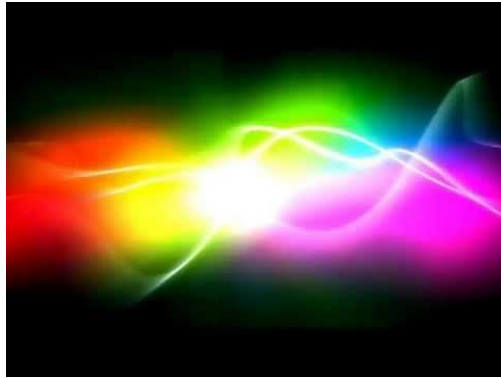


Gentle Comfort During Difficult Times
Settling the Soma: Uplifting the Soul



with Bette Freedson

“These are difficult times.” One member noted during my mid-November stress management group. “Everyone is angry. People who used to be friends are not speaking. It’s giving me stomach aches.”

“I know!” Her couch mate said with sadness in her voice. “There are too many changes. I’m having migraines.”

Group members discussed their usual stressors—interpersonal conflicts, worries about children and grandchildren, work stress, a few health concerns—but on that fall morning I sensed a difference in their presence and in each person’s felt sense of his/her stress.

“Maybe it would help to talk about it,” said a group member settled in the rocking chair. “In times like these we all need support.”

“Change brings unknowns that can raise fears and anxiety,” I responded. “Disgruntled-ness in the outer dimension can threaten your inner serenity and affect you physically. If you are also going through personal difficulty,

stress can become intensified. That can indeed make it feel like a difficult time.”

I explained that while it is important to have support during change, it’s also helpful to find ways to settle your soma and uplift your soul. I believe that the simplest way to soothe yourself when you’re stressed is to take one or two gentle breaths, then notice how the sensations in your body change. The oxygenation will tamp down sympathetic arousal and begin to calm your nerves.

Breathing is the body’s non-specific way to quell the cortisol (released in times of stress) and settle your mind. A more specific way to manage the stress is to redirect your thinking into more uplifting states of mind.

The Jester

My colleague [Paul Leslie](#) recently wrote about bringing out “our ‘Inner Jester’ to help get through a rough time.

“The Jester is the part of us that is playful, irreverent, and uses sharp humor to showcase ... absurdity that exists in the world... The Jester is at peace with the paradoxes... and sees the utter silliness the rest of us place on being ‘right.’ ... What could it be like if we laughed when someone said ‘It’s all horrible!’ or ‘It’s all wonderful!’?...The Jester realizes that everything ‘is what it is’ and just moves on...”



It's not that we ought to laugh at our troubles but rather it can be a comfort to laugh. Laughing lifts us out of ourselves and puts us back down with a different perspective, more prepared to go with the flow, less afraid we will drown. Simply put, laughing gets our minds off our troubles. Let's face it, millions of us watch modern versions of the jester on late night T.V. for a reason.

Indeed, how you *think about* a situation is a major key to turning stress into coping power. Another effective way to comfort your stress and energize your resilience is to envision images that uplift your spirit. Like laughing, envisioning can change psychology and neurobiology.

Thus, to comfort and energize themselves on that particular November day, the group was open to a gentle trance designed to tamp down the tension and help them shift into more uplifted states. You are welcome try it too.



Take a couple easy breaths and settle comfortably wherever you are. As you breathe normally, notice where in your body you feel tension. Now

imagine that with every outbreath you can breathe out tension. With every in breath you can breathe in peace.

As you comfortably breathe, let a picture or idea that soothes your inner spirit emerge into your mind. It may be a song, a picture of a loved one, part of a poem, or anything uniquely meaningful for you.

Notice how physical sensations shift as images arise and fade. Breathing normally, notice shifts in emotions and sensations. When you feel a shift into a more uplifted Self-state, memorize the feelings allowing them to become part of your felt experience. You can call forth these feelings and images to remind you to believe that you can come through. When ready, return refreshed and more peaceful.

Coming Through

The strength to come through the difficulties of change is beautifully described in "Crossing a Creek," by Margaret Courtot. In her lovely poem, Ms. Courtot likens the dangers of change to walking barefoot into unknown territory. Exposed and vulnerable as you make your way through scary territory, you neither deny the danger for you know "the Snake" is there; nor do you deny belief in yourself, for you trust that you will find the serenity and courage to make it through.

Crossing a Creek

crossing a creek
requires 3 things:

a certain serenity of mind,
bare feet
and a sure trust
that the snake we know

slides silently
underwater
just beyond our vision
will choose to ignore
the flesh
that cuts through
its territory
and we *will* pass through

some people think crossing a creek is easy
but I say this—

all crossings are hard
whether creeks, mountains
or into other lives

and we must always believe
in the snakes at our feet
just out of our vision

and we must practice believing
we *will* come through.



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who have to face the job of raising children alone...
I would advise all single mothers to read it."

T. BERRY BRAZELTON, M.D.
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