filled with unfathomable depth and diversity.

Integral to this mind-body dynamic is the spirit, that part of us that carries the truth about who we are... and our highest ideals. The spirit houses the net result of all our experiences, shaping how we feel about ourselves at our core.

If we are to effectively facilitate the healing and recovery of the mind, body and spirit then a model that is diverse, flexible and versatile is needed... a model capable of meeting their intricate web of needs and propensities.

The complex and intricate relationships of the mind, body and spirit operate in the context of the environment. The environment is vast and is made up of numerous actors pulling in multiple directions. It is pivotal to the needs of the other three. Their relationship to one another was summarised in the Story of Health (see Part 6 in the series).

Only a synergistic approach can respond to the complexity and diversity of the human condition – and in this piece we will illustrate the range of things we need to consider when looking after our own mental health... and supporting others in meeting their needs.

Time to do some brain washing...

Stress – enemy or foe?

Where we can we need to minimise/reduce our exposure to stress – and where avoidance isn't possible, we need techniques and strategies that help us to manage it better.

Stress can be a positive force in our lives, or it can drastically diminish us. We need to learn how to manage and channel our stress if we want to thrive in demanding and difficult circumstances. Introspective practices are a wonderful way of getting stress to work for us rather than against us.

So, what's happening when we're stressed?

In brief, the Hypothalamus-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) axis is designed to protect us from threats (but can be activated whether those threats are real or imagined). When we perceive something to be stressful or a threat, the hypothalamus excretes a hormone (CRF), which travels to the pituitary gland. This hormone activates special pituitary hormone-secreting cells, causing them to release another hormone (ACTH) into the blood.

The ACTH then makes its way to the adrenal glands, switching on the 'fight-flight-freeze' response which produces a cocktail of stress hormones. The HPA mechanism is an excellent line of defence – however, it's not designed to be continually activated. The way of modern life means this mechanism is often switched on for far too long, making us more likely to become victims to minor and major illnesses, in both mind and body.

We've already suggested in this series a host of ways to de-stress, such as: taking long walks in nature, listening to music that moves you, dancing, practising conscious breathing and relaxing your body in your preferred ways, gardening, learning to meditate, listening to and watching things that make you laugh.

The activity you choose isn't the critical thing, it's pursuing those things that make your heart sing that's most important – and making them a regular feature of your life.

Waste weakens

Most of us can see the benefit of detoxifying our bodies and yet overlook the need to detoxify the mind. The cutting-edge sciences are illuminating the fact that many of our diseases and afflictions begin as a result of stresses and disturbances in the mind, which trigger a biochemical sequence of events that lead to dysfunction and disease.

We now know, due to the epigenetic revolution, that our genes' expression is heavily influenced by our thoughts and feelings, the quality of our relationships, nutrition and the nature of our environments. Each of these factors can create a negative legacy, and if left unattended, they continue to be recycled in our minds, weakening us in the process.

One of our primary tenets at Reach is 'the removal of waste is the secret to health', and this is one of the principles we would invite you to hold onto and recite regularly. It will help you to be more mindful of your actions and their consequences, leading you to make better choices and decisions – encouraging you to pursue those things that are cleansing and purifying in nature.

It's important to understand that the more we complain the more our minds will find things to complain about. Negativity, resentment, unhelpful criticism, lack of forgiveness, all these mood states also poison the mind.

Therefore, we can either drown in our negative and waste thoughts or decide to swim to the shore of positive change and self-improvement. To do this, we need to generate a new dialogue, one centred around forgiveness and gratitude. We need to create a culture where we feel and acknowledge what's going on inside of us... learn the lessons and quickly let go of that which is no longer useful.

So, think kind thoughts about yourself every day... it helps to focus on your qualities, talents and abilities, those things you've not acknowledged or valued sufficiently. Promise to spend as little time as possible finding fault with yourself and use that energy to self-validate.

Extend this kindness to those that you know. When you think of those you love, send them something you feel they need... a good wish, it could be courage, confidence, stability. You might choose to send them peace and wish them good health. If you have the capacity and the time, you can extend the kindness further, wishing our world and its inhabitants the best of everything. Giving in this way gives rise to the angels of our better nature.

Act as if

William James, the nineteenth century psychologist and philosopher said, 'if you want a quality in your life, act as if you already have it. If you want a trait, act as if it is already yours'.

The poet William Blake also recognised that imagination could be the architect of our dreams. He encouraged us rather than mindlessly daydreaming to actively daydream – thinking of and 'seeing' ourselves already where we want to be.

The best way to act as if is to 'assume the feeling' of our heart's desire, our dream, goal, that unanswered prayer. The more you can feel yourself already possessing that quality or trait, the more you will manifest it in your life.

