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Stress Can Make You Strong

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Stress: we hear so much about it these days, mostly on the negative side. It used to be a sign of importance, bragged about by those who had risen to the top in their field. What was once desirable is now a "no-no." There are all kinds of things that are no-no's. It used to be split ends. Megabucks were spent correcting split ends. Scissors would have been a more economical way to handle the problem. Caffeine, once touted as an energy-giver and work-extender, became a health no-no. That gave rise to some awful tasting decaff. Everyone profitted. The latest is that coffee is OK, healthy even.

Stress too has become a no-no. I think it was in the late '50s or early '60s, when talking with a high-court Justice, I remarked, "Stress seems to be the upcoming disease." He leaned over to say, "Yes, those who experience it and object must be very weak people." I always remembered his statement. It made me think about army boot camps that put young men (and now women, too) through calculatedly multi-stressful situations. Why? To make them strong, to prepare them for high-performance tasks.

Interns in hospitals become resilient, able to act professionally in the most dire emergencies. By what means are they taught? Stress. Young doctors are put on call in hospitals for grueling 36-hour shifts. Aspiring attorneys are directed into stressful lifestyles so they can withstand and rise above the stressful situations their professions will later demand of them. Movie stars, musicians, NASA scientists? Stress is their friend, not their enemy. Yes, those who fear and avoid stress must be very weak people, as the Justice said.

People are confused about stress these days. There is a solution, and that is a change in consciousness, changing the way we are programmed by those who capitalize from others' stress. This means accepting stress as a "yes-yes," not a "no-no."

In the old days yoga wasn't just an Indian anti-stress pill. It made the mind and nerve system more intense, not less so. Stress is a natural reaction to intensity. Stress is our teacher, helping us to withstand intensity. Yoga in the early days of its popularity in the United States, at the turn of the century, was leading mankind into Self Realization, meaning God Realization. Anti-religionists rejected the God part of it. They accepted, however, the self realization part, redefining it as simply realizing one's potential, or one's individual self or ego, which we Saiva Siddhantists call anava, the individuating power. According to atheists, materialists, psychiatrists and psychologists, the more anava you have, the better off you are. They're infiltrating, diluting and destroying the spirit of yoga. This is directly counter to the spirit of yoga, which simply means to unite or to rejoin eternal consciousness with already-existing individual perfection. But (so they say) there is no money in that, so let's get rid of those concepts. The asanas, yoga postures, that were once for tuning the nerve system so that God could be intensely realized without stressful kundalini experiences, should it rise up through the wrong channel (read Gopi Krishna's accounts of his strained kundalini experiences) became: "Get a healthy body, look'n good, and have a good day, free from stress." Yoga breathing, pranayama, used to be for opening the higher chakras. Now it is reduced to a remedy for releasing stress. Now it involves big bucks-lots of rupees.

Long before it became a yuppy motto, my satguru often said, "No pain, no gain." He was right. Yes, "Stress makes you strong." Keep saying this to yourself when your natural prarabdha karmas (birth karmas which you are born to live through in this life) bring you into either-or situations, meaning situations in which either you collapse or you survive. "Stress is making me strong. Stress is making me strong. Stress is making me strong." Look into the bathroom mirror and mentally say to yourself, "Stress is making me strong." It really does. Try to believe it. Begin to enjoy stress and the strength that it is giving you. Where would our world leaders, our religious leaders and parliamentarians, be if they did not accept and transcend stress? I remember during World War II an outstanding man was tortured in an attempt to extract information from him. He survived. When asked how he handled the experience, he said: "They didn't even come near to touching the areas within myself in which I was conscious during the agonizing experience."

While most are trying with all their might to avoid stress, to eliminate its every

little presence in their lives, the great ones are asking for more. Accomplished businessmen, fantastic athletes, high-strung artists and musicians are asking for more. They want it. They thrive on it. They know it is making them perform at a higher level than normal. They know that weaker souls can't take it, and that gives them a special place in the universe, at the top.

How can you achieve your highest abilities? Use modern mantras, called affirmations. Impress the subjective mind. Your soul's infallible knowledge will confirm and validate this knowing. Not enough can be said about the power of affirmation. It was known only too well among the rishis of the Vedas. Everything they did was in fact an affirmation-every mantra, every sutra, every sloka. Whenever karmas peak, when troubles come to you unbidden, send them away troubled with the affirmation, "Stress is my friend. Stress is good. Stress is making me strong."