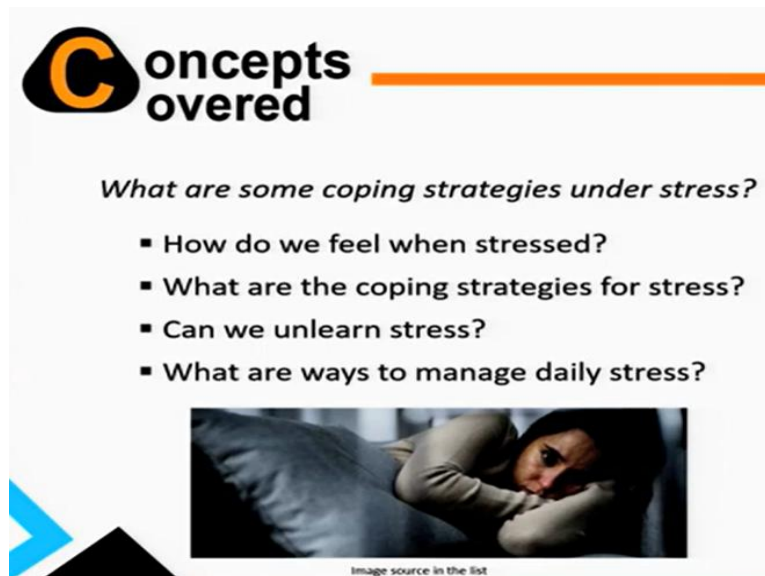


**The Science of Happiness and Wellbeing**  
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**Indian Institute of Technology - Kharagpur**

**Lecture No # 24**  
**Module No # 05**  
**Stress and Coping**

Welcome again we have come to know what stress is all about but it is very important now how to get rid of it what are the coping strategies that we can have in order to get rid of stress. Because the awareness of stress will help you understand how to get rid of it and then it is also very important what are the activities what are the action plans how do we unlearn it? How do we help ourselves resolve such conflicts through certain effective tools that is the purpose of this talk this time.

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**Concepts Overed**

*What are some coping strategies under stress?*

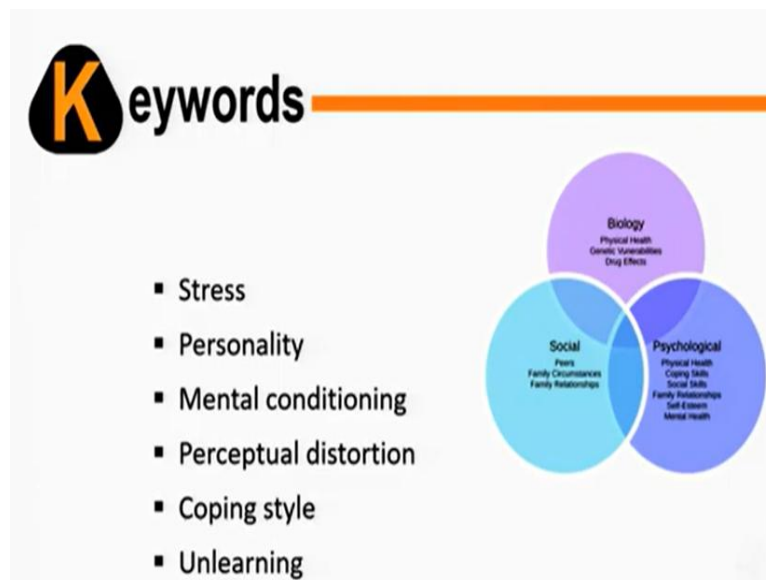
- How do we feel when stressed?
- What are the coping strategies for stress?
- Can we unlearn stress?
- What are ways to manage daily stress?

Image source in the list

We will first have questions involving certain issues related to stress. The major issue of course what are the coping strategies under stress how do we handle stress? Before we do that is important to understand how do we feel when we are stressed, what could be the possible coping strategies, and one such coping strategy would be to unlearn can we really rewind ourselves unlearn ourselves?

And is there a way to manage daily stress because you cannot get rid of daily stress from so many conflicting environments in which we will live in. Therefore it is important to get some guidance how to get rid of the daily stress. To begin with we will once again try to understand certain keywords.