However, it's important to be patient. When the farmer plants the seeds, she doesn't expect the harvest to be there the following day. She knows if she keeps watering and feeding the seeds and the conditions are right, that a bumper crop awaits.

Acting 'as if' increases the chances that what we desire will turn up in our lives. It is also a powerful healing agent as it nourishes the body with oxytocin, serotonin, dopamine and other beneficial hormones.

We each have the capacity and power to influence our lives, but if we do not exercise that reflex, circumstances take over. So, act 'as if' as often as you can, and you'll be surprised at how life conspires to assist you.

Procrastination

Procrastination is bad for your mental health.

One who continually defers 'doing' becomes like a stagnant body of water and nothing thrives in those conditions. Health is about movement – where there is movement there is growth.

If we accept the way things are, when they are not nurturing our hearts, minds and bodies, sickness in some form is sure to follow.

King Solomon wisely wrote in Proverbs, 'Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is the tree of life'. When you keep putting off what needs to be done your emotional energy, motivation and even physical strength begin to wane. Also, your creativity and inspiration falter and before you know it you are that stagnant body of water and your system inadvertently works against itself.

For this reason, it is crucial for us to have a clear vision and to invest our lives with meaning and purpose. Avoid procrastination... it will steal your time, potential, energy and your dreams.

The placebo effect

A group of scientists at the Medical School of Turin University undertook unprecedented research looking at the power of belief to heal, in a medical setting (2004). They began by administering drugs that mimicked the effect of dopamine (a neurotransmitter) which relieved the patients' symptoms. These drugs had a short lifespan in the body, lasting about an hour, so as they wore off the symptoms returned.

24 hours later, the patients underwent a medical procedure. They all believed they were again having the dopamine-like drug to alleviate their symptoms, when in fact they were given a saline solution (placebo) – that should have had no effect on their condition at all.

Following electronic scans of the patients' brains what was seen was quite remarkable. Their brain cells had responded to the procedure as if they had been given the drug that originally eased their symptoms.

Fabrizio Benedetti, the team leader of the study, stated it was the first time that he'd seen such an effect at the neuron level. This research supported similar studies that had been conducted at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. It clearly showed that placebos could raise the brain's levels of dopamine, on the back of the patients' beliefs. Many more studies around the placebo effect (and the lesser known nocebo effect) have taken place over the last 15 years.

It's worthy of note that in 1864 William James MD, who is best known in America as the Father of Psychology, wrote an article in which he stipulated that he was in little doubt that the real power of healing was less about procedures and more about the way doctors help their patients to feel about themselves. He believed hope was every bit as important as medicine.

The evidence is clear, that what we believe is pivotal to how our bodies respond to interventions. Could it be that the best medicine is combining a positive mental attitude with the appropriate treatment?

We think this is the case. So, whenever undertaking any treatment, always employ the power of your mind to assist you in the healing and recovery process.

We are much more than we realise

The great Sufi poet, Rumi, said, 'what strange beings we are, whilst sitting in hell, at the bottom of the dark, we're afraid of our own magnificence'. In so much of his poetry, he describes the contradiction of the human spirit. On the one hand we're led to believe we're frail and powerless beings, who live in a world where things just happen for no apparent reason – whilst on the other hand our most ancient philosophies and traditions tell us there's a force that lives within each one of us that has the power to survive the darkest moments.

Kahlil Gibran, the Lebanese philosopher and poet, in his classic book *The Prophet* (1923), also speaks of this contradiction. He suggests that we each have a great gift and power lying dormant within us and all we need is the courage to actualise it. So, he implores us not to be deceived by our fears.

Are we hopelessly fragile, victims of events that are beyond our control, or are we powerful creators, harbouring unimaginable abilities, that we're only just beginning to understand?

The answer is, it's up to you which of these is true. According to the choices we make we can either be the master of our destiny or its slave. The cause and effect universe in which we live means that our thoughts, words and actions are always having a consequence and they will eventually mirror back what we believe about ourselves.

The clearer we become about who we are and where we're going, the more we can mould our lives to reflect the paradise we seek. It's time to stand in your magnificence. Believe that you are much more than you had realised – and you'll be able to access that power lying dormant within.

The power of intention

We are all part of the unified field (the four forces that construct the physical universe) and to realise our potential we need to understand that our energy (our consciousness), impacts not only on our physical bodies but also on others and the world. We are not victims to the universal forces – we are powerful forces ourselves. So, how do we harness the power we possess?

Albert Einstein in 1935 first coined the phrase 'spooky action at a distance'. Since then, the power and role of consciousness and how it relates to matter, have been the subject of much scientific research – amongst the key contributors to this debate are quantum physics and more latterly neurotheology and noetic science.

