



A timeless collection of transformative teachings from a beloved teacher, offering profound insights on mindfulness, relationships, parenting, and inner growth. These pages hold the gentle power to awaken, heal, and guide us through life's everyday challenges with grace and clarity.

Ramya Ranganathan

PEARLS OF WISDOM

Collection of wisdom writings by Dr. Jagdish Dave

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Preface

A Tribute to Wisdom and Guidance

This book is more than just a collection of writings; it is a testament to the wisdom, love, and deep insight of a teacher whose words have touched countless lives. Compiling these teachings has been a journey of reflection and gratitude—a way to honor the profound impact of a mentor whose knowledge extends beyond the classroom and into the hearts of those privileged to learn from him.

Each page of this book carries the essence of mindfulness, compassion, and self-discovery, echoing the values that our teacher has lived by and shared with unwavering dedication. His words have been a source of guidance in moments of uncertainty, a beacon of light in times of darkness, and a gentle reminder that growth, resilience, and inner peace are always within reach.

These teachings have helped many navigate the complexities of everyday life—be it managing emotions, finding balance, or simply pausing to breathe amidst the rush. For parents, these words have become a compass in nurturing their children with empathy, understanding, and patience. For those facing challenges in relationships, they have offered tools to build bridges through conscious communication and heartfelt connection.

This book is not just a tribute; it is a gift to all who seek wisdom, a compilation of lessons that transcend time, inspiring generations to come. To compile these teachings has been an act of devotion. Each piece has been selected with care, not just for what it says, but for what it stirs in us. This book is not meant to be read in one sitting—but to be lived, one insight at a time. It is my hope that this book continues to be a quiet light in dark moments, a reminder of what is possible when we meet life mindfully—with courage, compassion, and presence. May these words continue to illuminate paths, nurture souls, and encourage hearts to walk the journey of life with mindfulness, kindness, and purpose.

To my teacher, thank you for lighting the path. Please accept this offering as a humble Guru Dakshina—a token of deep love, reverence, and gratitude.

To every reader—may this book meet you exactly where you are, and gently carry you forward.

With deepest gratitude and respect,
Ramya Ranganathan

Introduction



Dr. JAGDISH P. DAVÉ PH. D, PSY.D.

If you want to go fast, walk alone.

If you want to go far, walk together.

—AFRICAN PROVERB

Here is the introduction of our beloved teacher, in his own words:

I am Jagdish P Dave. I was born in Gujarat, India where Mahatma Gandhi spent many formative years of his life. I was blessed to attend the evening prayer meetings at his Ashram, called Gandhi Ashram. I was only 4 years old at that time. I would never forget his Presence. As a high school student. I participated in the Freedom movement based on nonviolent civil disobedience. I am very indebted to Gandhiji for the impact he has had on my life.

I have a passion for learning and teaching. I got my BA in Sanskrit in 1946. Since then, I have been teaching as a love of my life. I got B.Ed. and M. Ed before I came to the USA in 1959 on the Fulbright Exchange Program. I got my M.A. and PhD. in education from the University of Chicago. I got my Psy. D. in clinical psychology from Illinois Professional School of Psychology.

I believe in holistic health, counseling and education. My doctoral degree research was on Integrative Meditation for Reducing Cardiovascular Reactivity. The research clearly and strongly demonstrates how the integration of belly breathing-pranayama, yoga based gentle stretching exercises and meditation normalize heart rate, blood pressure and regulate emotional reactivity.

I taught psychology and holistic stress management program at Governors State University, in University Park, Illinois. I retired as Emeritus Professor of Psychology in 2000. Since then, I have been teaching in Phoenix, AZ at Desert Garden Montessori Peace Education, Mindfulness Parenting and helping children who manifest emotional and behavioral problems. Once a month I host Satsang and Mindfulness Meditation in Tempe, AZ. I have my private practice in Mindfulness Counseling. Since 2021, we have regular Satsang meetings in the online platform.

In summertime-May to August- I go to Naperville, IL. I conduct Mindfulness Meditation workshops at Yoga Centers, medical clinics, and holistic health centers. I hold once -a-week Satsang meetings in Naperville on Patanjali Yoga Sutra and the Bhagavad Gita. I also perform Vedic weddings.

Yoga of Relationship

Written by Jagdish and Vanleela Dave

Our parents used to say; “Lasting relationships are made in heaven by gods and nurtured by humans on earth”. This saying applies to both of us. Telling our life story to our children and grandchildren has become a yearly ritual in our extended family. They have been always curious to know how two people from vastly different backgrounds came together and sustained an unbroken relationship for nearly sixty years. Every year we gladly and happily share our life story with them, and we know how that experience has created a strong bond among ourselves. We are equally happy to share our life story with you though we do not know you. Such real life stories build an invisible but strong bond between people regardless of time, space, ethnic, religious and cultural boundaries. Our life story is a story of building such a bond beyond boundaries. It is indeed a Yoga of Relationship.

My Roots (Jagdish)

I (Jagdish) was born in a traditional, poor Hindu Brahmin family and we - my parents, four brothers and three sisters, lived in a small house. Though we were poor, my father was highly respected in our community for his scholarship, his devotion to God and his integrity. He was a teacher, a poet, a storyteller, a devotional singer and a healer. He always stood on his ground against popular winds and was never afraid of telling and living the truth. He followed traditions without being bound by them. He had an abiding faith in God, and he believed that God would never forsake him. We faced many hardships and there were times when we did not even have two meals a day. My mother was a woman of heart. She was a very sweet and giving person. My friends used to say that the piece of homemade bread they ate at our home tasted sweeter than any other bread they had eaten because my mother made it. I never heard my mother complaining against my father for not having enough clothes or other material comforts. She always counted blessings and never cursed the darkness. Though from a material perspective we were poor, we were rich in what was important. I am deeply grateful to my parents for teaching us such a great lesson in life.

We used to have evening chanting and meditation sessions in our house. I distinctly remember the devotional songs sung by my father and how joyfully we all sang along with him. Those two hours of chanting and singing devotional songs and meditating together laid a spiritual foundation in our life. I would never forget how my father lovingly offered his early morning hours to teach us and help us in our studies. He did not impose his wish, his way or his expectation upon us. He just offered his helping hand whenever we needed it. Such a helping stance made us approach him more to ask for help whenever we needed it. Another lesson he taught simply through his presence: it is the presence of a person that is more effective than words of advice, lectures or sermons.

My mother's presence in our family was more serene, supportive and comforting. Her path was the path of devotion. Every morning, she spent time in a little corner to worship and pray to Krishna- one of the ten incarnations of God in Hindu mythology. Her heart was filled with devotional joy, peace and deep contentment. Her presence was very calming. We could be totally ourselves in her presence. Her love was unconditional. She embodied forgiveness and kindness. When successes and failures would affect us she used to remind us to live like a lotus in the water-jalakamalavat- connected but non-attached and unbound, to be in the world and not of the world. She was a busy housewife and caretaker, but she always found time to attend to our needs. To her, we were more important than the work she was doing or the things around us. Once I drew a picture on a piece of paper. I was very eager to show it to my mom. She was busy cooking. She saw my eager face. She put aside what she was doing and paid her undivided attention to me. Her face mirrored my excitement, pride and delight. I was privileged to have such experiences that enriched my life.

I was very fond of asking my mother to tell me over and over one story that meant a lot to me. It happened before I was born. Mahatma Gandhi was inspiring and guiding the people to fight nonviolently against the mighty British rule in India. He had urged educators to start National Schools to inculcate a healthy sense of love, pride and service to our country. My father joined this movement. He was a principal of a National School in Mangrole, a small town in my home state, Gujarat. Mahatma Gandhi came to visit the school. It was a big gathering. Mahatma Gandhi inquired about my mother for not being with my father. She could not be with him as she was expecting a baby any moment. After the function was over Gandhiji went to our house to bless my mother and the next day I was born. Gandhiji's blessings meant a lot to my parents and to me too. My mother used to tell me this story and I was never tired of asking her to tell me over and over.

I was about four years old and went to a school in Sabarmati, a small town near Ahmedabad. We were destined to be reconnected with Gandhiji. Gandhiji had founded Gandhi Ashram, a spiritual community in Sabarmati. Our parents used to take us to Gandhiji's evening meditations and prayers to the Ashram located on the bank of the river Sabarmati. I was too young to understand what Gandhiji was saying but I would never forget his all-embracing presence. There were people from many religions attending the evening sessions feeling deeply connected with one another- a deeply formative spiritual experience of my life.

The tree of my personality grew from these simple but rich and profound roots. Such growth experiences have woven themes of my personality and have helped me develop a coherent and cohesive core of my being. Like any human being I have gone through ups and downs, conflicts and confusions, successes and failures, elations and deflations. However, the core of my being has remained intact – faith in the overall goodness of human beings across the board, the tremendous power of non- possessive love and forgiveness,

appreciation of ethnic, cultural and religious differences, balance and harmony and serving beyond oneself. Many people across the world have enriched my life and growth. Besides my parents the person who has affected the course of my life the most is my life partner Vanleela. She has been a great source of inspiration, support and encouragement to me since I have known her. Her roots are somewhat different from my roots and her personality is different from my personality. Vanleela has added new colors and glow to the tree of my life, and I am sure I have done it for her too. So now comes her story.

My Roots (Vanleela)

Life is a journey. My life path was influenced by numerous significant relationships that provided deep experiences with many people. In viewing my life to date, I can visualize how all these relationships have enriched and contributed to who I am today. Looking at my life over the years, I can see an image of me at various phases of my life and realize how many people played an important role in enriching and shaping my life. I am a very sensitive, caring, and emotional person. The question that always comes to me is: was I born that way, or did the genuine impact of the people in my life make me that way?

As I go back in my past years and experiences, the greatest impact that molded my life was from my father. My father was more than simply a caretaker. His importance was in nurturing and providing guidance at opportune times. This in turn served to help my self-esteem and help me start to find purpose in life. He was a deeply caring, intelligent and affectionate person. My mother was quite similar to my father. Her role was to look at my well-being and appreciate my achievements. I always felt accepted and special. My parents always encouraged me to advance in any area that I had chosen and supported me in my ventures. I grew up in a family where I felt free and supported to do anything that I desired.

My early days in grade school were filled with tremendous relationships that shaped my life. I have fond memories of those days. I enjoyed school, but I especially remember these years very deeply because of one special friend. After nearly seventy years, those days are still memorable and alive in my life. I still enjoy the memories of those years. I developed an intimate friendship with one unique friend, and she became a mentor in my life. Her affectionate nature, total acceptance of friendship, loving heart, and free-spirited personality made me look at myself differently. I was able to look at a deeper part of myself. I became a person who looked at my inner feelings and inner aspirations and inner wishes and inner strength and weaknesses. That is the time I started becoming who I am today. Even now, I feel her presence when I'm searching for answers in confusing situations. When I feel perplexed, I always get wisdom and true direction from her. Because of her impact, I became interested in literature, reading, music, writing, philosophy, and exploration of the natural world.

Another important relationship that became a significant part of my life was somebody who came into my life and became like my younger sister. During that time, I was in high school, and I grew up in an extended family. My family had about 15 people until I was 18 years old. I was the only girl in the entire family. I felt very special, but I was missing an important peer relationship that could provide closeness and significance. During that time, I was learning a lot from everybody, but I was missing the experiences of taking care of somebody: loving, nurturing, and guiding another. The joy of giving was missing from my life. I accepted this new friend as a sister. Though we were not related, I felt closer to her than most any other. I was so bound by my own desire to have a sister that I experienced emptiness in her absence. That relationship was a unique experience for me, as it was the first time I went beyond myself to give. This relationship made me realize that there is more to life than myself, and that brought me joy, fulfillment, and further understanding of my own heart.

I have been lucky enough to be exposed to relationships throughout my life that expanded my horizon. I have developed many unique, enriching, and giving relationships which made me look at myself as a lucky person and showed me the beauty of the joyful world. So many people came into my life and became an extension of my family. Those relationships not only extended my horizon but provided a depth of experience that would not have been otherwise understood.

I remember a special day that speaks deeply to my relationship with nature, as well as with myself. I have a strong and deep memory of this day. I was in Chicago after forty years of my marriage, and in those days I always wanted to spend a few hours by myself sitting in a living room looking through the window and spend time observing nature, the trees, the flowers, clouds, and colorful sky with an eye on becoming one with nature. In the front yard of the home, there were lots of trees, bushes with flowers, and green grass in a big circle. There were lots of evergreen trees, and beyond these trees I saw the miracles of clouds of many shapes and colors. It was like a marvel of changing shapes and colors. That particular day, I was deeply lost in experiencing that amazing scenery. It was a very quiet, bright, and sparkling sky. Golden and orange bright rays of the sun peeping through the green branches of the trees and colors of the flowers were very invigorating. The gentle wind blowing through the trees was dancing as if all of nature was dancing with sweet songs of whistling winds. I was totally engrossed in watching the amazing scenery. All of a sudden, trees were moving with bursting wind and fiery speed. The trees were seemingly struggling to survive. They were moving vigorously as if they were experiencing a life and death struggle. Branches and roots were fighting to sustain life, and the piercing wind was blowing at such a speed, as if they wanted to uproot the trees. Outwardly, that was a cruel dance of nature. Raindrops were pouring forcefully, and it was a powerful show of nature to destroy the quiet, peaceful, and invigorating force of the earlier day. I was also experiencing the storm within me, visualizing the past in front of me. Within half an hour, again nature changed the play. Again, it became calm. Trees became calm, cool, and the breeze was passing quietly like protecting the green branches, and the singing of the breeze

was quiet. As the breeze was dying down, the speed of the movement of the branches became very quiet, as if the trees and all of nature had taken a bath and they looked very refreshed. All of nature looked revived; the colors of the clouds became bright and replenished. It was then that I recognized the parallel with my life. I remembered the same phases I have gone through in my life. I remembered the days of my youth: always fresh, joyful, and nurtured and carefree. No worry in the world and freedom to enjoy life without any responsibilities. I saw those trees just the same, dancing, and enjoying existence with other parts of nature.

My teenage years is when my idea of relationships started changing. I started doubting my desires, worrying and questioning my abilities, and questioning my choices. Insecurities started entering into my life. I started doubting my own strengths. I was becoming a woman from a carefree girl. I experienced the excitement of meeting boys and caring for their attention. That is the time I got interested in my physical appearance. Body awareness became very strong, and I was very careful about my looks. I started getting involved in the things that I never paid attention to before. I became aware of my weaknesses, questioning my capabilities as if the storm started developing in all parts of me.

During my teenage years, many people came into my life. That was the time my explorations became a focal point in my life. I started college, and that was the time my horizon of life expanded. It was a stormy phase. I developed numerous relationships, and they were the source of conflicts within me. I started looking at those relationships and evaluating, and my acceptance and rejection process brought divergence. I developed a swing of excitement and sadness. I started questioning my ability to choose, ability to decide, ability to make thoughtful and clear decisions. That was a time of skepticism, questioning my strength and also developing meaningful relationships. Many relationships I developed, but none felt fulfilling or provided the fit I was looking for. That was a confusing time in my life. I often felt loneliness and also doubted my ability to find the right person. I was not able to get strength from my inner self and trusting the answers coming from that part of me.

Questions were raised in my mind and the answers were confusing. I didn't know what I was looking for. Every relationship I developed and experienced was not satisfying or fulfilling. I realized that all relationships in my life were based on a fraction of myself rather than the whole. Some were attracted because of my open and free-spirited temperament, some for my affluence, and some because of my intellectual capabilities. But I did not find the totality in any relationship. I will get enchanted for a while and then I will be dissatisfied and question the motive and intention behind the relationship. It was a very depressing and exhaustive period in my life.

It was at that time I met J.P., the man who would be my husband. That was a unique experience. He is a person who is very simple, but with a lot of depth. He is not only attractive, but very genuine. I experienced the depth of his heart, and purity of feelings for me. He did not have to show off, he acted as he was and whatever I experienced in my relationship with him was doubt-free. I felt totally accepted and he was always truthful in his expressions towards me. His love towards me was like a fresh fragrance. I found that we both had so many things in common. Simple things brought joy in our life. I felt like we were not separate beings, but one entity. We both enjoyed music, literature, nature, poetry, etc. Lack of money never bothered either of us. I experienced the genuine love, truthfulness, unselfishness, and depth of his heart. That was so fulfilling to me that I decided to do anything to build ties with him. I felt like I was one with him. All my doubts vanished. I was so happy that I did not want anything but his love and his presence. I knew that because of status differences, I was going to experience lots of blocks from parents and society in general. However, I was ready to go through whatever difficulties that may arise because my happiness lay in our merger. I felt that we were part of each other. Over the years, lots of obstacles came in my life as well as his, but our trust and desire to become one for each other was so deep and unbroken that nothing was going to destroy the trust. After a struggle of five years, painfully going through a forced separation, I eloped and got married. We have been married for over fifty years; still, we both have a strong bond, and we feel as one. This does not mean that we both do not have unique identities, different opinions and varied positions, but in spite of all differences, our hearts, minds, and bodies do not feel separate. Our oneness is indestructible. As I said before, I thought my happiness lay in our merger, and I was mature enough to forecast correctly: to this day, my feelings have not changed. We do have differences between us, but oneness between us is so deep that it surpasses everything.

My experience of love made me realize that when you have a deep and genuine relationship, it is quite easy to go beyond yourself and merge into one another. That relationship does not create ebbs, but fullness in life. When you become one with somebody, you are echoing the same genuine feeling. There are no two, only one. Your identity is separate, but your oneness is experienced in every breath. This kind of relationship develops a strength, joy, clarity, and genuine feeling. My experience of this feeling is about sixty years long, and it has given me not only joy but strength and ability to enjoy the happiness of us being together.

Raising three children was also a challenging and welcome experience in my life. I again experienced the unconditional giving and joy of totally going beyond myself. The duty to raise children in a world with temptations and attraction to the outside world was a painful struggle. There was regular defiance of the expectations and wishful desires of the parents. That was a constant conflict between unconditional giving and the truthful ways of disciplining. That was a time filled with joy, but also a time to observe the mistakes they make in choosing their own path. Yet you can see the seed growing to fruit. Through using their own unique understanding, their unique value system, finding their own creative

ways, you can visualize your own creation having its own unique identity. You can see another image yet still a reflection of you. I have gone through that period, but I see the fruit of that seed and that makes me fulfilled and proud. That fulfillment brings everlasting joy in life.

I realize that every relationship is different. There is always a uniqueness and different kind of depth to each one. Each one is fulfilling in its own ways. Each relationship creates a unique and joyful experience. If we have truthfulness, genuineness, and openness to experience, then it becomes a joyful experience. Each relationship enriches various corners of life. Then, life not only becomes an adventure, but we have fulfillment, and we are able to explore every corner of ourselves. Throughout my entire life, so many people came and touched my psyche, and every experience has enriched me. Experiences may be of any type, either positive or negative, but all people provided value to my life and gave me a chance to grow and gave me an opportunity to experience a variety of colors. While all relationships are by their very nature transient, I am thankful for each one and believe all have shaped me into the person I am today.

Our Tree

Our roots from different soils have come together and have grown into a tree of life. I (Jagdish) have been more easily, almost effortlessly and naturally drawn towards caring and nurturing female energy-Shakti. I distinctly remember how strongly I was drawn toward a four-year-old girl in my first grade class. I still remember her name, Kanchan, and her lovely innocent face and her hair glowing in the sunshine. As I grew up I realized how Shakti has helped me to develop a healthy balance of energy within me. When that balance got somewhat lost I got myself into negative energy cycles. I felt anxious, worried, depressed and lost. I was brought back to a balanced state, by the grace of benevolent loving and nurturing energy. At the age of 20, I was going through a severe depressive cycle because of a broken romantic relationship. It lasted for a year. Vanleela's entry into my life as a caring and supportive friend lifted me out of that depressive cycle. After a long dark night, I sensed the sunshine slowly rising in my life.

I will never forget my first encounter with Vanleela. I was 21 years old teaching in a very outstanding high school in Ahmedabad. Jitendra, a student of mine, invited me to pay a visit to his house. I was going to be interviewed as his tutor by his father and his sister, Vanleela. I was somewhat uneasy about being in a very posh bungalow with my ordinary dress. Beneath that uneasiness I felt at home with Vanleela and her father. Needless to say, I passed the test with flying colors. They liked me very much. I tutored Jitendra for 4 years. I felt like a member of the family.

During these four years Vanleela and I developed a strong bond of friendship. She totally trusted me and confided in me, and I did the same. We both had many common areas of interest: music, world literature, writing, traveling and studying. Both of us had gone through a deeply hurting relationship. Our compassion and caring for each other helped us heal our emotional wounds. By sharing our pain, we felt like traveling together on the same path. Without our conscious awareness we were developing a strong love bond between us. Vanleela felt so deeply for me that she helped me to initiate a love relationship with a young girl she knew so well. On one hand she was trying to make me happy by helping me. On the other hand, she was sensing sadness in her. How many times we do not listen to the inner voice? It is almost like closing your own door and not letting yourself enter into your own home. And that way unconsciously we push someone so close to us, far away from us! Both of us were not letting each other move inside ourselves though both of us deeply cared about each other. We needed to hear our own inner voice and let a song be born in that quiet clear place.

Nobody, including us, thought that our friendship would blossom into a loving soul mate relationship. And how could that happen? Jagdish, a poor Hindu Brahmin young man with no financial security and the responsibility of supporting a big extended family and Vanleela, an affluent Jain young lady born and raised in a very wealthy family with no heavy responsibility. Socially and economically, we were poles asunder. When Vanleela discovered her deep love for me and announced her determination to marry me, it was too much for her family to bear. At her father's wish and insistence, Vanleela gave a word to her family that she would not see me or talk to me as long her family wants her not to see me or talk to me. And that was a long distressing time for both of us. The chronic and intense emotional stress had its toll on both of us. We were hurt and deeply saddened by Vanleela's father's stand. Both of us empathized with her dad and understood his oppositional stance. He loved his daughter and was deeply concerned about her happiness. He thought that she would not be able to adjust to the poor standard of living and would be miserable. Our empathic understanding of her father did not cause bitterness or ill feelings for her father in our heart. However, the long separation time between two loving and longing hearts was very painful.

May 1, 1954 was our wedding day. Vanleela had decided to leave her family and elope to marry me. It was not so easy for her to elope. Her friend gave her a ride. Our family and a couple of friends were waiting for her with apprehension and uncertainty. I had told the priest that the wedding was up in the air. It was totally uncertain. It all depended on conditions beyond our control. If Vanleela could not leave her home, there would not be a marriage. By God's grace she could, and we had a very modest and relatively quick wedding ceremony. Talk about stress! We were extremely anxious and apprehensive and that feeling stayed with us for a long time. Our deep and unwavering love for each other, our intense longing for each other, our genuine caring for each other and going beyond ourselves for the well-being of others, were the strong foundation of our married relationship. Vanleela left her family, and my family became her family. She developed a

strong bond between my mother and herself. She became my mother's daughter and a loving caretaker of the entire extended family. Living in hardships made her heart strong, compassionate and nurturing. All these years of our married life she has extended her loving heart to help many people far beyond our extended family.

Raising a family

As a high school teacher my income was very limited. It was hard to make both ends meet. Vanleela had to let go of so many comforts and conveniences to which she was used. I did not hear any complaint or unhappiness about missing them. Her genuine love for me, her determination, dedication, her organizational and planning skills and her practical mindedness made us go through these difficult times successfully. In fact, difficulties made our emotional ties stronger.

Vanleela was raised in a family in which achievement was placed on a high scale of priorities. She came to a family in which achievement, planning for advancement and working hard for achieving the future was placed on a low scale of priorities. We were a family flowing with the flow of destiny, living more in the moment and content with what we have kind of orientation. Having someone with a different orientation and a heart filled with love for others was a blessing to our family. It was indeed a wedding of two orientations-the Brahmin and Vaishya- the moon and the sun, Yin and Yang, a yoga of relationships.

Vanleela encouraged me to advance my study, supported me and created a space for me to concentrate on my academic advancement. From the position of a high school teacher, I became a college tutor and a lecturer. I was moving up on the ladder of my life, our life. She also encouraged me to apply for the Fulbright Scholarship in order to go to the USA to advance my study. Though she was/is capable of advancing herself she felt happy and fulfilled by pushing me to advances. Going beyond herself has been her driving force and I have experienced it in many small and big contexts of life. After some time, she joined me at the University of Chicago, and we started a new chapter of our life.