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Initially we will try to revisit the concept of stress again because its just not about misconceptions its also to get rid of those misconceptions before we tell you about the coping styles. We would also like to know whether certain personalities have got more stress or not that's an important question. That if someone is having a particular kind of personality are they more susceptible to, stress? Is it so that stress is always mental, do we require only our mind to be controlled in order to get rid of stress?

We told you already that there could be a biological stress there could be a social stress there could be psychological stress. If the stress is confined to one particular sphere probably will not be affected much more but once it is transferred from one zone to another zone it actually engulfs your whole system and you become completely stressed. So mental conditioning as a concept we will use, how to get rid of it?

We will also try to understand perceptual distortion that what is the kind of distortion that we develop we have come to know by now that stress is something about the burden, about the way we carry the burden rather than the burden itself. Therefore why, perceptual distortions occur and how coping style and unlearning can take place, we will talk about some coping styles and also there are certain styles which we cannot perpetuate we need to unlearn them. Can we unlearn or relearn our coping style once again these are certain issues we are going to discuss.

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## Some clarifications...about stress

- **Stress is a core to some personalities (it affects everyone)**
- **Stress is only a mental phenomenon (it impacts physical status)**
- **Some tasks are more 'mental' than others (all activities require mental conditioning)**
- **Entertainment has stress-buffering effect (it also impairs the cognitive strategy)**
- **Too much load breaks us down (it's the way you carry it)**

Let us have some clarifications about stress as I said we would like to revisit stress apart from what we have already discussed about stress at length is the clarifications that we need to make here. If we believe that stress is core to some personalities that some people are more stressed because of their personality. Let us forget about it affects everybody. Each and every one is affected by stress is the way some people manifest depends on their personality.

Introverts may not be able to express their stress overtly as extroverts could make it but that does not mean the stress is not getting affected in the certain types of personalities number one. If we believe that well stress is only a mental phenomenon it has got nothing to do with your social relationship or your biological system that's also wrong it impacts physical status.

We have already said that, psychological stress is the source always and if that source is not plugged it will overflow to your social system and it will from social system it will overflow to your biological system. If you are under constant stress about yourself then it will start feeling that the person in front of you will get to understand your condition and will react accordingly.

And if they inject further stress in, you over a period of time you will find that your biological system also gets affected by the stress. Likewise we believe that some jobs are more mental than others like examination if we believe that examination is very stressful other jobs are not so stressful nothing like that. Stress is a perceptual phenomenon everything requires mental conditioning you require preparation for even for the filthiest job the most trivial job in the world also requires some form of mental conditioning.

If we don't do that we might be doing certain higher order mental job effectively but the stress factor will emerge from the jobs that you cannot succeed which are very trivial in nature. We also believe that entertainment has a stress buffering effect. As I said, entertainment gives you a short-term impact, the moment the short-term impact is over your stress comes back.

And in that process when you are entertaining yourself your cognitive strategy is impaired because for every stress there is a conflict. And you need to resolve that conflict and to resolve that conflict you need to develop some strategy and those strategies are generally reasoning based strategy or cognitively based strategy. So, it will impair your cognitive strategy and finally we believe that too much of load breaks us down load does not break us down it is about the way we carry it we repeatedly talk about it.

Since it is all about perceptual distortion if we believe even a very small problem is a big way in a big way then it becomes a big stress for me. But some people can actually carry bigger responsibilities without having any stress for that or without getting part out by that.

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### The greater the stress...

- ..., the greater the likelihood that a decision-maker will choose a risky alternative
- ..., the greater the tendency to make a premature choice of alternatives for a correct response
- ..., the less likely will be tolerance to "ambiguity"
- ..., the greater the distortion in perception of threat and poor judgment often occurs

*In stress, only immediate survival goals are considered, long-term goals are sacrificed*

So let us try to understand what happens when we are under stress. The greater the stress, the greater the likelihood that a decision maker will choose a risky alternative. It means if you are under stress, and if you are in a conflicting situation and if you have got certain alternatives under stress you will always carry you will, always go for a risky alternative. You will not go for an alternative which are easy and which can give you a solution more effectively.

