

“ The best way to cheer yourself up is to try to cheer somebody else up ”
— Mark Twain



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GUEST EDITOR

Shakti Durga worked closely with The Speaking Tree editorial team for this special issue on Valentine's Day

Shakti Durga, a barrister-turned-spiritual leader in Sydney is a frequent visitor to India. 'Shakti' means spiritual energy and 'Durga' is the fierce and protective form of the divine mother. Shakti Durga's teachings are charged with energy as she embodies the divine mother, teaching and role modelling the transformational power of unconditional love. She combines energetic and spiritual healing modalities in her *Ignite Your Spirit* therapy. She is the spiritual director of the Shanti Mission, a peace mission helping to create an age of peace on earth. Follow Shakti Durga at speakingtree.in

We live complicated lives. Too many of us feel overwhelmed and unfulfilled. We have competing needs and demands for our time. This results in the creation of, and the experience of stress. We may complain of feeling burnt out. We get into negative spaces of not being good enough, unable to cope, depressed and comparing our lives to others.

Stress is a fact of life. The American Institute of Stress reports that 75 per cent to 90 per cent of visits to health care providers are about stress-related disorders. The American Psychological Association (2007) reports that 50 per cent of us believe stress is increasing and 49 per cent believe that it affects our well-being. Forty-six per cent believe that it influences our physical state and roughly 50 per cent report symptoms of anger and fatigue.

A simple way to redefine stress is to see it as nothing more than a challenge to our system and an invitation for us to provide a wise response to manage it. Stress is a routine part of living and most of the time we handle it appropriately. For example, hunger is a stress, but a beneficial feeling; it tells us to eat.

The truth is that we can either manage stress poorly or well. It is the choice we make and our ability to cope which

STRESS-FREE & Happier

BADRI RICKHI and ALLAN DONSKY of the Canadian Institute of Natural and Integrative Medicine tell us how to manage stress by renovating our relationship with ourselves and others, so that we can love more and be loved even more

allows us to feel either in control or overwhelmed. A common complaint is that 'I don't have enough time in my day.' We are often too focused on what we are 'doing' to catch up that we neglect to pay attention to a critical aspect of ourselves. This is the aspect of 'being'.

Being creates a different type of focus. At the moment of 'doing', are we also aware of how we are feeling? Do we have the energy, focus, and desire? Are we in touch with those aspects of ourselves that allow us to navigate our internal states with wisdom? Ask the question: "How am I being while I am doing my doing?"

Let us look at whether we have a healing recipe for ourselves. We must be honest in answering these questions. For our physical well-being: Do we give ourselves enough breaks or rest time during the day? How fulfilling is our sleep and exercise? Do we eat healthily and in a disciplined way? All these significantly help us to manage stress. Without these basics steps, nothing else will work well enough.

Studies, for example, have shown that reducing calorie intake one day a week to 600 calories with fluids, can reduce stress, boost the immune system and build more

nerve cells, provides better tools to manage stress. How do we manage our thoughts and emotions? Do we have realistic and constructive ideas about what is reasonable to accomplish in a day? Is our self-worth so externally bound to our 'doing' that we sacrifice our 'being'? Too many of us need to appear competent in another person's eyes, so we sell our soul to do so. When we do this, our minds and hearts become overwhelmed, confused and we feel inauthentic to ourselves.

Can we listen to our spirit and heart about what is really important for our life? We are all worthy just the way we are. All of us are on a journey and we all have imperfections. Here are some other simple ingredients, which are backed by science and easy to do. They have all been shown to decrease stress.

Deep, slow breathing for at least five minutes a day, can improve concentration and memory. It increases brain neurons and helps the brain to access its delta and theta brain frequencies that causes the mind to settle. Important healing then takes place.

Meditation and yoga of all kinds are powerful tools. Seek a confidante who will listen to you

without judgement. Those who share, actually live longer than those who are isolated.

Get out there and be kind to others. Show gratitude for something, however small it may be. Practice forgiveness and patience and be nonjudgemental. Criticising and judging others are very self-centred behaviours and they actually produce harmful chemicals in our body.

