

INSCAPE February 2014

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

May you always be consciously aware of the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love and mercy of God the Father, and the communion of the Life-Giving Holy Spirit dwelling within your heart!

CONDITIONS OF OUR LIFE; STRESS, INNER PEACE AND HEALING

Jesus Christ is still the Prince of Peace who comes into our darkened world as Light. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder: and his name is called Wonderful Counselor, The Mighty One, The Everlasting God, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). He comes as Divine Physician to heal us in our broken relationships with God, our neighbors, our world. "She will give birth to a son, and you will call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). We cry out for His coming to bring us into a new era of peace and health, joy and happiness. "Then Jesus said to them again, Peace be with you; just as My Father has sent Me, so I send you. And when He had said these things, He encouraged them and said to them, receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive a man his sins, they shall be forgiven to him; and if you withhold forgiveness of a man's sins, they are kept" (John 20:21-23). The Peace of Christ is our state of *being* where nothing is lacking in our existence within the Life of God. The Father "knows what you need".

Yet as Christians we know Jesus Christ is always abiding within us and working dynamically around us at all times. It is we who have to receive Him in the cave of our hearts. We are the ones who have to be born into His life.

Is your life becoming progressively more and more stressful? We are literally destroying our God-given health of body, soul and spirit by the excessive anxiety and stress under which we work, live and try to gain much-needed rest in nervous sleep. If Jesus Christ lives within us, it is for us to surrender ourselves to His infinite love for us. We need to pray more deeply and come into contact with His living merciful-love that drives out all fear (1 John 4:18).

Stress, Inner Peace and Healing

Most physicians would recommend to you, for almost all illnesses from the common cold to heart attack, rest and silence. Our bodies are factories of tremendous energy and self-healing forces. Yet our Western culture seems to make the recommended rest and silence almost impossible to attain, since the demands of such a culture produce pressure, tension and stress. Our time is spent competing for money, power, self-glorification and self-satisfaction. To relieve, or at least reduce some pressure and anxiety, we consume mammoth quantities of aspirins and various pain reducing chemicals, antacids, tranquilizers and sedatives, mood altering prescriptions either natural or synthetic, stimulants and pep pills. We rush to psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and even spiritual directors to spill out our tensions and fears verbally, ever seeking release.

We are not a healthy people, and the root cause is the *stress* under which most of us live. We do not experience the inner silence that brings healing to our bodily and psychological tensions and anxieties because we seldom touch our indwelling, loving God, the Ground of our being.

Americans annually spend millions upon millions of dollars on laxatives alone. In one year we consume mega-tons of aspirin. Massive quantities of sleeping pills, tranquilizers, reducing pills and antacids are consumed, in the attempt to cover up symptoms and warning messages from a suffering, noisy body, flogged mercilessly by a disturbed psyche. Heart conditions,

rheumatism and arthritis, ulcers, diabetes and hypoglycemia, chronic disorders such as asthma and panic breathing difficulties, anemia, multiple sclerosis, cancer, senility, mental and nervous diseases, addictions to alcohol and tobacco, eating disorders from underweight, overweight and obesity (185 million children and adults in USA), distorted sleep patterns, the use of recreational drugs from cocaine, heroin and marijuana, all point to and suggest unhealthy lifestyles. Corporations world-wide are selling hope to very desperate people. Hope is not the ultimate solution. Treatment of medical diseases should follow from the diagnosis and knowing the cause of an illness; “why did I get sick in the first place?” The underlying problem at the root cause must be addressed by every person that is concerned, to insure an actual cure!

STRESS

What is stress? Usually we refer to the everyday wear and tear on the mind and body as stress. Dr. Hans Selye (1907-1982; endocrinologist, scientific researcher on Theory of Stress) a leading authority of stress, gives it an exact, scientific meaning. He defines stress as “the body’s non-specific response to any demand made upon it.” Thus, stress refers to the uniform set of changes that occur throughout your body whenever you meet any external or internal demand, be it physical or emotional or even spiritual.

You might be “stressed” because of an argument in your family or at work, or because of a viral infection, or a worry about your finances and debt responsibilities, or the falling apart of a once meaningful relationship. Whatever the source, physical or psychological, stress always produces a complex variety of bodily changes. These are some of the recognizable mental and physical signs and symptoms; muscle tension and irritability, inability to concentrate on matters at hand, often feeling tired and exhausted, sleeping difficulties (falling asleep or staying asleep throughout the night), dry mouth, pounding and rapid and irregular heart beats, difficulty in swallowing, difficulty in breathing, dizziness and lightheadedness, blurry vision, difficulty in hearing, upset stomach and frequent indigestion, tension headaches, mild to profuse sweating, cold hands or feet and free-floating anxiety, feeling “all-wound-up”, feeling depressed, pouches or dark circles under the eyes, worries, constipation and colds, frequent angry outbursts, excessive eating and drinking. If such effects endure for a prolong period of time, a battery of chemical changes takes place within your body.

