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Green Thoughts

The slogan of the United Negro College Fund is, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." For my purposes this month, I would like to adapt the statement and suggest that "mental energy is a terrible thing to waste."

Among the many quotes that have been misattributed to Mark Twain (or whose origin cannot be established) is: "I have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened." Whatever the origin of the quote, many people can understand this sentiment in that lots of the things we worry about never transpire. Time and thought get expended on "what ifs," eventualities that are only remotely possible. Such thoughts are not energy efficient. They consume attention, can harm health, and often proliferate into even bigger worries.

"Green" is being used these days as an adjective or noun to refer to something that is environmentally beneficial, or in some cases, energy efficient. How can a person have greener thoughts in the face of a potential problem or threat? How can mental energy be used more productively?

From an environmental perspective, we want energy to be expended in a purposeful manner, to achieve some goal. The same can be said for mental energy. If thought or worry becomes circular, goes nowhere, and accomplishes nothing, then it is nonproductive rumination. On the other hand, when thoughts have a problem-solving focus, and result in some action that can be taken or change that can be made, then they are productive. Green thoughts emphasize what is relevant to a given situation, and factors over which one has control.

Certainly it can be difficult to change nonproductive (i.e., wasteful) thoughts into green thoughts, especially if the pattern of thinking is habitual. Asking oneself questions can help. What is the specific problem? What are the most likely possibilities? What things are relevant to my circumstance? What control do I have over the situation? How might I look at the situation from a different perspective? What evidence is there that my current way of looking at the circumstance may not be accurate?

What and how we think affects our health, for good or ill. Thoughts are essentially chemical and electrical activity in the neurons in our brains. As thoughts change, biology changes. Green thoughts promote growth and health.

Paul J. Hershberger, Ph.D.

... is a clinical health psychologist. He is Professor of Family Medicine and Director of Behavioral Science for the Family Medicine Residency Program, Wright State University Boonshoft School of Medicine. His clinical practice includes psychotherapy, consultation, and coaching.

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To contact Dr. Hershberger:
e-mail: paul.hershberger@wright.edu
phone: (937) 278-6251, ext 2021