



The Struggle for Inner Peace

By Henry Brandt, Ph.D.

LESSON 7: MIND AND BODY

The body, host to the mind, can influence its invisible guest. I was reminded of this when traveling with a missionary friend in Africa several years ago. He was stricken with an attack of malaria. Over several days, this normally keen individual was frequently delirious. At such times it was impossible for me to discuss anything of a serious nature with him.

Most persons need a given amount of sleep or they become irritable. Induction of a narcotic or alcohol into the body decreases the ability to think straight. Even food can affect the mental process—ask any luncheon speaker who has seen part of his audience drift off to sleep.

Though the body can influence the mind and one's emotional state, medical science avers that the mind holds even greater mastery over the body.

One day, I encountered a highway accident just after it had happened. Three badly battered bodies lay motionless on the pavement. A survivor simply sat on the roadway and stared unseeingly at those who had been members of his family. Another who had lived through the crash stood beside the overturned car and screamed, "I killed them! I killed them! They told me to slow down. Why didn't I listen?"

I walked away from that scene literally sick to my stomach. In driving off, I noticed that the muscles in my arms and legs were tense. I sighed frequently. My body had undergone distinct changes that were the result of my reaction to that bloody scene.

One day during counseling, Charles Reed spoke of his problem at home. Often he would arrive home in a good mood and would be hungry enough to eat a side of beef. Then his wife would begin to air her complaints. Perhaps he had slammed the door when he had come in. Or he might have been a few minutes late. So just before dinner was ready, his body would become tense and he would lose his appetite. His reaction to his wife produced drastic bodily changes.

A young girl reported she suffered from severe headaches. Investigation disclosed they always occurred when her fiancé failed to call when he said he would. A further look

back through her life showed that her headaches started about the time something went wrong with her plans.

Eddie Bond sought counseling at the recommendation of his physician. "How can *you* help me get over a stiff neck?" he asked, truly puzzled. As he told his story, it became clear that life was to him one big pain in the neck. The tenseness of his neck muscles gave him the pain. He was tense because he approached the problems in his life as if he were a football lineman charging his opponent.

Mrs. Frick was a beautiful, cultured, well-educated woman. But in certain situations she was having difficulty swallowing her food, until I learned that these times of difficulty came in connection with appointments that her husband demanded that she make and keep. She resented his demands. She actually could not "swallow" them.

THE BODY UNDER STRESS

Think of the common expressions that unite mind and body:

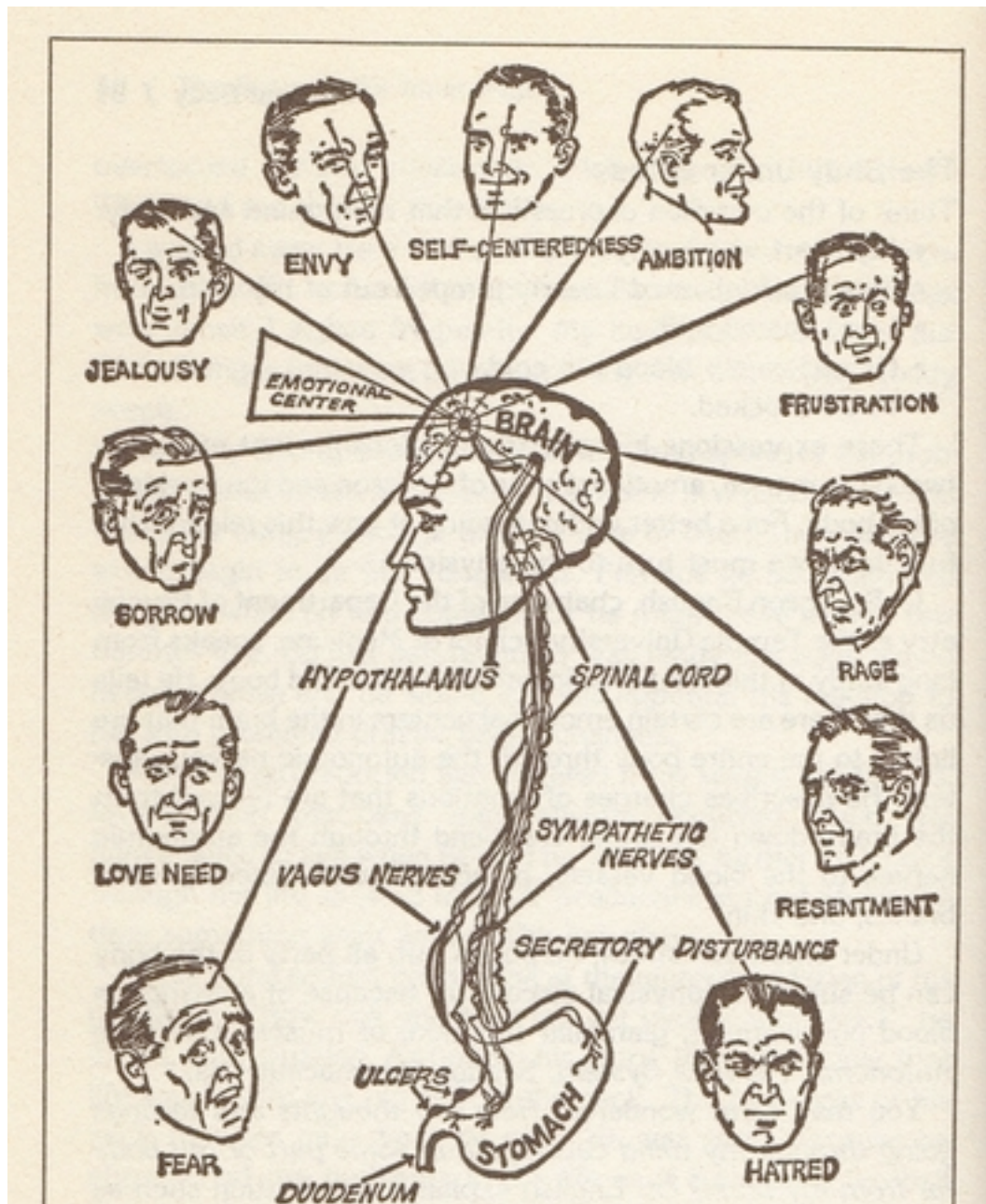
- My heart was in my mouth.
- I was so frightened I nearly jumped out of my skin.
- I was scared stiff.
- He makes my blood run cold.
- I was shocked.

