

Dr. Srimi Pillay, Best-Selling Author, Examines How You Can Find Peace of Mind in the New Year for "Psychology Today"

New research points to the "Easy Button" in your brain.

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EINPresswire.com/ -- In 2005, Staples introduced the "Easy Button" as part of a marketing campaign to promote the idea that shopping at the store was easy. This button symbolized the fantasy that life could be easy in certain contexts. Metaphorically, wouldn't it be fantastic if there was an "easy button" in the brain? And imagine if this could be your state of mind as you entered 2020. Although there is no literal "easy button" in your brain, recent research suggests that there are ways to make experiencing the world much easier.



Srimi Pillay, M.D

The big picture—recognizing the easy button: One of the ways to access this "easy button" is to switch out of your brain's default state. On a day-to-day basis, you experience the world through your five senses. This becomes your reality and you experience pleasure or pain as a result of this.

However, this sensory state confines you to a reality that is always a tug of war. It is heavily dependent on what life offers you. If you have an interesting conversation or enjoy a good laugh with friends, you'll have a good day. And if you are bored, or if you experience a loss, you'll have a bad day. But what if pleasure and pain were not your masters? What if there was something more appealing than pleasure itself?

Clues to this alternate state of mind are described in the Buddhist traditions as "tranquility" and "wisdom." You needn't be Buddhist to reflect on these principles as their implications are quite universal. Contemplating the correlates of this state of mind will help you reach it. You have to turn your eye inward for self-examination.

The fog that obstructs the path to the easy button: To start, there are five mental hindrances that disrupt your peace of mind. Each is a challenge on its own because your brain is wired to default to these states. However, paying attention to each attribute could help you reset your mind to the "easy button" mode.

The five hindrances to identify and contemplate: sense-desire; ill will; sloth and torpor; restlessness and worry; and doubt. They are challenges to all of us. Yet, if we instituted controls over each of these dimensions, it would help us to stabilize our minds to feel calmer and wiser.

Sense-desire: On the surface, it seems like too big of a challenge to eliminate sense desires. A delicious meal, relaxing massage or satisfying sexual encounter could brighten up anyone's day. Yet, the absence of these elements, as well as the resultant craving that arises, can also be a form of bondage and torture. That's why you don't want to be beholden to sense-desires for your happiness.

To start your journey toward a peace of mind that is better than sense-desire, you have to first accept that such a state of mind is possible. Then, you have to be willing to withdraw your senses from the world from time to time to experience your consciousness before it becomes intentional.

Many traditions prescribe focusing on the breath, as the practice of mindful breathing connects you with what is outside of you. In that sense, you cannot desire anything because you are not separate from anything outside of you. There's nothing "else" to desire when you are in a state of oneness with the universe. We know from research on LSD that your brain is, in fact, capable of experiencing this state.

Exercise: To begin this journey of oneness to dissolve desire, notice how your breathing in and out connects you with the world. In a quite literal way, you are in a constant exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide with the world. Simply spend five minutes a day paying attention to your breath while contemplating this truth.

Ill will: Ill will is often provoked by mental states such as fear and fatigue. Anything that makes it more difficult to control your emotions will leave you susceptible to this negative feeling state. Often, ill will is experienced when your brain automatically reflects the ill will of another. And sometimes we feel like we have to defend ourselves out of pure self-interest. However, recent research indicates that self-interest may not be entirely in the interest of the self. When you feel ill will, you are also hurting yourself.

Exercise: Identify one situation in life where you are feeling some ill will. Perhaps you are getting less than you want from a relationship, or somebody is overtly depriving you of something you deserve.

Now, think of one selfless thing to do and do it. When you do this, simply do this as an act. Avoid thinking of it as a virtue. This act is not about moral superiority. It is simply about restoring a balance of feeling good to your brain. Feeling authentically generous will change your brain to make you feel happier.

Sloth or torpor: Sloth refers to laziness or the reluctance to make an effort. Torpor refers to lethargy. When you are exhausted, both of these states will seem like a natural default. And mental fatigue will make it very difficult to control your mood, thereby making your mind wander aimlessly, and increasing your distress.

When you are feeling lazy, examine what might be demotivating you. Is your physical fitness optimal? Does life feel too risky? Are you being avoidant? Or are you simply delaying gratification?

Exercise: Add regular exercise to your weekly schedule. Start monitoring the number of steps in your day so that you aim for more than 10,000 steps a day. Adding a physical component to this approach will help you feel a greater sense of vitality.

Restlessness and worry: For many of us, it's "natural" to worry, but we only think this because worry is a default state in which our attention is automatically directed to threats. This could be protective and helpful, but when overdone, all we see are threats and the world becomes a frightening place. Rather than "oneness", everything appears to be separate. Making a proactive

decision to decrease worry can give you much peace of mind.

If you need money to pay your bills, have an illness, or feel like you will never meet the right "someone", it may make sense to worry. Yet, in many instances, worry, rather than leading you to possible solutions, will keep you stuck in an endless loop of mental torture.

To worry less, it helps to practice some of the principles of acceptance commitment therapy. This is a therapy in which people learn to be more willing to experience uncomfortable thoughts, feelings and sensations rather than trying to control, eliminate or avoid them (Acceptance); and they feel better when they engage in meaningful activities that are consistent with longer-term goals and values (Commitment).

Exercise: Spend five minutes a day observing your thoughts rather than controlling or judging them. Then, make a decision to engage in some activity that strongly represents your values. For instance, if you value music but have to spend time developing your startup, set aside time to listen to music you love.

Doubt: When doubt helps you to make decisions it can be helpful. However, when it is excessive, it can erode your peace of mind. Like worry, it makes people more paranoid, and they become less inclined to see the world as one. This contrasts with how one might see the world on LSD or during meditation.

Doubt is a form of self-consciousness that can become excessive. Paradoxically, it often represents a disconnection from yourself and the world. The world is in fact uncertain. Our lives are uncertain. The future is uncertain. Doubt assumes that all of these things are certain when they are not. It is a supreme form of ego-ism in which we mourn the loss of control where there is truly none.

One way to address self-doubt, as philosopher and psychologist William James suggested in 1890, is to switch from seeing yourself as "me" to seeing yourself as "I." Rather than seeing your "self" as an "object", you experience yourself as the "subject." Drug-induced ego dissolution, focused attention, loving-kindness meditation, mantra-recitation, meta-awareness, mindfulness meditation, non-dual awareness, and certain religious practices with religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism all offer an opportunity to experience yourself as part of the world.

Exercise: When you observe yourself, ask yourself, "Who is the observer?" Also ask: "If the observer were observed, what would I know about the observer?" "Can the observer be objective if the observer is part of the observed?" "If the observer cannot observe himself or herself, then is it possible that the observer cannot see that he/she/it is part of a greater whole that extends beyond our bodies?" "When we see ourselves as separate from others, is it only because we have become the observers?" While somewhat riddling, these questions, when more deeply contemplated, will lead to sensations of being that are peaceful and connected.

Summary: The "easy button" in the brain can be more easily accessed when we break through the mental fog of sense-desire, ill will, laziness, worry, and doubt. Understanding how your incoming and outgoing breath connects you with the world outside of you, being generous, engaging in physical exercise, living according to your values, and including the observer in your total self-understanding will all help to clear the fog so that the "easy button" is within reach.

It's not an overnight process, but might it not be worthwhile to remove the fog, as an experiment, to see if 2020 can be a more peaceful year for your mind?

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/debunking-myths-the-mind/201912/how-can-you-find-peace-mind-in-the-new-year>

<https://drsrinipillay.com/>

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