

Surviving Through the Madness – The Chronic Dis-Ease.

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What are we really surviving for is the question. Take a moment and bring your attention to this experience. Chances are it will be difficult.

Your preoccupation with producing will inevitably consume your mind with thoughts ranging from to do lists, children, what someone recently said, social media drama, and back around that silent yet loud chatterbox in your head that won't seem to stop. We live in an age where we are constantly doing something. It's not even enough to simply drive a car as driving and looking at our phones has seemingly become a ubiquitous behavior.

In today's Western civilization, it is difficult to fully embrace our moments in life without being battered with preoccupations. As a result, there is seemingly this constant battle for energy as we meander through our day to day experiences out of balance.

As a professional counselor, I am sometimes met with resistance in therapy. It is believed that to have positive mental health one must achieve a certain level of productivity and harvest certain fruits – be it money, social status, or position. However, evidence shows that nearly half of the general population will suffer from psychological struggles related to experiences such as tragic loss, neglect, abuse, poverty, addiction, anxiety, and despair. Despite our human capacity to understand language, thought patterns, emotional needs, and problem solve unlike any other creature on earth, a “chronic dis-ease” will be experienced throughout our lifetime because of our preoccupations and survival methods.

It is our very nature to problem solve and survive. I, like many helping professionals, propose that the very source of this preoccupation (the never-ending drive for efficiency and production) can become our greatest salvation. Positive mental health is not achieved by the absence of problems. It is achieved by the gaining of balance and psychological strength so that despite the existence of our problems our lives don't fall apart.

Throughout history, we have exposed the problems we face and sought the most effective ways to alleviate the pressure of surviving. Today, we are inundated with patterns like living paycheck to paycheck and adjusting to life's circumstances. We transition from one life phase to another. We experience love, loss, laughter, and so on. Yet, despite all the preoccupations and new “efficient” ways of connecting, storing, and experiencing life, are we that much different from our ancestors?

Our methods are different, indeed. Perhaps the variables contributing our survival have evolved over time. But at the core, aren't we simply re-learning to experience? Take that word alone. Experience.

When is the last time you truly experienced a bite of food or basked in the warmth of the sunlight or simply breathed? When is the last time you took a moment to just be?

Becoming more aware of your experience is a process by which we learn to focus away from autopilot and reactivity. Instead, try commanding your attention to a more “moment-by-moment” experience rather than the experience as a whole. Mindfulness provides us tools to accept circumstances, relationships, thoughts, and feelings from the less critical and demanding positions we use to manipulate the outcomes.

For instance, take a moment and direct your attention to your feet touching the ground (go ahead). Now direct your attention to your posture and settle into a more relaxed position. Now take in a slow, natural breath. Pay attention to the air flow and the moment by moment experience of you breathing in, your lungs expanding, and you breathing out. Whether you direct this attention for 30 seconds or 10 minutes matters less than the fact that by doing so you activate mental processes which typically remain distracted by our preoccupations.

To be mindful of your experience is all about learning to become more aware of what is happening in the present moment – to experience the words “you are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think” more than just as words in an article.

It is not by the absence of problems that we measure our successes but by the awareness and acceptance of our experience so to become mindful of how much power we have over the preoccupations that distract us from full experiences. Sharpening your focus into the moment brings you to a place where choices as to how you engage with your survival can be made.

So what exactly are we surviving for? To experience. Go now. Breathe in. And release yourself.

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