These expressions indicate the relationship that exists between the mental/emotional state of a person and the workings of his body. For a better understanding of how this relationship functions, we must turn to the physician.

O. Spurgeon English, chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at the Temple University School of Medicine, speaks from long study of this relationship between mind and body. He tells us that there are certain emotional centers in the brain that are linked to the entire body through the autonomic nervous system. He describes charges of emotions that are relayed from the brain, down the spinal cord, and through the autonomic nerves to the blood vessels, muscle tissues, mucous membranes, and skin.

Under emotional stress, he points out, all parts of the body can be subject to physical discomfort because of a change in blood nourishment, glandular function, or muscle tone (*The Autonomic Nervous System*, Sandoz Pharmaceuticals).

You may have wondered, *How can thoughts and feelings going through my mind cause pain in some part of my body far from my brain?* Dr. English explains: An emotion such as fear can cause the mouth to become dry. This means that the blood vessels have constricted and the blood supply and glandular activity have been reduced. This dryness will occur, for example, in someone who must make a speech and is afraid.



Various emotions, which have their source in the brain, find their way through definite pathways to the stomach. When a troublesome person can't be coped with, we say we can't "stomach" him—and that may be literally true. O. Spurgeon English, chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at the Temple University School of Medicine, points out that a poorly functioning personality can be the reason for disorders of the digestive tract. (Drawing used by permission of O. Spurgeon English.)

Laboratory tests show that, under emotional stress, the same decrease in glandular activity occurs in the mucous membrane and various parts of the digestive tract. Not only does the blood supply change markedly, but secretions of various types increase

or decrease in an abnormal manner. Changes in muscle tone in the digestive region can occur, causing painful cramps. It has also been proven that emotional stress will increase the size of the blood vessels in the head: this change in turn produces pain because of the stretching of the tissues around the blood vessels and their pressure on the nerve endings. Of the heart, Dr. English says:

Without the presence of any heart disease whatever, psychosomatic patients are prone to increased heart rate, irregularities of rhythm, unusual sensations about the heart such as oppression, tightening, pain, and numbness sometimes accompanied by shortness of breath and the feeling of faintness and weakness, possibly giddiness. Along with this so-called "spell" there may be a general "all-gone" feeling, free perspiration, accompanied by a sinking sensation and the feeling as if the patient would fall in a heap (*Psychosomatic Disorders of the Heart*, Sandoz Pharmaceuticals).

Joe Johnson collapsed at work and was rushed to a hospital, apparently a heart attack victim. But he had been having some social problems. For one thing, he and his wife were experiencing acute troubles. Then a neighbor acquired a dog that barked all night. Soon a promotion put him under more pressure. The last straw was the need to provide housing for his elderly parents. Why did he collapse? Because he was not adjusting happily to his life situation.