Coming to a new and climatically, socially, and culturally very different country was a formidable challenge for us. Like other challenges in our life, we embraced this challenge as an opportunity to grow, learn and expand our horizon. This challenge helped us grow as a couple and as parents. Our son who was raised by his grandparents in India joined us in Chicago. We both got an MA from the University of Chicago. Vanleela took a back seat. She encouraged and supported me to continue my education and finish my doctoral degree work at the University. We had an added responsibility by having a lovely unplanned

daughter in our life. Carrying such a heavy load was too much for Vanleela. We had to make a difficult decision to send our daughter and son back to India. Vanleela's parents were very supportive and took care of our children with utmost care. In a year I completed my doctoral degree research and went back to India as soon as possible (1964). I taught in Gujarat University, as an Associate Professor of Psychology and Education for two years. Our third child, a son, was born in Ahmedabad. In 1966 I got an invitation from the Dean of Central YMCA Community College in Chicago to design and develop an innovative interdisciplinary program for disadvantaged students. I accepted the invitation and came back to Chicago leaving my family behind. During these months Vanleela took care of our children and also my extended family. After 7 months she came to be with me with our three children.

Another chapter began in our life. We were to raise three children in a different culture in which we had not developed roots. There was no cultural, community or familial network for us. We faced another challenge of providing a strong foundation built on our traditional customs and values and yet keeping the windows of our home open to receive, adapt and integrate wholesome but different aspects of the American culture. Acculturation and integration are essential growth processes for a healthy personality development. Since we are well grounded in our own culture, relating to a different culture was not that difficult. We are happy to say that our family is multi faith and multicultural. Two of our children, our son Mehul and our daughter Shetal, have chosen to marry Caucasian Christian life partners and the youngest son Utpal has chosen a life partner hailing from the Southern part of India studying on the university of Illinois-Urbana campus.

Facing these challenges together as a couple has enriched our personal life, married life and family life. The ingredients of our enriched life are love, empathic understanding, open mindedness and willingness to change. We feel blessed as a couple, as parents and as grandparents. We are grateful to our parents, grandparents, our children, our grandchildren, our teachers, our students, our relatives, our friends, our neighbors, even strangers and above all to each other as a couple for teaching us lessons of building, sustaining and enriching relationships. Relationships are a door to becoming a whole person.

Lessons We Learned

We are pleased to share with you what we have learned from our relationship experiences.

- Relationship is a process, not a product.
- Maintain inner integrity for creating and enriching wholesome integrated relationships.
- Be fully present to the other in the moment-your spouse, child, grandchild, relatives, students and friends and even God.
- Learn to enjoy the fullness of aloneness and togetherness.
- Learn the art of enjoying giving with no strings attached to it. Then we realize the spiritual law: it is by giving we receive.
- Listen more, talk less.
- Hasten slowly.
- Stand on your ground keeping your heart and mind open.
- Ask and do what you can do for others joyfully and not just for yourself.
- Look at the whole picture to be free from a distorted and fragmented view. Buddha calls it samyak drishti-right seeing.
- A healthy relationship with the other is a reflection of a healthy relationship with you.
- Do not let yourself be bound by your traditions. Allow yourself to be connected with them to have a flowing constancy.
- Accept your limitations and appreciate other's strengths. When you point your finger toward the other, be mindful of the three fingers pointed toward you.
- Do not act like a god. Be and remain human.
- Forgive and forget. Learn from your mistakes without being too hard on you and turn over a new leaf. Holding on to grudges is a sure way of ruining your relationships.
- Make clear and conscious choices by practicing mindfulness meditation. Choices and decisions made in clouded consciousness bring and perpetuate the cycle of suffering.

Teja Panthana Yatri

Poem written by Dr. Jagdish P Dave

Teja panthana yatri

We are Pilgrims of light

Ame tej panthana yatri

Pilgrims of light!

Prabhatni komal anguliye

*Delicate fingers of the dawn are striking
the chord of our heart*

Urtantri jankari

Aspiring, blazing new trails,

Naval ragane naval rahane

creating new melodies.

ujvaltana prarthi.

Hearts overflowing with sparkling light,

**Teja panthana yatri, ame teja panthana
yatri!**

We are moving the pilgrims of light!

Surya chandra ne gagan rashmini

*Luminous light shimmering from the sun
and the moon,*

tejal dhara jhili'

awakens light within us.

dahartini dhulina kana kana

With heads touching the sky

ghumanara chir yatri!

and feet planted in the ground,

**Teja panthana yatri, ame teja panthana
yatri!**

*We are on our way bowing to our Mother
Earth.*

We are pilgrims of light, pilgrims of light.

The Foundations of Mindfulness and Meditation

What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is being fully present to what's happening at the present moment in me and around me compassionately and non-judgmentally; what is here and now without being hijacked by the past that is already gone and the future which is yet to arrive. We live in a fast-paced world with a smartphone in our hand and a laptop in the front of us. No wonder why we do not find time to be with us and with others in our life. Practicing mindfulness helps to be focused and centered to be with ourselves and with others in deeper and more meaningful way.

The roots of mindfulness are in the ancient wisdom tradition of Buddhism. Buddhism offers us a way of understanding and alleviating suffering. In that way mindfulness is secular. One does not have to be a Buddhist or a Hindu to learn and practice Mindfulness.

Jon Kabat- Zinn introduced Mindfulness in Mindfulness-Based- Stress Reduction Program at the Medical School of Massachusetts University in Boston, 35 years ago. Since then, the Mindfulness paradigm has been widely accepted and practiced by medical and mental health practitioners, schools, prisons and for treating veterans for post-traumatic stress disorder. Thousands of research studies have demonstrated physical, mental, and emotional benefits of practicing Mindfulness.

The concept of mindfulness is two thousand and six hundred years old. The Pali word for mindfulness is sati. It is an ancient Buddhist approach to living that helps us to be in the here and now. To be mindful is to be fully aware of what is happening in the present moment, to be fully aware of what is going on in ourselves and what is happening around us without judgment or preconceived notions. Although mindfulness has been taught and practiced in Eastern meditation trainings, it is not some mystical or esoteric practice that is hard to learn. People in all walks of life have followed these age-old practices on their path to health, well-being, peace, and happiness for over twenty five hundred years.

When we walk and our mind is aware of each step that we plant firmly on the ground, we are already practicing mindfulness. When we eat and our mind is aware of each bite,

savoring the taste and nourishment it gives to us, we are already practicing mindfulness. To be mindful of something, we need to learn to be fully present for an instant and look deeply into that something. We must first be mindful of our wandering mind called the monkey mind, get hold of it in order to begin to engage it in what is there in the present moment. When we are mindful of what we are doing, we learn to keep an appointment with life. This awareness of the present moment gives us the opportunity and the tools to touch peace and joy, to the true nature of who we are and how we are related to everything else, and to end our struggle with doing what is good for our well-being.

To end our struggle, we need to learn to not let regret, worry, or fear dominate our life in the present moment. Each moment we spend regurgitating over the past that is already gone and worrying about what will happen in future, we miss an appointment with life- a missed opportunity to engage in life and to see that each moment gives us the chance to change for the better, to experience peace and joy. This is the way we savor our life.

Living mindfully, we can take care of our problems of eating more, gaining weight, sleeping less, losing healthy energy, and many physical, biological, neurological, psychological, racial, cultural, and relational problems. We learn to observe and be more aware of our motivations for and obstacles to staying healthy. As we become more aware of our motivations and obstacles, of our body and feelings, thoughts, and realities that prevent us from health enhancing actions, we will realize what we need to do individually and what kind of psychological, social and community support we need.

Here is a taste of mindfulness- a mindfulness meditation on an apple. With mindfulness, the simple act of eating an apple becomes a profound experience. It opens up our awareness that the apple is a manifestation of our world and that it cannot come into being in isolation. The apple is dependent on everything else for its existence, reminding us that we too, are constantly supported by the effort of many things that we can enjoy the apple.

Let us look at our personal makeup. Explore how everything we see, taste, smell, hear, touch, and think affects our physical, mental, social and communal well-being. To maintain a healthy lifestyle, we must look carefully at the interrelationships of our body, our mind, our family and societally. We all are interconnected. All wisdom traditions teach us to live in harmony within ourselves and beyond ourselves, in the inner world and the outer world. Spiritually speaking, our individual consciousness becomes unitive consciousness.

Source: Savor: Mindful Eating, Mindful Living by Thich Nhat Hanh and Dr. Lilian Cheung

Mindfulness Meditation: A Way of Living

Spending twenty minutes a day to practice Mindfulness Meditation is very beneficial for our mental and emotional wellness. It lays a good foundation for living clearly and peacefully.

We are social beings. We have a need to belong to, to be connected, to take care and to be taken care of, to share our dreams, joys and sorrows. We create a social network, a world of relationships of all kinds. The closer the relationships, the greater are the challenges and opportunities for growth and development. A big challenge in interpersonal relationships is how to work through differences without causing emotional distances. What do we do to create and sustain bridges instead of walls?

This is where the practice of Mindfulness Meditation comes into play.

Create personal space and time for processing the inner stuff by recognizing (awareness) and staying with it (attending) non-judgmentally, non-critically, without reacting, accepting it. This needs to be done gently, patiently and compassionately. We do not get stuck with or dwell on the energy draining recurring negative stuff. We are making a shift from fight, flight and freeze stress response zones to a stress free flowing zone. We are on the path to wellness. We are coming out of the cloudy sky to a clear sky. A wholesome understanding and insight arise from the clear mind. Right knowing leads to right speech and right action. We get numerous opportunities in our daily life to practice mindfulness meditation. We do not hold onto and accumulate negative stress resulting in self and other hurting behaviors.

The same procedure needs to be used when we encounter differences in intimate and important relationships. We follow the same procedure as a couple or as parents, teachers or friends and colleagues. We need to create space within ourselves and between ourselves to create and sustain I to I mode of communication resulting in a we-together- mode of communication. We get numerous opportunities to work on ourselves personally and interpersonally.

Five Dimensions of Mindfulness Meditation

Why do we need to meditate? We learn and practice mindfulness meditation for calming and centering our busy, noisy and wandering mind and living peacefully, healthily and happily.

There are five dimensions of mindfulness meditation: Physical, Mental, Emotional, Social and Spiritual. They all are interconnected. Physical Dimension; A mounting body of evidence has shown the positive impact of doing mindfulness meditation on specific bodily and neurological functions. Our stress response is decreased in the short term by taking time out on a stressful day to meditate and in the long term if we keep up the practice.

Mental Dimension: Meditation calms the restless mental activity. It quiets the noisy mind, centers the wandering mind and settles down and rests the monkey mind. Quiet mind creates space and clarity to understand and respond wisely, for making wise decisions. It frees us from reactive behavior to responsive behavior, from reflexive behavior to reflective behavior.

Because of the mind-body connection, the positive mental effects of meditation also affect what's happening in the brain and central nervous system. Our busy lifestyle creates and perpetuates sympathetic overdrive, the chronic over stimulation of the involuntary or autonomic nervous system that controls bodily functions such as heart rate, blood pressure, hormonal imbalances, biorhythms and other bodily functions. Sympathetic overdrive is linked to many lifestyle disorders.. The lifestyle disorders begin much earlier- decades and years- before symptoms of disorders show up. The root cause of these disorders is low-level chronic stress and inflammation. We may not be aware of being constantly stressed with no visible signs of inflammation. The inroads of disease and aging have already started.

Biological and subjective measures show a positive impact of Meditation on chronic stress and inflammation.

There is a remarkable increase in both biological and subjective measures when meditation is connected with lifestyle changes such as changes in diet, exercise and sleep. Such epigenetic changes create a positive change in gene activity and everything mentioned- chronic stress, inflammation, and sympathetic overdrive.

Emotional Dimension: Emotions move us, motivate us, create energy and add fuel to life. There are positive emotions and negative emotions. Positive emotions create positive energy and positive actions and interactions. They lift us up. Negative emotions create negative energy and negative actions and interactions. They bring us down.

How do we make our emotions our friends and allies? How do we regulate our emotions? How do we bounce back and become resilient? Mindfulness meditation offers us a doorway to turn the negative energy into positive energy. Mindfulness is non-judgmental awareness of what is happening in the present moment and relating to it in a friendly and compassionate way. "What hurts you blesses you. Darkness is your candle". -Rumi. Be present to your emotions. Our conditioned judging mind labels emotions. In mindfulness meditation, we do not fight or oppose or resist our emotional experience or run away from it or chase it or deny it or get stuck with it,

With breathing as our anchor, we let thoughts and emotions come and go without judging and reacting. We recognize our thoughts and emotions, let them come and go. By breathing in and out slowly and deeply we learn how to be steady, rooted and let the clouds of thoughts and emotions come and go without getting stuck with them. Our energy does not get blocked by our fight, flight or freeze stress response. We feel the flow of energy.

"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In the space lies our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom."-Viktor E. Frankl

Social Dimension: No man is an island. We are not only rational, emotional but also relational. Our health and happiness depend on the quality of our relationships. In the mindfulness paradigm, we become mindful of what kind of relationships we want to create, cultivate and flourish. No relationship is perfect. Even in good and great relationships we go through twists and turns, ups and downs. We need to learn how to navigate and create a flow in our relationships. In the mindfulness paradigm, we create an inner environment for cultivating wholesome relationships with us and with others.

It is an intrapersonal and interpersonal ongoing mindfulness work. We practice mindfulness meditation for intrapersonal journey and interpersonal journey. Mindfulness meditation helps us in building bridges within us, between us and others. We remain mindful when we listen and talk, Words matter. Words hurt us; words heal us.

Spiritual Dimension: The goal of meditation is to reach a higher state of consciousness. Regular practice of meditation develops a state of quiet mind as a portal to expanding consciousness. We all are quite familiar with “constricted awareness” where there is an unending stream of sensations, images, thoughts and feelings. In meditation, this activity either vanishes or becomes secondary as one is drawn to the mind’s source of pure consciousness. With regular practice, it becomes natural to identify with the deeper source of the mind, a shift that has no definite goal, because awareness can expand infinitely.”
(Deepak Chopra)

Spirituality has no divisiveness, no discrimination, no egoic mind. Pure consciousness is not contaminated by toxic thoughts of hatred, greed, possessiveness, jealousy, close mindedness and close heartedness. The light within us leads us on the path of truth, compassion, gracefulness, unconditional love, harmony and universal connectedness. We all are evolving. It’s up to us to make wise choices bringing blessings to us and to others.

Practicing Mindfulness Meditation On and Off the Cushion

Doing once a week Guided Mindfulness is wonderful and helpful. It is advisable not to take a six day vacation from our weekly Mindfulness Meditation. How to do Mindfulness Meditation off the chair in our everyday working world is an important challenge and a great opportunity for living meditatively. I always set aside time, about twenty minutes, to do Mindfulness Meditation every day in the morning. And during the rest of the time, I apply meditative mindfulness in different walks of my daily life such as when I walk, talk, hear, do exercise, eat and for making important decisions. This “open awareness” meditation has been very helpful to me for my daily functions and engagements with people in my life.

I love the wise saying by Jiddu Krishnamurti: To pay attention means we care, Paying attention means we love. Paying full whole-hearted attention to myself and others has deeply enriched my life. I teach and practice a holistic paradigm of Mindfulness Meditation. It has five interconnected dimensions. Body, Breath, Mind, Heart and Relationships.

The first thing to do is to sit on a cushion or in a chair in a relaxed, alert and upright position. Let your feet be firmly planted in the ground to settle down and feel grounded. We

pay our full attention nonjudgmentally with loving kindness to our bodily sensations and bodily parts while we breathe in and out that suits your breathing rhythms. Breathe slowly, gently and as deeply as you can. As we know, gentle slow belly breathing generates a relaxation response. The same way we become mindful of our breathing going through different parts of our body.

Next is paying our attention to what arises in our mind. We let thoughts come and go as we continue breathing in and out. Our intention is to create a calm and clear mind. We do it by becoming aware of the thoughts coming and going in our mind without chasing them if the thoughts are pleasant and avoiding them if they are unpleasant. We do not resist them or get stuck with them. The same way we relate to the range of emotions, glad, sad, mad and other emotions arising in our heart. This way we experience the flow of energy in body, breath, mind and heart.

The next dimension is relational. We are social and relational human beings. Our relationships, like our thoughts and emotions, have a wide range of colours. This is an ongoing process, and it makes our life peaceful, joyful, fulfilling and happy or stressful, painful, difficult and unhappy depending what kinds of experiences we go through in our life.

We practice Mindfulness Meditation everyday as we eat, drink and sleep. Mindfulness Meditation brings many gifts to us and the people connected with us.

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Why do I have to Practice Mindfulness?

1. In a hyper connected world, bombarded by multiple forms of stimulation, how can we be aware of the quiet gifts that the present moment has to offer? What are those gifts? **Cultivating mindfulness practice can be a powerful way to train our minds and tune into the beauty of here and now.** When we take a few minutes to observe our breath or eat a meal with silent attentiveness or read a book with full attention the subtle impact of such mindfulness practice carries far reaching ripples, within and without.
2. **Mindfulness tunes out unwanted distractions.** It helps the wandering mind or the monkey mind to be centered and focused. When we multitask, we weaken our brain's ability to filter out important information from irrelevant inputs. Taking time to be mindful can regulate brain waves that focus the mind and screen out unwanted distractions.
3. **Mindfulness calms the mind.** Mindfulness practice releases the tension in the body and also the mind. Mindfulness practice can help us embrace our worries, our fears, our anger and that is very healing. We need to genuinely learn the art of resting, relaxing and that way restoring our energy. Mindfulness practice reduces rumination, anxiety and stress.
4. **Mindfulness inspires us to be compassionate and altruistic.** *"It is in giving we receive" -Saint Francis of Assisi.* A growing body of brain research shows that we are hardwired to be kind. Mindfulness practice enables us to drop into our natural inclination to help. Research at Northeastern and Harvard studied the link between mindfulness and compassion. Extend your loving kindness to yourself, to others. - Words of wisdom from wisdom traditions.
5. **Mindfulness helps us feel good about helping others.** It also ignites a deeper joy within us while we do it. Research shows that helping behavior could be predicted by two specific aspects of mindfulness: the ability to focus on the present moment-focused attention- and maintaining a non-judgmental acceptance of thoughts and experiences. Help others as you help yourself. *Love your neighbor as you love yourself-* Words of wisdom from wisdom traditions.
6. **Mindfulness enables us to show our authenticity.** By practicing mindfulness, we develop a more nuanced awareness of who we truly are. We need to feel in order to heal. We need to learn to accept ourselves compassionately and non-judgmentally in order to discover and know our true self. All wisdom traditions remind us *"to know thyself."* *It is by losing yourself, you find yourself.* -Words of wisdom from wisdom traditions.

Mindfulness and 11 Mindfulness Attitudes

Mindfulness is the awareness that arises by paying attention on purpose in the present moment nonjudgmentally. -Jon Kabat-Zinn

Mindfulness is awareness of bodily sensations, breath, thoughts, feelings, and emotions in the present moment without harmful judgement. -Eileen Fisher

Mindfulness is non-judgmental attention to what you're noticing, what's happening in yourself and outside of yourself. It is simply the art of paying attention with no judgments

11 Attitudes of Mindfulness

1. Beginner's Mind. Present mind is fresh and pure.
2. Non-judgmental and discernment
3. Acceptance. Recognition of actuality or suchness (tathata). Place a welcome mat to whatever unfolds in the present moment.
4. Letting go. It is the opposite of craving, clinging and grasping. Let in. Let be. Let go.
5. Trust. Listening to the wisdom of the body and mind with an open mind and open heart.
6. Patience. Cultivating mindfulness attitudes requires patience, vigilance, and perseverance.
7. Non-striving or non-doing. Allowing things to unfold naturally. "Sitting by the river, doing nothing. Spring comes; Grass grows by itself."-Zen poem
8. Gratitude for the everyday gift we receive fills our heart.
9. Generosity. Offering gifts to others from your heart.
10. Undivided full attention and awareness (noticing) what's happening in the present moment.
11. Compassion for self and others.

Mindfulness living is living from inside out. Mindfulness living is the inner work or intrabeing work. Relating to oneself mindfully. It is also intra being work-relating to others mindfully.

Freeing the Mind-Finding the Peace

Mind can bind us, and the mind can free us. How do we use our mind? If we become aware of our mind, we notice it trapped by thoughts and emotions usually relating to the past or future. Spiritual teachers compare such a mind with a wild elephant or a monkey mind. We all know how the wandering mind wanders in the clouds of wishing and craving, worrying and fighting, and holding several negative thoughts and emotions draining our energy. We also know how it affects our physical, mental and emotional health; how it affects our behaviors and our relationships. Wherever we go, we carry our mental and emotional backpacks.

We all want to make our mind free from the grip of such energy draining thoughts, emotions and feelings. We all want to live in a calm, peaceful, loving and happy home of our mind. How can we attain our goal? How can we befriend our mind? How Can we convert the negative energy into positive energy? How can we free ourselves from ourselves?

One of the ways to attain our inner freedom is to become mindful of our mind spinning the same mental commentary, the same old stuff. Mindfulness is paying our full attention to what is happening in the present moment without judging. There are two wings of ourselves that help us to be from the cage of bondage. One is mindfulness and the other is heartfulness. Mindfulness is allowing the disturbing thoughts and feelings to come. It is like inviting guests to our house. As the Sufi poet Rumi says, “invite all of them, pleasant and pleasant, without discriminating”. This is paradoxical or counter intuitive. It is by letting things come, we make them go. As Saint Francis of Assisi says it is by giving we receive. We do this compassionately and kindly. Self-compassion creates compassion for others.

Mindfulness and compassion, open mind and loving heart, creates a shift in our consciousness, expands our consciousness, frees us from our constricted consciousness. In order to expand our consciousness and to set our mind free from self-created suffering, we need to practice mindfulness meditation, the practice of letting the clouds of our mind come non-judgmentally and compassionately and letting them go away without pushing them out or trying to tame them. We arrive home, the abode of calmness, peace, clarity, love and joy.

How to Sustain Mindfulness Meditation and Mindfulness Living Practice?

We all value and love to practice Mindfulness Meditation. One of the common problems we encounter is how to sustain it.

Here are a few ideas and suggestions I would like you to reflect on and apply:

1. Fix a time like 5 minutes, 10 minutes or 20 minutes per day to practice Mindfulness Meditation. It could be any time that suits your schedule. Stick to it with no excuse or exceptions unless you have an emergency.
2. Select a place where you may have little or no distractions. Give your smartphone 5, 10 or 20 minutes break. It will thank you!
3. Find your intention: why are you doing meditation? Is it to get a good sleep? Is it to manage your emotional distress such as anger or anxiety or pain? Is it to be fully present to cultivate skills of relaxing the body, calming your mind and processing whatever arises in the moment nonjudgmentally? Keep that intention in your mind. It keeps you on the track.
4. Once a week or once a month be a part of a group for practicing Mindfulness Meditation. As you know, doing meditation in a group has many benefits. This is one of the best ways of getting connected with kindred spirits.
5. Do your daily practice with someone in your family if it is possible. Getting support is very helpful.
6. If you miss a day, do not be harsh on you. Let your heart forgive you. Be kind to you and go back to the cushion.
7. Have patience. It takes time to train your mind. You may experience ups and downs. Slowly and steadily, you will learn how to be focused, how to be calm, how to be relaxed and how to be fully attentive to what is happening in the present moment. You will also realize how practicing mindfulness has a carryover impact on your daily transactions and relationships and in other areas of your life.
8. Keep a daily or weekly journal to reflect on your meditation and mindfulness practice experiences.
9. We do Mindfulness meditation on the cushion, and we also practice mindfulness in our everyday living and our everyday transactions with others. Mindfulness is our loving and compassionate presence in all walks of our life. When we practice mindfulness in our everyday transactions, our sitting Mindfulness Meditation practice gets easy and more beneficial.
10. For practicing mindfulness in our daily transactions, practice this simple short technique which is called STOP. - S stands for stopping what you are doing. - T stands for taking a deep breath break. - O stands for observing what is happening in your mind in the situation. - P stands for proceed. Take the next step mindfully.
11. Environmental clue: Place something like a sign, a symbol or a word or a phrase that reminds you to be quiet, sit and meditate for your regular meditation practice. Some

use a piece of relaxing meditative music as a sign to sit and meditate. Some light up a lamp or burn an incense stick. It is a good idea to meditate in a clean, uncluttered and quiet room or quiet place in your house or in nature.

12. When you practice mindfulness meditation formally as well as practice mindfulness in your everyday life, you provide a good role model to your family members and other people in your life. Meditative energy is contagious. It has a good ripple effect.
13. Practicing mindfulness with an open mind and an open heart cultivates friendly curiosity and connectedness. It also cultivates trust and wholesome relationships.
14. Practicing Mindfulness Meditation helps us to be free from our conditioned and habitual fight, flight and freeze stress patterns to the flowing relaxing positive energy patterns. Energy medicine is being revived and is going to be a wholesome mental and physical health care practice.