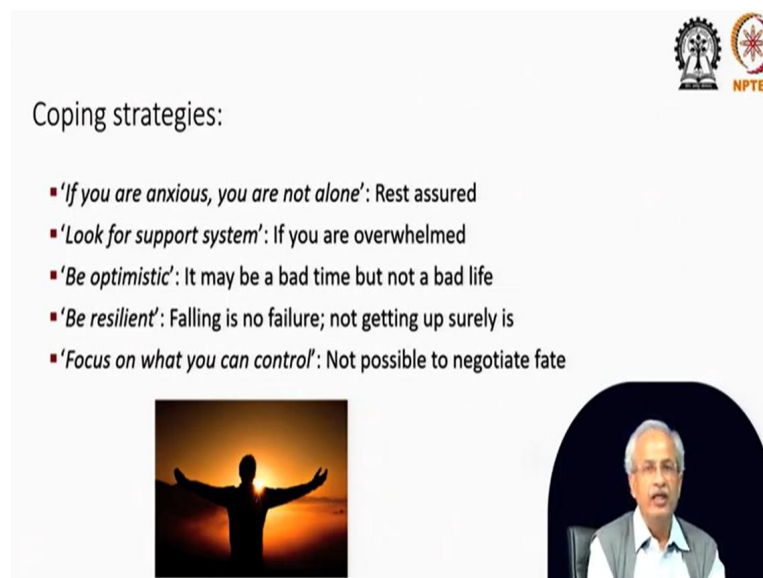
Because we believe under stress something very stressful or something very risky alternative would probably help us get rid of this stress. The greater the tendency if you have got greater

stress you will take a premature choice of responses if you have got 2, 3 alternatives. You would not logically process or you would not develop a cognitive strategy in order to find which solution is the best solution or which solution is a good solution or a right solution.

So under stress we take a solution which is premature and under stress we would not be able to tolerate ambiguity. If the situation is ambiguous you will always try to find an immediate answer, for that. But those who are not under stress they can tolerate ambiguity and manage uncertainty in a much better way. So perceptual distortion occurs and poor judgment occurs if you are under stress. And under stress you cannot think of your long-term goal you will only think about your short-term goals.

So your long-term goal will continue to be sacrificed if you are under constant stress so greater the stress these are the situations which you are going to face in long run.

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The slide features the NPTEL logo in the top right corner. The title 'Coping strategies:' is followed by five bullet points: 'If you are anxious, you are not alone': Rest assured; 'Look for support system': If you are overwhelmed; 'Be optimistic': It may be a bad time but not a bad life; 'Be resilient': Falling is no failure; not getting up surely is; 'Focus on what you can control': Not possible to negotiate fate. Below the text are two images: a silhouette of a person with arms raised against a sunset, and a video frame of a man speaking.

Coping strategies:

- *'If you are anxious, you are not alone'*: Rest assured
- *'Look for support system'*: If you are overwhelmed
- *'Be optimistic'*: It may be a bad time but not a bad life
- *'Be resilient'*: Falling is no failure; not getting up surely is
- *'Focus on what you can control'*: Not possible to negotiate fate

Now it's important after understanding or revisiting stress all about let us try to get some ideas how to cope with the environment how to cope with the situation. First of all let us be, rest assured that if I am anxious I am not alone. There are people almost everybody in this outer universe is having some kind of stress, some kind of anxiety. So I am not alone I am not the person only suffering in this world and if you are having stress don't get overwhelmed, look for the support system.

Because sharing of your anxiety or stress will lessen your stress to a great deal in a great in a big manner. Therefore it is important that you look for the support system don't confine yourself do not try to stigmatize your, stress and retain it within yourself. And it has to be

