

Let Your Feet Find the Focus

The other day I went for a run on my favorite local trail in a beautiful county park. I just love being in nature, breathing that fresh air, seeing all those colors, hearing animals scurrying or the creek babbling.

I also love the challenge that the trail presents. Navigation in the woods requires a much more alert mind. You have to really pay attention so that you don't trip. Jumping over curbs is one thing when running outside, but constantly scanning for roots or fallen branches is something else in the woods.

What's the beauty of that? My mind HAS to focus on what's ahead on the ground, which means it gets a break from thinking the squirrely thoughts it normally does all day long. The kind of break that meditation provides. Trail running is moving meditation? Indeed!

Besides the physical aspect of the run, which in the end always makes my body feel more relaxed, being so close to natural elements provides a release that no medicine can. I can go in feeling down and by the end I'll be back to positive.

But let me tell you, I've had some tumbles on the trail. Fortunately it doesn't happen often. Once you fall the first time, you realize: YOU ARE NOT INVINCIBLE! You are perfectly human.

I'd been running on the trails for a couple years before I fell the first time. It was during a 12.5K race, which I hadn't trained for very well. I was tired that morning, and I had neglected my pre-race nutrition.

I knew I wasn't in top form for the race, but it is an annual one I do and I was determined to give it my best.

I stepped to the start line with eager anticipation, believing I would do great.

Half way through the race I realized I was running on empty, with no fuel or water in my belt.

My mind started to move away from the trail and onto the path of monkey mind... how far away is the fuel station? How is my time compared to last year? Why don't my legs move faster? There were probably 100 other questions I asked myself and considered the answers to.

Probably my mind should have been on the ground three feet ahead, but it was wandering widely.

With all this build up, you won't be surprised that I fell three times during that race. Each time I grew more humiliated. Then, worse, I started to feel sorry for myself. How could I not fall with all the negative reaction going on?

I basically lost my confidence and drive to finish the race. I allowed myself to walk in sections, I beat myself up mentally. For a while. Fortunately with about a mile left in the race, I started to look at the ground in front of me.

I pleaded with my feet to pick themselves up higher.

And then something magic happened: I didn't fall again!

I started to feel so grateful that I didn't quit. That despite the dirt on my hands and the bloody scrapes on my legs, I had the power to complete this journey. That gratitude got me to the finish line and has stayed with me since that race day.

Cut to my trail run the other day. I've been training well lately and when I started out I was feeling good. I was grateful to be in the park, and was ready for the run.

Then, you guessed it: My mind went wandering away from the roots and branches onto something else and, boom, I went down. Sometimes it isn't the physical pain that causes the trauma. In this case, since I hadn't fallen for so long, I was startled to find myself sprawled out with dirt under my fingernails.

Determined, I brushed myself off, and carefully proceeded. About 20 minutes later the second fall came. By that time I had stopped shaking from the traumatic fall earlier, and was feeling good about the run again. Great, in fact, and as we

were heading toward the end of the run, I picked up speed. I was proudly thinking about how I was actually achieving a negative split. In that moment, I tripped again and fell. Surprised?

When we allow our mind to waiver, our body follows along.

Trail running isn't for everyone, but trails can be used as an analogy for many challenges.

Know that you will fall sometimes, be prepared to pick yourself up, and, when you get back on the trail, remember to keep your mind focused. On whatever is right for that moment.

Don't judge the thoughts and gently remind yourself that the obstacles on your path are there to keep you focused on where you are going.

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