The Second Arrow

The Buddha and Jesus the Christ and other great spiritual teachers told stories and parables to their disciples to convey spiritual wisdom. Here is the story of The Second Arrow told by the Buddha to his young disciple. One day, the Buddha was talking to a group of his followers about our habit of being down on ourselves when something goes wrong, and how that only imprisons us in suffering. Noticing that one of his young disciples looked puzzled, the Buddha invited him to come forward and asked, "If a person is struck by an arrow would it be painful to him?" Probably thinking that was a pretty obvious question, the student responded, "Well, yes it is."

Nodding, the Buddha went on. "And if that same person is struck by a second arrow, would that be even more painful?" The student replied, "Yes, it would be." Then the Buddha explained: "In life, difficulty naturally arises-things don't go the way we wish, or we have an accident, or we get stuck. We cannot always control that first painful arrow. However, he went on, "We can add our pain by the way we react to what is happening." He added we might feel victimized or angry about life being unfair, or we might blame ourselves for our poor self-care. "Our reaction is the second arrow, and it intensifies our suffering," said the Buddha. "We become identified with the suffering itself. The young man nodded; new understanding how painful the added emotional reactivity can be.

The Art of Breathing and Silence

Mindful Breathing

I saw a sign in Las Vegas: You must be present to win. To be present in every endeavor we need to cultivate the ability to be calm, at ease, clear and steady. When we arrive in a relaxed and clear presence the ability to be present is cultivated. Research shows that our mind gets less distracted and scattered by practicing breath meditation. Our mental functions we rely on in our daily life like memory, reasoning, planning, and problem solving are positively affected by breathing mindfully. Regular and consistent mindful breathing will slowly and steadily deepen our ability to stay present in each moment. It will transform our experiences.

Mindful breathing is a tool for gathering and focusing attention. I invite you to say the word Calm with each in breath and Ease with each out breath. We whisper the words with a soft and gentle inner voice. As we notice our breath with kind awareness our sense of calm and ease will slowly grow like a plant growing. We will be steadying and relaxing our body and mind. The sense of well-being will continue to grow. The experience of feeling calm and easy will ebb and flow. We may feel quiet and present for a few moments and the next moment we may get distracted and agitated. This happens to most of us. We let the distracting thoughts come and go. In order to maintain the flow of calm and ease, we need to practice mindful breathing regularly even for a short time. We simply need to be relaxed and dedicated. There is a saying, "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf." Our breath becomes an anchor for remaining focused and steady.

Throughout the day, we may do mindful breathing before opening the door, eating our food, in our workplace, attending a meeting, driving the car and communicating with people, and discussing with our teenager. Try to pause to take mindful breaths. Mentally whisper calm with the in breath and ease with the out breath to arrive in the present moment.. Our breath is always with us to calm, ease and steady our attention.

Eight Exercises of Mindful Breathing

Thich Nhat Hanh describes Eight Exercises of Mindful Breathing as taught by the Buddha 2026 years ago to his disciples. These practices are secular and anybody, theists, atheists, or agnostics, can practice and benefit by practicing them in their daily life.

Exercise 1

Be aware of your in-breath and out-breath practice. Say silently, “I am breathing in, and I know I am breathing in. I am breathing out and I know I am breathing out.” Be aware of your in-breath and out-breath. As you breathe in, pay your full attention to your in-breath and as you breathe out pay your full attention to your out-breath. Your breath becomes the only object of attention. As you breathe in you release everything else except your breath. You let go of the pain of the past and worry about the future. Past is gone and the future has yet to arrive. Do not arrive before you arrive. Be here and now. And if you need to make a decision, you are not under the burden of fear, anger and uncertainty, fight, flight, and freeze. Your decision is much better when you’re free. You are in the flow, the stream of pure consciousness.

Exercise 2

Follow your in-breath all the way through without interruption and follow your out-breath all the way without interruption anywhere and anytime. Enjoy the flow.

Breathing in I follow my breath from the beginning to end. Breathing out, I follow my path from the beginning to end. You can enjoy doing this exercise anywhere, any time.

Exercise 3

This third exercise is to be aware of our body. You bring your mind home to your body. Let your body come home. I am breathing in; I am aware of my body breathing in. I am breathing out; I am aware of my body breathing out. If your body and mind are together, you experience oneness. The oneness of your body mind is what you realize in the third exercise. When you spend two hours with your computer, you forget entirely that you have a body. You are not truly alive in that moment. You are truly alive when the mind is with the body. You are truly alive in the here and now and you touch the windows of life in you and around you. It is a good idea to have the sound of a bell to remind you to take a brief break.

Exercise 4

The fourth exercise is to calm my body. Breathing in, I calm my body Breathing out, I release my tension in the body. Breathing in I realize my body has tension. Breathing out, I let the tension go. I release my tension. These are the first four exercises of mindful breathing recommended by the Buddha so that we can take care of our body.

Exercise 5 and Exercise 6

How to generate the feeling of joy and happiness?

The fifth exercise is to generate the feeling of joy, and the sixth exercise is to generate happiness. Mindfulness helps us to be aware of all the conditions of joy and happiness that are already available. We can remind ourselves and we can our beloved one that we are blessed to know that we can be happy right here, right now. A good practitioner of mindfulness knows how to generate feelings of joy. Because she knows how the practice of mindfulness creates the conditions of happiness that are already available. That you can be happy right now, right here. You don't have to run to the future to look for happiness. This is teaching given by the Buddha. That is the teaching of living happily in the present moment. Life is available in the present moment. Happiness can be born right away. This sutra, this brief wise saying, is repeated five different times by the Buddha. A rich businessman named Anathpindika who lived in the city of Sravasti came to the Buddha to learn how to be happy. He was not happy living in his palace and having rich material possessions. The Buddha said, "Gentleman! You can be happy right here, right now. You don't have to run in the future to find it." The Buddha knew that businessmen think a little bit too much in the future and the success in the future, of name, fame, prestige and material prosperity and not for the goodness of others. That's why the Buddha repeated the same sutra five times from his teaching on

Drushtadhamasukhviahara - how to live in the place, in the abode of happiness. Recognize all the conditions of happiness that are available right away. Creating happiness is an art and anybody can learn it and nourish it.

Exercise 7

The seventh exercise is to be aware of painful feelings, dukkha. Be aware of painful feelings or painful emotions.

Breathing In, I know there is a painful feeling coming up in me. The mindfulness practitioner does not fight the pain, does not cover up the pain, or try to run away from the pain. As a practitioner of mindfulness, she knows how to generate the energy of mindfulness. With that knowing she recognizes her pain tenderly: "Hello my dear pain, I recognize you and how you're there. I will take good care of you." This stance applies to

anger, fear, jealousy and despair. We have to be there with our pain. There is no fighting. There is no violence done to our suffering.

I heard a baby crying. Our pain, our suffering, is our baby, and the mother has to recognize that the baby is suffering. She picks up the baby and holds the baby tenderly in her arms. That is exactly what a good mindfulness practitioner will do when a painful feeling arises in her. You have to be there, to be present with that energy of mindfulness you recognize the pain, and you embrace the pain tenderly.

In Buddhism consciousness is recognized in terms of “store” and “mind.” Our fear, anger, and despair are in the bottom (store) of our consciousness, in the form of seeds. There is a seed of anger and let it sleep quietly down there. Then we are Okay. We can laugh and have a good time as we are not trapped by anger.

Breathing in, I know anger, fear, jealousy or despair in me. Recognize without denying or fighting or fleeing. The second thing we do in mindfulness is to embrace it tenderly.

There are two levels of consciousness. The lower level is called “Store of consciousness. Our anger, fear, jealousy, and despair are there in the lower level or bottom of consciousness, in the form of seeds, bija. There is a seed of anger, a seed of fear, a seed of jealousy, a seed of despair. And when it comes up to the level of “mind consciousness” it will become a kind of energy called mental formation, anger. So, when the practitioner notices when anger is coming up, she right away breathes and invites the seed of mindfulness to come up as energy. Mindfulness is another seed that is there. If we are a good practitioner of mindfulness the seed of mindfulness in us has grown to become a very important seed. It needs to be touched lightly, then there is a lot of energy coming up in us and the seed continues to grow. And whenever you need that energy, you just lightly touch it, and you have a powerful source of energy. If you do mindful breathing it will continue to grow. And whenever you need that energy, you just touch it lightly and gently, and you have a powerful source of energy. Regular practice of mindfulness will take care of the seed of painful feelings and emotions and will plant the seeds of compassion and kindness.

Exercise 8

Be calm.

The mother does not know what is wrong with the baby. But the fact that she is holding the baby gently and calmly can help the baby suffer less right away. The same thing is true with the mindfulness practitioner. She does not know what the cause of that kind of anger or fear is. But the fact that she is recognizing that anger or fear can help her suffer less right away after one or two minutes. This is the art of suffering. This is the art of happiness. With the exercise of mindfulness, you can transform pain, fear, sorrow into something positive like making something positive like making good use of mud in order to grow lotus flowers.

So, a good practitioner of mindfulness is not afraid of pain. She does not fight pain or run away from pain. She knows how to grow flowers from the mud. How to transform. These are the factors of happiness.

Befriending Your Breath

“Let us inhale slowly, gently, and deeply. Pause for four counts. Now let us exhale slowly, gently, and deeply.” Every Yoga teacher teaches belly breathing to cultivate breath mindfulness. It takes time to learn how to be present to each inhalation and each exhalation. With constant practice it becomes easy and effortless. Number of scientific studies have shown numerous physical, mental, emotional and spiritual benefits of doing such simple Yogic breathing exercises.

Neuroscientists have discovered the powerful impact of belly breathing on the vagus nerve. In Latin, the word “vagus” means wandering, a fitting description for this meandering vagus nerve connecting with many parts of our body and with the sympathetic and parasympathetic branches of the autonomic nervous system (ANS). Vagus nerve is the largest and most complicated of the body’s 12 cranial nerves, each connected to the brain and other parts of the body. The vagus nerve plays many roles, affecting our emotional states, heart rate, inflammation levels, blood pressure and digestion. Based on research, Dr. Relisa Vranich, the author of *Breathe*, estimates that 9 out of 10 do not use their diaphragm as a primary breathing muscle. With practice, diaphragmatic or belly breathing becomes our natural rhythmic breathing.

Research studies by cardiologist Dr. David O’Hare and others have shown that slow paced breathing has a positive effect on the heart’s ability to adapt to stress. It increases Heart Rate Variability (HRV). It means that it makes the cardiovascular system more flexible and resilient. That’s why it is called a predictor of longevity and overall well-being.

So do mindful belly breathing regularly even for 5 to 15 minutes, especially when you wake up in the morning and before you go to bed.

Nourishing Breath

Conscious breathing is a good way to nourish the body and mind with mindfulness. Your body and mind come back together, and both are nourished by your mindful breathing. Your breath will naturally grow more relaxed and help the tension in your body be released. Your conscious breathing will give you a nourishing break. It will also make your mindfulness stronger.

Guided meditation has been practiced since the time of the Buddha. You can do the following exercise when you sit or walk. In sitting meditation, it's important to you to be comfortable and for your spine to be straight and relaxed. You can sit on a cushion with your legs crossed or on a chair with your feet flat on the floor. With the first in-breath, say the first line of the meditation below silently to yourself, and with the out-breath say the second line. With the following in-and out-breaths, you can use just the key words.

Breathing in, I know I'm breathing in.

Breathing out, I know I'm breathing out. (In. Out)

Breathing in, my breath goes deep.

Breathing out, my breath grows slow. (Deep. Slow.)

Breathing in, I'm aware of my body.

Breathing out, I calm my body. (Aware of the body. Calming.)

Breathing in, I smile.

Breathing out, I release. (Smile. Release.)

Breathing in, I dwell in the present moment.

Breathing out, I enjoy the present moment. (Present moment. Enjoy.)

Extracted abridged from SILENCE The Power of Quiet In a World Of Noise written by Thich Nhat Hanh

Silence

There is much wonder and beauty calling us every day. The basic condition for us to be able to hear the call of beauty and respond to it in silence. But we are rarely in a position to listen. Our mind chatters. There is a non-stop radio playing in our head. Our mind is filled with noise coming from the past and the future. That's why we do not listen to the call of life, the call of love. We do not have time to listen to our mind and heart.

Mindfulness is the practice that quiets the noise inside us. Without mindfulness we are pulled away by many things. Sometimes we are pulled away by regret and sorrow concerning the past and suffer again the pain we've already experienced. We may also get pulled away by the future. A person who is anxious and fearful about the future is just as much trapped as one bound by the past.

Mindfulness is often described as a bell that reminds us to stop and silently listen, a bell that helps us to remember not to be carried away by the noise outside and inside us. When we hear the bell, we follow our in-breath and out-breath practice, paying attention only to the breath. I am breathing in, and I know I am breathing in. I am breathing out and I know I am breathing out. By breathing mindfully, we can quiet all the noise inside us. This mindfulness practice awakens us to be aware of a profound spaciousness. We can respond to the call of the beauty around us. "I am here. I am free. I hear you."

What does "I am here" mean? It means, "I exist. I'm really here, because I am not lost in the past and I am not bound by the future. My mind is free and silent. In Buddhism such silence is called noble silence. The practice is easy. We do everything mindfully such as walking, eating, cleaning dishes, seeing the sunrise and sunset, talking and listening.

In a family or in a group meeting, we ring the bell, and we all take three mindfulness breathing in and breathing out practice. Breathing together mindfully creates collective silence and a strong sense of creative, dynamic and positive energy. In noble silence, we can walk, we can sit, we can enjoy our meal, and each other's company. With this kind of silence, we are capable of having sound sleep, and healing ourselves, mentally and physically.

Extracted and modified from Silence The Power of Quiet in a World Full of Noise written by Thich Nhat Hanh

The Sacred Pause

Our life is so busy that we do not have time to pause, breathe and respond. We need to learn how not to react habitually and automatically. Our reactive habitual patterns of relating to others or a situation can cause harm to us and to others associated with us. And once a verbal arrow is thrown unmindfully it is difficult to take it back. Remember the wise words of Viktor Frankl `` Between a stimulus and response, there is a space, and in that space there is freedom and power.” - freedom and power to make wise choices. In this silence we actually notice pain or pleasure, fear or excitement. In the stillness before our habits arise, we become free to act wisely. In this pause, we become aware of our intention and motivation.

It is relatively easy to practice skillful responses when things are relatively easy. We start from this palace and cultivate our skills of responding to others. We can develop a healthy pattern which helps us when things are tough. It also helps to train ourselves to pause before we respond. This is called the sacred pause. It is a moment where we stop and free ourselves from our identification with problems and reactions. When we pause, we can actually be aware of the actual emotional experience. In the stillness before we habitually and automatically throw an arrow of anger or blame. We become free to respond wisely. In the sacred pause we are open to see other's perspectives.

This is the secret of wise communication. As the Buddha says: “Speak with kindly motivation. Speak what is true and helpful. Speak in due season and to the benefit of all.”

Sitting In Stillness

Sitting in stillness allows us to see things as they are. When the body is relaxed and the mind comes to rest, we can see clearly. We become as still and clear as the water in a mountain lake whose tranquil surface reflects the blue sky above, the clouds and the surrounding rocky peaks as they are. When we are sitting still, we see things as they are. We neither reject or avoid them if they are unpleasant nor get attached to them or bound by them if they are pleasant. Sitting in stillness we let pleasant or pleasant things come and go. This way we see things clearly and let them come and go. We experience freedom or emptiness. Emptiness doesn't mean nothingness. It means not bound by aversion and attachment. It is like a flow without obstructions created by our mind.

As long as we are restless and the mind is unsettled, we won't be able to see reality. We will be like the lake on a windy day, its surface troubled, reflecting a distorted view of the sky. But as soon as we restore and restore stillness, we can look deeply and begin to see the truth.

Sitting in stillness allows us to see things as they are. In order to create stillness, we need to relax our body and rest our thinking mind. When the body is relaxed and the mind comes to rest, we can see clearly. The art of mindful breathing is a wonderful way to calm the body, the agitated mind and our disturbing feelings. When we practice mindful breathing regularly we do not accumulate tension in the body, the stress of an agitated mind and the load of our disturbing feelings. When we breathe mindfully, we bring our whole body and mind into harmony.

Source: The Art of Living Peace and Freedom In the Here and Now. Thich Nhat Hanh, Harper Publication

The Light of Silence

I have selected a few excerpts from J. Krishnamurti's talks and writings for us to reflect on.

In the light of silence, all problems are dissolved.

Thought cannot solve any problem, for thought itself is a problem. The light is not born of the ancient movement of thought. It is not born, either, out of self-revealing knowledge. It is not lit by time nor by any action of will. It comes about in meditation...In meditation the dividing line between you and me disappears; in it the light of silence dissolves the knowledge of the "me". The "me" can be studied indefinitely, for it varies from day to day, but its reach is always limited, however extensive it is thought to be. Silence is freedom, and freedom comes from the finality of complete order.

Without freedom from problems, there cannot be tranquility, and tranquility is essential for happiness, which is not an end itself. As the pool is still when the breezes stop, so the mind is still with the cessation of problems...

When this is clear, then the maker of problems can be observed. The observation must be silent and not according to any predetermined plan based on pleasure and pain. If you see that silent observation, passive awareness is essential for understanding, then the truth of your perception liberates you from the background.

All our culture, all our training, tells us that the mind must be occupied, and yet it seems to me the very occupation creates the problems-there are problems; but I think the very occupation with the problem prevents the understanding of it.

The mind creates problems, makes mistakes, and creates pain. When we make mistakes, when we are in pain, to meet these mistakes, these pains without judgment, to look at them without condemnation, to live with them and to let them go by. And that can happen when the mind is in the state of non-condemnation, without any formula, which means, the mind is essentially quiet, when the mind is fundamentally still, then only is there the comprehension of the problem.

The very noise of the self prevents its own dissolution.

You are merely a thought, are you not? We are the thought of a name, the thought of a position, the thought of money, you are merely an idea.

Remove the idea, remove the thought, and where are you? So, you are an embodiment of thought as “me”. And I also see that the “me” must entirely cease if there is to be peace in the world and in myself.

The very noise of the self prevents its own dissolution. The noise of the self-hinders the bliss of the Real. A mind which has many hidden drawers, hidden cupboards with innumerable skeletons held down by will, by denial, by suppression, how can such a mind be still? So, we need to understand why the mind is disturbed. By looking into oneself deeply, opening all the cupboards, all the drawers, understanding all the skeletons, the mind becomes quiet, We cannot have stillness of mind with locked doors

As long as the ego exists, there must be disturbance... If one realizes this, if one does not merely hear it but actually experiences it, then peace will come. But that requires a great deal of awareness, in which there is no choice (choiceless awareness); because if you choose, then you are back again in the process of acquiring and attaining.

Self-knowledge comes with the slowing down of the mind. The mind is like a machine that is working day and night, chatting everlastingly busy whether asleep or awake. Another part of this complex mechanism tries to control the whole movement, and so begins the conflict between two desires, urges.

What does slowing down mean? When you are going very fast in your car, the nearby landscape is blurry; it is only at a walking speed that you can observe in detail the trees, the birds and the flowers. Self-knowledge comes with the slowing down of the mind but doesn't mean forcing the mind to be slow.

Truth is in the silent observation of what is, and it is a truth that transforms what is. Silence, the movement of silence is the only field in which there is a change; that is the only constant state from which change can take place.

The Science and Benefits of Meditation

Meditate to Improve our Health

Meditation involves quiet and focused attention which creates inner mental space for Mindfulness Meditation. As Dr. Judson Brewer, director of research and innovation at Brown University's Mindfulness Center says, "Meditation is not about emptying our minds or stopping our thoughts, which is impossible. It is about changing our relationships to our thoughts."

According to Miles Neale, a clinical instructor of psychology at Weill Cornell Medical College, there are three main types of Meditation: single-pointed meditation where we try to anchor our mind to one point of attention, like our breath, a candle or a mantra. The second type of meditation is open focus meditation which involves noticing, recognizing, whatever arises in our body and mind such as bodily sensations, thoughts or feelings without passing our judgment on them. This is a big component of mindfulness practice. The third type is "cultivation meditation". This meditation is to cultivate or develop specific qualities such as Metta-Loving Kindness which emphasizes openness and compassion.

Health Benefits of Meditation

Research shows that all types of meditation cultivate attention and awareness and bolster concentration. We know how attention plays a significant role in many aspects of our life. We are bombarded with a lot of information coming from a variety of sources. But plenty of information comes from our own mind, thoughts and worries about an upcoming event or of the past events or behaviors. "Attention acts as a filter- like the gatekeeper of your mind- and so where we direct our attention is the best predictor of our experiences" says Michael Mrazek, director of research at the University of California, Santa Barbara, Center for Mindfulness and Human Potential.

Enhanced thinking and memory are two more benefits that research has consistently linked with meditation. The practice of meditation can also help us better recognize and understand our emotions- and to let them go instead of becoming embroiled in worry or rumination. This ability to regulate emotions can help people with depression and anxiety disorders.

Meditation can also help people with stress-related conditions such as patients with irritable bowel syndrome and inflammatory bowel disease. Research has also linked meditation to improvements in people suffering from chronic pain. Meditation activates the body's relaxation response- the opposite to the fight-or-flight state that activates anxiety and stress. Meditation can kick up severe painful memories of people who have been traumatized. Such cases should be handled by trained meditation professionals. Meditation requires good instruction and a slow, gradual build up in training. Like exercise it requires a long-term commitment to get the benefits of meditation.

Source: Mindfulness & Meditation published in Time for Health

Positive Residual Effects of Meditation

Scores of research studies have demonstrated positive effects of meditation on biological, neurological, mental, emotional, social and behavioral well-being of the meditation practitioners.

A recent study done at Emory University in Atlanta conducted a research study to assess the residual effects of two forms of Meditation. Mindfulness Meditation and Loving Kindness Compassion Meditation.

The first group was designed to cultivate skills of focused attention and non-judgmental awareness of breathing, bodily sensations, thoughts and emotions.

The second group was designed to cultivate loving kindness meditation.

Twelve participants in each group who had not gone through Meditation training before were the subjects of the research study. One group went through 8 weeks of Mindfulness Meditation training program. The other group went through 8 weeks of the Loving Kindness Compassion Meditation training program. The third control group took a health education course for eight weeks.

Three weeks before the study began, the study participants were administered fMRI (functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging). The brain scan provided baseline data of the study participants.

Three weeks after the training program the participants in each group were administered fMRI (Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging test. The participants of both meditation groups showed decrease in the right amygdala in response to emotional stimuli. Amygdala plays an important part in emotion and memory. The participants were given an assessment tool to check the symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress before they went through meditation training. They were given the same symptoms assessment test after they completed their meditation training. The decrease in the amygdala activity is correlated with decreased depression and anxiety scores. Meditation helped the meditators for creating emotional stability. When the participants in the Loving Kindness and Compassion Meditation were shown images depicting some form of suffering, they showed enhancement in compassion for the people going through suffering. Showing compassion for others may be beneficial not only for the receiver but also for the giver. Both groups showed remarkable reduction of stress symptoms.

The findings showed the positive and enduring effects of meditation. The studies show that both forms of meditation result in enduring changes in the brain function, especially in the area of emotional processing.

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Cultivating Skills of Mindfulness Meditation

How many times we hear us and the people we know saying these words, “I cannot meditate because I cannot stop my thoughts.” We use the word ‘monkey mind’ to indicate the difficulty of calming, clearing and remaining focused when we meditate. Keeping the mind quiet, clear and focused has become more difficult as we are going through challenging times of facing the COVID-19. I have listed four ways of cultivating skills of mindfulness meditation.

1. Do not fight or run away to stop thoughts and feelings in order to meditate. We notice when a thought or a feeling arises in our mind without judging it. It could be pleasant or unpleasant. We do not pursue a pleasant thought because we like it. It is tempting. We do not avoid unpleasant or disturbing thoughts because we don’t like it. In meditation we notice and become aware of what is happening in our mind. We notice that our mind is distracted by a thought or a feeling. If and when the mind spots threats, it instantly tries to avoid them and if it spots things that the mind wants and likes, it plots various ways to get them. This is our nature or Prakriti. In mindfulness meditation, we just notice. We do not fight it or run away from it. We witness it without denying it or avoiding it or running after it to grab it. We witness the mental phenomenon. We let it come and go. As we continue our meditation practice, things will eventually settle down.
2. We do not try to stop thoughts and feelings arising in our mind, but we relate to them differently. As Sharon Salzberg says, “It’s not what is going on -it’s how we relate to it. So, when thinking happens, we just notice it, “ah-thinking”. And then we go back to watching our breath. We do not want to be distracted either by pleasant thoughts and feelings or unpleasant thoughts and feelings. The point is to relate to what is going in our mind with a calm, clear and non-judgmental and loving attitude. We do not need to kick out but if and when our mind is caught or lost in thoughts and feelings. Notice them non-judgmentally and compassionately.
3. Meta-cognition is the concept used by brain researchers doing research on meditation. Meta-cognition means observing without getting involved in thoughts and feelings. It means we are aware of our thoughts, aware of our mind. It is similar to witnessing- witnessing whatever thoughts and emotions are arising, rather than thinking or feeling them. We do not develop meta-cognition if all our meditations were quiet and undisturbed. We learn to be free from distractions by facing them mindfully.
4. Entering a “flow state” With practice, frequency, duration and intensity of our thoughts and feelings slow down to the extent we really can experience our life differently from our habitual patterns of living. There are moments where we enter a “flow state” in such a way that the discursive chattering of the mind is significantly quieter than usual. We experience this flow state not only in meditation, but it also can happen when we are fully absorbed in reading a book, listening to music,

playing sports, taking a quiet walk or helping someone in deep emotional distress. This happens when we are fully engaged or absorbed in what we do. Our focus is on the activity itself to the exclusion of everything. It is a very powerful inner experience. The results are quite delightful.