What has become clear as a result of the research, is how our intentions impact on outcomes. In other words, what we think and what we focus on really matters. You can influence the destiny of life events by using your greatest resource... your mind.

So, make time to work out what you really want and write it down. It could be simply a statement of your desires written as a list. Or you might choose to tell it as a story, where you are the principal actor in this drama of your dreams.

Alternatively, you could try creating a vision board – which is a very powerful way to conceptualise the future of your choice. Gather images that represent that very best life and create your own collage which mirrors back to you your aims and objectives. Place the images on card or a memo board in a way that appeals to your heart and mind. Then position it somewhere you will see it regularly. It's a good idea to then take a picture of your vision board, make it a screen saver on your phone or computer. The more you see it the more you will be motivated to do what's required to meet your aims and objectives.

Those of you who are more technically adept, might prefer to create your own video that pulls together those images, with an inspirational soundtrack.

Regularly reading your mission statement and/or looking at your vision board will inspire you to make positive changes. These activities help to clean the brain and uplift the mind. You then become a magnet, pulling into your orbit all that you need.

Obsessively focus on these practices and you will achieve outcomes you never thought were possible. It's important to underline that the degree of your sincerity is critical to the nature of the outcomes – in fact, sincerity is the most potent ingredient of them all.

Don't believe your thoughts!

Good mental health is determined by your relationship to the voice within... the inner narrator. S/he reads faithfully from the script that has been written over the course of your life. If that script is positive, inspiring and uplifting, then what a gift. Sadly, this is rarely the case.

Most of us have a script that is mixed, which causes so many problems in terms of our self-image and self-belief. One moment we feel assured and confident and in the next moment, without good reason, we feel uncertain and vulnerable. It can be such a confusing place to live, a position that denies us the best of ourselves.

If our script is never challenged or questioned, we eventually believe that that voice is telling the truth. Even worse than that, we passionately defend its opinions, ideology and beliefs because we now believe they are our own. And yet so much of what we carry around with us as our opinions and beliefs are merely ideas and concepts that we've inherited from our environments, that don't necessarily reflect our truth because in most cases we don't know what that is.

The psychological consensus is that the average person has around 60,000 thoughts a day and around 95% of those thoughts s/he thought yesterday, a year ago, ten years ago. There are approximately 5% of new thoughts (3,000) that are being generated each day.

The other 57,000 thoughts, coursing through our minds, are those that over time have come to define us. But how many of those thoughts have you even assessed and audited? How many of them, if you were born today, would you hold onto as your own? It's time to check if your inner narrator is reading a script that truly reflects your views and values, or is that voice within still seducing you with its outdated storylines and hypnotic charm?

There are several ways to begin this questioning process. Some people find it valuable to keep a journal of their thoughts and experiences, which can be a useful tool for self-reflection. This can be quite a cathartic exercise for many as they strike up a conversation with themselves – and they hear and see more clearly what's going on inside the walls of their own minds.

Keeping a journal is an effective way to wash the brain and keep the mind clean. It's not a cliché to say that it is 'better out than in'. Wherever we accrue waste in our lives – whether that be in mind, body, spirit or environment – we weaken ourselves. Regularly emptying the mind of those things that are burdening us is a worthwhile pastime.

Some individuals find it more helpful to speak with someone they trust when walking this tightrope of self-examination. This is because they are better able to process their issues when they hear themselves vocalising their experiences. They might undertake this activity with a friend, colleague, or someone who is professionally qualified in mental health issues.

Whatever you decide, it's important to use these 3,000 thoughts wisely, otherwise we are merely drawn back to familiar patterns, habits and behaviours.

Where your attention goes, your energy flows

We've quite rightly spent a lot of time talking about what we need to do for good mental health, but it's also important to point out what we need to avoid. The energy that can bring about miraculous outcomes, is the same energy that when misdirected can bring us to our knees.

As we've said, we need to be very clear about what we want to appear in our lives – hence the expression 'be careful what you wish for'. Far too often we focus on what we don't want, but focusing on something, anything, magnifies and strengthens that thing in our lives.

This means when we focus our minds in a specific direction – whether using images or thoughts – the energy of the universe reverberates back to us a perfect echo of the signal we have emitted. Therefore, we need to be very clear and unambiguous about the messages we send out in order to influence the ones that find their way back to us.

Our ability to shape the energies around us is much greater than most of us think and pure intentions and a sincere heart can liberate us from our deepest fears.

Give up the habit of focusing your attention on those things that you don't want, those things that are not going well for you, and liberate your mind. Direct your attention towards those things you have only dared to dream about. Invite the expansion of what you want... and you'll see that miracles are never very far away.

