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A Key to Mental Resilience: A Meaningful Life

By Dr Alan B. Wallace

Santa Barbara Institute for Consciousness Studies (<http://sbinstitute.com>)

The Meaning of “Resilience”

- The ability to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions, and to “spring back into shape,” i.e., to restore one’s equilibrium and elasticity.
- Physical resilience is closely related to one’s immune system and vitality.
- Mental resilience is closely related to one’s degree of mental balance and the degree of meaning in one’s life.

Four Aspects of Mental Balance

Mental balance is achieved through freedom from excess, deficiency, and dysfunction of four kinds:

1. Conative
2. Attentional
3. Cognitive
4. Emotional

A Matrix of Mental Balance

Mental Faculty	Spectrum	Causes	Meditations
Conative	Optimal Deficient Hyperactive Dysfunctional	Social/environmental Physiological Behavioral Psychological	Fourfold vision of flourishing
Attentional	Optimal Deficient Hyperactive Dysfunctional	Social/environmental Physiological Behavioral Psychological	Four modes of attentional training
Cognitive	Optimal Deficient Hyperactive Dysfunctional	Social/environmental Physiological Behavioral Psychological	Four applications of mindfulness: (1) body, (2) feelings, (3) mind, (4) phenomena
Emotional	Optimal Deficient Hyperactive Dysfunctional	Social/environmental Physiological Behavioral Psychological	Four immeasurables

Man's Search for Meaning

Viktor Frankl (1905-1997)

- “Life is not primarily a quest for pleasure, as Freud believed, or a quest for power, as Alfred Adler taught, but a quest for meaning. The greatest task for any person is to find meaning in his or her own life.”
- “Don’t aim at success—the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side-effect of one’s personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one’s surrender to a person other than oneself.”
- “To be sure, man’s search for meaning may arouse inner tension rather than inner equilibrium. However, precisely such tension is an indispensable prerequisite of mental health. There is nothing in the world, I venture to say, that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one’s life.”

Where is Meaning Found?

- Religious perspective: in the objective universe
- Scientific perspective: in the subjective mind of the individual
- Contemplative perspective: in the interrelation between individuals and the world

A Spectrum of Meaning

- Physicists attend to the purposeless behavior of inorganic configurations of mass-energy.
- Zoologists attend to the purposeful behavior of conscious organisms.
- Psychologists attend to the meaningful behavior of human beings.
- Contemplatives attend to the source of the meaning of existence.

The Pursuit of Meaning

- The pursuit of genuine happiness
- The pursuit of virtue
- The pursuit of understanding

The Pursuit of Happiness

HH the Dalai Lama:

“I believe that the very purpose of our life is to seek happiness. Whether one believes in religion or not, whether one believes in this religion or that religion, we all are seeking something better in life. So, I think, the very motion of our life is towards happiness.”

Kinds of Happiness

- Hedonic pleasure: the pursuit of pleasant stimuli and the avoidance of unpleasant stimuli ~ the hunter-gatherer phase
- Genuine well-being: the integrated pursuit of happiness, virtue, and understanding ~ the cultivator phase

Hedonia

Albert Einstein:

“Well-being and *happiness* never appeared to me as an absolute aim. I am even inclined to compare such moral aims to the ambitions of a *pig*.”

Eudaimonia

- Socrates:
 - “You Athenians, who are known in excellence, are you not ashamed of yourselves to not pursue the virtues of the soul rather than fame, wealth and reputation?”
 - We must treat as most important not life, but the good life. . . and the good life, the fine life, and the just life are the same. (*Crito* 48B4-7)
- John Stewart Mill: “I would rather be a hungry Socrates than a satisfied swine.”

The Pursuit of Virtue

- An ethical way of life based on nonviolence and benevolence
- The way of life leading to social, psychological, and spiritual flourishing
- Prepares us to realize those truths that will make us free, thereby opening up the deepest wellspring of virtue and well-being

The Pursuit of a Life of Virtue

- Generosity
- Ethics
- Forbearance
- Enthusiasm
- Meditation
- Wisdom

Virtues of the Heart

- Loving-kindness
- Compassion
- Empathetic joy
- Impartiality

The Pursuit of Understanding

- Understanding the physical world enhances our physical well-being.
- Understanding the mental world enhances our psychological well-being.
- Understanding ourselves and our relation with the world is the basis for spiritual well-being.

Self-Knowledge

Socrates:

“I am still unable, as the Delphic inscription orders, to know myself; and it really seems to me ridiculous to look into other things before I have understood that.”