References: The Gate of Tears: Sadness and the Spiritual Path by Dr. Jay Michaelson

Flow by Dr. Mihaly Csikszent Mihaly

Meditation and Self-work

Wandering Mind

A wandering mind is called a monkey mind. When we meditate our monkey mind shows up. Our mind wanders. A stream of thoughts keeps on flowing. How do we deal with our wandering mind? The fact that you have noticed thoughts arising in your mind, you are no longer lost in your thoughts itself is a meditative process. That means you are aware. You are not carried away by your thoughts. That means you're awake. When you are not awake, your thoughts carry you away from the present moment. Even when your practice of meditation is punctuated by periods when you aren't focused, it does not matter. Every time you're present, you're meditating. You didn't give up. Your focus begins to improve.

This approach strengthens your intention, your resolve, and your confidence. This kind of resolve is more important to your awakening than whether or not you stayed perfectly focused throughout a given meditation session.

Reflections:

How do you relate to the idea of monkey mind?

What do you do when the monkey mind shows up while you are practicing meditation?

What thoughts and feelings arise in you when the monkey mind keeps on showing up?

Does this approach help you improve your focused attention?

What happens when you try to fight or flee from the monkey mind?

Doing Nothing

There is an Italian “phrase: dolce far niente” which means sweet do nothing. There is also a saying, “Sometimes the most important thing to do is to do nothing.” - Debasish Mrida. We are raised to work hard and be productive. Doing is considered the ultimate value, As Swami Satchidananda says, “Human beings have become human doing.” Our family applauds striving and accomplishing. Our efforts and performance are rewarded and celebrated. So, it is only natural to grow up to become a “do-er”. We can get addicted to this paradigm of keeping ourselves busy.

Our sense of worthiness is defined by our staying busy. The downside of this “doing” is that we too easily lose our touch with our “being.” Being stuck in busy-ness does leave us time to connect with our innate essence or to appreciate who we are deeply inside beyond what we do. We may miss the source of the sweetest parts of our life. And when our actions are infused with our beingness, they are more powerful. Slowing down allows us greater insight, presence, and connection.

Practice:

I’m inviting you to do 3 minutes’ practice of doing nothing while keeping your eyes open.

On the first day sit and BE and notice whatever comes up. Notice if there is any discomfort in the body or impatience in your mind. If so, just be with that feeling. Feel the feeling without taking action or judging it. Give yourself spaciousness to be.

Each day of this week, embark on this practice of doing nothing, adding one minute to your practice until you reach ten minutes. Notice what shifts in your life.

You will find that this practice of just doing nothing will infuse your actions with much more awareness and sweetness.

How do you shift from the doing mode to the being mode?

How does this approach help you?

What do you experience when you do nothing?

Was it easy or difficult for you to let go of doing and be in the state of being?

Exploring Shadows

Shadow shows that part of ourselves that we don't want to see or feel. It's a dark zone of our psyche, a blind spot which blocks us seeing us as a whole and integrated person. We all have shadows. We judge those traits of our personality we don't like to have and own them. So, we suppress and repress them or deny them. We judge not only ourselves but also others who we think have similar traits. So, there are two kinds of judgments: -internal and external. The denied and disowned parts stay in the unconscious mind, and they have a strong and adverse effect if we do not acknowledge them and face them. Our shadows may have unwanted shameful, hateful, guiltful, resentful, envious, and embarrassing thoughts and feelings. As we have personal and individual shadows, we also have collective or social shadows. We project our shadow onto others. We judge them or criticize them. Our individual or personal shadows have a strong effect on us on an individual level as well as on a social level. We need to work on our personal and social shadows to live a wholesome life on both levels.

Suppression, repression and denial continues our personal and social ill health. Psychotherapy, introspection and practicing mindfulness meditation regularly opens the door of clear perception and helps us to be free from the powerful grip of our shadows.

Reflections:

Identify your personal and social shadows.

What do you discover in you by working on your personal and social shadows?

Give examples from your own life when you have judged or criticized and disowned your own personality traits rather than acknowledging them.

When you have denied your own negative traits and projected them onto someone in your family.

Look within-introspect- to see your personal and social shadow. Practice mindfulness meditation to work on your personal and social shadow. Notice how such Shadow Work helps you and helps your relationships.

Newly born babies do not have a shadow. As they grow up a blind spot develops in them as we as parents and teachers mould their personality.

Self-shadow work helps us liberate ourselves from our own shadows and that way we can provide modeling to our children and our students. This is not easy work, but it is worth doing to live a full and wholesome life.

Self-compassion Meditation for Getting Unstuck

There are times in our life when we feel stuck like the groundhog dog. We may feel inertia, stagnation and roadblocks. We feel as if we are in a cul de sac not moving anywhere. How do we face this challenge and get unstuck? Self-care or Self-compassion Meditation is one of the effective ways for freeing ourselves from the grip of getting stuck.

Place your body in a comfortably relaxed and alert position. Gently close your eyes or let the gaze downcast and go soft. Pay your loving attention to your body and simply notice and feel the body sitting. Feel the body breathing naturally. Now allow your breath to go deeper and slower. Notice how your body relaxes and the energy flowing smoothly. Take your time. No need to rush. Take it easy. Your relaxing breath relaxes your body and mind.

Build an open-minded attitude. Keep on breathing slowly and gently. Continue breathing slowly and softly. This is the beginning of self-caring. Say to yourself how you're feeling at this time; notice how your physical and mental energy is flowing freely and smoothly. You are cultivating an attitude of self-caring. Cultivating such a caring attitude and practicing in your everyday life keeps you free from getting stuck. You keep this self-caring attitude for physical, mental and emotional well-being. When you mentally run back to your getting stuck position, relax, reset and resume the practice again. Have patience. Practice self-caring meditation to be free from getting stuck.

Wheel of Awareness Meditation

Meditation is a training of the mind. There are so many ways to meditate, just as there are so many ways to exercise. Scientific research has revealed that practices of harnessing “three pillars of mind training” - strengthening the focus of attention, opening awareness, and building loving kind attention-enable us to build core foundations of well-being and resilience. These three pillars, what might be called mindfulness and compassionate training, have been demonstrated to enhance health at least in six ways:

1. Reduce stress and diminish the stress hormone, called cortisol.
2. Improve your immune function to help fight infection.

3. Optimize the level of the carrying of the enzyme, telomerase, which repairs and maintains the ends of our chromosomes, keeping your cells-and therefore you-youthful, functioning well, and healthy.
4. Enhances the “epigenetic” regulation of genes, to prevent life-threatening inflammation.
5. Modify cardiovascular factors, improving cholesterol levels, blood pressure, and heart function.
6. Increase neural integration in the brain, enabling more coordination and balance in both the functional and structural connectivity within the nervous system that facilitates optimal functioning, including self-regulation problem-solving, and adaptive behavior that is at the heart of your well-being.

While studies are done with individual meditation, practices derived from ancient contemplative traditions, imagine if you could access each of these three pillars in one practice while integrating consciousness itself.

The Superpower of Mindful Awareness

Awareness of the cognitive and affective walls we create within ourselves and between people in our life shifts the experience of our life, the people in it, and the world around itself. By developing awareness, we understand the transformative and healing power of mindful awareness.

Developing awareness helps us navigate and respond with loving kindness rather than react along our same rigid patterns of thought. When we break free from our well-worn stories, we are able to respond with greater understanding and compassion. Awareness is deeper knowing, a stabilizing that we can carry in all parts of our life-physical, mental, emotional, relational, spiritual and environmental aspects of our life.

One of the most beautiful things about mindful awareness is that anyone can develop it. Anyone can nurture a practice that helps them connect more meaningfully with others and widen a sense of who they are.

Science of Meditation

Breakthrough clinical studies have demonstrated that just 10 minutes a day of regular practice of meditation have powerful effects on brain structure and function.

Neuroscientists at UCLA have shown another fascinating neural effect of regular meditation: the ability to increase “cortical gyrification” of the brain. Cortical gyrification refers to the folding of the cerebral cortex, a foundation that allows the brain to process information faster. The central is the outermost layer of neural tissues in the brain and it serves an important role in memory, consciousness, thought processing, decision making, attention and awareness.

A study by the Harvard School of Public Health found that a positive outlook can help heart disease at bay. Happy thoughts are good for the heart.

Blood Pressure Remedy

Another study conducted in India examined the health benefits of Yoga and Meditation. Participants who adopted the practice of yoga and Meditation experienced significantly lower resting pulse and blood pressure. This finding is significant because the window of time was relatively so brief.

Healthier Heart Ventricles

Other research conducted at Georgia Health Science University showed that teens who practiced meditation regularly were able to reduce their heart left ventricle thickness which can increase from high blood pressure.

Instant Calmness

When we calm the mind by meditation, everything relaxes, including the autonomic nervous system (ANS). As a result, few stress hormones are produced, heart rate slows, blood pressure goes down and reduces symptoms of anxiety. In addition to supporting cardiovascular health, clinical data shows that meditation provides numerous other benefits:

enhancing immunity, alleviating anxiety and depression, improving emotional health, boosting cognitive functions, reducing pain, easing stress and associated cortisol levels and controlling inflammation.

Samatha Meditation

One of the simplest ways to calm the mind is an ancient form of meditation called Samatha which means calming down. In Samatha meditation, you focus your breathing and attention on a single object, such as a small pebble. As you pay your attention to both the object (small pebble) and your breathing, you learn to let go of your surface distractions and neurotic patterns. As the saying goes, “The mind is like a blind rider on a wild horse.”

Too often, many of us have no control on our mind and we don’t know where our thoughts are going. We are literally held captive by our mental processes. Samatha helps us peel away the layers of distractions. As you relax, you begin to experience peace, clarity, and healing.

Experiential Session of Samatha Meditation

To begin, find a quiet space. Sit comfortably. Place a small object such as a pebble or shell in front of you and focus on the object and on your breathing. It won’t be easy to remain focused. Your busy mind will likely distract you with to-do lists and other chatter. This is a natural part of the process. Don’t give up. Stay.

Gently bring your mind back to your breathing and the object. Use your belly breathing to nurture your inner calm. It becomes easier over time.

The Peeling Process

It is equally as important not to identify ourselves with our crisis, and not to internalize our suffering and then make it more painful. Remember we are not our illness, our condition, our circumstances. We have illness, we have conditions, we have circumstances. One way to move through such circumstances is not to allow our feelings to flow freely, without overindulging in them, and begin to experience them as a “peeling process.” There is a real truth in the philosophy that crises present an opportunity for growth and healing on all levels: physical, mental, emotional, and psychospiritual. It is the “peeling process” where layers of obstructions and distractions seem to peel away or vanish during a crisis, and our true essence can emerge. We experience growth and transformation by facing such challenges. The goal for healing and growth is to liberate ourselves from fears, to cut through our attachments and aversions, to give greater rise to love and compassion. This can generate authentic motivation to benefit ourselves and others. Healing is about uncovering greater love and compassion, thereby allowing our innate healing capacities to arise and flourish. Meditation is one of the best ways to accomplish this. In this way, we overflow our cups with unconditional love, gratitude and compassion to ourselves and everyone around us. And this is something to be grateful for.

Emotional Awareness and Inner Transformation

Sound of Silence

“And then there crept a little noiseless noise among the leaves,
Born of the very sigh that silence heaves.”

Look at the trees. The more we look at them the more we come to appreciate them. How are you looking at them? Silently? Are we fully present at this moment? Is our mind still not hijacked by past or future thoughts? Do we hear the little noiseless noise among the leaves? Here everything is still, and we enjoy the silence as John Keats describes in these lines. It is a perfect simile for the silence of the mind, when conflicts are resolved, when all selfish desires come to rest. All of us are looking for this absolute peace, this inward healing silence in the redwood forest of the mind. When we find it, we become small forces for peace wherever we go.

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Chasing the Shadow

Buddhism and modern psychology agree that there are many pitfalls on the path of happiness. We tend to seek pleasure after pleasure, never achieving happiness. Such behavioral patterns are deemed the “hedonic treadmill”. We run after something that we think will bring happiness. The Buddha described the same behavioral patterns as the “cycle of craving”. In our endless material accumulations, we further end up reinforcing feelings of lack, longing, and deficiency.

“The truly rich person is one who is not greedy for superficial things.” writes Tibetan Buddhist monk Matthew Matthiese Ricard.” If you think that always having more will lead to you being satisfied you are deceiving yourself.” It’s like thinking that by drinking more salt water, a time will come when you are no longer thirsty. What if what we have right now was enough? When we release the grip of our habitual grasping for more, we open our hearts to appreciate the many gifts of the present moment. As an old Tibetan proverb says, “Being satisfied is like having a treasure in the palm of your hand.”

There are three Buddhist teachings:

1. Being content with what we have.
2. Living lighter with less. How strongly we cling to things determines how much we suffer. Attachment complicates life. We simplify our lives by releasing our desires for superfluous things.
3. Buddhist scholar B. Alan Wallace describes genuine flourishing as having nothing to do with worldly tapping, but instead arising from our ethical life, a focused mind, and an open heart.

Looking for happiness by craving and grasping the outward pleasant stimuli is like chasing the shadow. It is an illusion like looking for water in the mirage. It is an exhausting search. We need to be awakened to see the reality as it is “tataha” as the Buddha says.

Questions to reflect on:

1. How do you relate to the extortion to release the mindset of needing to have more and needing to go somewhere other than where you are?
2. Describe an experience of having a treasure in the palm of your hand.
3. What helps you remember the difference between “being” and “having”?
4. How do you relate to the notion of “chasing the shadow”?
5. Do you go through the “cycle of craving? “or the” hedonic treadmill”?
6. What makes it difficult to be free from the trappings? What helps you to be free from these trappings?

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The Essence of Awakening

Everyone wants to be happy and to be free from suffering. All of our efforts harken back to this basic motivation: why do we suffer? Attachment and anger are two sides of the same coin. Because of ignorance, avidya, and the mind's split into object-subject duality-dvandva, we grasp at or push away what we want, and we don't want. We encounter something that we want and cannot get, or someone prevents us from getting it, or something that happens that does not accord with the way we want things to be. We trap ourselves in this cycle of suffering which is called samsara chakra. We experience anger, aversion, or hatred. In the Mahayana Buddhism these three destructive emotions are considered three poisons of the mind. We become what we think. As we know this reactive cycle serves no benefit. In fact, it causes and continues our suffering. They only cause harm. We generate endless karmas, endless suffering.

We need to restructure our worldview and perception in a way that aligns with the way things really are. This is self-work, spiritual practice called sadhana. We need to deconstruct what we "know" to be true and cultivate selflessness, emptiness, and compassion. Emptiness means detachment from our selfish desires, freeing ourselves from our limiting selves. It is a difficult path as Kena Upanishada says "it is like a sharp razor's edge difficult to cross over", khurasys dhara nishita duratyaya. Such inner work paves the way to peace, joy, and fulfillment, a path to self-realization and enlightenment. Let us walk on this path diligently, courageously, consistently, and joyfully.

Questions to reflect on:

1. Examine what kinds of bondage you create that cause suffering to you and others in your life?
2. What is your understanding of emptiness? What makes it relatively easy to create emptiness in you? What makes it difficult to create emptiness in you? Give a couple of examples to illustrate what emptiness means to you.
3. What is meant by the endless cycle of Karma? Do you think that we are stuck with it, or we can gradually be free from it? How can we accomplish it?
4. What is your spiritual practice? How does it help you reduce your suffering?
5. Formulate a question that you would like to answer.

Spiritual Awakening

The universal essence is also the essence of our being.

Developing inner stillness is an essential part of the process of awakening. We need to slow down and calm our mind to wake up to transcend the layers of thought and emotion that cloud our consciousness. By learning how to be still, we come to realize that we are not our sensations, thoughts, and emotions. The inner emptiness creates space for inner fullness. We enter into a world far beyond the mind, beyond the ego. We experience oneness within and without, the universe within and the universe without. There is one stream of consciousness flowing. There are no twos, there is only one, and that's who we are. Dr. Dan Siegel describes this state of being as MWe.

What obstructs us from being connected with the spiritual essence of the universe and our being? It is our powerful sense of ego with all its cravings, attachments and ambitions. It separates us from others. Spiritual practices help us transcend separateness and connect us with the Divine Spirit which is in all beings. When we realize our true nature, our true identity, we experience fullness, self-sufficiency, deep contentment with what we have. There is no concern for worldly success, worldly possessions and personal ambitiousness and personal promotion. We get unaffected by praise or blame, approval or disapproval, pleasure or pain.

The lack of self-interest leads to a high degree of empathy and compassion. Such a person has deep concern for the welfare of others. The other is really him. Life becomes an experience of something greater than oneself- a force flowing through oneself, wu wei, actionless activity, the Tao; an experience of being-sat, consciousness-chit, ananda-bliss-Satchidananda. Self-realization is literally an awakening into bliss. There are many pathways to awaken ourselves individually and collectively. All wisdom traditions offer the paths of liberation, self-transcendence, peace and harmony: meditation, prayer, selfless service, devotion, love, compassion and kindness. Paths are many, destination is one. We follow the path that suits us.

Life is a journey, a pilgrimage. We all are evolving, some slowly, some rapidly. Some take two steps forward and one step backward. Some fall down and rise again. Some may get stuck and may not rise again. Some wake up and remain awake. Some wake up and go back to sleep again. We all have the potential to awaken, get out of the cave of darkness and see the light. Some are blessed and do not go back to sleep and remain awakened forever. Such awakened beings share their wisdom with others, guide them lovingly and let them go on the path of liberation, freeing oneself from the self-created bondage and help others.

We need to wake up individually and collectively. We need to join our hands to rise and invest our energy for a greater good. We need to create sanghas-spiritual communities- to follow the path of Dharma, that upholds us on a higher plane of harmony, compassion and peace. It is time for us to awaken spiritually and help our brothers and sisters to walk and move along.

Quotations:

Appa deepo bhava-Buddha. Be thy lamp unto you.

Fishing baskets are used to catch fish, but when the fish are got, the men forget the baskets; snares are employed to catch hares, but when the hares are got, men forget the snares; words are employed to convey ideas, but when ideas are grasped, men forget the words. -Chuang Tsu

There is a basic unity within and behind the apparent diversity. Existence, suchness - tathata, Being-sat, Atman-the Self, Tao-the Way, the Word, Brahman-the all-pervading spirit- is the essence of everything that exists. The cosmic web is interconnected and interwoven. The Supreme Being is transcendent, beyond all dualities.

All phenomena in the world are nothing but the illusory manifestations of the mind and have no reality of their own- Ashvaghosha. One who knows this is free from avidya-ignorance, is no more under the spell of maya- illusion. The operation of the mind colors and distorts the awareness of the Self. When we identify the Self with our mind and body, we believe that we are a mind, and we are a body. This delusion is the cause of human bondage and human suffering. The spiritual paths help us outgrow this delusion and liberate us from the self-created bondage.

Mind is the cause of human bondage and suffering. It is also the cause of inner freedom and bliss. -Bhagavad Gita

Ego-centric self- conscious "gives you a feeling that you are the center of your being, and others are "other", and you are different from them... Yoga and all other methods of meditation are just to make you aware that separateness is false, and no-separateness is real.... You will be just a wave on the vast ocean.... A new being, a new energy has arisen as a result, The center of this new being is the universe, and with this transfer of the center,

all your worries, all your anguish, all your hell disappears.... They simply disappear.... They are not solved.... they are simply no longer there. They cannot exist without ego.”-Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh

Every man is born as a seed. The ego is the outer covering: it protects the child, but it becomes so strong that it will not allow you, the inner being, to expand, to go beyond, to sprout. Ego is needed and ego transcendence is needed. -Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh

Kakuan, the Zen mystic, uses the metaphor of the man looking for the ox he is riding. The ox is the symbol of the original nature, of the Buddha nature. Kakuan drew a series of ten pictures and added commentaries to each picture. In his commentary of the first picture, Kakuan says: “The ox has never really gone astray, so why search for it? Having turned his back on this True nature, the man cannot see it. Because of his defilement, he has lost sight of the ox.” His commentaries on the ninth and tenth pictures read: “He (the man who realizes his original nature) observes the waxing and waning of life in the world while abiding...in a state of unshakable serenity.” This is the final stage: “His mental panorama (concepts, opinions, and so forth) has finally disappeared. He goes his own way, making no attempt to follow the steps of earlier stages, Carrying a(wine) guard, he strolls into the market; leaning on his staff, he returns home. he leads innkeepers and fishmongers in the way of Buddha.”-Kipleau, Philip, Ed, The Three Pillars of Zen

Before you study Zen, mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers; while you are studying Zen, mountains are no longer mountains and rivers are no longer rivers; but once you had enlightenment, mountains are once again mountains and rivers are once again are rivers. -Zen saying Rebirth is transformation. We become dwija-our second birth.

As is your vision-drushti- so is the world-srushti.

Fragrance lies within you-Kabir

Mind is the forerunner of all activities. If our mind is defiled, suffering follows like the wheels of the cart following the pair of bullocks. If our mind is undisturbed, still and clean, then happiness follows like a shadow that never leaves the object. So, one has to deal with one's mind-Dhammapada.

If one is to explore the world of inner experiences, his thoughts, his emotions, and learn about himself, he must have some framework within which to do this, energy transformation. He must have a playroom- a sort of workshop or a laboratory within which he can experiment with experiencing and expressing different aspects of his being and different reactions to the world. The framework provided by the centers of consciousness provides the student with a structured inner space in which he can play...He becomes more able to understand and put in perspective different aspects of personality and to grasp a first-hand way what goes on during the evolution of consciousness- Swami Rama, Rudolph Ballentine and Swami Ajaya.

The Two Arrows

“There is a Buddhist teaching found in the Sallatha Sutra as The Arrow.” We all go through suffering-physical, mental, emotional and relational. Unwelcoming things sometimes happen in life-being rejected, failing a test, losing a job, having illness, getting injured in an accident. They cause some pain. They are analogous to the first arrow. The second arrow is fired by our own selves. The second arrow is how we react to the first arrow, our story line, our worry about what might happen, how long our pain will last, what if the pain does not go away- our anticipatory anxiety. The second arrow may take the form of judgment (how could I have been so stupid? What if the pain does not go away? I am really stuck with it and there is no way out.) Our fear of the unknown makes our pain stronger, magnifies our suffering. It is like arriving before we arrive.

Part of the art of suffering well is learning not to magnify our suffering by getting carried away in fear, anger, and despair. Mindfulness is recognizing what is there in the present moment without getting caught up with the idea of what will happen in the future or why I did not think about it before it happened. Worrying about the future or dwelling on the past drains our energy. Facing what is right now and right here and doing the right thing is a wise way of working on our suffering. The first arrow may be out of my control. I realize it and accept it. The second arrow is thrown by me, and I can undo it by practicing mindfulness.

Adopted and modified from No Mud, No Lotus authored by Thich Nhat Hanh

Benefits Of Self-Care

Self-care is a simple practice of taking care of yourself. It is not selfishness or self-centeredness. It is simply taking care of yourself to preserve and improve your physical, mental, emotional, relational and spiritual well-being. When we take care of ourselves, it becomes relatively easy to take care of others in our life. Self-care activities can have a wealth of benefits for oneself and for others.

1. Self-care activities can improve your physical health. Many self-care activities involve changing your diet for better and incorporating meditation and exercise into your daily routine. These changes often translate to improved muscle tone, increased bone mass, better heart health, more energy and other measurable benefits. These benefits, in turn, trigger the body's relaxation response which can lower stress levels.
2. Self-care can help reduce anxiety and depression levels. Common forms of self-care include warm baths, meditating, listening to relaxing music, and going for walks in nature. Each of these activities triggers the body's natural relaxation response, which in addition to reducing symptoms of stress, can also reduce feelings of anxiety and depression.
3. Self-care boosts self-esteem. When you treat yourself like you matter, you will begin to feel as if you do too. Though it is important to always know that you matter. If you ever feel yourself questioning your value of self-worth, take a few minutes for yourself thinking positive thoughts while engaging in a relaxing activity.
4. Maybe you just need to gain a new perspective that allows you to look upon yourself with more kindness. In fact, studies show that people who regularly engage in self-care activities have higher levels of self-esteem, are better able to achieve their self-improvement goals and can more easily overcome setbacks.
5. Self-care can help you preserve your mental health.

