

Are you busy?

That's too bad, being busy is now unfashionable!

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Somewhere along the way in “developed” countries, being busy became a revered state to be in. Busyness became associated with purpose; with efficiency; with power; and with money. When asked the question, “how are you?” how often do you answer “BUSY” with a disgruntled shake of the head and an exasperated expression on the face? If you haven’t noticed this, please observe what you say the next time someone asks how you are!

As a Surgeon, many of the illnesses and complaints that I see are simply a manifestation of a poorly managed life. We set up a cycle of busyness based on a perception of how life should be lived usually in comparison to how others are living. What may not be apparent is that one in five (20%) Australians aged 16-85 experiences a mental illness in any year with depression, anxiety and substance abuse being the most common mental illnesses. Though some of these conditions maybe “inherent or endogenous” susceptibility, many of these tendencies may actually be provoked or promoted by the lifestyles we choose to live.

Australian mental health statistics show that, every day, at least six Australians die from suicide and a further thirty people will attempt to take their own life. This is an alarming state of affairs. In many parts of the world that we consider “developing”, the rates of mental health problems is far lower than countries

like Australia, USA and Europe. The idea of being ‘that’ busy that it is actually detrimental to health would be considered ludicrous, if not laughable. Yes, in those countries a different set of health problems may exist such as nutritional deficiencies and water borne illnesses.

In places such as Cambodia, Vietnam, Nepal and India, many of us would have witnessed the unbridled simplicity with which people live. A humble straw hut with a small patch of land to till, with no prospect of ever having investments or wealth, but a day to day living that is full of people, family, culture and life. The old adage, “they have so little but are so happy” is commonly heard when Western people return from their Asian sojourn.

Is the solution to go back to a caveman style existence and live for the day? Should we shun material living and adopt a frugal lifestyle? This clearly is not the answer. The solution comes in developing clarity about life and what truly matters. Is it more important to have a 1 million dollar house but have zero happiness amongst its occupants? Is it worth sacrificing ones entire time doing a job that they hate, simply in order to afford a luxury holiday once a year and a few small fleeting pleasures spaced sporadically through the year?

Clarity either happens out of intelligent observation of the world around them or it develops due to the “knocks of life” that happen as a result of poor choices or occasionally bad luck. Clarity is the ability to look at things with an uncluttered mind free of biases, misconceptions and comparisons. Only a mind that is humble can be clear. Some of the characteristic that “cloud” our mind include: greed; jealousy; hatred; anger; pride; and fear. Only through observation, introspection, contemplation and meditation, can we come to understand the true nature of our minds, and walk the path towards clarity.

Busyness is often an excuse. If we weren’t busy, we would be forced to look in a different direction altogether. And the inner space sometimes just seems too hard. The alternative is to keep living the

“rat-race”, and rats go round and round and round doing the same thing day after day, till ultimately they die!

So just this one day, make a few minutes to pause, stop and reflect. Spend 5 minutes watching the mind and observing the breath. And take the necessary action to move towards greater states of clarity. It’s like a breath of fresh air when it finally dawns!

About the Author

Apart from his profession as surgeon, Mr. Ranjit Rao is a keen golfer, practices yoga, competes in marathons and is a wine lover. He is passionate about good health and well being. He has written a number of well-received articles for The Asian Executive on health-related topics. He is married with two children, ages 12 and 10.