STRESS RESPONSE

Dr. Hans Selye discovered the stress response many decades ago. He observed that the central nervous system registers a demand on your physical-emotional-spiritual resources. The demand might be caused by an argument with a loved one or a reaction to a disobedient child, or to loud noises around you.

The first state is the *alarm stage*. This triggers off, within the autonomic nervous system, a “fight or flight” syndrome. This is a surge of energy produced by the release of adrenaline (epinephrine) from the adrenal glands that are situated on top of the kidneys. Energies are mobilized in order to attack or flee from the impending “enemy”---that person or event which is seen as a threat to our safety. The heart beats faster, breathing accelerates and muscles become tensed and ready for action.

This first stage of stress response is not unhealthy or adverse in itself. It often has saved our lives or the lives of others. It fuels excitement for pleasures and increases anger in frustrating situations. When the demanding situation passes, we normally are “mildly tired and exhausted” and naturally need to restore our inner integration by “recharging our batteries.”

If, however, the demanding situation is not resolved, and fear, worry or frustration remain, we enter into the second phase of stress. Again, this is not necessarily a bad reaction for it allows us to enter into the *stage of resistance*, as in the case of an extended illness or imprisonment etc. On this level of stress we find a prolonged high level of adrenaline pumped into the mind-body system along with other hormones necessary for long-term resistance.

The normal stage that follows this second stage of stress response is again exhaustion, but a marked exhaustion. On this level, if we do not have rest or relief, fatigue will continue and serious effects, destructive to our total well-being, will result. Some of these effects are most dramatic and actually pathological, in which a disease state becomes established. These signs and symptoms include but not limited to: chronic elevated blood pressure with slow but steady damage to heart, kidneys and the entire cardiovascular system; micro-tearing of arterial walls and increased plaque formation within the lining of blood vessels (clogging of arteries); increased sugar levels which raise cholesterol and triglyceride levels (fatty substances) within the circulatory and internal organ systems; lowered resistance to disease through a reduction in certain critically important white blood cell levels which protect against infections; increased stomach acidity and changes in the stomach lining which contribute to gastrointestinal distress and ulcer formation; increased inflammation in articular joints of movement; aches and painful sensations; and ultimately chronic arthritis; hyperactivity of the entire physiological system, resulting in mental-physical exhaustion, chronic fatigue syndrome and insomnia.

JESUS THE DIVINE PHYSICIAN

Is there any realistic hope or way by which we can offset the ravages of stress in our lives? We Christians believe in God's infinite merciful and compassionate love for each of His children, all of humanity, especially in the healing power given to His Son, Jesus Christ. We believe that Jesus went about healing all the sick persons brought to Him, provided they believed in Him. His Risen Spirit continues, today, this healing potential within all our hearts.

Jesus was in touch with His Father's uncreated energies in a way that no other human being ever has been. God created man's psyche in such a way that the unconscious, receiving a suggestion from an outside authority, can unleash great energies effecting healings and miraculous actions normally not performed by man on a conscious level.

USE OF TECHNIQUES

Jesus utilized matter, the "stuff" of this material universe, which He created from "nothingness". No pre-existing material! He made a paste of spittle and clay and laid it on the blind man's eyes and told him to bathe his eyes in the Pool of Siloam "As long as I AM in the world, I AM the light of the world. When He said these words, He spat on the ground and mixed clay with His saliva, and He placed it on the eyes of the blind man. Then He said to him, go and wash in the baptismal pool of Shiloha. He went and washed, and he came seeing" (John 9: 5-7). He put spittle on the eyes of the blind man at Bethsaida and laid His hands on him and after two attempts He healed him "And He came to Bethsaida; and they brought to Him a blind man, and they besought Him to touch him. And He took the blind man by the hand and brought him outside the town; and He spat on his eyes and put His hands on him and asked him what he saw. And he looked and said, I see men like trees walking. Again He put His hands over his eyes and he was restored and saw everything clearly" (Mark 8 22-26).