Each of the five mentioned benefits work together to produce a simple priceless outcome. Your mental health is an invaluable asset that you want to protect at all costs. Fortunately, when you engage in self-care, the price is minimal. If you have yet to prioritize self-care, now is the time to work on it. By taking just a few minutes of your day to some love and appreciation, you can experience a world of benefits.

Self-Understanding and Emotional Intelligence

Social Intelligence

- Evolutionary thinkers, social scientists and psychologists speculate that the social brain and social prowess-not cognitive superiority or physical advantage-may be what allowed Homo sapiens to eclipse other humanoids.
- The major functions of the social brain-interaction skills and synchrony, empathy, social cognition, and concern for others-all suggest strands of social intelligence
- We are wired to connect. Neuroscience has discovered that our brain's very design makes us sociable.
- Science now tracks connections between the kind of relationships and the operation of specific genes that activate T-cells, the immune system's foot soldiers that regulate our immune system. The link has a double-edged sword: nourishing relationships have a beneficial impact on our health while toxic relationships act like slow poison in our bodies. We all have capacities within us to manage our own emotions and work on our interpersonal relationships. Our social interactions play a role in reshaping our brain through neuroplasticity. Repeated experiences sculpt the shape, size and number of neurons and their synaptic connections. They refashion our brain. Our positive relationships can buffer us from medical and mental health disorders.
- Our human connections seem increasingly under siege. There is a spike in violence. Healthy interactions between real people are slowly declining. Humans around the world are connecting- and disconnecting- as technology offers more outlets. People are everywhere, somewhere and at times nowhere! Constant digital connectivity keeps us busy. Working, even when we are on vacation.
- ***Emotions are contagious.*** We "catch" strong emotions. We can make each other feel better or worse. Beyond what transpires in the moment, we can retain a mood that stays with us long after the direct encounter ends-an emotional afterglow or "afterglower" or hangover.

- When we encounter danger or even anticipate or think about danger, the amygdala, an almond-shaped area in the mid brain triggers fight, flight or freeze response to danger, shepherding our thoughts, attention and perception toward whatever has made us afraid.
- The give and take of feelings in every transaction is termed emotional economy.

Characteristics of Empathic Persons

Empathy is discovering and understanding the other person's perspective, his needs and feelings to guide our actions. A revolutionary shift has taken place in postulating the nature of human nature. The old view that human nature is basically bad and self-centered is being replaced by the research made by psychologists, sociologists, historians, evolutionary biologists and neuroscientists. Their research has shed a new light on the basic nature of human nature. We are also homo empathicus wired for empathy, social cooperation and mutual aid. We are social beings naturally evolved to take care of each other, just like our primate cousins.

We are primed for empathy by having strong attachment and bonding relationships with the care- taker in the first two years of life. The good news is that we can nurture empathy throughout our lives. We can make empathy an attitude and an important part of our daily life.

Research studies of empathic personalities have identified the following six characteristics of empathic persons:

1. They have genuine curiosity about strangers, persons out of their social circle. Such curiosity expands our empathy circle. They show an earnest interest to understand the world inside the mind of the other person.
2. They challenge their own preconceptions and prejudicial labels about people different from themselves. For example, "Homeless people are lazy and parasites",

“The well-fare mom”. Have courage to chat with a stranger with a curious and open mind once a week. You will find a lot of commonalities between you and them-the same needs, the same aspirations and the same pains and sufferings. We discover humanness in people who apparently look so different from us.

3. They implement experiential empathy learning models. Peace core workers are a good example of such empathy learning. We may have information and bookish knowledge of people who are different from us. What is missing in our education is the experiential component of real and significant learning. We need to be reminded of *John Dewey’s words of wisdom: “All genuine education comes about through experience.”*
4. Listen hard and attentively and open up. This is the radical art of listening. As *Marshall Rosenberg says, “Empathy is our ability to be present to what’s going on within the other person-the unique feelings and needs the person is experiencing in the very present moment.”* We need to grasp their emotional state and needs at the present moment.
5. Inspire change on a personal and interpersonal level, class -room level, home level and on a community level. We need to plant the seeds of empathy in our children, and they will flower on a larger scale. Canada’s pioneering program Roots of Empathy is one of the most effective programs for teaching empathy to school children. Research shows the positive impact of this program on children’s social and emotional intelligence, decline in aggression and improving their academic learning.
6. They do not interrogate or examine people of differences. They show genuine curiosity to develop deep understanding and relationships. Such openhearted communication and interaction helps them examine their own limitations, biases and preconceived notions. It opens avenues for both sides to learn from each other and grow within and between.

Gift of Empathy

Empathy is defined as seeing things from the other person's perspective or point of view. Empathy makes a breakthrough when we actually see things from the perspective of the other person we are related to. With empathy we can intervene to help him/her. Empathy is the foundation of emotional intelligence. When we empathize, the other feels not only connected but also feels valued. Without empathy the other person won't feel loved no matter how much you love him/her.

Empathy is actually a physical event, controlled by the insula in our right brain. The structure of the right brain is formed in the first two years of life. According to neuroscientists the right brain is the orchestrator of intimacy. The insula connects the brain with the heart, digestive organs and skin. So, when our heart leaps, or our stomach turns, or our skin crawls, the insula is sending a message. And when we feel deep empathy, we feel it in our bodies.

Empathy strengthens the relationship bond. Empathy makes the other person feel understood, less alone with pain and suffering. Empathy heals. Empathic experiences provide us with a launching pad for every future relationship. In fact, the experience of empathy wires the child's brain for emotional health. Those who receive empathy in relationships feel more connected throughout their lives. They're more compassionate and understanding and they enjoy deeper relationships.

How do we develop empathy? It happens naturally, as part of healthy emotional development, as long as children experience it from their caretakers. Experiencing empathy from others helps our child to develop empathy for others. This giving empathy is also a gift for you, because those who feel empathy are much more cooperative in accepting your recommendations for cultivating healthy emotional relationships.

Translation: Empathy makes the relationship a lot easier.

Every time you say to someone, "I know how you feel" or "Looks like you had a hard day" or similar statements you are being empathic. Humans are creatures of passion. Emotions arise within us, influencing our moods and actions. We get swept away with passionate feelings many times a day. Sometimes we need help to navigate this world of difficult emotions so that we don't get swamped by the intensity of our emotions. It helps our emotions lose their charge and begin to evaporate.

Repressed feelings, on the other hand, do not fade away. We carry them with us. Repressed feelings are trapped and looking for a way out. Because they aren't under conscious control, they pop out unmodulated. So, our empathy, our acceptance of the other person's emotions teaches the other person in the relationship that his or her emotional life is not dangerous, is not shameful and in fact is universal and manageable. The other person feels understood and accepted. They learn that they are not left all alone to cope with the crush of those powerful emotions. It is safe to feel them. Which is the first step to working them through and learning to manage them.

When one expresses his or her feelings about someone or something, we need to listen and acknowledge rather than jumping in with solutions. Accepting and acknowledging the other person's feelings does not mean you agree with him/her or endorse the feelings. You are showing her/him you understand his/her feelings. The other person realizes that his or her feelings are not minimized by pushing them to "get over it". All of his/her feelings are acceptable, including his/her yucky feelings.

Empathy is listening without the pressure to solve anything. Don't take it personally. Breathe. Detach but remain connected. When you really feel that you're understood your hurt diminishes. A person's empathy serves as an emotional first aid for bruised feelings. And when we genuinely acknowledge the plight and voice his/her disappointment, he/she often gathers strength to face reality.

Self-acceptance and Other-acceptance

Self-acceptance and Other-acceptance are interconnected.

Accepting oneself and the other in our lives is an ongoing journey as we go through different phases of growth and development and face existential challenges in our life. We never become perfect and can tell us “I made it and nothing I need to learn and change.” We all are journeying. We all are human beings with our strengths and weaknesses.

The perfection syndrome prevents us from looking at our shortcomings and making necessary adaptations and health promoting changes. This is where the inner work of working on ourselves mindfully continues with ups and downs in our life. With mindfulness practice, the upward journey gets smoother and easier and helps us go through the downward journey with fewer bruises. Ongoing introspection and self-awareness are our great friends to keep us walking on the wholesome path.

Being honest with oneself and cultivating integrity are essential steps for our well-being and the well-being of others in our life. And that requires courage and compassion to be true to oneself. Fear is contagious and so also courage. Hiding, denying or justifying the dark zone of ourselves diminishes our potential to grow within us and between us. Let yourself say, “This is who I am, a human being like you.” I have my open self, closed self, hidden self and the self about which I do not have a clue. My intention is to expand my open self, reduce my closed self, enlighten my blind self and go deeper to discover my unconscious blockages and be free from my self-created trappings. Carl Jung calls shadow work-working on the dark zone of our life.

This is an ongoing intrapersonal and interpersonal work in relationships. You can't know until you know and when you know, you know. I know that I don't know what the beginning of knowing is. No emotions are wrong. Not recognizing our emotions keeps us trapped and blocks the unfolding, experiencing and manifesting our deeper and inherent positive kind, loving and nurturing emotions. We need to be compassionately aware of our holding on to the tightness of our fist, the hurt it creates and be willing and bold enough to let it go and open it. The open fist is a welcoming fist, a helping fist and a connecting fist. It offers the joy of giving, receiving, and celebrating.

Being compassionate to oneself, forgiving oneself, freeing oneself and taking care of oneself paves the way to be compassionate to others, forgiving others, freeing others and taking care of others.

Self-acceptance done lovingly and compassionately is transformative. It builds the bridge of self-empowerment, peace, deep contentment, joy and happiness within ourselves and with others. When we practice mindfulness consistently on a regular basis, we become free from our habitual and conditioned patterns of thinking, emoting and acting. We function wholesomely.

May we continue our well-being journey mindfully and lovingly share our gifts with others.

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Wise Choice Making

“Watch your thoughts; they become words.

Watch your words; they become actions.

Watch your actions; they become habits.

Watch your habits; they become your character.

Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.”

If we are to follow the logic of Lao-Tze, his quote implies that how consciously we respond to life and how we approach our everyday moment to moment existence, ultimately leads to how we adapt to challenges and stress and the overall quality of our lives.

How does stress affect the body? When the body experiences stress, levels of hormones adrenaline and cortisol rise. The heart rate follows suit, blood flow increases, and digestion slows down — all part of the fight-or-flight (or sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system) response preparing the body to address the source of stress.

Hundreds of years ago, this function of the sympathetic nervous system was useful when you had to escape a serious physical threat like a tiger in your cave, but now, sources of stress, while in most cases not life-threatening, have the same physiological effect on the body and are worse overall because they don't let up. We just keep going and going.

The chronic nature of modern-day anxiety may lead to increased levels of inflammation in the body. Disease states may subsequently ensue, beginning with lowered immunity and ultimately leaving an individual more susceptible to respiratory tract infections, slowed wound healing, autoimmune disease, obesity, and possibly even depression and heart disease, among other problems. At Living Inline, we literally know what these processes feel like under our hands.

In the interest of our own physical health, it's time to step away from the moment to moment feelings of anxiety and hysteria even for just 5 minutes. Where does one begin? Going back to Lao-Tze's philosophy, it starts with language: both what we tell ourselves and the words we use to communicate to others. Every self-help book from the well-known Wayne Dyer's "You'll see it when you believe it" to the famous Russell Conwell speech "Acres of Diamonds" the acclaimed benefits of shifting our thoughts away from self-

defeating, negative processes toward affirming, positive reflections are well advertised and documented.

But is there science behind it? You bet. A seminal study conducted more than two decades ago broke ground by establishing the connection between positive outlook and reported health. Since then, hundreds of papers have been written about the capacity of the mind-body connection to improve everything from pain tolerance to discomfort and fatigue during cancer recovery.

The moral of the story? If you face a challenge, even a small one today, instead of allowing the stress to undermine your well-being, you can shift the effects by actually changing your thoughts and your words.

Choose your words wisely. A positive outlook, and its attendant language, is an integral part of any attempt at creating ease. Research has indicated that the language we use may actually influence our visual perception of the world around us. And where does a shift toward optimism begin? Going back to our Lao-Tze quote: in our thoughts and in our words.

So, what are some helpful hints:

Cut the cursing:

Hold off on harshness. A recent study showed that swear words may actually stress the brain.

Keep it all in perspective:

Don't make every situation seem like it is your last. Researchers conducted a small study that indicated that laughing has an immediate lowering effect on levels of stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline. Need to lighten it up in the wake of stress? I love the Far Side comics. Just 3 minutes makes me giggle. You can look them up.

Switch off the thoughts and the electronics:

The constant barrage of news and media and Facebook updates too much? Take a walk. Breathe. Meditate. Giving your mind and body a break from the constant stream of thoughts, words and worries is a powerful way to reduce tension. Give yourself five minutes a day to sit quietly and focus on the breath. Without your phone.

Beginner's Mind

"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, in the expert's there are few."-Zenkei Blanche Hartman

Beginner's mind is Zen practice in action. It is the mind that is innocent of preoccupations and expectations, judgments and prejudices. Beginner's mind is just present to explore and observe and see "things as they are." It's like being awake to what is happening. As soon as we think we know the answers, we stop paying attention to the reality of what's happening right now and close down to the other possibilities. Beginner's mind is the mind that faces life like a small child, full of curiosity, and wonder and amazement. It's like approaching things without a fixed point or a prior judgment, just asking "What is it?" Can we look at our lives in such a way? Can we look at all of the aspects of our lives with this mind? It gives us an opportunity to look again more carefully and see what other possibilities there might be in the situation. It is hard to do that. We have a lot of habits of mind. When we begin to sit, we begin to see how many fixed ideas and fixed views we have.

As much as we would like to start every day with a clean slate, the reality is that we tend to bring the past into the present with our fixed ideas, expectations, and assumptions. Zen teacher Suzuki Roshi used the term "beginner's mind" to describe the clear, open state of awareness that allows us to view any situation from an innocent and fresh perspective. Suzuki Roshi said that we see through the limited lens of our own concepts and conditioning, the beginner is open and available to a vast world of possibilities.

The essence of a beginner's mind is not knowing. When we drop our sense of certainty, we discover that there are many ways of understanding and responding to any given situation. We become like a child again, full of enthusiasm, spontaneity, and wonder at the aliveness of the moment.

How can we be a beginner in each moment, even in those situations where we are doing something we have done many times before? Beginner's mind is a mind of not knowing. As soon as we think we know the answers, we stop paying attention to the reality of what's happening right now, and we close down to other possibilities.

Why do we struggle to embrace new beginnings? It's generally because we're still stuck in old emotions and reactive patterns from the past. Before we can let go of preconceptions and expectations and prejudices, we have to notice them; otherwise, they're just carrying on unconsciously and affecting everything we do.

In her poem “When Death Comes”, Mary Oliver has a few lines that say, “When it is over, I want to say: all my life / I was a bride married to amazement. / I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.” This is a beginner’s mind: I have been a bride to amazement.” Just how amazing the world is, how amazing our life is. How amazing is it that the sun comes up in the morning or that the wisteria blooms in the spring? “A bride married to amazement.... the bridegroom taking the world into my arms.” Can we live our life with that wholeheartedness, with that kind of thoroughness? This is the beginner’s mind that Suzuki Roshi is pointing to, encouraging us to cultivate. He is encouraging us to see where we are stuck with fixed views and see if we can “open the hand of thought” and let the fixed view go. This is our work. Just to be here, ready to meet whatever is next without expectation or prejudice, or preconceptions.

Excerpts from Seeds for a Boundless Life by Zenkei Blanche Hartman, 2015 Shambhala Publications

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Emotional Intelligence-Emotional Learning; Social Intelligence- Social Learning

We are wired to be social and emotional. Though we use these words separately, our social and emotional capacities are intertwined. The two domains, the Social Mind and the Emotional Mind, are interconnected and they intermingle. Become aware of your own recent social and emotional experience. We find two relational components-I and someone else. As Dr. Richard Davidson, Director of the Laboratory for Affective Neuroscience at the University of Wisconsin, observes, “All emotions are social. You can’t separate the cause of an emotion from the world of relationships-our social interactions are what drive our emotions.”

According to Dr. Daniel Goleman, the author of Social Intelligence, there are two ingredients of social intelligence: Social Awareness and Social Facility. “Social awareness refers to a spectrum that runs from instantly sensing another’s inner state to understanding her feelings and thoughts.

Social Awareness:

- Primal empathy. Feeling with others; sensing non-verbal emotional signals.
- Attunement: Listening with full receptivity; attuning to a person.
- Empathetic accuracy: Understanding another person’s thoughts, feelings and intentions.
- Social cognition: Knowing how the social world works.
- Social Facility: Simply sensing how another feels or knowing what they think or intend does not guarantee fruitful interactions. Social facility builds on social awareness to allow smooth, effective interactions. The spectrum of social facility includes
 1. Synchrony: Interacting smoothly at the nonverbal level.
 2. Self-presentation. Presenting ourselves effectively.
 3. Influence: Shaping the outcome of social interactions.
 4. Concern: Caring about others’ needs and acting accordingly

Reflect on these social capabilities. Identify those capabilities you need to work on. You may identify these capabilities with the help of your Thinking or Cognitive Brain. Real and deep learning takes place when you identify them, mindfully work on them and go through an experiential learning with at least one important person in your life. As we all know, needs matter. The challenge is how do we meet them? And that’s what we do in our Mindfulness Meditation class. One session is not enough. It is up to you to practice what you learn from this session and apply to your personal life.

Emotional Intelligence-Emotional Learning:

Anyone can become angry-that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and the right way-this is not easy. -Aristotele

The educational institutions mainly and mostly emphasize cognitive learning. Social learning and emotional learning are in the back seat or have little or no place in our academic world. We may create intellectual giants missing healthy socially and emotionally developed human beings. We need to educate the whole person by embracing and implementing holistic education which also includes spiritual development. Let us read another wisdom statement:

"It is with the heart that one sees rightly, what is essential is invisible to the eye."-Antoine De Saint- Exupéry

Our deepest feelings, our passions and longings and our love play a vital role in making us human beings. They play a vital role in shaping our decisions and actions. Our challenge is how to create balance between head and heart, rational and emotional, harmonizing emotion and thought. Brain studies have shown that we have two brains, two minds- and two different kinds of intelligence: rational and emotional, personal and interpersonal. Cultivating equanimity is essential for walking successfully on the rope of life.

"Interpersonal intelligence (social intelligence) is the ability to understand other people: what motivates them, how they work, how to work cooperatively with them, Successful people, are likely to be individuals with high degree of interpersonal intelligence."-Howard Gardener, Developmental Psychologist at Harvard Graduate School of Education.

In another rendering, Gardener noted that the core of interpersonal intelligence includes the "capacity to discern and respond appropriately to the moods, temperaments, motivations, and desires of other people. In Interpersonal intelligence, he included "access to one's own feelings and the ability to discriminate among them and draw upon them to guide behavior."

There are five domains of Emotional Intelligence

● **Self-awareness** - knowing one's emotions-recognizing a feeling as it happens..

This is the keystone of emotional intelligence. It is the ability to monitor feelings from moment to moment-to relate to them mindfully.

● **Managing emotions** - It is the ability of handling feelings. The capacity "to soothe oneself, to shake off rampant anxiety, gloom, or irritability. People who are poor in this ability are constantly battling feelings of distress." Daniel Goleman.

● **Motivating oneself** - “marshaling emotions in the service of a goal is essential for paying attention, for self-motivation and mastery and for creativity. Emotional self-control- delaying gratification and stifling impulsiveness-underlies accomplishment of every sort. And being able to get into the “flow” state enables outstanding performance of all kinds. People who have this skill tend to be more

highly productive and effective in whatever they undertake.”

● **Recognizing emotions in others** - Empathy, another ability that builds on emotional self-awareness, is the fundamental “people skill”. Empathy kindles altruism. Those who are more attuned to the subtle social signals recognize what others need or want.

● **Handling relationships** - The art of relationships is largely based on managing emotions in others. In order to cultivate such a skill, one has to learn how to handle and manage one’s own emotions in relationships. You cannot teach what you don’t know.

Each dimension is on a continuum. There are individual differences in the abilities in each of these five domains of emotional intelligence. We can always improve our skills in these domains. Though these are different skills, they all are interrelated.

Improvement in one area will help us in other areas. What we need is honesty, readiness, and willingness to work on ourselves.

Six Dimensions of Emotional Style

Dr. Richard J. Davidson has identified six dimensions of Emotional Style. Each dimension has a specific identifiable neural signature. Each dimension describes a continuum. Some people may fall at one or the other extreme of that dimension, while others fall somewhere in the middle. The combination of where you fall on each dimension adds up to your overall Emotional Style.

Your Resilience Style::

Do you usually shake off setbacks or do you suffer a meltdown? If you have an argument with an important person in your life, are you able to recover and quickly bounce back and put it behind you and throw yourself into the ring of life again, or do you melt in the puddle of depression and resignation?

If any or all of these apply to you, then you fall toward the Slow to Recover pole of the Resilience Dimension.

Alternatively, can you brush off setbacks, so something bad happens to you, you're able to move on? If this applies to you, then you fall toward the Fast to Recover pole of the Resilience Dimension.

Either extreme of the dimension can trip you up. An extremely resilient person can lack the motivation to overcome challenges, accepting every setback with a metaphorical shrug and an attitude of "don't worry and be happy." In contrast, being Slow to Recover can prevent you from moving forward after a setback.

Your Outlook Style::

Do you let your emotional clouds darken your sunny outlook on life? Do you tend towards cynicism and pessimism, struggling to see anything positive? Or do you maintain a high level of energy and engagement even when things don't go your way?

People at one extreme of the Outlook spectrum can be described as Positive Types, those at the other as Negative Types.

Your Social Intuition Style::

Can you read people's body language and tone of voice, like a book, inferring whether they want to talk or be alone? Or are you puzzled by -even blind to the outward indications of people's mental and emotional states?

Those at one extreme on this spectrum are Socially Intuitive types; those at the other: Puzzled.

Your Self-Awareness Style::

Are you aware of your own thoughts and feelings and attuned to the message your body sends you? Or do you act and react without knowing why you do what you do, because your inner self is opaque to your conscious mind? Do those closest to you ask why never engage in introspection and wonder why seem oblivious to the fact that you are anxious, jealous, impatient or threatened?

At one extreme of this spectrum are people who are Self-Aware, at the other those who are Self-Opaque.

The Sensitivity to Context Dimension::

Most of us know when conversation with a particular tinge has no place in a given circumstance. People who are especially aware of the social surround are at the Tuned In pole of the Sensitivity to Context spectrum.

People who are oblivious to the social context fall at the Tuned Out extreme. They are oblivious to the implicit rules that govern social interactions and that make a behavior that would be perfectly acceptable in one context offensive in another. Sensitivity to social context is largely intuitive and that's why it is considered an important component of Emotional Style. Context Style: Are you Tuned In or Tuned Out?

The Attention Dimension::

Can you screen out emotional or other distractions and stay focused? Or do your thoughts flit from the task at hand to something that had happened before (like an argument you had with someone close to you)?

At one extreme on the Attention spectrum are people with the Focused Style; at the other end, there are people with the Unfocused Style.

Everyone has elements of each of these dimensions of Emotional Style. Who you are emotionally is the product of different amounts of each of the six dimensions. Some extremes of Emotional style sound almost dysfunctional, such as when someone is so slow to recover from adversity that he or she is at risk of depression or suicidal ideation. Such dysfunctional emotional style makes it harder for people to be a productive member of a family or society at large, to forge meaningful relationships, and to achieve a sense of well-being.

We can assess our emotional styles and decide which emotional styles I need to change or to strengthen. Does your emotional style interfere with your daily life and constraints your happiness? Does it prevent you from reaching your goals or causes you distress? If it does, you should make an effort to change for your well-being and the well-being of people close to you or at your workplace. There are specific, effective ways for you to achieve your goals.

Assessing Your Emotional Styles - The Resilience Dimension

How would you relate to the following situations? Write True or False for each question.

1. If you have a heated argument with a friend, does it cast a pall on the remainder of your day?
2. If you arrive at the airport and discover that your flight was canceled, do you sputter profanities at the gate agent, snap at your spouse, feel as if these things always happen to you, and find it difficult to regain your calm and composure for hours?
3. If the vending machine eats your money without giving you the bag of chips, do you pound and yell at the stupid machine?
4. If a driver cuts your lane and frowns at you for driving slowly according to his version, you are likely to fume about it for a long time?
5. If you make a mistake at work and get reprimanded for it, you get and remain upset for a long time?
6. If your friend does not show up on time and does not call you for being late, you harbor angry and blaming thoughts in your mind and hold on to them for a long time?
7. If you are being considered for an important professional award or promotion and it goes to someone you consider less qualified, do you hold onto your feelings of anger and disappointment for a long time?
8. If you try a new restaurant and find that the food is awful and the service snooty, it ruins your whole evening and affects your sleep?
9. If your home water heater breaks and a plumber is not available to fix it the same day, do you feel down and frustrated for hours or even days until it is fixed?
10. If someone close to you dies, do you experience not only normal sadness but a prolonged profound despair so debilitating that you are unable to function for months?

