Today we’re going to talk about stress. It’s obviously a big deal. We’ve all got it. Life is busy, life is stressful, life is compressed in the modern world. Question is, what are we going to do about it? I’ll tell you what we’ve tried to do about it. We’ve tried meditation, and for most of us that’s too hard. It’s a lot of work and there hasn’t been a payout, so we don’t know what we’re doing with it. The problem is all that stuff takes time. If you don’t have time to deal with stress then you’re stressed about not having time and it’s way easier to self-medicate. What does it do? It takes away your sex drive. It takes away your energy. It makes you feel like the walls are caving in and the world is crazy.

Look, everything is toxic. There’s a lot of crap out there and there is very little time to deal with it. There’s very little time to do what you need to do for your health. Money is flying out the door. It’s hard to make ends meet no matter how much you’re getting paid because there’s just so much going on and we don’t have time to catch our breath and chill. That’s the big issue. That’s the big takeaway of why it’s hurting us. What I’d like to do now is teach you how to stop and catch your breath. Urban Monks are good at this.

What we all want is to feel at peace. We want to be calm. We want to be happy. We want to be safe. We want to be reassured. When the walls are caving in, we just don’t feel that way. Right? The problem is physiological also, not just psychological. Our bodies have not adapted to this stress so our parasympathetic nervous system, which is rest and digest, is getting over run by sympathetic fight or flight. This chronic stress, it’s pulling the blood from the pre-frontal cortex which is part of our cognitive reasoning, part of our brain that says no to things that we should say no to and our moral reasoning, all the way back to our limbic system or our kind of reactive brain.

It’s messing with our blood sugar and it’s messing with us all around. That’s the chronic stress we live in. We’re also in physical stress. I was on a plane a couple days ago. You try so hard not to collapse under the weight of this sitting all day. That physiological stress comes from the food, comes from the chemicals, comes from the pesticides. Mental stress is obvious because we all have it, but then there’s emotional stress. Right? What happened with your spouse this morning. What happened with your kids at breakfast. All of the things that are driving you out of the present moment and getting you thinking about what is hurting your feelings or making you sad. Then there’s spiritual stress. What is this show all about? What am I doing? What’s this all for? I get up and go to work every day. So what? I’m just not feeling it. Right?

A couple things I want to define right now is that meditation has been taught wrong in the west. That’s the good news, is if you think that it’s all been about stopping your mind, don’t worry about it. That’s not the answer. The Dalai Lama himself cannot stop his mind. He can just control the reactions he has, therefore down stream the body doesn’t freak out and signal for cortisol to go up and robs you of the blood sugar balance, stores fat, and it also messes with your endocrine system and all your hormones. From that decision at the top, not of what stressors am I going to have in my life. Look, you can curate your life a certain amount, but look, stress is going to come at you. It’s about learning how to adapt and learn how to deal with that stress. That’s going to determine whether it’s going to affect you or knock you off your perch.

First thing is there’s also this concept called positive stress when it comes to solutions. Hans Selye, when he coined the term, there was eustress and distress. Distress is what we know as stress, which is the bad stuff. Eustress is, “Hey, your kid just scored the goal and won the soccer game.” I mean, how does that affect you? When you go to the gym and you’re doing some kettle bell swings, that is positive stress on your muscular system getting you to adapt and grow. That’s a big part of learning how to use stress and make it your ally again. We have only the negative slant to stress which is, “Oh my God, it’s coming to get me.” Look, what doesn’t kill us makes us stronger, so part of what we learn
as Urban Monks is to become strong and resilient through adversity. That makes us tougher in tough moments. Right?

What we want to do is we want to create a cushion of vitality, and in doing so not be at our wits end next time some bad news comes. Right? We pay it forward. I get up and I meditate and I do the things that I do throughout my day not because I’m taking it as a chill pill, but because I know that the day is going to bring what it brings and then it’s going to give me the adaptive cushion to be able to handle my day better. Another thing that I find is a big deal with a lot of students is that, “Hey man, you know I wish I had time to meditate, but who the hell has an hour to just sit there and do that thing?” I said, “An hour? I barely have an hour on most days.” But ... I just meditated right now. I’m meditating while we’re hanging out and having this conversation.