Dr. English points out that a poorly functioning personality can be the reason for psychosomatic disorders of the digestive tract:

For decades it has been known that a personality problem which cannot be solved by the mind itself is prone to be "turned over" or "taken up" by some other part of the body. When an irritating friend or a troublesome family member cannot be coped with, the patient becomes "sick," he can't "stomach" it, or it "gripes" him. The physician knows that the cause of these gastrointestinal disturbances is emotional conflict. He knows it is the attitudes of generosity and responsibility struggling with an opposing wish to escape them (*The Emotional Cause of Symptoms*, Sandoz Pharmaceuticals).

His description of the conflict within a person is surprisingly like the one the Apostle Paul presented in Galatians 5:17, PH): "For the whole energy of the lower nature is set against the Spirit, while the whole power of the Spirit is contrary to the lower nature. Here is the conflict, and that is why you are not free to do what you want to do." The physician and the Bible describe the same problem—the struggle between what ought to be done and the contrary wish to evade it.

The physical effects of this conflict are often referred to as "nerves." "My nerves are shot," a woman says. "I'm on edge," explains another person.

Just what is meant by a "nervous disorder"?

The human nervous system may be compared to a large telephone network. Through sensory nerves the brain, like a central telephone exchange, receives messages or sensations; through motor nerves, orders or impulses are sent out to the muscles so that action may be executed.

Consider the effect of a pistol shot. The sound waves enter the ear, then travel as sensory impulses to the brain and then to the muscles in the arms and legs, to the heart, lungs and intestines, resulting in a rapid heartbeat, increased rate of breathing, and alterations in the functioning of the intestines. The nervous system did not cause the fright, but served to alert the body to a sudden change that hinted of danger.

THE WORKS OF THE FLESH AND YOU

In describing the emotions that cause psychosomatic illnesses, the Bible and Dr. English describe similar emotions which cause psychosomatic illnesses. Compare the physician's list with God's:

Dr. English

hatred
resentment
rage
frustration
ambition
self-centeredness
envy
jealousy
sorrow
love-need
fear

The Bible

hatred
quarreling
jealousy
bad temper
rivalry
factions
party spirit
envy

The emotions which English recognizes as being disease-producing are the same emotions that the Apostle Paul denounces and associates with man's "lower nature" (*Phillips*) or "flesh" (*New King James Version*). In either case, the words describe reactions to someone or something that gets in your way. Such reactions are not pleasant to acknowledge in one's life, particularly when they are tagged "the lower nature" or "works of the flesh." So the individual tends to deny their presence and perhaps deceives even himself. He focuses his attention not on the shameful reaction but on the bodily ailment that the reaction produces through his nervous and glandular systems.

Actual organic disease of the nervous system is easily observable under the microscope. Structural changes can be seen. But a case of "nerves" is something else.

If you have a viral infection in a nerve, you feel pain and tenderness along the course of the nerve. If you sever a main nerve running to a muscle, you are unable to move the muscle. But a "nervous" person has no physical impairment.

There is, then, the strange situation in which, on one hand, a person has a disease of the nerves without being "nervous" and, on the other hand, a person who speaks of being "nervous" but who has an apparently normal nervous system. The complaints of the "nervous" person are usually lodged in his stomach or intestines or heart—organs that are not a part of the nervous system.

Tom Fischer drove several hundred miles to reach our clinic. He came because he had stomach pains that the physicians said were functional. "That means," he said with a wincing grin and a report from the Mayo Clinic fresh in memory, "that my stomach pains are all in my head."

Essentially he was right about the term "functional," which means that the pain of an affected area is not caused by a disease. It also usually implies that the individual is not meeting his emotional problems in a wholesome way.

"They asked me if I was having any problems," he said. "What's that have to do with my stomach?"

When we first started talking, the idea of his getting well by talking to a counselor seemed a big joke. But he took the experience well—at least he was getting a nice trip out of it.

But life to Tom Fischer was no joke. Especially his employment. Two events of several months ago were still "grinding" him. First, he had been transferred from one machine to another and he did not like the change. Then a company safety officer came along and ordered him to wear safety glasses. Tom refused, saying, "I never will." The company left it up to him—wear the glasses or quit. He ate his words.

As we talked, he became upset over his work situation. It was hard for him to admit it, but he hated his work, his boss, and the safety officer. He literally burned within. Then slowly he became more preoccupied with the pains that began to come than with the hate that had brought them on. He was learning to live with a distasteful work situation, though not liking it. As far as his stomach was concerned, he was sure cancer was eating it up.

Strecker and Appel describe a man like Fischer:

Human beings stand a *single* mental shock relatively well, even if it is severe, like the drowning of an only son. It is a series of shocks or a long-continued emotional strain like worry or apprehension that finally breaks us. Such tiring and destructive emotional stress may be due to a prolonged struggle with difficulties and problems which we are not meeting

in a straightforward manner. Long drawn-out fear, anger, shame, resentment, or other intense emotion may produce an increased heart rate and alterations in the activity of the gastrointestinal functions. If these reflexes are established, they tend to keep on going, even after the original situation has disappeared. Thus anxiety, states of intense fear, worry, agitation, and loss of control dominate every waking hour (*Discovering Ourselves*, Macmillan, p. 197).