Transcending pain

High tech brain-imaging scans (MRI) have been used to help patients 'wish away' chronic pain. Trials were conducted at Stanford University led by Dr Jon Hawkinson (2007). The pilot study allowed patients to see where their pain was coming from (using the MRI scan) and then watch as their own positive thoughts diminished its impact. The results thus far have shown a 64% reduction in pain.

This treatment used the MRI scans to monitor blood flow in the brain. It identified activity levels in the area involved with pain. Patients were given special goggles like those used in virtual reality computer games, which highlighted the areas of activity. These areas were represented by the image of a burning flame – the greater the pain, the bigger the flame.

Patients were then taught to reduce the size of the flame, for example by visualising the flame being put out with a bucket of water. The theory was that once the patients could see their thoughts reducing the size of the flame, they would then learn to control their pain without technological aids. This indeed began to happen as the patients developed confidence in their own ability to visualise – wish away the pain.

This research demonstrates that we have the capacity to manage or transcend pain with the power of positive thought and helping patients to see that, strengthens their belief in their own ability to do so.

Next time you're experiencing discomfort or pain, why not try this visualisation exercise.

Living beyond the past

Until we decide to use our conscious minds to alter the nature of our bad habits, unwanted tendencies and feelings of unworthiness, we will continue to be deceived about being in charge of what's taking place in our lives – when in fact, our histories, our hurts and wounds, our sense of inadequacy are just churning out well-practiced responses to life.

Regularly practise going within and you'll be able to hear the internal conversations that are driving your life. 'Listening-in' is the foundation of positive change because until you hear and understand those 'voices', many of which are from your past, you will find yourself doing their bidding.

Listening-in is the beautiful practice of asking your heart to reveal its secrets to you. If you find time to do this regularly, you will increasingly notice what blocks and limits you and the patterns that are unhelpful and prevent your growth.

Living in the present is about learning to leave the past behind. Interestingly, for many people, this only happens once their past has been heard and acknowledged. This isn't about getting stuck in pity and 'poor me'. This is about listening, learning and letting go. The more you practise doing all three, the more you'll live beyond the past and it will stop annoyingly tugging away at you.

Humility

If you're unwilling to put down your old perspectives, patterns, habits and ways of understanding yourself and viewing the world, you're unlikely to ever change.

To create something better out of your current situation you need to be prepared to accept that the position you hold dear may not be correct. Until you begin to view things with that humility, you'll find yourself at times holding onto points of view that are now redundant.

Humility opens the door to the unknown, the unexpected and even the divine. It allows us to see the most beautiful aspects of ourselves and acquire a different view of the world around us. We can then more clearly see what is worth holding onto and what is best released into the ether of time.

Humility also ensures that we don't hold onto things because of the need to be right. Its concern is to do what is right. As a result, our minds are elevated - and we are no longer trapped by our egos.

Washing the brain meditation

We pointed out in Part 2 of this series that one of the most effective ways of imbibing positive material is to record it – whether that be affirmations or meditations. When we listen to positive messages in our own voice, although we might initially meet some resistance, this is the voice that your brain and unconscious mind most recognise. It has the greatest influence on changing the architecture of your mind. If this meditation appeals to you, then you might want to do this, or use it as a template to create your own meditation...

Remember, whether you choose just to read this or record it, treat the dots as extended pauses, as they allow you to appreciate each phrase. This is not meant to be read at a conversational pace, as it will lose its power that way.

I am more than the sum-total of my experiences... I have an unlimited reservoir of potential waiting to be tapped... I am now ready to embrace this... I encourage the dormant power in me to be released... I'm not afraid to believe in the impossible as I'm coming to understand that I am the major shareholder in my life...

I am not able to control everything that's happening in my time and space, but I can always control how I respond to it... as I grow in my understanding I choose to stand in my power and find the courage to believe in myself...

I imagine the life that I most want to lead... I imagine the opportunities turning up and lifting me beyond where I am standing right now... I'm surrounded by relationships that strengthen and support me in my endeavours... these relationships are such beautiful anchors of love and kindness... and I am grateful for that...

All the things in my physical space act as agents of change... everywhere I look I see the unimaginable becoming real... I'm no longer limited by fear and doubt... my mistakes become my tutors and allies, illuminating my path... and I am growing out of the insights and learning... I can't change the past, but I can change how it affects me...

I step into that feeling of being magnificent, courageous and true to myself... and it feels wonderful... I am filled with hope and joy... when I look around me, I see that I am now standing in my dream... it is no longer something I wish for, it is part of me...

I now walk off into the future knowing that I determine more than anything else, what my future looks like... I am powerful, I am magnificent... and I am free.

Regularly allow your mind to flow in this way and it will eventually become second nature to believe that you are capable of incredible transformation. You are the alchemist, who changes the non-precious material to the precious gem, the magician who performs wonders.