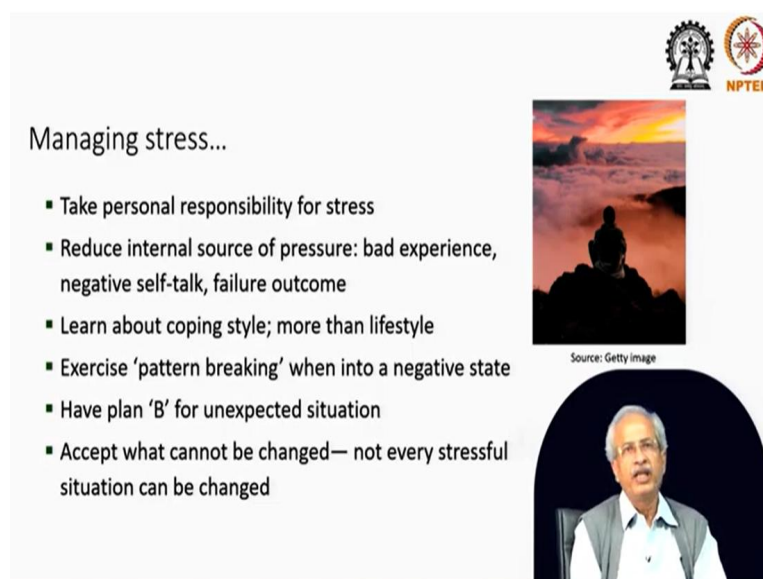
added with some degree of optimism because those who are under stress on a continuous stress they generally had a pessimistic thought process.

Those who are pessimists, they think about a bad life those who are optimist they do not think about a bad life they do not even think of a bad time they do not even think about a bad day they only think about a bad moment. So they believe that well I may be having some difficulty at this moment but next moment probably I will be able to achieve something better. So it is a matter of coping style you have to be optimistic with little bit of failure with little bit of difficulty we cannot over generalize it.

Therefore we need to be resilient so failing is no failure not getting up surely is a failure so everybody fails at some point of time. But those who are resilient people they can get rid of the stress and they can get back to their feet once again. So point is that there are many situations under stress where you do not have any control. If you are flying an airplane and if you are very anxious what will happen if something goes wrong you have got no control on that situation so, if you cannot negotiate fate focus on what you can actually control.

If there are certain instructions in the flight under emergency what you should do you must focus on that rather than trying to overwhelm yourself with the anxieties based on the kind of thoughts you are entertaining for yourself.

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The slide is titled "Managing stress..." and features a list of six bullet points. To the right of the text, there are two images: the top one shows a person sitting on a rock at sunset, and the bottom one is a portrait of a man in a suit. Logos for an institution and NPTEL are in the top right corner.

- Take personal responsibility for stress
- Reduce internal source of pressure: bad experience, negative self-talk, failure outcome
- Learn about coping style; more than lifestyle
- Exercise 'pattern breaking' when into a negative state
- Have plan 'B' for unexpected situation
- Accept what cannot be changed— not every stressful situation can be changed

How to manage stress. It is important that we take personal responsibility for stress if there is a stress we do, not blame others. In fact under stressful condition some people can actually attack the stress in the sense try to aggressively time find out a solution for the stress. Some

people cannot do that they try to compromise the stressful situation if there is a conflicting situation between security and flexibility they will try to compromise somewhere. Some people do not even go for conflicting, compromise they go for an avoiding situation they avoid both the conflicting situation. But some people try to avoid the stress by blaming others which we call a defensive reaction. So some people who are very effective those who have got very effective coping style they can actually aggressively attack the problem and try to find a solution.

But those who are not they can compromise they can avoid, or they can defend themselves by having some kind of blame for others. But if you take responsibility of your own stress you would not accumulate your stress. So the internal source of pressure need to be reduced we all have got bad experiences we all go for some kind of negative self-talk and there are certain failure outcome which continuously bugs us down.

Therefore if we think too much about, past will remain depressed if we think too much about the future we will remain anxious. Therefore it is important the internal source of pressure must be reduced by actually focusing on what you are supposed to do today. So today becomes more important if we can concentrate today probably we will be able to focus tomorrow much better.

Likewise people often guide us how to maintain our lifestyle. Lifestyle is primarily by our food habit or physical status our pattern of activities they are very important in our life. But equally important is our coping style some people have got good lifestyle bad coping style and some people have got good coping style and bad lifestyle. I would strongly recommend to have a very good coping style because at times lifestyle is not under your control but coping style is, very much under your control.