This was Tom Fischer's problem—a long-term, slow burn of hate that switched to a preoccupation with his body. Tom said his physician called it nervous exhaustion, resulting from mental cross-purposes. With Fischer, it came because he was defeated by a personal problem. He held grudges against his boss and the safety officer. He, of course, could not express his resentment openly and keep his job, so he hid it. But in the effort, he became alert to every muscular pain as well as the sensations of heart and stomach functions. The interesting thing was that he could switch from the anguished details of his suffering to a cheerful, animated discussion of his trip. Turn the conversation back to his work—Tom Fischer would again begin to grimace. "I didn't realize how much I hate those men," he finally said.

HOW HATRED DESTROYS

S. I. McMillen, a physician skillful in writing as well as in practicing medicine, speaks of the devastating effects of hatred:

The moment I start hating a man, I become his slave. I can't enjoy my work anymore because he even controls my thoughts. My resentments produce too many stress hormones in my body and I become fatigued after only a few hours of work. The work I formerly enjoyed is now drudgery. Even vacations cease to give me pleasure. It may be a luxurious car that I drive along a lake fringed with the autumnal beauty of maple, oak, and birch. As far as my experience of pleasure is concerned, I might as well be driving a wagon in mud and rain.

The man I hate hounds me wherever I go. I can't escape his tyrannical grasp on my mind. When the waiter serves me porterhouse steak with french fries, asparagus, crisp salad, and strawberry shortcake smothered with ice cream, it might as well be stale bread and water. My teeth chew the food and I swallow it, but the man I hate will not permit me to enjoy it... The man I hate may be many miles from my bedroom; but more cruel than any slave driver, he whips my thoughts into such a frenzy that my innerspring mattress becomes a rack of torture. The lowliest of the serfs can sleep, but not I. I really must acknowledge the fact that I am a slave to every man on whom I pour the vials of my wrath (*None of These Diseases*, Revell, pp. 73-74).

Fortunately, the Bible points the way to a cure: "Let there be no more resentment, no more anger or temper, no more violent self-assertiveness, no more slander, and no

more malicious remarks. Be kind to one another; be understanding. Be as ready to forgive others as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you" (Eph. 4:31-32, PH).

Strecker and Appel have an additional comment on the relationship of emotions to the body:

If aroused to a high pitch, shame, distress, hate, envy, jealousy all strike to the very core of our being. They leave us worn, tired, incapable, and almost helpless. The blush of shame, the haggard countenance of distress, the consuming burning of jealousy and envy, and the facial and vocal expressions of hate are striking testimonials to the deteriorating effect of these emotions upon the body. We may jump with joy or droop with sorrow (*Discovering Ourselves*, p. 12).

Like Dr. English, Strecker and Appel use practically the same words to describe hurtful emotions as the Bible does in speaking of the works of the flesh.

REACTING BIBLICALLY

S. I. McMillen says the stress of living does not cause big or little problems to adversely affect the body. Rather, it is one's reactions to his problems. Stress can be beneficial. It is the spirit of retaliation that calls forth glandular toxins.

"Is it not a remarkable fact," he asks, "that our reactions to stress determine whether stress is going to cure us or make us sick? Here is an important key to longer and happier living. We hold the key and can decide whether stress is going to work *for* us or *against* us. Our attitude decides whether stress makes us 'better or bitter'" (*None of These Diseases*, p. 111).

"Nervous" patients demand the kind of medicine that comes in a box or bottle. But they fail to recognize, say Strecker and Appel, that the medicine they need is mental peace. "It is almost axiomatic that in the presence of a clear, honest, and conscious understanding of the conflict, a neurosis cannot occur" (*Discovering Ourselves*, p. 204).

The Bible's admonition is to confess your lower nature or works of the flesh, your hurtful emotions—your sins—and God will be faithful to forgive your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Admit to God that these things are true of you, and then cleansing—fellowship with the Lord and inner peace—will be yours.

The refreshing cleansing that comes from God is capable of washing away all aches and pains brought on by a troubled mind.

Questions for review:

1. What are some of the emotions that can cause psychosomatic illnesses?
2. Over the next week, try to observe any instance in which you have a physical response to an emotion.
3. The author mentions that the Bible points the way to a cure for psychosomatic illness problems in Eph. 4:31-32. What do those verses say?
4. S. I. McMillen says that stress can work either _____ us, or _____ us.
5. What is the Bible's admonition to us on this subject? Memorize 1 John 1:9 and follow its instruction to take a step toward inner peace.

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