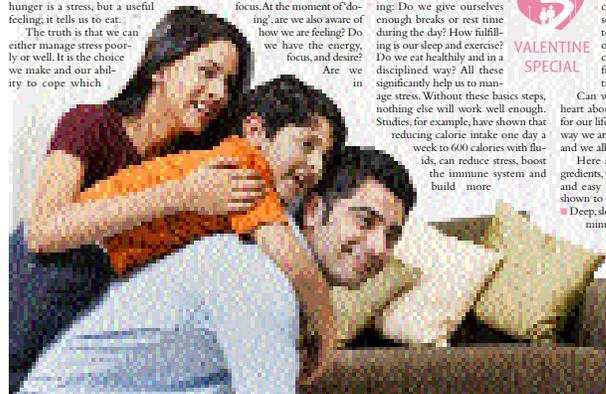
A special word to teenagers and young adults: Research is showing a marked increase in the use of technology. An average 18 to 19-year-old uses technology anywhere between 11 to 18 hours a day. It is now shown that the more hours spent on using technology, the less empathetic and compassionate we are to each other. So by avoiding face-to-face human con-

nection and creating more isolation, teenagers and young adults are managing their stress poorly. Depression, anxiety, drug abuse is a sad outcome of this trending behaviour.

Whoever and wherever we are, we came into this world to make a positive difference. Fulfilling that desire is our goal and stress sabotages our ultimate dream. Small, consistent steps in addressing our stress gradually free us up more and more to be who we really are.

Post your comments at speakingtree.in

REDEFINE STRESS
TO SEE IT AS NOTHING MORE THAN A CHALLENGE TO OUR SYSTEM AND AN INVITATION FOR US TO PROVIDE A WISE RESPONSE TO MANAGE IT... WE CAN EITHER MANAGE STRESS POORLY OR WELL. IT IS ALL ABOUT THE CHOICE WE MAKE AND OUR ABILITY TO COPE



ADVT



Ravana's Ten Heads

Ravana's ten-headed condition has been diagnosed by a neurosurgeon, reports PATRICK JERED

Over a period of two years, in the international medical journal *Surgical Neurology*, there was a learned exchange of views between medical specialists concerning historical cases such as the 18th century two-headed boy of Bengal, whose double-skull had been preserved as a medical specimen at the Royal College of Surgeons in London.

The medical condition of the unfortunate child had been posthumously diagnosed by one of the specialists as *craniopagus parasiticus*, in which two separate heads are fused together and share a single neck. Other possibilities, it was stated, included having two heads on individual necks (*discephalus*), and having two faces on a single head (*diprosopus*).

There were several documented cases of humans with multiple heads throughout history as well as mythological examples from around the world, one surgeon pointed out. These included King Ravana of Sri Lanka who had ten heads. The neurosurgeon, K Rajasekharan Nair, even went so far as to offer a diagnosis. Based upon various mythological descriptions, he stated, King Ravana's multiple heads were most likely a case of *craniopagus parasiticus*. (Patrick Jered is a Netherlands-based medical writer and author of the recently published book *Finding the Demon's Fiddle: on the Trail of the Rasavaththa (Tranquebar)*.)

Learn to be 'love on legs'

Turn your relationships around and transform your life, writes SHAKTI DURGA

Love: Everyone wants it, but there is definitely a knack to lasting love. At some stage in almost every relationship, situations arise which put a lot of pressure on our capacity to stay open, receptive and graceful in love. We close down and get defensive.

We make ourselves harder to love. Often we blame our beloved. We can feel aggrieved when our beloved says or does things that are not in accordance with our expectations. Sometimes we feel justified in our anger, impatience or ridicule because our ego tells us it is all their fault!

In a complex world, we are always going to have challenges and obstacles, and there will be times when we disagree. The quality of our interaction in these difficult times will affect just how blazing with joy we can be the rest of the time.

See The Big Picture

If we were able to be objective, we would notice that our attitude needs some attention, our lower nature has taken over and the sunshine of our love is hidden behind clouds of negative attitude, egoistic control and our own passive aggression. The spiritual reality is that no one is perfect, and we will all have days when our stress levels are too high, or when our samskaras and old karmas arise to be dealt with.

No matter how aggravated we might feel, in order to experience lasting love, we can use the situation to reinvent ourselves at a higher level of consciousness.

We alone are responsible for the quality and vibration of our thoughts and words, actions and habits. We alone can create a lift and shift to bring harmony to our spirit and everything it infuses.

Are we being the loving partner that we would like to have? All of life is a spiritual classroom, helping us to grow in love, wisdom, compassion, humility and peace. Relationships are the advanced class!

This Valentine's Day let us take stock of how your spirit is infusing your relationships. Take steps using the tools of your spiritual path to be empowered in turning your relationships around. By shifting your own attitude and energy, you can make bad relationships good and good ones fabulous.

Let us learn to be love on legs.

Valentine's Day
Thank you for coming
For seeing, for staying
For being the answer
To all of my praying
In spite of all the crazy things
I think and say and do
Thanks for loving me
As I love you
— Gayatri Kamadhenu
Singer, song-writer

