

## Practice does much more than ?make perfect?

by MARK PAVILONS

?To practice five things under all circumstances constitutes perfect virtue; these five things are gravity, generosity of soul, sincerity, earnestness, and kindness.? ? Confucious

We all know that the more we practice, the better we get at everything. Whether it's athletic competition, mental agility or composing music, more is always better.

So much so that ?an ounce of practice is worth more than tons of preaching,??according to Gandhi.

And Deepak Chopra noted ?to think is to practice brain chemistry.?

He's right.

Our thoughts are chemical and even electrical. Thoughts and emotions are transmitted via neurotransmitters and neurochemicals in our brain. Substances like dopamine and oxytocin flow freely, impacting our feelings, love of music or closeness with others.

Neurons group together and connect and these fire, almost like a car's combustion engine, creating electrical impulses. We have upwards of 100 billion neurons in our heads. The more they fire and connect, the more information and memories we store.

Practice, like learning to ride a bike, make these connections stronger. These unseen magical things then tell our bodies ??uscles ? how to react.

We're only aware of a small portion of the information our brain processes, every second of every day. Our senses take in a ton of input and our brains file them away. That's how the smell of coffee may make you think of that special, romantic time at the cafe.

It's all quite fascinating, but even brain scientists admit there's so much left to uncover. Why have humans been given such a supercomputer, when we can't even remember phone numbers?

It's important to constantly challenge our brains, not by watching reality TV, but by reading, doing puzzles and making art. Positive thinking keeps those pleasant connections bursting with joy.

We don't have to be fully versed in neuroscience to understand the nuances of brain health.

Emotional wellbeing is hugely important and our brains know this. Apparently, we can regulate our brain chemistry by practicing mindfulness ??ocusing our attention on the present, without distraction.

We can also shift thoughts around, and sideline the bad ones. Negative thoughts, like doom and gloom, don't do any good at all. Replacing them with even a bit of positivity makes our brain smile.

I read that practicing gratitude has a positive impact on the brain, by producing serotonin and dopamine, which regulate mood.

I?never thought that being positive and optimistic are actually good for you, and keep that gray matter well oiled.

There are likely dozens, if not hundreds, of things to do to help our brains think happy thoughts.

Not only that, but our true selves are resting in there, perhaps in the recesses of our minds. The best that we can be is there, waiting

to be tapped into, uncovered and unveiled.

This is part of the equation, maybe the most important part.

As George Eliot put it: "It's never too late to be what you might have been."

So, how do we become the amazing person we truly are? How do we show the world our inner face?

Well, it combines all of the things I mentioned: brain chemistry, eagerness, and of course, practice.

If we want to be more compassionate, we have to practice compassion. We become gracious when we decide to be gracious.

Those amazing synapses are the key to our personality and great qualities we have in abundance.

Perhaps, along with practice, we need to share these things with others. Keeping it to ourselves may make our brains function better, but we have to let it out. We need to spread these things around, just like fertilizer in our gardens.

I have encountered literally thousands of people over the years in my line of work. I try to learn from them as I pick their brains on the subject at hand. I study them and their mannerisms.

I have found those who are generous, kind and non-judgmental have the best dispositions.

Their outlook is amazing and it shows on their face, in their speech, and in their actions. They have a certain calmness and focus.

I wish I could take samples from all of these people and create the ultimate concoction of human pleasantness.

We humans have a great capacity to love and learn and it's pretty much endless. Maybe part of our journey here on Earth is one of constant self-improvement. Yes, the self-help industry has spawned a lot of charlatans and greedy gurus. But the bottom line is we need to do better and be better.

Nourishing our minds and bodies seems to be the way to go. It's personal, so we all choose our own method of evolving.

And some of those may involve things like meditation, journaling, spending more time outside, and practicing the best qualities or virtue, as Confucius mentioned.

Having a clear and open mind are necessary and you have to look inward to really know yourself. I think most of us refrain from deep self-examination out of fear and apprehension.

What's to be afraid of?

A few people I know have said they simply sit quietly and listen to their inner voice. This may be easier said than done, but again, practice is the key.

I'm not saying all the answers to life will come flooding into our brains, but reflection is always healthy.

Just as we're feeding our bodies, we need to take the time to feed our minds, too. What comes out is tied directly to what goes in, so do yourself a favour and treat yourself with kindness and sincerity.