

Review of *the Chemistry of Calm*, by Dr. Henry Emmons

It may be time for a major re-set, and not just on Capitol Hill. It appears that our factory-food eating, multi-tasking, terror-traumatized, techno-driven, two-income but still cash-strapped consumer nation's nervous system may be Twittering in unintended ways.

Here's a tweet: depression and anxiety are opposite ends of an axis of illness that is the number one disabler in the US and the world, sapping billions from our GNP and staggering our sick-care system. Few escape unscathed: one in five Americans suffer at anyone time and one in three will experience anxiety or depression at some time in life.

"It's an epidemic, but I think the country is beginning to realize that these are whole body illnesses and should be treated as such," says Northfield's own Dr. Henry Emmons. The pioneering psychiatrist, who taught us to turn depression into *The Chemistry of Joy* five years ago, is back with an assault on anxiety as outlined in his latest book, *The Chemistry of Calm*. The book challenges the chemical cures promised =but rarely delivered-- by heavily hyped antidepressants and sedatives, offering instead the restoration of the body/mind/spirit system's natural resiliency.

The new book provides a concise, clear and compassionate iteration of "The Seven Roots of Resilience" program Emmons teaches to patients at his Partners in Resilience practice and also at Abbott Northwestern Hospital, both in Minneapolis. Like his first book, it explores the complex interrelatedness of biochemistry, brain function, and nutrition. It also includes a lively overview of anxiety disorders and how they were treated by doctors until updated science shifted the focus from pharmaceuticals towards prevention and recovery.

Emmons is not categorically averse to using medications. "I try to prescribe them cautiously and judiciously," he says. "I see antidepressant therapy as short-term approach, whereas lifestyle changes and preventive strategies-diet, exercise, adequate sleep-will go a long way to help prevent mood problems.

Many of us are already working on the nutritional foundation of Emmons' prescription for peace. We all know that a varied diet of brightly colored organic fruits and vegetables, free-range meats and healthy fats protects us from killers like heart disease, diabetes and cancer; now we can learn how they balance brain functioning. (Why rely on Xanax when reducing sugar, eating more salmon and drinking green tea can reprogram our genes to keep us calm?) The author also outlines the ways in which natural supplements can soften the damaging effects of the stress response, offering specific suggestions on the uses and ideal dosages of products found in the wellness aisle of your co-op.

Getting enough exercise and sleep are also ancient wisdom to most of us; Emmons also details how both are crucial to managing our mental energy, encouraging us to get our cycles of exertion/recovery, tension/relaxation, wakefulness/sleep back into alignment with nature. He avers

that *mindful* movement with proper breathing-as employed with yoga, tai chi and qui gong-has more value than random activity.

Emmons also takes on our toxic thought patterns, and the way they create toxic emotions and the behaviors that perpetuate them, creating a downward spiral into despair.

"While everyone experiences external sources of pain and stress, it is our thinking mind that is the primary source of our discontent," he says. "Yet, we continue to believe that there is something just outside our grasp that would make us happy if we could only reach it."

Emmons offers a comprehensive menu of mindfulness practices that encourage us to be observers of our minds-rather than victims-so we can choose our thoughts and experiences, rather than wasting energy on worry.

Mindfulness- which Emmons defines as the art of "placing your awareness with intention from one moment to the next" -is the main mantra pervading *The Chemistry of Calm*. He maintains that mindfulness is mandatory if we are to relearn emotional resiliency. "When we are able to be present with ourselves, we can access deep calm even in difficult moments, and we can be more deeply present with others," he says. And creating deep connections with others is key because "we are only human in connection with others, and resilience requires a genuine sense of belonging and engagement."

The book is packed with practical and accessible lifestyle suggestions toward these ends. It features, for example, a rich variety of guided meditations-based on a blend of Eastern wisdom traditions and the latest mind-body medicine research-specifically designed to help the reader "settle the mind, reclaim healthy emotions, stop worrying and start fully living."

Because the concept of mindfulness is such an important--- albeit elusive-- concept to communicate to millions of manic multi-taskers, Emmons confides that he plans to devote the last book in his projected trilogy to further exploration of the subject.

Azna A. Amira
507-213-8372
amira.azna@yahoo.com