2016 June Newsletter

Nancy Rockey
In May’s Newsletter we wrote about the three levels of the brain. Of the Limbic System or Mid-Brain, we wrote:

“What is of utmost importance in our understanding is that the brain’s (Limbic System) is very powerful! The more input there is from the Limbic System there is, the less capacity the brain has to put a damper on destructive behaviors. Because the amygdala (component of the Limbic System), receives information from the Thalamus (another Limbic System component) faster than the frontal lobes do, we tend to react even before we are consciously aware of the danger. By the time we realize what is happening, our body may already be on the move.”

What part does the Amygdala play in reducing stress, if any? In Dr. Bassel Van Der Kol’s great book, The Body Keeps the Score, he writes:

“If the amygdala is the smoke detector in the brain, think of the frontal lobes – and specifically the medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC), located directly above our eyes – as the watchtower,
offering a view of the scene from on high. Is that smoke you smell a sign that your house is on fire and you need to get out, fast – or is it coming from the pot you put over too high a flame? The amygdala doesn’t make such judgments, it just gets you ready to fight back or escape, even before the frontal lobes get a chance to weigh in with their assessment. As long as you are not too upset, your frontal lobes can restore your balance by helping you realize that you are responding to a false alarm and abort the stress response.

What in the world would we do without a pre-frontal cortex? It would seem that we would live totally by our emotions! We would be a display of constant explosions of emotion – all emotions. And that’s the way it is with Rick. Suffering from a horrible history of abuse: rejection, physical and sexual abuse, Rick has been unable to get his Amygdala under control. In addition, his pre-frontal cortex was damaged - the result of an accident that caused him to have a stroke – a brain bleed – shorting out some of the circuits in the pre-frontal cortex. So what happens? He explodes about everything that does not please him or that reminds him in any way of his childhood experiences. So Rick is always on alert – watching all around him and especially in his relationships, for anything that brings up the past, making him feel rejected. After all, that’s the way the mind works – Stimulus > Response. Because of his complicated life, including his stroke, he tries to medicate himself with alcohol to calm the amygdala, but alcohol just makes his rage escalate. His relationships are deteriorating due to his violent, ever-present temper, and his family is backing far away from their explosive husband and father.

Reading on in Dr. Van Der Kolk’s book: “Ordinarily, the executive capacities of the pre-frontal cortex, enable people to:

- observe what is going on
- predict what will happen if they take a certain action
- make a conscious choice.
- hover calmly and objectively over our thoughts, feelings and emotions (an ability I call mindfulness)
- take our time to allow the executive brain to inhibit, organize and modulate the hardwired automatic reactions preprogrammed into the emotional brain.

This capacity is crucial for preserving our relationships with our fellow human beings. As long as our frontal lobes are working properly, we’re unlikely to lose our temper every time a waiter is late with our order or an insurance agent puts us on hold. (Our watchtower {MPFC} also tells us that other people’s anger and threats are a function of their emotional state.)

When that system breaks down we become like conditioned animals. The moment we detect danger, we automatically go into fight or flight mode.”

Life is Grace

"Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it no less than in the excitement and gladness; touch, taste and smell your way to the Holy and hidden heart of it .. because in the last analysis all moments are key moments and life itself is GRACE." - ~Frederick Brechner

It’s early morning and clouds are hiding the sun. Yet there’s lots of inner light coming from the Son, and I am filled with His GRACE, so I will immerse myself in that beautiful radiance as I share it now and will as the day progresses.. I feel His presence as I sit and write. May you keenly feel His loving presence also and let it precede you where ever you go and whatever you do today! Grateful Donna
When we are in a large amount of stress or are suffering from PTSD, the balance between the amygdala and the pre-frontal cortex shifts dramatically. This makes it much harder to control emotions and impulses. Intense fear, sadness and anger all increase the activation of the limbic system, containing the amygdala, which is involved in emotions. It simultaneously reduces activity in the MPFC. The ability of the MPFC to inhibit the amygdala’s reactions breaks down and people tend to “take leave of their senses.” They may become:

- enraged by small frustrations,
- startled in response to loud sounds
- frozen when someone touches them.

Effectively dealing with stress depends on creating/achieving a balance between the smoke detector (amygdala) and the watchtower (MPFC).

There are two options to manage your stress:

**Top Down** – This involves strengthening the Watchtower’s capacity to monitor your body’s sensations. Meditation and yoga can help with this.

**Bottoms-Up** – Involves recalibrating the Autonomic Nervous System. The ANS can be accessed by breath, movement or touch. Breathing is under both conscious and autonomic control.

This is all very interesting! Believe it or not, Ron has been privileged to speak with Alex Kerten, the author of a wonderful book entitled, “Goodbye Parkinson’s, Hello Life.” He is a mentor to people suffering with PD. He has instructed Ron to do certain movements, conducting) to improve his breathing and his ability to move. These exercises impact the Autonomic Nervous System in a way to improve how he is feeling and functioning. Amazing how science and the medical community are learning so much about the body - things that can benefit us all.

This article is already quite long, so we shall continue next month with additional information about stress reduction.

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**It’s Time to Prepare**

The fall season is only 2 months away. What are YOU going to do this year to benefit your family, friends or fellow church members?

There are 4 books that have accompanying workbooks that would be great for a “Book Club!”

**Heart Connection** – a book designed to help readers improve relationships, marital or other.

**Free At Last** – a book that tells the stories of several individuals, how and why they went wrong, and how they changed. Of course it includes principles for recovery.

**Shadows of Acceptance** – this book explains rejection, it’s impact when received and for a lifetime, without intervention. It offers help to move beyond its effects.

**Shadows of Belonging** – In the first 2 years of life, we develop a style of attaching to others, based on the relationships we experienced with parents. We use that same style for the rest of life. We can change and find the comfort of intimacy with others.

The workbooks correlate with the books, chapter by chapter. These are excellent for Small Groups or between couples. They are excellent for a Mid-Week Service at church.

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**Contact the Rockeys** with your questions and/or comments