And to cope that if you are under negative stress or a state for a longer period you need to break the pattern. Don't think in a continuous process about a stress do not be apprehensive about the future all the time with a particular focal point you must be able to shift yourself from one point to another point. So pattern breaking is important thing distributed thought process is an important thing.

And if there is a stress for you for example in the exam if you believe that you may not be able to answer certain questions you should have plan B for certain situations which are

unexpected. Because everything that you want to control a anxious person would like to control everything but there is something called negotiable fate that is you cannot control everything.

So if there is an unexpected situation you should be having a plan B well ahead of time therefore it is important accept what cannot be changed. Every situation every stressful situation cannot be changed, you have to accept certain situation where you have got little control. So the tendency to control everything gives rise to stress even if there is no burden on you even if there is no conflict on you.

I would strongly recommend therefore to, avoid such tendency where you feel that something may happen even if something has not happened right now.

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### Learning to unlearn...

- All or none thinking fallacies trap us to no-win situation
- We neglect toolbox & try to change too much
- We underestimate the process; do not stick to pace
- We fear loss of identity loss while changing thoughts
- We suffer from optimism bias

So important therefore is how to unlearn because over a period of time if we have already developed certain faulty learning pattern or faulty coping style how to unlearn it? If we do not unlearn it we cannot mask it or relearn it so how to unlearn is a process. Those who are I mean I mean they all are non-thinking fallacy actually trap us to know in situation I mean those who failed to unlearn they always believe in yes or no that is all or none there is no middle way they are not flexible.

So we need to be flexible in order to unlearn certain situations learning is very easy but unlearning takes a lot of time and to unlearn certain coping style or habit once you develop a mental habit then it is very difficult to unlearn it. And habit is something where mind the logical mind does not work that is why it has become habit and in order to change it you have



to utilize the toolbox that is there are certain rules for doing or developing a proper coping style.

My suggestion is to go for those toolbox which we have been trying to, help you understand over a period of time. So if there is a process that is happening with you a negative state if you are always in the hurry we call them type A personality, if you are always in a hurry, you will face some kind of stress over a period of time. We need to realize that process is equally important outcome is important but process is equally important.

Those who fail to unlearn they always look at, the outcome they do not look at the process in fact in happiness also happiness can never be a target it can never be a destination it has to be a process it has to be a journey. So somebody who is trying to achieve happiness as a target even if they achieve it at some point of time they will find that they become unhappy once again at some point other time.

Therefore the stress is also like that it is a process and if you only are interested how to get rid of the stress then you would not be able to unlearn. So some people who try to unlearn their personality or stressful pattern they believe that their way of thinking would be lost if they try to change habit. And some people also suffer from optimism bias they believe that they can do it by doing something very funny. They believe, that well others will have difficulty if they follow certain procedure but if you follow it you would not be having such kind of difficulty.

So you develop certain unusual methods to get rid of your stress and in the process you cannot unlearn it very effectively. So put together the idea behind unlearning is that you need to relearn as well. So relearning is possible only when if you want to learn, otherwise if you are already having a faulty coping strategy. On the top of it if you want to relearn the faulty strategy will continue to hit you and will affect you in a long manner long term manner.

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## Managing daily stress...

- Avoid self-medication
- Maintain sleep – wakefulness cycle
- Perform deep breathing exercise, deep muscle relaxation
- Establish realistic target, stop negative self talk
- Do not combat stress & do not give repetitive suggestions
- Manage time effectively & do not take big decision
- Practice mindfulness



Source: Getty image



So we need to manage our daily stress because one of the major important issue is that you need to manage your daily stress avoid self-medication maintain sleep wakefulness cycle perform deep, breathing exercises. Set a realistic target do not combat stress and do not give yourself repetitive suggestions manage time effectively. And if you are under stress, do not take a big decision practicing mindfulness of course to be at this moment would always help you out in a long run.

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## Some general guidelines - I

- **Develop a strategy to think rationally**  
*(...95% of our thoughts are repeats in the brain)*
- **Handle 'daily hassles' at work**  
*(...do not allow these to cumulate)*
- **Find a match between your ability & interest**  
*(...sustain your interest privately)*
- **Strike a balance of flexibility & discipline**  
*(...set a priority line for duty-family-career)*

Now some general guidelines I would like to give, first of all develop a strategy to think rationally. Let me tell, you 95 percent of our thoughts are repeats and repeats in the brain and as a result of which we cannot get rid of our stress. And with every thought process your energy in the brain is lost and if 95 percent of the energy is lost you would be engulfed in stress only.

