



HOW TO STRESS EFFECTIVELY

Our emotional life as a nation is conflicted. Individually, we can find it hard to remain in the present and may experience feelings that are strongly past or future focused. We can also experience confusion about norms of appropriate social expression.

Critics of the search for calmness argue that anger as a proportionate response to wrongdoing has resulted in massive historical progress, and that government is abnegating the public, social arena in seeking to manage campaigns around happiness.

Within both Western and Eastern traditions of thought, there are strong arguments that anxiety, suffering or other existential crises are fundamental to our condition. In other words, we have good grounds for not being calm at times. We need to attend to our relationship to the world and note that our anxiety and emotional disquiet may be linked to external situations of injustice or ethical conflict that need to be addressed in the public, moral arena.

We also need to attend to our relationship with our deep self, the shy and yet more resilient, constant partner often hidden behind our noisier, changeable ego.

And yet it can be hard to develop to this relationship because we are dating an invisible partner, and one most responsive to our patient and sensitive attention rather than to willpower and coercion. We can consider qualities worth cultivating to attain calmness and prescriptions for practicing them.

- *Discernment - prescription of mindful awareness*
- *Surrender – prescription of wilderness, solitude & silence / beauty*

Developing our relationship with our deep self is not without its pitfalls and challenges. We can focus on calm at the expense of acknowledging our actual feelings, we can berate ourselves for not progressing more quickly in our attempts to cultivate calm, we can become overly introspective, or we can become too passive in our new philosophy of acceptance.

We need to be careful to remain rooted in flesh and blood experience, even if we seek some reflective distance from it. We do not want to anaesthetize our emotional lives or to take flight from reality and hide from the stuff of the world.

Below are some questions to prompt further discussion and reflection.

Do you think there are good grounds for taking Prozac?

What nation would best suit you in terms of the degree of emotional expression you prefer?

Are you more drawn to ascetic or aesthetic experiences? What strategies appeal in terms of cultivating calm?

What do you think are the merits of a Romantic position on feeling that says ‘indulge your emotions’ – even at the expense of precipitous mood swings?

Have you met anyone who you considered ‘too calm’?