Through loving compassion displayed by our Lord Jesus Christ, He confirmed the seemingly absurd possibility that with some clay from the earth, in truth, the blindness of human vision was opened and restored the awe, admiration and wonder of life.

“Again Jesus went out from the border of Tyre and Sidon, and came to the sea of Galilee, to the border of the ten cities. And they brought to Him a deaf and dumb man; and they asked Him to lay His hands on him. So He drew him aside from the people, and put His fingers into his ears; then He spat, and touched his tongue. And He looked up to heaven (acknowledging His Father) and sighed, and He said to him, Ethpatakh, which means, be opened. And in that very hour his ears were opened, and his tongue was loosened, and he spoke plainly. And He warned them not to tell this to any man; but the more He warned them, so much the more they published it. And they were greatly astonished, saying, He does everything so well. He makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak” (Mark 7: 31-37).

The woman with a hemorrhage touched Him and He felt a current of energy pass from Him to her. His Disciples were instructed by Him to anoint with oil, and healings were effected “And they cast out many demons, and anointed many who were sick, and they were healed” (Mark 6:13).

Jesus often gazed intently upon the sick person in need of healing as did Peter and John in healing a cripple at the Gate Beautiful (door or gate of Herod’s temple which led from the court of the Gentiles to the court of the women). “Behold a certain man, lame from his mother’s womb, was carried by men who were accustomed to bring him and lay him at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, so that he might ask alms from those who entered into the temple. And when he saw Simon Peter and John entering the temple, he begged of them to give him alms. And Simon Peter and John looked at him and said. Look at us. And he looked at them, expecting to receive something from them. Then Simon Peter said to him, gold and silver have I none; but what I have, I give to you. In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk” (Acts 3: 2-6).

Jesus often gave the suggestion, asking whether the sick wanted to be healed and whether they believed firmly that they would be healed. Using such techniques, Jesus allowed the sick person the opportunity to become attentive to God’s presence in Him. Jesus was the concrete expression of God’s love for His sick children. By His gaze, touch or spoken word, His whole gentle presence, Jesus opened the sick to the inner depths of God’s presence within them. They yielded in faith to God’s mysterious presence within Jesus that released God’s loving compassion and merciful presence in themselves.

Jesus was telling them that on all levels, the Heavenly Father was concerned and wanted them to be healthy, if they would yield to that inner divine power locked within them. His Spirit of love allows us to see and experience by faith His presence as the Father’s love, living within us and He calls us into healing unto abundant life. As we are healed on all levels: spirit, soul and body relationships, we are called out to be channels of God’s healing love to each person we meet. It is God’s love in us that heals us and allows others to be healed by our touch, our look, our word.

TECHNIQUES IN PRAYER

If the Trinity dwells within us, how can we tap into that healing power of God’s love? We should not fear using techniques of centering ourselves in God’s presence so that we may submit our tensioned fears to the perfect love of God. We have always maintained a healthy use of material techniques in bread and wine, oil, holy water and icons in the sacraments and divine services. Should we, therefore, fear techniques for becoming quieted, techniques that we can find employed by all human beings, regardless of country and religious spirituality? Man, universally the world over, has learned to calm his psychic inner world by a rhythmic breathing. The body, soul and spirit merge into a relaxed “whole” person as God’s breath is followed inwardly and outwardly, back and forth. One can concentrate on the flame of a burning candle illuminating an icon and be powerfully aware of Jesus Christ as the light of the

world. Or one gazes lovingly at a scene of nature, a picture or image of beloved friends or relatives. One finds a reposeful and deeply prayerful attitude coming over him/her self. Christians have always realized the powerful techniques of chanting and music in church services to calm and quiet the participants and open their deeper selves to prayerful veneration and worship.

Such fixation points pull our dispersion to a centering-point (Stillpoint) so that our hearts can move easily to contemplate the transcendent God as immanently present within us. The ultimate worth of any technique must be measured by the fruit produced. A technique has no meaning unless we ask the questions: How is it being utilized? What are the fruits that come from such use? Does it help us or others to pray with greater consciousness, beyond the habitual, superficial level of controlled, discursive prayer? "But the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control; there is no law against these. And those who belong to Christ have controlled their weaknesses and passions. Let us therefore live in the Spirit, and surrender to the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vainglory, provoking one another, envying one another" (Galatians 5: 22-26).