If any or all of these apply to you, then you fall toward the Slow to Recover pole of the Resilience Dimension. Alternatively, you can usually brush off setbacks, so when something bad happens to you, are you able to move on? Can you put it behind? People toward this extreme are Fast to Recover or resilient. Either extreme of the dimension can trip you up. An extremely resilient person can lack the motivation to overcome challenges, accepting every setback with a metaphorical shrug and an attitude of “don’t worry, be happy.”

In contrast, being Slow to Recover can prevent you from moving forward after a setback, causing you to fume and obsess over something that is over and done with. The ability to introspect and understand our own emotions is an aspect of the Self-Awareness Dimension of Emotional Style.

Assessing Your Emotional Style - The Outlook Dimension

How would you relate to the following situations? Write True or False for each question.

There are some people who see the positive in every situation. They see a silver lining in every cloud. They are the ones we sometimes want to shake, screaming, "Don't you see the world is going to hell?" They see the positive in everything-which can blind them to warning signs in both their personal and their professional lives. These are the people who inhabit the optimistic, Positive extreme of the Outlook Dimension. They have an uncanny ability to maintain positive emotions. The "maintain" aspect is the key characteristic of this dimension. It measures not whether you can feel joy but how you can keep that feeling alive.

At the other hand of the spectrum are people in whom joy tends to melt away as quickly as a snowflake in the sun. These are the cynics and pessimists who, if they feel an initial jolt of happiness or pride over some encounter or accomplishment, cannot sustain it. The people at the extreme negative pole of the dimension have difficulty experiencing pleasure for any length of time and can be at risk for clinical depression or addiction. They are described as gloomy Negative types.

The capacity to remain upbeat and to sustain positive emotion over time is the key measure of the Outlook of your Emotional Style. It can be thought of as the complement of Resilience, which reflects how quickly you recover from adversity.

Outlook reflects how long and how well you can sustain positive emotions. The durability of positive feelings has a strong carryover effect on your overall outlook.

Answer the following questions - True or False to get a sense of whether you tend toward the Positive or negative end of the Outlook Dimension of your Emotional Style.

1. When I'm invited to meet new people, I look forward to it, thinking they might become my friends, rather than seeing it as a chore, figuring these people will never be worth knowing.
2. When evaluating a co-worker, I focus on details about which areas he needs to improve rather than on his positive overall performance.
3. I believe the next ten years will be better for me than the last ten.
4. Faced with the possibility of moving to a new city, I regard it as a frightening step into the unknown.

5. When something small but unexpected and positive happens to me in the morning - for example, having a great conversation with a stranger -the positive mood fades within minutes.
6. When I go to a party and I'm having a good time at the outset, the positive Feeling tends to last for the entire evening.
7. I find that beautiful scenes such as a gorgeous sunset quickly wear off and I get bored easily.
8. When I wake up in the morning I can think of a pleasant activity that I've planned, and the thought puts me in a good mood that lasts the entire day
9. When I go to a museum or attend a concert, the first few minutes are really enjoyable, but it doesn't last.
10. I often feel that on busy days I can keep going from one event to the next without getting tired.

Assessing Your Emotional Style - The Social Intuition Dimension

You have probably seen it: a man and a woman are talking, and he looks away, leans back, takes half a step away from her... and still she has no idea that he has absolutely no interest in her. Or maybe you have had a friend grab you as you were dashing out of the door in a rush, and he begins jabbering away about a long and complicated experience he wants your advice on while the whole time you are inching towards your car and checking your watch. And still he won't let you go. People at this extreme on the social Intuition Spectrum are Puzzled.

At the other extreme are socially intuitive types. They have an uncanny ability to pick up on subtle nonverbal cues, to read other people's body language, vocal intonation, and facial expressions. They can tell when someone who is grieving wants to talk about her loss and when she wants to be distracted by gossip and chitchat. They can tell when a colleague who has been reprimanded by a supervisor wants advice and consolation and when he wants to be left alone. They can tell when a child who has suffered his first romantic rejection wants advice about relationships and when he wants them to pretend they have no idea what's going on.

People differ dramatically in how attuned they are to nonverbal social cues. There are people who are socially deaf and blind, with devastating consequences for personal and professional relationships. Conversely, acute sensitivity to the emotional state of others is central to both empathy and compassion. Indeed, Social Intuition is the hallmark of some of our greatest teachers, therapists and others in the caring profession.

To gauge where you fall on the spectrum of Social Intuition answer these questions True or False.

1. When I'm talking with people, I often notice social cues about their emotions- discomfort or anger- before they acknowledge those feelings in themselves.
2. I often find myself noting facial expressions and body language.
3. I find it does not really matter if I talk with people on the phone or in person, since I rarely get any additional information from seeing who I am speaking with.
4. I often feel as though I know more about people's true feelings than they do themselves.
5. I'm often taken by surprise when someone I'm talking with gets angry or upset at something I said for no apparent reason.
6. At a restaurant I prefer to sit next to someone I'm speaking with, so I don't have to see his or her full face.
7. I often find myself responding to another person's discomfort or distress on the basis of an intuitive feeling rather than on explicit discussion.
8. When I'm in public places with time to Kill, I like to observe people around me.
9. I find it uncomfortable when someone I barely know looks directly into my eyes during a conversation.
10. I can often tell when something is bothering another person just by looking at him or her.

Assessing Your Emotional Style - The Self-Awareness Dimension

Do you have friends for whom introspection seems as foreign as Sanskrit? Do you act and react without knowing why your inner self is opaque to your consciousness, an utter mystery? Do those closest to you ask why you seem anxious, jealous, angry or impatient- and now that has been called to your attention, are you surprised that you do feel that way? We have all known people who are completely blind and deaf to their own emotions. They are not in denial: They are honestly unaware of emotional cues that arise within their own bodies. Some people have a very hard time recognizing their own feelings. It may take them days to recognize that they are angry, sad, jealous, or afraid. At this extreme of the Self-Awareness Dimension there are people who are Self-Opaque.

At the other end are Self-Aware people who are acutely conscious of their thoughts and feelings and attuned to the messages their body sends them. They can be super sensitive to the messages their body transmits, experiencing the physical aspects of the emotional states with heightened, sometimes crippling intensity. This heightened sensitivity can be beneficial in several ways, it appears to play a crucial role in empathy, the ability to feel what others are feeling, and by allowing you to understand your own emotional state. It can help you avoid misunderstandings during an argument with a significant other. If you

grasp that you are upset about something that happened before you got home, then you are more likely to understand that the explosive anger you are feeling is not really because dinner isn't on the table yet.

High Self-Awareness can also exact a cost, however. Someone with a very sensitive emotional antenna for his own feelings who observes the pain of another will feel that anxiety or sadness in both mind and body- experiencing a search for the stress hormone cortisol, for instance, as well as elevated heart rate and blood pressure. Such extreme sensitivity is likely a factor in the burnout that nurses, counselors, therapists, and social workers suffer.

How would you relate to the following situations? Write True or False to each question.

1. Often when someone asks me why I'm angry or sad, I respond (or think to myself), "But I'm not angry."
2. When those closest to me ask why I treated someone brusquely or meanly, I often disagree that I did any such thing.
3. I frequently- more than a couple of times a month- find that my heart is racing, or my pulse is pounding, and I have no idea why.
4. When I observe someone in pain, I feel the pain myself both emotionally and physically.
5. I'm usually sure enough about how I am feeling that I can put my emotions into words.
6. I sometimes notice aches and pains and have no idea where they come from.
7. I like to spend time being quiet and relaxed, just feeling what is going on inside me.
8. I believe I very much inhabit my body and feel at home and comfortable with my body.
9. I'm strongly oriented to the external world and rarely take note of what is happening in my body.
10. When I exercise, I am very sensitive to the changes it produces in my body.

Assessing Your Emotional Style - The Sensitivity to Context Dimension

Most of us know when conversations with a particular emotional thing have no place in a circumstance. People who are emotionally aware of the social surround are at the Tuned In pole of the Sensitivity to the Context spectrum. People who are oblivious to the social surround fall at the Tuned Out extreme. They are oblivious to the implicit rules that govern social interactions.

Depending on whom we are interacting with and in what circumstances, there are different rules and expectations- for instance with close friends, people you know only slightly, family members, coworkers, or superiors. You can think of the Sensitivity to Context dimension of Emotional Style as the outer-directed version of the Self-Awareness style. Just as the latter reflects how attuned you are to your own physiological and emotional cues, so Sensitivity to Context reflects how attuned are to the social environment. In short, attention and emotion are intimate partners.

To get a sense of where you fall on the Sensitivity to Context spectrum, answer True or False to these questions.

1. I have been told by someone close to me that I'm usually sensitive to other people's feelings.
2. I have occasionally been told that I behaved in a socially inappropriate way, which surprised me.
3. I have sometimes suffered a setback at work, or I fell out with a friend because I was too chummy with a superior or too jovial when a good friend was distraught.
4. when I speak with people, they sometimes move back to increase the distance between us,
5. I often find myself censoring what I was about to say because I have sensed something in the situation that would make it inappropriate (e.g. I would not rave about how delicious the meat is I am eating in the company of my vegetarian friend.
6. When I'm in a public setting like a restaurant, I'm especially aware of modulating how loudly I speak.
7. I have frequently been reminded when in public to avoid mentioning the names of people who might be around.
8. I'm almost always aware of whether I have been someplace before, even if it is a highway that I last drove many years ago.
9. I notice when someone is acting in a way that seems out of place such as having to casually at work.
10. I have been told by those close to me that I show good manners with strangers and in new situations.

Assessing Your Emotional Style - The Attention Dimension

Can you screen out emotional distractions and stay focused? Or do your thoughts flit from the task by a distressing experience you had in your family in the morning or the anxiety you have about visiting a dentist for your tooth extraction? If you can remain steadfast in your mind in spite of what happened in the past or your upcoming dental appointment tomorrow, you fall at the Focused extreme of the Attention Spectrum. A focused person can screen out sensory and emotional distractions and can have a focused attention on the task at hand and can maintain equanimity. It may seem odd to include attention as a dimension of Emotional Style since the ability to focus attention is usually considered as a component of cognitive ability. An emotional overlay on the distracting sounds and sights makes it difficult to remain focused on what we do. Others may find it difficult to plug away from the throes of emotional impulses that have nothing to do with the task at hand. They fall at the Unfocused extreme of Attention spectrum. In short, attention and emotion are intimate partners. Since emotional stimuli command an untoward share of our attention, maintaining a stable internal compass that allows us to calmly focus, and resist distractions is an important aspect of Emotional Style.

Selective Attention: There are several forms of attention. We will discuss two forms of attention. One form is Selective Attention, and another form of attention is Open, Nonjudgmental Awareness or Mindfulness Attention. Selective Attention is the ability to be immersed in the constant sea of stimuli that surrounds us and yet to pay attention to only one thing. Notice how many things are happening while you are reading this passage. If you manage to focus only on one thing, such as paying attention to what you're reading, congratulations on a commendable feat of focus.

In **Mindfulness Attention**, you cultivate your capacity to remain receptive to whatever might pass through your body and mind such as your bodily sensations, thoughts, feelings, emotions, sounds and sights and you do so in a noncritical way. You are paying your bare attention. It is called Beginner's Mind. You accept without reacting. This is the kind of awareness that many forms of meditation cultivate. In Mindfulness Meditation, you practice non-judgmental moment-to moment awareness. While sitting in a quiet place, you focus on whatever you experience moment to moment. How you take each sensation, thought, feeling, emotion as it comes. The non-judgmental part is key. If your legs feel tense, you do not scold yourself for having difficulty in relaxing; your reaction is clear to 'Huh "tense legs:", interesting'. Similarly, for any thoughts and emotions, you do not intentionally pursue a thought as you ordinarily might do. If thoughts arise in your mind, you observe them disinterestedly, as if from the perspective of a dispassionate observer, but do not take them to heart.

Those who practice Selective Attention and Meditation Attention regularly fall at the Focused end of the Attention spectrum and tend to be unflappable, not pushed and pulled

by constant emotional ups and downs, Open, non-judgmental awareness is also critical for being tuned in to our own thoughts and emotions, and as such plays an important role in Self-Awareness and Social Intuition. Without a capacity for open, non-judgmental awareness, we can miss both subtle cues arising from within our own body and mind and the nuanced cues in our social environment.

Assess your Attentional Style by answering True or False to the following statements:

1. I can concentrate in a noisy environment.
2. When I am in a situation in which a lot is going on and there is a great deal of sensory stimulation such as at the party or in a crowd at an airport I can keep myself from getting lost in a train of thought about any particular thing I see.
3. If I decide to focus my attention on a particular task, I find that I am mostly able to keep it there.
4. If I'm at home and trying to work, the noises of a television or other people make me very distracted.
5. I find that if I sit quietly for even a few moments, a flood of thoughts rush into my mind and I find myself following multiple strands of thought, often without how each one began.
6. If I'm distracted by some unexpected event, I can focus my attention on what I have been doing.
7. During periods of relative quiet, such as when I'm sitting on a train or a bus or waiting in line at the store, I notice a lot of the things around me.
8. When an important solo project requires my full and focused attention, I try to work in the quietest place I can find.
9. My attention tends to get captured by stimuli and events in the environment, and it is difficult for me to disengage once that happens.
10. It is easy for me to talk with another person in a crowded situation like a cocktail party or a cubicle in an office. I can tune out others in such an environment even when, with concentration I can make out what they are saying.

Now that you have assessed where you fall on each of the dimensions of Emotional style, get a piece of paper and draw six horizontal lines, evenly spread from top to bottom:

● Label the first line Resilience, and continue through Outlook, Social Intuition, Self-Awareness, Sensitivity to Context, and Attention.

● Label each extreme of each dimension, from left to right. For Resilience, the ends are Fast to Recover and Slow to Recover. For Outlook, Negative and Positive. For Social Intuition, Puzzled and Socially Intuitive. For Self-Awareness, Self-Opaque and Self-Aware. For Sensitivity Context, Tuned Out and Tuned-In. For Attention, Unfocused and Focused.

Now, depending what you scored on each of the six questionnaires, a mark on each line. You can see at a glance your Emotional Style. Maybe you are a sort of Positive person who is Fast to Recover, Socially Intuitive, Self-Opaque, Tuned IN, and Focused. Maybe you are

Negative but Fast to Recover, Puzzled about the social surround. Self-Opaque, and Unfocused. Whatever your Emotional Style, knowing it is the first step toward understanding how it affects your health and your relationships, and the first step toward deciding if you would like to move it toward the right or the left on any of the dimensions. You can make your Emotional Style diagram.

Resilience

1 _____ 10

FAST TO RECOVER SLOW TO RECOVER

Outlook

1 _____ 10

NEGATIVE POSITIVE

Social Intuition

1 _____ 10

PUZZLED SOCIALLY INTUITIVE

Self-Awareness

1 _____ 10

SELF-OPAQUE SELF-AWARE

Sensitivity to Context

1 _____ 10

TUNED-OUT TUNED-IN

Attention

1 _____ 10

UNFOCUSED FOCUSED

Emotional Regulation and Resilience

How to Manage Anger?

*“Don’t teach your children never to be angry: teach them HOW to be angry.”-
Lymann Abbott*

On the spectrum of emotions, anger is one of the most difficult emotions to regulate. We can help our children as well as us adults learn how to manage anger responsibly. If a child is not taught how to regulate his anger the reactive patterns last into adulthood. How to regulate anger is necessary for all of us. Research studies show the following ways are very helpful for regulating anger-a shift from reactive anger to responsive and responsible anger.

Children develop emotional intelligence when they feel understood. By offering empathy-even with limits-we teach children that all their feelings are okay but always have a choice about how they act.

1. Do not let yourself move into a “fight or flight” zone by taking a few deep breaths.
2. Empathic Listening. Try to see your child’s reactive anger from his perspective. Often, when your child doesn’t feel heard his anger escalates. By contrast, when your child feels understood, he will be calmer-even when he doesn’t get his way.
3. Acknowledge the anger. You don’t have to agree, and you don’t have to disagree. Just acknowledge his truth in the moment. Once he feels heard, his truth will shift.
4. Don’t get hooked by rudeness and personal attacks. Parents are hurt when children yell at them. But your child does not hate you even when he says he hates you. You may say “Ouch! You must be so upset to say that to me. Tell me you are upset. I’m listening.” As he realizes that she doesn’t have to raise her voice or go to the attacks to be heard, she will develop the capacity to express her feelings more appropriately.
5. You don’t accept or ignore your child’s misbehavior. Set whatever limits are necessary to keep everyone safe, while acknowledging the anger and staying calm and compassionate. Encourage her to say what upset you. Compassionate listening

facilitates openness and honesty in your child. This way you also provide role modeling to your child.

6. If your child is in a full meltdown, don't talk except to empathize and reassure her that she is safe. Remind yourself that tantrums are nature's way of helping immature brains let off steam. Children don't yet have the frontal neural pathways to control themselves as we do. The best way to help children develop those neural pathways is to offer empathy to them any time they get upset. (This is called the emotional backpack).
7. Anger is a defense against threat. It comes from the "fight, freight or freeze" response.
8. Make it safe for your child to move past anger. If they feel safe expressing their anger, and we meet their anger with compassion, the anger will begin to melt.
9. Stay as close as you can. If a child says, "Go away," say, "You are telling me to go away, so I am moving back, ok? I won't leave you completely alone with these scary feelings, but I am moving back as far as you want. I'm here with you with a hug when you're ready."
10. Keep yourself safe. When your child pushes your button, hold her wrist if you can tolerate it and stay compassionate, and say, "I don't want that angry fist so close to me. I can see how angry you are. You can push against my hands but not hurting." Kids don't really want to hit us. Most of the time, when we move into compassion and they feel heard, kids stop hitting us and start crying. It's ok to just lovingly welcome her meltdown. When children get whiny and impossible to please, they usually need to cry, with our empathic support.
11. Acknowledging her anger will help her calm down a bit. Then let her go under her anger by softening yourself. If you can really feel compassion for this struggling child, she'll feel it and respond.
12. Don't analyze, just empathize. Once you recognize the feelings under anger, she will probably pause and stop lashing out. You can help her surface those feelings by focusing on the original trigger: "I am sorry you can't have the———you want, Sweetie. I'm so sorry this is so hard." When our loving compassion meets her wound, that's when she collapses into our arms for a good cry. And all these upset feelings evaporate. After she's calmed down, you can talk, not lecture.

Accepting emotions like this is the beginning of emotional resilience. Gradually your child will internalize the ability to weather disappointment and learns that he can't always get

what he wants. Such an approach strengthens rather than erodes your emotional bond with him. All by taking a deep breath and staying compassionate in the face of rage.

Abridged from a mini course Helping Your Child Learn To Manage Anger by Dr. Laura Marham

Questions to reflect

1. How do you manage your own anger with your children and your life partner?
2. What resonated with you by reading this article?
3. What do you do that thwarts your emotional relationship with your children and your life partners?
4. What other ways do you use to help your children regulate their reactive anger patterns? How about you and your life partners?
5. Out of 12 steps listed in this article, which steps do you follow that works best for you.
6. Give an example when you used those steps dealing with your child's anger and your own angry experience with your life partner.

Letting Go

*Let go of the ways you thought life would unfold,
the holding of plans
or dreams or expectations-Let it all go.
...Let it all go and flow with the
grace that washes through the days.
...Let go, and the wave's crest will carry
you to the unknown shores, your
wildest dreams or destinations. Let it
all go and find the place of rest and
peace, and certain transformation.
- Danna Faulds from the Heart of Yoga*

Danna is an American poet, a long-term Kripalu Yoga practitioner and Mindfulness Meditator.

How we become free from suffering and emotional wounds is a challenge to all of us. 2600 years ago, Gautama Buddha had faced that challenge, and he found a way of becoming free from suffering. Letting go of attachment and aversion and heart-felt compassion is the way of becoming free from our self-created dukkha, suffering. We are awake from the sleep of ignorance and delusion. We become the Buddha, the awakened one.

There is an interesting parable of two Buddhist monks who are climbing a mountain to go to the top of the mountain to meet the Buddha. They were eager and moving at a fast pace. Halfway up the mountain, one of the monks fell down. He broke a leg. He could not climb any more. The other monk had to make a choice. Leave his friend in distress and keep on climbing the mountain and take care of the monk with a broken leg later. You know what he chose. The Buddha resides in our compassionate heart. He lives in the realization of our full and open hearted presence, in this precious moment.

We all have two lives. The second one starts when we realize we have only one life-this life, these precious moments. What we have is the presence of loving kindness right here and now. The path is letting go of something that prevents us from being fully present right now, right here, our open hearted presence. We let go of thoughts, attitudes and emotions that keep us from inhabiting the blessings of letting go.

Ask: what is in between me and presence? If you let go of that block a little, you find a little peace. If you go a lot, you find a lot of peace. And if you let go absolutely you will find absolute peace and tranquility. This is the path of becoming the Buddha, the awakened one, the enlightened one. We all have the potential of being fully awakened. We come home.

There is an interesting Indian story of a monkey trap. A monkey has rice in his hand. He wants to grab a kernel that was at the bottom of a coconut. He could not reach it as he had rice in his hand. He was trapped. In order to reach the kernel, he had to let go of the rice in his hand. He has to free his hand. Our ego has a survival value. If we want to go beyond survival we need to be free from the ego trap that prevents us from realizing our higher self. We let go of our contracting and constraining to more open space within us. Practicing mindfulness and loving kindness facilitates the process of releasing the tension in our body, mind and heart.

What do we release? What do we let go?

Remove the shoulds: I should not be angry. I should not be sad. I should not open my mouth. I should be quiet. I should never fail. I should be perfect. You should not be yourself. You should be like your brother or sister. Such shoulds will be big obstacles in the path of becoming our True Self. We need to let go of such judgmental and critical voices so that we can realize our authentic self. How do we attain our goal?

Recognize what is happening in your body, breath, mind and heart-my bodily sensations, tension and tightness. Recognize what is happening.

Allow what is happening. Do not reject or resist. Let it be. **Accept** what is happening. Breathe in and let in. Breathe out and let go. Notice the changes taking place in your body, mind and heart.

Inquire or **investigate** with an open mind. What causes what you are experiencing? Practice in-breath and letting in and out-breath and let go. Relate to this process mindfully

with loving kindness, with softness and tenderness. Light is here. Love is here. Loving awareness is here. Life is here.

This is inner work. It requires patience and perseverance. It is life practice.. We can also apply this model to do interpersonal work.

Read, reflect and practice the wisdom teaching of Gautam Buddha:

Gate, gate, paragate bodhi swaha.

Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone beyond the beyond. What a blissful awakening!

* * * * *

Perfection And Excellence

We have been given a message to be perfect in what we do. However, we do not realize how perfection syndrome creates a lot of problems for us and for others connected with us in different walks of our life. Perfectionists become hard on themselves and on the people associated with them. Listed below are four points that differentiate between perfection and excellence:

1. Perfectionists often see mistakes as failures. People who strive for excellence as opposed to perfection accept mistakes are inevitable. They don't let mistakes define them. They see mistakes as a way of learning from them. Perfectionists see mistakes as evidence of their inadequacy or inferiority. They believe and insist that they and others should be above reproach. This is not only unrealistic. It's a hard burden to carry.
2. People confuse perfection with excellence. Excellence is a healthy striving to be outstanding and magnificent. It promotes personal growth and improvement. Perfectionists not only expect excellence, but they have such painfully high standards that anything short of perfection is intolerable. Unlike excellence, perfectionism is a narrow, intolerant expectation that we will never make mistakes or have imperfections. Excellence on the other hand, allows for imperfections and mistakes; it's a way more forgiving than perfectionism. The primary difference between excellence and perfectionism is the way making mistakes is viewed. They may take one mistake and use it to deem themselves as complete failures or inferior. They get stuck on their downfalls and are unable to see the potentially positive aspects of mistakes or missteps. When we expect perfection from us and from others, we are inevitably going to be disappointed.
3. Perfectionists value the outcome, not the process. When we pursue excellence or high standards, we value the process, not just outcomes. We know that the learning, joy, challenges, relationships and memories that we build up along the way are often as important as the outcome. When we value the process, we are better equipped to endure the see-saw dynamic of life because we know that the outcome is not always an indicator of our effort, skills or intelligence. Failing to achieve a goal is particularly disappointing for perfectionists because they are result-focused, not process-focused. Perfectionists tend to only see what they did wrong and can't find any value in doing something imperfectly. They also miss out on the enjoyment. Clinically, I have found that many perfectionists end up compromising their health and relationship in the name of winning or achieving. Sadly, they do not relish in the process of learning, growing, and healthy striving for excellence.

