



a haven of repose

BY SONIA RAPAPORT, MD MEDICAL CO-EDITOR

present wonders

*"Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile,
but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy."*

—Thich Nhat Hanh

As a teenager, I visited the Moulin Rouge cabaret in Paris with my parents. During the performance a fire sparked in the orchestra pit and we were swept up in the rush to leave the theater: the rich velvet curtains, plush carpet, and cushioned seats were hazards waiting to ignite. It was my first experience of a crowd in panic and I'll never forget the almost tangible fear that seemed to rise above and flow through us. What I didn't know then was that we were all experiencing a sympathetic nervous system response, the flight-or-fight response that helps a person respond to physical (and emotional and spiritual) threats.

Homeostasis describes the narrow range of conditions (temperature, electrolyte and sugar levels, acid-base balance, etc.) our bodies require for optimal function. When an external force threatens to push the body out of balance, that trauma is countered by a series of responses. Dr. Hans Selye described this theory of a stress response in his 1956 book, *The Stress of Life*. "Every stress leaves an indelible scar, and the organism pays for its survival after a stressful situation by becoming a little older."

For Selye, stress was not all bad; happy events can also evoke the stress responses. If you've ever felt the "rush" of winning a sports event or fallen in love, you understand the effects of "eustress." Selye believed that, "Adopting the right attitude can convert a negative stress into a positive one."

It may seem hard these days to convert the negative stressors into positive ones. In the days and weeks after the presidential election, I saw many people for whom the trauma of the Trump Electoral College win caused an exacerbation of their underlying illness: chronic fatigue, migraines, insomnia, arthritis. As Selye wrote, "It's not stress that kills us, it is our reaction to it." In this issue of *Health & Healing*, you'll find articles that describe ways to heal trauma, and as you read these stories, keep Selye's teachings in mind with these suggestions:

- **Be grateful:** keep a gratitude journal, pray, say thank you, forgive.
- **Help others:** choose 3-5 causes that matter to you and volunteer, do random acts of kindness, donate anonymously.

- **Find your life's purpose:** find your passion, learn something new, read, nurture creativity.
- **Look at the world through the eyes of a child:** look for beauty in your life, search out genuine goodness, relive experiences as if for the first time and embrace the wonder and delight of it.

- **Be modest.**

Peace activist, spiritual leader, and Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hahn is known for his writings on mindfulness and peace, which offer us many ways to respond to trauma. "The energies of mindfulness, concentration, and insight can liberate us from our anxiety and worries. We let go of the past and the future, and come in touch with the wonders of the present."

The past six months have brought us an astounding amount of traumas: personal, social, global, and environmental; these traumas can teach us to convert anxiety and fear through insight and mindfulness.

The energy that swirled quickly through the Moulin Rouge crowd of my youth inciting panic, had the same source as the positive and uplifting energy that I felt during the Women's March on January 21st, when the millions of women, children, and men united in support of human rights, women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, racial equality, and more. We can choose to unite in love and in support of those who do not have power to make change for themselves. We can choose to respond to trauma with positive action.

For the past six months, I've highlighted causes and organizations that are working to keep the world a peaceful, safe place. In light of the US withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord, I encourage you to consider those that seek to protect the earth for our children. My favorites: Natural Resources Defense Council (nrdc.org), Environmental Defense Fund (edf.org), Environmental Working Group (ewg.org). Whatever the organization, find a cause you can embrace, a cause that will leave the world a better place for your role in it. 

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