JESUS PRAYER; THE PRAYER OF THE HEART

Christians have had a long living tradition, both in the East and the West, of breathing in the name of Jesus in order to experience His healing power as an indwelling, risen Lord. The original Christian communities, as we prayerfully read in the Acts of the Apostles, knew by true faith and experience, that there was no other name whereby they would be healed and saved. "...By what power or by what name have you done this? Then Simon Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, leaders of the people and elders of the house of Israel, listen: if we are convicted today by you, concerning the good which has been done to a sick man, on the ground of by what means he was healed; then let it be known to you and to all the people of Israel, by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, and whom God raised from the dead, behold this man stands before you, healed. This is the stone which you builders have rejected, which is become the corner-stone. There is no salvation by any other man, for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:7-12).

Gradually a Christian mantra was developed in the Christian East which monks of the desert (men; *Intoxicated with God*) experienced the reality of the presence of God on their lips, in their mind and within their heart day and night: "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!"

Thus a true transcendental meditation developed from the earliest centuries of Christianity. It was not "imported" from Hinduism. The unerring instincts of the Christian athletes of the desert, led by the Holy Spirit, developed the *Jesus Prayer*. It was more than a technique. It was a summary of the whole Gospel (Good News) that God so loved this world (John 3:16) as to give us, as total gift, His Only Begotten Son who died on the cross for love of us but rose from the dead in order to dwell within us. Through His released Spirit of Love, we Christians can experience the deepest silence, the richest healings by surrendering to His perfect and eternal love.

Their faith in the True God, the Trinitarian Community of Three Persons in One Nature, revealed to them that He who was within them was greater than any other force without "But you are of God, my children, and have overcome them, because He who is among you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). The more they experienced the healing power of the Lord Jesus, the Divine Physician, the more they cried out in humility and poverty for continued healing and greater unity in Christ for themselves and for the whole human race.

MEETING THE LORD IN DARKNESS

Do you seek an answer, a way to deal with the stress and anxieties that hold you enslaved to the dark powers of passions and vices, that cripple your health in body, soul and spirit? The answer is Jesus Christ, for the Second Person of the Holy Undivided Trinity is the Way, the Truth and the Life “Thomas said to Him, Our Lord, we do not know where you are going; and how can we know the way? Jesus said to him, I AM the Way and the Truth and the Life; no man comes to My Father except by Me” (John 14: 5-6). But the secret is to open yourself up deeply, both in quieted consciousness and in the deepest recesses of your dark unconscious, to His living and healing presence. This means that you can and should use techniques to quiet yourself on all levels of your being.

Fr. George Maloney, in his own words, shares with you how he learned to cope with stresses in his own life. “Ask yourself whether God is calling you into deeper prayer and more intense silence through a similar method of encountering the healing Lord. While studying the Fathers of the Desert, I saw how they broke their sleep to rise in a night vigil to worship God. There was always the element of waiting for the Parousia, the full coming of Christ, both in their own lives and in the entire world.”

“Over the many decades of my life I have used and found this practice to be most helpful and health-giving. Praying at night, around 2 A.M. after three or so hours of refreshing sleep, brought me into a purer faith in the presence of Jesus Risen. The Light of Christ, which shines for all, is experienced as truly overcoming the powers of darkness and sin, not only in one’s soul but also in the world. While the majority of people remain sleeping, a handful of Christians are waiting for the Bridegroom to come. In the middle of the night they cry out joyfully: ‘the Bridegroom is here! Go out and greet Him’” (Matthew 25:6).

“During this treasured time, any anxieties or stress that filled the previous day are shed like water, as I am wrapped in the warming arms of my Saviour.”

HEALING LOVE

Those who have accustomed themselves habitually to such nightly visits with the Divine Physician, have experienced a deep level of healing of hurts lodged deeply within the unconscious. This healing, known and experienced as new strength and loving power of creativity, is felt during the up-coming day. Concentration on daily tasks becomes much easier since the source of much distraction and diffusion, of fears and anxieties, has been dispelled by the enlivened consciousness of being grounded in God’s light. “You are all the children of light and the children of the day...” (1 Thessalonians 5:5). You might just like to experiment. Tell the Lord I sent you!

May all of us prayerfully reflect in contemplation on the great wisdom and advice of Saint Paul “Rejoice in our Lord always; and again I say, rejoice. Let your humility be known to all men. Our Lord is at hand. DO NOT WORRY OVER THINGS, but always by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4: 4-6).

No Christian should ever feel so lost and sick that not even God can find them. He will always grant His gift of total healing and integration of their personhood when He is approached with faith, even a faith the size of a mustard seed.

May we be consciously aware of all the blessings that our Lord bestows throughout our lives.

Fr. John Michael Zboyovski