

AZ Health: Breaking the Second Arrow

Written by Allison Carmichael

Tuesday, 10 September 2019 10:21 - Last Updated Monday, 23 September 2019 08:05



A hard true fact in life is that we will experience pain. Many times this is literal pain from an injury, accident or diagnosis. Other times it is emotional pain in experiencing the death of a loved one or a difficult breakup. This pain can even be trivial, like when a driver cuts us off or when our children spill the milk in the morning.

Buddhists call this pain the first arrow. We all must endure the pain of the first arrow because it is just part of life.

How we humans react to that first arrow is called the second arrow. The second arrow may present in the form of stress, anger, pouting, lowered confidence, etc. Often we feel that we are victims to this second arrow. In the Buddhist parable, the second arrow is "suffering." The real phenomenon about suffering is that we have a choice in accepting this second arrow at all. The parable challenges the learner to break the second arrow instead of suffering from it.

It is easy to become stressed, overwhelmed and lack work-life balance in today's fast-paced society. Social media reminds us that we aren't keeping up with the Joneses. Depression rates are at an all-time high as is the prescription of anxiety medications. Sleep is elusive.

There is a clear need to make mental health a priority whether you are a parent, employee or employer. Strategies in preventing the strike of the second arrow are paramount to our happiness, success and enjoyment of life.



Allison Carmichael, principal for Silver Valley Elementary

Through learning mindfulness tools, the second arrow can be broken. There are three key tools to mastering the prevention of suffering.

- **Positive Self Talk:** Sleep is disrupted often by worry. Concern about the next day's scheduled events prevents us from getting the rest the body needs. This second arrow can be assuaged by positive self-talk. Reminding ourselves of our capabilities and preparation can give us confidence in getting back to sleep in the middle of the night. Repeating statements logically convince our minds to get back to sleep. Next time you awake mid-sleep, repeat these statements: "The best thing I can do for myself is to be asleep." "Sleep is what my body needs to be successful tomorrow." "I will do better in my presentation tomorrow with a good night's rest." "Staying awake is counterproductive." "I know what to do and say in that meeting tomorrow, I do not need to practice anymore." Counter this second arrow by reminding yourself of how awesome you really are.
- **Noting:** Our minds carry us away into negative storylines. Often, we are stuck for great periods of time in this negative storyline allowing assumptions, presumptions and fiction to literally ruin our day. Our prehistoric selves are programmed for fight, flight or freeze mentalities looking for danger even though we may be perfectly safe. Noting your mind's drifting down the stream of negativity can break that storyline and allow your logical mind to recognize it as ludicrous. Without recognition, or noting, that nonsense is allowed to

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continue carrying on and carry you away to the land of negativity. It is so simple but must be intentional in recognizing our thoughts. Due to our human condition to be looking for danger, we must counter that second arrow by noting the thoughts and allowing your mind to change topics.

- **Meditating:** If you want to get in shape, you could walk and that would be good and it might help. But if you really want bang for your buck, you would weight train and count calories. The same is true for the mind. Mindfulness tools are good, but meditation is the best. The most effective manner in breaking the second arrow is through meditation. Meditation shows the benefit of chemically altering the mind creating a mind more open to positivity and calm. Meditation does not alter a personality but it may allow a person to feel more themselves. There are many apps that offer guided meditation from even just one minute long to support beginners. Break this second arrow by changing your brain's natural state through meditation.

Although yoga and exercise are also techniques found to improve mental health, recognizing what your mind is up to is significantly more effective. Once we look inside our heads, the real healing will begin. Sleep through the night by reminding yourself that you are awesome. Snap yourself out of those negative storylines by noting. And alter your brain chemistry to be calm through meditation.

Next time you see a second arrow on its way, break it before it breaks you.