It’s about catching your breath and throttling your burn rate so that you’re not just, “Bah!” Out there all the time. You’re just learning to regenerate and circulate by breathing and being mindful all the time. Find your breath and anchor your consciousness into real things, which breath is included. Right? I’ll love to look at a tree. I’ll look at the sun through the window. I’ll look out at a landscape because that’s real. It brings me back into reality versus the spread sheet or the idea that you had that you’d been ruminating on or the he said/she said that’s been running you all day. Right?

The breath is something you got to do, so every time you breathe, if you could remember to layer in a practice of awareness, to just become aware of what you’re doing with your breath, that right there is going to help you more than feeling guilty about not meditating for an hour and barely getting it in all week. Right? Here is a metaphor that’s been very helpful for thousands of my students. It’s very contemporary because the world we live in needs to share the same metaphors. In the old days we’d talk about steam engines and all these types of things. They were like clockwork. Everything was like gears in clocks. Now it’s all computers.

Your mind, imagine, is your mental desktop. You have fifteen windows open and you’re wondering why your performance is getting sluggish, your attention is drawn all over the place, you’re stressed out and nothing is getting done. What we’ve been trained to do is to say, “Oh wow, this is stress. This isn’t good. What I’m going to do is double click my meditation icon or my yoga icon.” This thing pops up. We do some stuff. We feel a little better. We close it, we go back to fifteen open windows. False. That does not work. That’s what a lot of my students were doing before they came over. Here’s what I suggested, and this is what has worked really well, and it’s going to work for you.

Look at your meditation more as like, a virus scanner. It should be the operating system. As you are working on something and then your monkey mind says, “Oh, yeah. I got that thing to do.” Then you open up another window and then you open up another window. Your meditation goes, “Hey, hey. Hold on a second. You have three windows open. Which one do you need to do first? Great.” Save, close, save, close, back over here. Stay here. Finish, next. Finish, next. Use your awareness to stay focused on one task at one time, even if you got a million things to do. There’s no such thing as multi-tasking. It’s about being present and engaged and aware. That’s where the meditation comes in is to really help you to understand. To step into the task at hand, nail it, take a break, stretch, go for a run, whatever. Come back, do the next one.

Trying to do fifteen at the same time means stress. It means burning up sugar in the brain and it means getting tired and frustrated and not being as happy in life. I don’t want that for you because the master remains calm. The Urban Monk remains calm and understands how to work with our consciousness. Again, it’s not about stopping the thoughts. That will happen when we are dead. Right? When I have stuff physiologically coursing through my veins and my brain is adjusting for balance and
all the things that my body is set up to do physiologically, that reflects as noise inside the mind. The mind constantly has noise. Everybody has noise. It’s what we do. Okay?

There’s another piece to this which is an important one because I want you to live into your greatness. Let’s talk about recalibrating your stress bucket. If your day revolves around getting up, getting in the car, going to work, coming back, watching some TV, and going to bed, then the little things can be stressful. If part of your day also includes rock climbing at the rock climbing gym, and feeling what it feels like to be dangling over something and having to fear for your life and kind of stepping into your body to pay attention to that, now you’ve kind of recalibrated your stress bucket. Part of the gestalt is once we start to learn how to manage our psyche so that we don’t stress as much, is to start doing things that kind of engage and stress us out in a way that is good for us.

For me, I love public speaking because it still gives me those butterflies and it makes me better. Right? On the front end of public speaking you’re just like, “Ooh, okay. Yeah, here we go.” Then on the back side of it you’re like, “All right, great. I faced something.” Then when the taxi is late or something small happens, you’re not like, flipped out over it. Look at that in your life and see what you can layer on to kind of bring more adventure into your life so that your stressors aren’t so small. Then you can work your way into a life filled with more meaning and abundance.

What I have for you here is a light bulb meditation, and also another practice that’s called alternate nostril breathing. Both of these are very powerful techniques to rid yourself of stress by understanding how to move energy and move stress through your life. They don’t take very long to do, and they are very effective. Day one we started with food because we need you on this type of clean diet for the seven days just so you can start feeling a difference. Now we’ve already talked about exercise and movement in day two. Today, now you have some tools for stress. Implement them. Look, it’s only seven days to start this thing. Right?

Start practicing these. See how you feel. Do it again tomorrow. See how you feel. In seven days you’re going to feel different and from there you can pick and choose what you want to keep, what you want to do, what you don’t want to ever do again. That’s fine. This is a little experiment to see what you can do in your life to feel better. I’ll see you tomorrow.