So it is important that we go for pattern breaking we have just mentioned about it daily stress or daily hassles must be handled, effectively. In the earlier slide I just mentioned about it if you can go through you will understand that if you can manage daily stress it will never accumulates. And if it accumulates one day you would be overwhelmed one day you will find that you cannot handle stress.

So it is important that on a daily basis we handle our stress. It is also important that you find a match between your interest and, ability. You may be doing certain jobs which are not part of your ability or part of your interest and you find a constant conflict at work. If you have got interest somewhere else then you can actually pursue it privately. Suppose I have been pursuing my degree in masters and my interest is to play cricket I can always pursue it privately and as a second carrier or a paired carrier.

So interest ability, and expectations they should be matched at least to a great extent important also is to strike a balance between flexibility and discipline. I told you in the earlier point that there is always a conflict between flexibility and discipline we always want flexibility. But the flexibility and discipline has to be prioritized the priority line for family duty career must be decided well ahead of time. And even if they are in conflict and if you have a priority already in line you would be able to take a decision very effectively otherwise you will suffer from analysis paralysis.

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## Some general guidelines - II

- **Manage uncertainty @in everyday life**  
*(...take decisions beyond outcome)*
- **Go beyond short-term mission**  
*(...long term vision is equally important)*
- **Redefine 'success'**  
*(...failure is not orthogonal to success)*
- **Build your career @through studies**  
*(...but do not leave 'life' behind)*

Uncertainty management is very important certain decisions we take but we do not realize the outcome of those decisions so it is important that we take decisions beyond outcome. We

believe that once this conflicting, situation is over then we will never be stressed again but that is not the right way the guideline is that even if that conflict goes we must understand how in a next such conflict we should be able to handle it.

So taking decision beyond outcome is equally important. It is also important to go beyond short-term mission because many of us believe those who are under stress as I told you earlier, that under stress you only try to fulfill your short-term mission. You are always in the fire fighting mission if you are under stress your long-term goal is always sacrificed. If your long-term goal is sacrificed you would not be able to handle your stress effectively.

So it is important that we redefine our success, failure is not orthogonal to success it is important that failure is part of the success and if you have not failed ever then probably you will also not be able to succeed ever. Therefore understanding failure and success that the two sides of the same coin in fact those who are resilient people they believe that failure is always a learning experience. It is always important to have a root first by having some experiences in failure and then only you will get wings in order to succeed.





If we only learn how to succeed without having any root then probably in any case if we fail sometime at some place at somewhere then we would be lost in stress only. Therefore it is important to get our root first wings later that is if you have got experience of failure entertain them get them as a part of your learning experience and then you should lead for some kind of successful venture.

So build your career is important through studies but do not live your life behind remember career is within life is not within career.

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**CONCLUSION**

- Stress affects everyone & impacts our quality of life
- Low tolerance to stressful situation results in poor decisions
- It is possible to unlearn stressful thinking fallacies
- Coping style is as important as life style
- There are ways to manage daily stress



So in conclusion stress affects everybody impacts our quality of life lowest tolerance of stressful situation results in poor decision. If you do not manage ambiguous situation if you cannot tolerate uncertain situation then you will take bad decisions. Therefore it is important that we learn how to tolerate it we should be able to unlearn stressful thinking fallacies. That is if certain thoughts are coming to you on a repetitive basis we need to unlearn it through pattern breaking I have already mentioned about it.

So coping style is as important as lifestyle and there are ways to manage daily stress as I have already mentioned you do not allow, them to accumulate because if they accumulate then you it will be overwhelmed with stress. So with all these messages, I am sure you should be able to lead a very happy life management stop stress is very important. But also at the same time as I said having a happy understanding what happiness is all about what kind of journey it is all about what kind of process is all about it needs to be understood.

And if we do not understand then we will always do fire-fighting we will always go for short term mission we will always try to understand how the stress can be managed without ever trying to become happy in our lifetime thank you so much.