Mean Dog, Sweet Dog

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I recently attended a one-day training on Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction. The presenter told the following story:

*A Native American elder told his grandson about his two dogs, one of whom was sweet, the other mean. He explained that the mean dog was always picking fights with the sweet dog. The boy asked, “who wins the fights?”, and the grandfather replied, “the one that I feed!” The point of the story was to present an analogy to the inner sweetness and meanness inside of each of us, and to imply that we can impact the conflict between them by the amount of attention we give to one or the other*.

The story caught my ear. While as a therapist I know that it is important to let oneself feel what one is feeling, I can also appreciate the distinction between simply allowing the feelings, and fueling thoughts about the feelings which increase suffering.

In the teachings which I have heard or read about mindfulness, one of the essential elements is stopping…to notice non-judgmentally what one is experiencing and where one is putting one’s attention. This process can help you disengage from the stress you are feeling.

At this recent workshop, the presenter suggested remembering the word STOP. S for stop. T for take a breath. O for observe. And P for Proceed.

Dr. Tara Brach, in her book, “*True Refuge*” uses the acronym RAIN. R for Recognize what is happening. A for Allow life to be just as it is. I for Investigate your inner experience with kindness. N for Non-identification.

I was inspired to write the following verse to remind myself to stop and notice where I am putting my attention:

*What am I feeding my body?*

*What am I feeding my mind?*

*Am I nurturing thoughts that are angry and mean,*

*or ones that are peaceful and kind?*

*What are these thoughts that I’m thinking?*

*Are they leaving me gloomy and blue?*

*I can notice these thoughts, tell them hello,*

*But not have to believe that they’re true*

*What do I feel in my body?*

*Am I twisting myself in a knot?*

*Am I picturing battles that I’ll have to fight,*

*or ones that I’ve already fought?*

*Bring myself back to the present*

*Back to the middle of now*

*Feel feet on the ground, breath in the lungs,*

*and whatever is happening, allow*

I encourage you to use whatever words or images work for you as reminders to help you pause and disengage when you are feeling stress.

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