4. Perfectionists have a hard time adjusting their expectations. Perfectionists are often rigid. They operate as if there is only one right way to do things, there's only one right way to be successful, and other rules are unacceptable. If one chooses excellence, his/her thoughts are fluid, meaning he or she can adjust goals and expectations as needed while still embracing patience and grace with oneself and others.

Let me end with a cartoon story. Boss says to his employee "Your productivity has been outstanding, your performance has been impeccable, and I am someone who believes in rewarding perfection. Too bad about the speck of lint on your tie."

* * * * *

The Power of Mindset

We all have a mindset. Our mindset is one of the most powerful tools we have that can influence our health span and lifespan. Positive mindset or growth mindset works in our favor and enhances health outcomes. Negative mindset goes against our wellness and diminishes health outcomes.

Be aware of our mindset. Is it a fixed mindset or growth mindset? If we have a fixed mindset it means that we view ourselves as unchanging. We will be afraid of making mistakes. We are hypercritical and we tend to think that change is hard or not worth making. A growth mindset embraces the outlook that we can improve and change. Research studies show that people with this mindset are resilient, have higher performance levels, have better relationships, less stress and less anxiety. They also have improved brain functions.

We can move from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset. Apply the following three ways for changing the mindset:

1. Take life as a challenge and not as a struggle. Struggle means you're stuck. Challenge is an opportunity to grow, to discover new ways to face and solve challenges. We don't focus on being stuck in the struggle. We rise to the occasion and view challenges as opportunities to grow.

2. Focus on the journey and not on the destination. It is a journey of getting personally healthy or cultivating healthy relationships. It is an ongoing process leading you towards your destination. It is living in alignment with your goal.
3. Be mindful of your thoughts and words. Pay attention to how many of our ruminating thoughts are negative, judgmental or hypercritical or self-degrading. Talk to yourself as if you're talking to a dear friend. Befriend yourself. Be kind and compassionate to yourself. This is a game changing stance. You will notice an improvement in your emotions. You may feel more joyful and hopeful.
4. Take small steps rather than a long jump. Start with something relatively easy to change. One step at a time. Be patient with yourself. Be kind to yourself. Such a mindset will help you continue your journey to wellness.

* * * * *

Setting Boundaries

Have you ever caught yourself repeatedly saying “Yes” when deep down you really want it to say “No. This regiment can leave you feeling overwhelmed and out of control.

Why Setting Boundaries Is Crucial?

Many of us struggle with the concept of setting boundaries due to a mishmash of unresolved personal history and unconscious reasons. Yet, establishing these boundaries is essential not just for our own health and sanity but also for surviving and thriving with our personal creative ventures and professional relationships.

The Clarity Tool: Understand Your Own Needs

Here is something to help. Before you can effectively set boundaries, it’s crucial to understand why you need them. Is it to protect your time, your energy, or your health? This understanding gives your brain solid reasons to uphold these boundaries. For example, during a family crisis, I need to protect my health. Similarly, to write my book, I need to safeguard my creative space to handle stress better. For writing my book, I need to set boundaries so that our efforts don’t get diverted. Feeling into the “why” can give you insight and energy to get the ball rolling.

Real Life Application: Work and Personal Relationships

Scenario 1: At Work

Setting boundaries at work. Imagine feeling overwhelmed at work. Using principles of nonviolent communication, you might express to your boss, “I’ve been feeling overwhelmed and anxious due to my workload and need some breathing room to remain productive.” This approach opens a dialogue, helping you negotiate your work conditions with less conflict.

Scenario 2: In Personal Relationships

In a personal context, like feeling ignored when your partner is constantly on the phone, a gentle approach using “I” statements can make a big difference. You could express, “When we are together and you are frequently on your phone, I frequently feel ignored and unimportant”. This is honest communication, and it can bring inside the other person who may have been unaware and lead to mutual understanding. And it enhances your relationship quality and mastering the art of saying “no.”

The ability to say “no” is a critical aspect of boundary setting, yet it is often the hardest. Reframing how we view the word “no” is essential. It’s not about rejection or selfishness. It’s an affirmation of your integrity and a necessary step towards maintaining our well-being and relationships

The Psychological Hurdles of Saying “No”

it’s natural to fear the repercussions of saying no, like disappointing others or facing rejection. However, by acknowledging these fears through writing or speaking we gain perspective and can articulate our needs more clearly. Remember saying “no” allows us to be more present and supportive in our relationship, Is an act of self-compassion.

Practical Steps to Strengthen Your “No”

Start with low- stakes situations and gradually build up your confidence, whether it’s declining dessert or an extra drink.. Each “no” adds to your sense of self- control and integrity. Over time, this builds a resilience that enables you to handle more significant challenges without regret, guilt or anxiety.

Conclusion

The Power of Positive Refusal saying “No” is not about neglecting something. It is about affirming something else - a healthier, happier you. By setting clear boundaries, you not only protect your well-being, but also enhance the quality of your relationships. So, embrace the bravery and generosity inherent in saying “No.” It will make your “Yes” more powerful and meaningful.

Extract from The Psychological Hurdles of Saying No by Elisha Goldstein’s Blog June 13, 2024

How to Deal With Regrets

We all regret small as well as big mistakes we make in our life. Our regrets can either shackle us to the past or serve us as an engine for a change. It depends on how we tackle our mistakes.

We can be a meticulous planner, priding ourselves on making thought out decisions, turning down a dream offer in a different city to stay close to our family. As the years passed, we watched our friends climb the career ladder, while we remained in a stagnant position. This regret gnawed at us, manifesting in sleepless nights and a constant feeling of uneasiness. The stress from a regret begins to take a toll on our body, leading to chronic headaches, high blood pressure, and a weakened immune system.

The impact of our deep and prolonged stress has a negative impact on our holistic and multidimensional wellness: physical, mental, emotional, relational and spiritual wellness. Our brain's prefrontal cortex, the region associated with decision making and compassion and our limbic system, the region with emotional processing, is in overdrive. This constant activation leads to persistent negative thoughts and anxiety cycles. The stress hormones cortisol and adrenal flood our nervous system preparing the body for a 'fight or flight' response over time. Over time, the chronic stress disrupts our neurotransmitter's balance, contributing to mood disorders and further exacerbating the feeling as though we always have 'tension' in our body, even when we constantly try to breathe deeply.

Our emotional turmoil also leads to poor lifestyle choices. We may find solace in comfort foods, leading to weight gain and further health complications. Our once active life dwindles as we withdraw from friends and family, feeling ashamed of our perceived failure. The cycle of regret and poor health becomes self-perpetuating, making it increasingly difficult for us to break free. We know we need to make changes, but we feel trapped by past decisions. We may think of getting help from a therapist specialized in Cognitive Behavior Therapist (CBT). Through therapy, we learn how to reframe our thoughts and views as a learning opportunity rather than a life sentence.

In addition, we begin to learn and practice mindfulness techniques such as paying our non-judgmental loving and compassionate attention to what happens in our body, breath, mind, heart(emotions) and in our relationships and spiritual dimension of our life.

Finally, we start forgiving ourselves and others for not being with us empathically when we go through difficult times and stand by ourselves and join their compassionate hands with us. They stand by us when we navigate obstacles and challenges, ups and downs, defeats and victories. We learn how to stay resilient and strong.

Creative Resilience: Rising from the Ashes

Your grief for what you have lost lifts a mirror up to where you're bravely working. Expecting the worst, you look, and instead, here's the joyful face you have been waiting to see.

-Rumi (translation Coleman Barks)

Jennifer Bichanich: Rising from the Ashes

In this deeply moving episode, Fill to Capacity podcast host Pat speaks with writer and life coach Jennifer Bichanich. Jennifer opens a window on her experiences with profound loss, including losing her beloved husband when the church they were remodeling went up in the flames. Despite immense grief and despair, Jennifer found ways to rebuild her life and discover her creative resilience. Working with a shamanic healer, delving into therapy, and joining the Modern Widows Club, an organization that supports and mentors widows. She found community, healing and the possibility of creating something beautiful from the ashes of her life, something creative from the ashes.

Everyone has turning point events in their life. Something happens and your life is never the same. You can create a new life. Chaos is the beginning of new life. Who am I? What is my dream of life? What is my vision of life? What is my lifeline, life purpose? Am I willing to be reintroduced to myself? I have come back to life.

There are many gifts that can be found in grief if you're open to receiving them. One of the gifts is finding yourself by observing yourself, keeping the windows of your mind and heart open. You really love yourself. It is called the golden rule. Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. We do not talk about loving ourselves. That really has to come first before you love your neighbor. You cannot offer love to others if you do not have love within you. We have to be a friend to ourselves and to love ourselves.

We all go through grief. We need to sit with and honor that grief. We have to honor that grief and work through it. In working through it the most essential thing is the loving voice we use to talk to ourselves.

Abridged from a talk by Jennifer Bichanich: Rising from the Ashes published in DailyGood.

From Learned Helplessness to Learned Hopefulness

Dr. Martin Seligman is one of the leaders in the field of Positive Psychology. He is well known for his book on “Learned Optimism”. He has developed a theoretical model of psychological well-being and happiness. He describes five core elements or constituents of psychological well-being. He has created the PERMA model for happiness.

Using the key PERMA, he breaks down the elements like this:

P-Positive Emotion:

It is the ability to maintain optimism, and to view your own past, present, and future from a constructive perspective or a positive outlook. We all go through up and down episodes. If we focus on the “down” episodes we create a cycle of depression and hopelessness-Learned Helplessness. We can make a shift from Learned Helplessness to Learned Hopefulness. There are health benefits that come with being optimistic and positive.

E- Engagement:

This could be described as the “flow” state of mind, where we are immersed in an activity or task that brings us enjoyment. The body is filled with positive hormones and neurotransmitters that boost our sense of well-being.. We are present, focused and joyful. Time moves quickly and we are absorbed in present moment awareness.

R- Relationships:

As humans we are wired for relationships. We are interdependent. We have a need for healthy and fulfilling relationships. Connections that make us feel love, intimacy, and strong emotional and physical interactions that help us thrive. Positive relationships with our families, peers, friends, and colleagues bring support so that we don’t feel alone.

M-Meaning:

This is where spirituality comes in, having a connection to something greater than ourselves. Meaning can come from doing volunteer work, parenting, or creative self-expression as well.

A-Accomplishments:

Setting goals for ourselves, putting in the effort, and reaching them gives us a sense of achievement, pride, and fulfillment. Having that intrinsic motivation rather than just external motivation contributes to feelings of happiness and well-being. Self-discipline is the key to accomplishing our goals.

Extract from Flourishing by Dr. Martin Seligman

Reflect on the five elements of well-being and happiness and relate each element to you. Are you needing more emphasis in certain areas?

How can you find more happiness within each of these elements?

How To Break Negative Thought Loop

We have two kinds of thought loops: Positive and Negative.

Positive thoughts are traits like openness, higher self-esteem and lower social anxiety. On the flip side some kinds of negative thinking notably rumination and worry. They tend to be associated with being closed to new ideas and poor mental health. Anxiety and rumination form a negative feedback loop where one causes the other. We need to be mindful when we are ruminating so we can disrupt the loop.

Listed below are five strategies to disrupt the negative loop.

1. Identify, recognize when we're ruminating. Rumination is usually about minor issues. We often get lost in rumination without realizing

Experiment: Fill in the following blanks to create a list of topics you ruminate on.

Replaying conversations, you had with someone who tends to believe he/she is always right, who has a superiority complex.

Replaying memories of experiences of failure from the past. Give examples.

Thinking that you're not as good at ————-as you'd like. Inferiority complex.

Thinking about things you should be doing to be more successful such as———.

2. Become aware of memory loss. You tend to focus on and remember what went wrong in your interview with someone. You constantly rehash what went wrong.

Experiment: Do you remember any current rumination topics where memory bias might be playing a role.

Answer the following questions:

What is your ruminating mind telling you?

What is the objective data telling you about whether your ruminative thoughts are likely to be correct?

Are you recalling feedback as harsher than it was or recalling blips in your performance as worse than they were?

3. Distinguish between worry rumination and helpful problem solving. Rumination and worry doesn't help you to solve problems and make good decisions. Rumination and worry usually just make it difficult to see forest for the trees.

Experiment to check for yourself whether ruminating and worrying lead to useful actions. Try tracking the time you spend ruminating or worrying for a week. If one week is too much of a commitment you could try two days-one weekday and one weekend day. When you notice ruminating and worrying write down the approximate number of times you spend doing it. The following day, note any times when ruminating/worrying led to useful solutions. Calculate your ratio: How many minutes did you spend over thinking for each useful solution it generated.

4. Reduce Self-criticism. Reducing self-criticism is a crucial part of reducing rumination. Give yourself a compassionate rather than a critical message.

Experiment to practice self-compassion as an alternative to Self-criticism. Try the following three-minute writing exercise. Identify a mistake or weakness that you want to focus on and write for three minutes using the following instructions: Imagine that you are talking to yourself about this weakness from a compassionate and understanding perspective. What would you say?

5. Recognize when you're criticizing yourself just for feeling anxious. Should/shouldn't thinking traps are common problems for anxiety-prone people. These can come in several varieties, virtually all of which can prolong and intensify rumination-for example, "I shouldn't ever let anyone down." which is an example of excessive responsibility taking.

Try to notice when you get caught in should/shouldn't thinking traps in which you criticize yourself just for feeling anxious. For example, "I should be able to handle life much better" or "I shouldn't get anxious about such little issues. If this happens, you give yourself compassion for the fact that you feel anxious regardless of whether the anxiety is logical or not. Think of it this way. If a kid was scared of monsters. You wouldn't withhold compassion and empathy just because the monsters aren't real.

Treat yourself with the same caring. A common mistake people make is to think they need to give themselves excessive encouragement, praise or pep talks while they're feeling anxious-you don't. Taking a patient and compassionate attitude about the fact you're experiencing anxiety is an overlooked strategy that helps anxious feelings pass away.

Experiment: Try this Switch out any should(s) hidden in your self-talk and replace them with prefer. For example, instead of saying 'I should have achieved more by now" try I would prefer to have achieved more by now." This is a simple, specific and repeatable example of how you can talk to yourself in a kinder, more patient way. These tiny self-interventions may seem ridiculously simple, but they work. They may not seem like they shift your anxiety to a large degree; however, they can help you disrupt your rumination just enough to give you a small clear mental space. This allows you to start doing something useful rather than keep ruminating.

Adapted excerpt from The Anxiety Toolkit by Alice Boyes, PHD

Going Through Difficult Emotions

The Delta variant has caused difficult emotions in almost all of us. Emotions like fear, anxiety, anger, rage, confusion, uncertainty, disappointment, despair and many more. We are not alone experiencing such difficult emotions.

We practice mindfulness to relate to such painful emotions. Of course, mindfulness meditation will not protect us from the virus, nor will it banish all our difficult emotions so that we feel great about everything. But mindfulness meditation has three superpowers:

1. It can let us know what we're feeling so that we don't let our emotions "drive the bus."
2. It can provide some short-term relief.
3. It can provide some perspective, some insight, and some wisdom to have a more balanced relationship to the latest round of turbulence.

Let us see how it plays out in practice.

Fear and Anxiety:

In mindfulness meditation we do a quick gut check. Is our pulse racing? Is our mind catastrophizing? Do we feel like jumping out of our skin? Okay! Anxiety and fear may be present. The point is not to judge ourselves for having such feelings. It is also not to justify or criticize them. Notice anxiety has arisen. The point is to relate to our fear and anxiety compassionately. The mindful move here is to both accept anxiety with self-compassion. We can also use meditative tools to calm down. Keep it simple: Taking nice, long and relaxed breaths with good, full exhales. Notice the presence of the body and bodily sensations which are happening at the present moment.

Meditation can also be used to gain some insight and perspective on the fear we're feeling. Suffering is an unavoidable part of the human condition. How we relate to it is significant. Meditation helps us to lessen the grip of fear and suffering. When we relate to fear and suffering compassionately we get an opportunity for personal growth and transformation.

Anger:

We may feel anger at the unvaccinated and at the politicians who have enabled them or those who give misinformation about the vaccines. But just like anxiety, even when this anger is justified, it's not helpful. It is not motivating us to do anything productive. It is only causing suffering. Like fear and anxiety, in mindfulness meditation, we notice the presence

of anger. Where it feels and how it feels in the body, the quacking arms, the tensing jaw, the belly tightening and rapid chest breathing. So, when we feel it, we pause and do not react, do not rant. Don't go down rabbit holes. Secondly, we do simple meditative exercises like taking a slow long deep breath or unclenching the jaw and calming just as with fear. And thirdly, we remember that these people's decisions are not under our control, and hope and pray that they will not suffer.

Confusion, Disappointment, and Uncertainty:

Even if we're not dealing with fear or anger, now is just a confusing time. People have different levels of safety protocols, the situation is chasing, and things aren't as over as they once seemed. It is totally understandable that we might feel disappointed, disoriented, or just plain dissed by the Delta variant. Fortunately, the same superpowers apply.

First accept and notice: We are confused, sad, disappointed, or uncertain. It is time to self-care. We can do loving kindness meditation for ourselves like a mother holds a young child close to her bosom. Disappointment is hard; uncertainty is hard; it's okay to feel this. Or maybe it might be something more energetic, like fast walking meditation. Whatever tools we may use, mindfulness helps us know when it's time to reach for it.

And lastly, some wisdom. This unpredictability and impermanence is, like pain, an unavoidable part of the human experience. This is how things are: we plan, and sometimes our plans get ruined. This doesn't mean we give up and don't plan anything-it means we do our best, knowing that outcomes may not be under our control. We do grow by learning to relate more mindfully and compassionately to fear, anger, confusion, disappointment, and whatever we may be feeling right now. This is the invitation that life extends to us.

Adapted excerpts from Ten Percent Happier Weekly August 29, 2021// ISSUE 216

Rewiring Your Brain

Our brain is not static and unchangeable. However, research on neuroplasticity has shown that this is not the case. We know that the brain can evolve, change and adapt over time, and that neuroplasticity is present throughout our lifespan-though it is more pronounced during our development. By actively rewiring the brain, exploring what it means, how it works, and steps we can take to harness the power of neuroplasticity for healing, optimizing well-being, as well as personal growth and development.

The exciting concept of rewiring the brain, also known as designing the mind, brain hacking, and biohacking, is based on our growing understanding of neuroplasticity. By actively rewiring our brains, we can improve our cognitive abilities and overall well-being. In this eBook, we will delve deeper into the topic of rewiring the brain, exploring what it means, how it works, and the steps we can take to harness the power of neuroplasticity for healing, optimizing well-being, as well as personal growth and development.

The brain is a completely holistic enterprise, making it difficult to describe functional areas or specific aspects without oversimplification. However, there are still useful ways to discuss what we know. It's essential to remember that the brain and the human nervous system are the most complex systems we know of in the universe. The brain alone contains over a trillion cells, with approximately 86 billion of those being neurons. These neurons communicate with each other, forming connections, neural pathways, and circuitry that allow us to do everything from walking and talking, to tying our shoes, speaking languages, doing mathematics, driving cars, and riding bicycles. The ability to perform such a wide range of activities is due to the brain's development of neural connections, pathways, and networks.

We should, however, remember that the brain is a highly complex, organic system, whose activity resembles waves of energy moving through its neural architecture. In an optimized brain, these waves of energy and processes flow like a beautiful symphony, with everything working in harmony. What we call mind is an emergent property of our brain's complex neural activity and its interactions with other energy fields. Dan Siegel, MD, a leading theorist and practitioner in the field of interpersonal neurobiology, describes mind as a flow of energy and information within (our own neural processes and bio-energetic systems) and between (in relationship with others and the natural world).

Before we delve into the topic of rewiring the brain, it's worth discussing the key requirements for the brain to function in an optimal manner. Dr. Dan Siegel explains that the brain requires differentiation. This means that, as the brain grows more complex to

solve more complex problems, it develops a greater number of neural networks and specialized areas for different functions. Additionally, these different parts of the brain must be highly integrated and communicate with each other efficiently and fluidly for optimal brain function. Thus, an optimal brain is described as a highly differentiated, integrated, and synchronized system, leading to a beautiful sense of flow and optimal cognitive and self-regulating capacities. I would highly recommend Dr. Siegel's work, particularly his book "The Developing Mind," for anyone interested in delving deeper into this topic.

The concept of rewiring the brain and optimizing its performance is about achieving an optimal state of integration and flow as well as avoiding being stuck in rigidity or moving into chaos. One could imagine this optimal flow as a river flowing between the banks of rigidity on one side and chaos on the other.

As the brain differentiates to solve increasingly complex problems, it also needs to integrate, which means all the differentiated parts are connected and communicating efficiently with each other to maintain this optimal synchronization and flow. Thus, the process of brain optimization occurs at higher and higher orders of complexity as the brain continues to develop and evolve.

The process of developing neural networks occurs when "neurons that fire together wire together," as stated in a well-known quote from Canadian neuropsychologist Dr. Donald O. Hebb. By repeatedly associating activities, certain neurons in the brain continuously fire together, allowing neurotransmitters to cross the synapse between them. Over time, these connections become stronger and form stable neural networks. We can think of these neural networks as well-developed pathways or roadways. The more well-developed and robust they become (neuronal thickness and myelination), they are then like newly paved, well-lit roadways that are easy to follow.

We learn by repeating activities again and again and associating certain inputs with certain behaviors and outcomes or rewards, which, over time, become habits that are supported by neural pathways in the brain. Our ability to tie our shoes, for example, is a learned behavior supported by specific neural pathways in the brain.

Both positive and negative habits are formed in this manner— positive habits like remembering to brush our teeth every morning and negative habits like overeating or being prone to lose one's temper. These all correspond to neural pathways in the brain. We've repeated behaviors again and again, and as a result, these neural pathways become deeply ingrained, leading to almost automatic behaviors. Many of us have had the

experiences, for example, when driving on the highway, of mindlessly taking the exit we normally use every day to get home, even though our intention is to drive to a different destination requiring a different route.

Neuroplasticity, however, allows us to change these habits if we choose to do so. These pathways can be modified. The brain can form new neural connections, reorganize existing ones, and even generate new neurons in certain areas of the brain through a process known as neurogenesis. This process allows us to learn new things, acquire new skills, create positive habits that are serving us, and even recover from brain injuries. In fact, studies have shown that even in old age, the brain retains its ability to change and adapt.

The idea of rewiring the brain is closely related to what is called “self-directed neuroplasticity.” This approach is based on integrating neuroscience with positive psychology, a branch of psychology founded by Dr. Martin Seligman and focused on human flourishing and well-being. Positive psychology emphasizes positive emotions, life satisfaction, and happiness, and is distinct from other forms of psychology that focus more on pathology and suffering.

Self-directed neuroplasticity combines insights from positive psychology with what we know about the brain and neuroplasticity —how the brain learns and changes. This approach is about intentionally directing our thoughts and actions to promote positive changes in the brain and its functioning.

It’s worth noting that positive psychology doesn’t aim to demonize negative emotions, which are a normal part of being human. Instead, it encourages us to cultivate more positive emotions like appreciation, gratitude, joy, love, and compassion. Dr. Rick Hanson, a renowned author and expert in self-directed neuroplasticity, has written extensively about this approach. His work combines neuroscience, positive psychology, and contemplative practices like mindfulness meditation to help people optimize their brain function and promote well-being.

The term “self-directed” refers to activities that we can do on our own to promote neuroplasticity and rewire the brain in ways that benefit us. By engaging in these activities, we can enhance the brain’s ability to adapt and change, leading to improved functioning and a greater sense of flow in our lives. Rather than getting stuck in the rigidity or chaos that can result from a dysregulated, stressed-out brain, we are able to navigate challenges with greater ease and take on new opportunities with confidence. So, what can we do to optimize our brain health and promote neuroplasticity? The good news is that the same things that are healthy for our body are also beneficial for our brain. Regular exercise, a

balanced diet rich in nutrients, and adequate sleep promote neuroplasticity and brain health. Aerobic exercise may actually be the most effective means for increasing neuroplasticity.

Additionally, stress management techniques like mindfulness meditation, yoga, and various deep breathing exercises can increase neuroplasticity, neurogenesis and healthy brain functioning, while ameliorating the negative effects of stress on the brain. Engaging in activities that challenge the brain, such as learning a new skill or language, playing an instrument, or solving puzzles, can also promote neuroplasticity and neurogenesis. These activities encourage the formation of new neural connections and help maintain existing ones.

