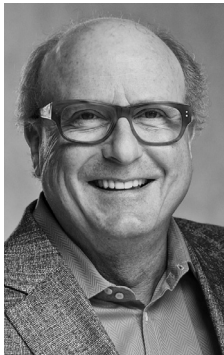


Parasympathy



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The sympathetic nervous system activates every aspect of the human mind and body for fight-or-flight when the brain detects a situation that could have catastrophic consequences; like being killed and eaten. The body is saturated with signals and hormones that focus the mind and senses on an obsessive, hyperactive search for threats. Blood is diverted to the muscles and limbs that will be expected to do the fleeing or fighting. Heart rate increases, pupils dilate, digestion stops and the whole organism is set on hair trigger. In the natural environment for which sympathetic

activation was evolved, the situation is resolved within seconds or minutes by means of escape, victory or death. If activation is extended beyond this timeframe it has the medical and psychological consequences we call stress and anxiety.

The *parasympathetic* nervous system deactivates the red alert conditions of fight-or-flight; returning all systems to modes more appropriate to digestion, reflection, sex and sleep. Despite the headlines, physical danger is extremely rare in our society, so we should spend most of our time in this state of serenity. Unfortunately, the mental systems responsible for perceiving threats often attach themselves to abstractions that pose no existential threat; such as the status of our relationships, financial statement or political perspective. The fight-or-flight response can be triggered by almost anything, and it is unclear when abstract situations like these have been resolved, if ever. The parasympathetic response may never be allowed to return us from fight-or-flight to feed-and-breed, so we suffer from anxiety and stress. Fortunately, it is possible to stimulate the parasympathetic response intentionally, which usually requires some training in breathing, meditation, hypnosis, biofeedback, courage and/or philosophy. This is often an aspect of personal counseling and psychotherapy. Trust me. Call me.

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