Exercise

- Exercise can boost the production of a growth factor called brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) which promotes the growth of new neurons in the hippocampus, a region of the brain that plays a crucial role in memory and learning. Moreover, exercise increases blood flow to the brain, which supports healthy cognitive function.

Proper Hydration and Diet

- By drinking enough water and other fluids, we actually improve cognitive performance. Additionally, studies have shown that a plant-based diet can play a preventive role in reducing the risk of dementia, a condition that impairs brain function over time. It also protects the brain from the effects of aging on memory and cognitive performance.

Restorative Sleep

- Our body habits have an internal healthcare system that operates at night. During deep sleep, the brain sloughs off damaged cells through our glymphatic system, effectively cleaning itself—a little bit like the defragmentation of a computer's hard drive. Dreams are also important for brain health. During REM sleep, the brain consolidates memories, processes emotions, and stimulates creativity. Dreams help us process and make sense of our experiences and emotions and can even provide insight and solutions to problems we may be facing. It is important to spend a sufficient portion of our sleep time in deep sleep and REM sleep, which together amount to what is called restorative sleep.

Sane and fulfilling relationships:

- As social beings, the quality of our interactions with the people in our life is another critical factor that impacts our overall physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. For

instance, the Harvard Study of Adult Development, the longest longitudinal study of adult development ever conducted, has found that the most powerful contributor to overall well-being is the quality of our relationships. The science now confirms what we intuitively know—long-term, quality relationships positively impact our health, longevity and happiness. They provide us with a sense of belonging, social support, and emotional stability, which are important for the healthy functioning and optimization of our brain and nervous system.

Mindfulness:

● Another strategy for increasing neuroplasticity involves mindfulness meditation. By placing our attention on an object—usually the body and the breath—and then noticing our attention wandering and bringing it back, again and again, we’re building up neural networks that support greater focus, better concentration, and the ability to have our attention remain with a particular object —what is called attention stabilization. The practice of mindfulness also can increase emotional balance. Many of us experience intense emotional reactions, which Daniel Goleman refers to as the “amygdala hijack,” where the emotional part of our brain hijacks our thinking brain, sending us into a fear-based fight, flight or freeze reaction. Regular mindfulness practice improves our capacity for emotion regulation, allowing us to have greater cognitive control and emotional balance.

Regulating the Nervous System:

The autonomic nervous system, which regulates almost everything in the human body, has two branches, the sympathetic branch and the parasympathetic branch. Activation of the sympathetic branch upregulates our nervous system for alertness, but can elevate further into stress, panic, aggression or rigidity. This is sometimes called the “stress response.” Activation of the parasympathetic branch downregulates our nervous system for relaxation, rest and digestion and is sometimes called the “relaxation response” or the “rest & digest response.” However, an overactive parasympathetic response could lead to inattentiveness, lethargy and in extreme cases to immobility and a lack of awareness of one’s surroundings. Both branches are always active, and there is an appropriate balance between the two, depending on the activity we are engaged in.

When we want to sleep, we rely on the parasympathetic branch to help us unwind, but when we drive a car, we need more sympathetic branch activity to stay alert. What is wonderful is that the autonomic nervous system is connected with the breath, giving us direct access to it. Thus, regulating our breath is the key to regulating our own autonomic nervous system and to self-regulation altogether.

Inhaling activates the sympathetic branch, while exhaling activates the parasympathetic branch. By emphasizing the out-breath, we can bring ourselves back down when we are too upregulated. By emphasizing the in-breath, we can wake ourselves up when we are too lethargic. Breathing techniques like straw breathing, box breathing, and 4-7-8 breathing can help us regulate our own nervous system at will. By doing so, we can stay in a more resourced state, which can have a positive impact on our mental and physical health. By regulating our autonomic nervous system appropriately, we can regulate our own emotional responses and behaviors, thus putting us in a self-leadership position or more in the driver's seat of our own lives.

The Window of Tolerance

Dr. Dan Siegel has developed a helpful framework called the "window of tolerance." We could also call this our "zone of resilience." It refers to an optimal range of neurophysiological and emotional balance where we are able to respond to life circumstances and even challenging situations in a relatively well-regulated, relational and skillful manner... or from our best self. When something triggers us outside of this window of tolerance, we tend to either get too upregulated, leading to the fight, flight or freeze response, resulting in chaos or rigidity, or to shut down and dissociate, neither of which are optimal for responding to life's everyday challenges.

We can learn skills to find our way back into the window of tolerance, which is not the same as our comfort zone. Ideally, we learn to operate within the window of tolerance even in uncomfortable and very challenging situations.

We can respond to life with wisdom, knowledge, discernment, and skill, instead of being triggered into a reactive, fear and survival mode. Ideally, we want to spend as much of our time as possible in a responsive, relational mode, where we can decide how to respond from a place of openness and relaxation, optimizing relationships and inviting others to experience safety and have their social engagement system online. By practicing these skills regularly, we can rewire our brain, developing a greater capacity to respond to life with this zone of resilience, even in challenging situations

States and Traits

Being consistent in our practice of self-directed neuroplasticity with self-regulating practices like meditation, breathwork and mindful movement makes a big difference. Another way to explain the process is by using the two categories of 1) states and 2) traits. States refer to temporary states of body and mind... physiological, mental, and emotional states. For instance, deep sleep, the dream state, and the waking state, which can include various balances of alertness and relaxation, are all related to different brainwave frequencies such as delta, alpha, beta, and gamma brainwaves. States of being can also include temporary emotions like frustration, depression, openness, appreciation, gratitude, and so forth.

On the other hand, traits are more like lasting personality types that are harder to change, such as being an optimist or a pessimist. However, by cultivating positive and/or prosocial states like openness, compassion, gratitude, and appreciation, we can over time turn these into traits and improve our well-being. Cultivating particular physiological, mental and emotional states again and again (practice) eventually turns states into traits making use of our brain and nervous system's capacity for neuroplasticity and neurogenesis.

Self-directed neuroplasticity and positive psychology techniques can help us cultivate these positive states and turn them into traits. For example, maintaining a gratitude journal can help us cultivate a state of appreciation and gratitude and over time develop a great default trait of being grateful and appreciative. By using various techniques and practices, we can rewire our brains for enhanced well-being, life performance, and happiness.

Conclusion:

Practicing self-directed neuroplasticity with consistency can dramatically influence how we experience and lead our lives. In essence, we can become neuro-architects, learning to reshape the neural architecture of our own brain and nervous system in positive life-enhancing ways. When you think about this, it's quite an amazing opportunity!! We have the power to become the best version of ourselves. With consistent practice, we can create lasting changes, leading to greater happiness and fulfillment and a better life. We have the power to exercise self-agency and become lifelong learners to sculpt the brain that will optimize our lives in any direction we choose

I hope you found this information useful. You can continue to explore topics like rewiring the brain, neuroplasticity, and positive psychology with experts like Dr. Rick Hanson, Lara Boyd, Dr. Jud Brewer, and Dr. Kristen Willeumier to name a few. By deepening our understanding of our own brain and

nervous system and engaging in simple self-regulation practices, we can optimize our brain's healthy functioning throughout our lifespan.

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How to Become a 100 Percenter

Recently I came across an interesting article about how to invest our core beliefs and values to help and serve others who need our help.

The term 100 percenter is created by Charly and Lisa Kleissner, tech entrepreneurs who wanted to invest their money in a meaningful way and inspire others to do the same. That's why they started the 100 impact network, which brings together like minded people who invest all of their assets into social environmental causes.

These are some serious investors, but being 100 percenters isn't just about money; it's about making 100 percent commitment to encouraging your life that reflects your values. As Weissner says, "social transformation begins with personal transformation." Just think of all the decisions you make every day from the big to the mundane-where you invest your super, what you eat for dinner, where you buy your coffee, what you do for work. What kind of work do you do? What kind of relationship do you have? What do you do after you retire from your work? Do you make choices which align with your core beliefs and values? Do you invest your talents, your knowledge, your skills, your passion in projects that can make the world better?

How to become a 100 percenter? There are two steps that will guide you to get the wheels in motion:

1. Be clear about your core beliefs and values. What things would you like to change in your personal and interpersonal arenas? Do you want to change the environment? Do you want to work for peace? Articulate things that are most important to you. In which area do you want to volunteer? Children? Family? Homelessness? Environment? Education? Health? Try something until you are hooked on, From this, a list of values will emerge.
2. Align your values with your actions. If protecting children is your high priority, consider whether what you do at work, or buy, or employing a single mother affects kids in some ways. Surround yourself with likeminded people. If your friends smoke, it will be hard to be a non-smoker. Find a mentor or coach whose values you respect.

If you care about health. Should you still have that sugary dessert? If you care about animals, how can you eat meat? Be aware of your inconsistencies. The key is to be conscious about your choices and do the best you can.

Four Shapes of Transformation

We all can evolve and transform ourselves. Ken Wilber has described the evolution of moral and spiritual development in four stages: Cleansing Up, Growing Up, Waking Up, and Showing Up.

Cleansing up is an inner process of purifying ourselves which has to do with our inner attitudes. It is a change in consciousness itself. Mature morality is largely a series of religious encounters leading to a deep transformation of consciousness.

Cleaning up is mostly about the need for early impulse control and creating necessary ego boundaries- so you can actually show up in the real and much bigger world.

Growing Up refers to the process of psychological and emotional maturity that we go through. The social structures that surround us are highly color, strengthen, and also limit how much we can grow up and how much our own shadow self we will be able to face and integrate.

Waking Up refers to any spiritual experience which overcomes our experience of the self as separate from Being in general. It should be the goal of all spiritual work including prayer, sacraments, meditation, yoga, and any kind of religious and spiritual services. The purpose of waking up is not perfection but surrender, love, and union with God. This is the meaning of liberation, salvation or enlightenment.

Showing Up means bringing our heart and mind into the actual suffering and problems of the world. It means engagement, social presence, and a sincere concern for justice and peace for others beyond ourselves. Only cleaning up, growing up, and growing up is not enough. Showing up is the full and final result of the prior three stages.

Adapted from Richard Rohr, "Four Stages", homily, May 20, 2019

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Mindful Awareness and Inner Growth

Empowering Yourself by Non-grasping

Ask the question when your mind is calm and clear:

- Are you using your mind as a tool to think thoughts or does it feel like your mind is driving your thoughts?
- Who is in the driver's seat? You or your mind?

As we know it is our mind that imprisons or liberates us. How do we liberate our mind from the grasp of non-grasping? Mindfulness Meditation is a way of re-establishing a sense of empowerment in the midst of the thinking process. It is not a matter of not suppressing thoughts but of influencing how much we grasp onto or resist the process of our mind. Non-craving and non-grasping is a way of freeing ourselves from the self-created cage and flying freely in the vast sky of pure Self-consciousness. It takes time to empower and free ourselves from the knot of craving and grasping that has been built for a period of time. Patience and perseverance helps us to attain the goal of liberation called Moksha, Salvation. We become Jivanmukta, free while living in the world. It becomes a living Reality.

Play Your Own Instrument

Destiny doesn't mean that your life is predetermined. Therefore, to leave everything to fate and not actively contribute to the music of the universe is a sign of sheer ignorance. The music of the universe is all pervading, and it is composed on different levels. Your destiny is the level where you will play your tune. You might not change your instrument but how well you play is entirely in your hands.

-Rumi

Rumi was a mystic Sufi poet and like other mystic and Sufi poets of Persian literature, Rumi's poetry speaks of love which infuses the world. Rumi describes love in the following words:

Love is the flame which, when it blazes up, burns away everything except the Everlasting Beloved.

Rumi's longing and desire to attain this ideal is evident in the following poem from his book the Masnavi.

I died to the mineral state and became a plant.

I died to the vegetable state and reached animality.

I died to the animal state and became a man.

Then what should I fear? I have never become less from dying

At the next change (forward) I will die to human nature,

So that I may lift up (my) head and wings (and soar) among the angel.

I will become non-existent; non-existence says to me (in tones) like an angel,

Truly, to Him is our return.

Destiny doesn't mean that your life has been predetermined. Therefore, to leave everything to fate and not actively contribute to the music of the universe is a sign of sheer ignorance. The music of the universe is all pervading, and it is composed on totally different levels. Your destiny is the level where you will play your tune. You might not change your instrument but how you play is entirely in your hands.

Guest House

This being human is a guest house.

Every morning a new arrival, a joy, a depression, a meanness

Some momentary awareness comes

as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all

Even if they are a crowd of sorrows

*who violently sweep your house,
empty your furniture,
still treat each guest honorably.
He may be cleaning you out for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
meet them all at the door laughing
and invite them in.
Be grateful to whoever comes
because each has been sent
as a guide from beloved.*

In the verse in Masnavi, Rumi describes The Lover's Cause as separate from all other causes.

Love is astrolabe of God's mysteries.

Why should I seek? I am the same as He. His essence speaks through me.

Jalal al-din Muhammad Rumi (30 September 1207 December 1273) was a thirteenth century Persian poet and a Sufi mystic. His Masnavi is considered one of the greatest poems of the Persian language. Rumi's influence has transcended national borders and Ethnic divisions. His poems have been translated in many of the world's languages. He is considered as one of the most popular in many parts of the world and he has become one of the "bestselling" poets in the United States and "Glory of Faith" in Arabic countries. He is most commonly called Rumi. He was buried in Konya and his shrine has become a place of pilgrimage. Upon his death, his followers and his son Sultan Walad founded the Mevlevi Order of the Whirling Dervishes famous for the Sufi dance.

Rumi died on 17 December 1273. A splendid shrine was created on his burial, His epitaph was:

When we are dead, seek not our tomb in the earth, but find it in the hearts of men.

Listening With an Open Mind and an Open Heart

"When you listen to yourself, everything comes naturally. It comes from inside, like a kind of will, to do something. Try to be sensitive. That is Yoga."

-Petri Raisanen

"In order to read I need a reading device. In order to listen I need a listening device. In order to make my mind calm and clear I need to meditate. In order to get support, I need true friends." - J P Dave

"Our hearts are ever restless," wrote Saint Augustine, "until they find their rest in Thee".

Spiritual traditions all over the world recognize that human beings are creatures with restless hearts. We are not content to be just content. Dogs, cats, bumblebees, and whales do not know, as far as we know, pine to be something other than what they are. They accept their dogginess or whaleship.

The human animal, on the other hand, is by nature discontent. We want to be somewhere where we are not or become something we are not. We have implanted in our breast a divine discontentment that moves us. We seek salvation, liberation, transformation, regeneration, the Kingdom of Heaven or Paradise, the Pure Land, We call it many things. But it is greater than ordinary every round of existence.

The British author Francis Thompson wrote of a restless heart under the image of a pursuit in his poem "The Hound of Heaven."

"All Nature's wordless voice in thousand tones arise to proclaim:

Joy unto you, O people of Earth

A pilgrim has returned back from the other shore.

A new saint is born.

Peace to all beings."

Teaching can only be fruitful if it is lived.

Power and Tones of Vibes

We are vibrational beings, creating positive and negative energy. We create positive and negative energy within us and in people close to us. Vibrations either empower us or deplete us, uplift us or bring us down. It depends on what kinds of vibrations we emanate knowingly or unknowingly. Our vibrations have an impact on us as well as on others close to us.

Awareness and discretion are significant steps in generating and sustaining our positive energy in us and in others. This is palpable, measurable, and even quantifiable. Our own experience provides feedback. Research studies demonstrate the impact of the tone and power of vibrations on different structures and functions of our brain.

Take a few moments before you interact with anyone today and evaluate what your vibes are. Our vibes are generated and sustained by our perceptions, thoughts, feelings and emotions and behaviors. It is so powerful when we get our vibes by thinking our way into a state of cooperation, collaboration, solution focused thinking and compassion and invite others to join us.

Is it a lot of work? Does it take vigilant and constant focus? Yes, of course. Check where your attention is focused on. We see and enjoy the impact and profound connection and results we experience every day. If we have a challenging week, we shift to a challenging day. If we have a challenging day, we shift to a challenging hour. Amplify your vibe. It affects our nervous system, a shift from Sympathetic Nervous System to Parasympathetic Nervous System creating a deep Relaxation Response.

Positive Self-Talk

When we face uncertainty or challenges in life, it is not uncommon to experience strong negative feelings, negative thoughts, and even negative self-talk. It is important to recognize or to be aware of negative thoughts, and feelings going through our mind and heart.. It is important to learn how to reframe our thinking and focus on our inner strengths. All the lessons we learn from the challenges we face in our life. Positive self-talk empowers us to face life's challenges with resilience, self-confidence, and self-esteem. The goal of positive talk is to train the mind to recognize strengths and opportunities for improvement or growth, and reasons to try again.

Positive self-talk helps us identify our strengths to things that we will do traits that we can be proud of and aspects of our personality we feel good about. We do not have to let the setbacks and challenges derail our goals and dreams. We are prone to self-doubt, negative messages and thoughts that are harmful to our confidence and resilience. Our self-confidence plays a huge role in our mental well-being. It helps us to get through challenging times, times of disappointment when the efforts we put in don't end with positive results or the outcomes we would have expected or wanted.

Research done by Positive Psychologists provides a number of benefits of positive self-talk.

- Builds resilience.
- Develops a positive outlook on life.
- Helps us identify our strengths.
- Instill self-confidence.
- Pushes us to seek out things at which we are good.
- Empowers us to face challenges and take risks.
- Provides courage to go after dreams and goals.
- Helps us improve problem-solving and decision making under stress.
- Increases self-compassion and cultivates prosocial behavior.
- Can be used for routine task completion and for preparation for situations that create anticipatory anxiety and worry.
- It is very easy to think about what went wrong throughout the day.

Positive self-talk gets us to recognize what went well or what we did well to see the bright ray of light in the darkness. Sharing our experiences with people in our life establishes bonds between us and people associated with us. There are times when we share our positive experiences and what went well may be perceived by others as bragging about ourselves. It is a good idea to ask people what their strengths are or identify what they are good at and where they need more work to do. It's good and helpful feedback. It is advisable not to offer feedback until it is asked for.

Ask people in your life what they are good at, what are their strengths, and what are the important areas in their life where they excel and where they need to improve. Offer genuine suggestions when they ask for it. Focus on the efforts they make and not the outcomes. As the Bhagavad Gita states, “Your duty is to focus on the efforts you make and not the outcome of your efforts.” Praise the sincere efforts they make, not the outcomes or fruits of their efforts. Not everything always turns out the way we wanted. We learn from our shortcomings. We make our self-effort to work mindfully on our shortcomings. With an open mind and an open heart, we learn from our shortcomings and make necessary modifications.

Small Changes Matter

In the journey of transformation small changes really matter. Finding small ways to transform our mental processes make a huge difference.

Expanding our gratitude even just a little can have a snowball effect. Be aware of the negativity bias or Yes-But mentality. So, if we just start making a habit of appreciating each other, our relationships can truly transform. Similarly, even small increases in our physical activity can really transform our health. And renewed commitment to practicing yoga, mindfulness, meditation and prayer can go a long way.

When the holiday season rolls around, let us ask ourselves: How can I be more patient, generous, and compassionate with my family and friends this new year? How can I practice forgiveness and letting go of my holding on to the past grievances? How can I bring stillness and spaciousness into our interactions with my closest companions? How can I meet with patience, and recognize the sacred and eternal dimension of life?

There is one gift we can all give to us and others that is loved and appreciated. You guess it: It is the gift of Presence

Being Alone and Being Lonely

Some people like to be alone, but very few enjoy being lonely. The difference between the two states was aptly explained by the existential philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich, who said, "Our language has created the word 'loneliness' to express the pain of being alone. And has created the word 'solitude' to express the glory of being alone."

Periods of solitude can help clear the mind or, conversely, focus it. Loneliness is a different state of mind. It is associated with sadness and being cut off from others. People can feel just as lonely in a crowd as they can on their own.

But loneliness is nothing to be ashamed of. It's natural to feel lonely at times, and even people who have friends and family all around them can feel alone. The key, perhaps, is not to let that feeling take control. Loneliness doesn't have to last forever and nor should it.

Rules of Happiness

1. Happiness is not being upbeat all the time. Instead, think of it as a trait-one that helps you to recognize even the tiniest moments of joy, to fully embrace the good stuff in life without pause, and to know that even when things aren't going well, this hard time too shall pass. Science shows that happiness is one of the best defenses against hardship.... The key to uncovering happiness is to be on the lookout for the sweet moments in life, big and small, and to really take them in.

2. Getting involved in something outside of your day-to-day routine has the power to infuse daily life with greater meaning.... Ask these three questions:

1. What do I care about beyond myself?
2. What small action can I take today that is in line with this belief?
3. How will my actions affect the world in the long run?

Then take these values and turn them into verbs. If you value family time, start putting smartphones aside during dinner, create a plan for a monthly family outing.... If it's the environment, consider volunteering your time or donating money to an organization that supports that cause, or both.

3. Be generous: it's contagious. There is no experience more uplifting than giving. At the base of generosity is compassion, which research finds has a direct impact on well-being. You know what's cooler? Generosity is generative: The more you practice, the better you feel and the easier it becomes to be generous! Plus, it's contagious. Your act of generosity very well might inspire someone else to act kindly toward another.... Or get more connected. Try smiling at a stranger, tell a friend that you appreciate them, or tell a loved one how much they mean to you. It all adds up- and adds to your happiness quotient.

Remember. Real life isn't all rainbows and kittens, but real happiness is always available, even in rough times.

Cognitive and Behavioral Mastery

Radio NST(Non-Stop-Thinking)

Even if we are not talking with others we don't feel settled or quiet. This is because we're still tuned to an internal radio station, Radio NST (Non-Stop Thinking). Even when we're still sitting still, with no external stimuli, an endless inter dialogue may be going on in our head. We keep on ruminating the past dialogue.

We need to learn to turn off Radio NST. In Plum Village, the retreat center in France where I live (Thich Nhat Hanh), we focus on practicing mindful consumption of sensory food as well as edible food. Not only do we choose to drink alcohol or eat meat, but we also do our best to talk and to think as little as possible while we are eating, drinking, washing dishes, or doing any other activity. In order to be able to live our life, we have to stop that radio inside, turn off our internal discourse.

It is important to become aware of what we feel, not just what we think. When we touch the ground with our foot, we should be able to feel our foot making contact with the ground. When we do this, we can feel a lot of joy in just being able to walk. When we walk, we can invest all our body and mind into our steps and be fully concentrated in each precious moment of life.

In focusing on the contact with the earth, we stop being dragged around by our thoughts and begin to experience our body and our environment in a wholly different way. Our body is a wonder! Its functioning is the result of millions of processes. We can fully appreciate this only if we stop our constant thinking and have enough mindfulness and concentration to be in touch with the wonders of our body, the Earth, and the sky.

It's not that thinking is always bad. Thinking can be very productive. Thoughts are often the product of our feelings and our perceptions. So, thinking may be seen as a kind of fruit. Some kinds of fruit are nourishing. Others are not. If we have a lot of worry, fear, or anguish, that is very fertile ground for thinking that is completely useless, nonproductive, and harmful. When we know we are more than our thoughts, we can make the

determination not to allow our thinking to take over and dominate us. Do our thoughts support our true intention in life? If not, we need to push the “reset” button. If we aren’t aware of our thoughts, they run rampant through our mind and take residence there. They don’t wait for an invitation.

Extracted and abridged from SILENCE by Thich Nhat Hanh

Stopping And Letting Go

Stopping bring body and mind together, back to the here and now. Only by stopping can you realize calm and concentration, and encounter life. By sitting quietly, stopping the activities of body and mind, and being silent within, you become more stable and concentrated, and your mind becomes clearer. Then it’s possible to be aware of what’s happening inside you and around you.

Begin with your body. When your body is still, when you don’t need to pay attention to any activity other than your breathing, it will be much easier for your mind to let go of its own habitual running, although this can take some time and some practice. Once you have learned how to stop your mind, you’ll be able to stop your mind even when your body is moving. Focusing on the way your breathing combines with the physical movements of your daily activities, you can live with awareness instead of forgetfulness.

Just like everything in the world, your thoughts are impermanent. If you don’t grasp a thought, it arises for a while and then fades away. Clinging to thoughts and harboring desires for such things like wealth, fame, or sensual pleasures can bring about craving and attachment, leading you down dangerous paths and causing suffering to yourself and others. Recognizing thoughts and desires, allowing them to come and go, gives you space to nourish yourself as well as to get in touch with your deep aspirations.

Habit Formation

All of us want to form good habits in different areas of our life: physical, mental, emotional, relational, and spiritual areas of our life. Habits are learned behaviors. We can cultivate good habits as well as bad habits. We can learn new and good habits and get rid of harmful habits. How can we accomplish this worthy goal?

There are four steps we can take to form good habits: Cue, Craving, Response, and Reward. Let us take one unwholesome habit that you really want to break. You go to the kitchen, and you see a bag of potato chips. You are not hungry, and you know that eating potato chips is not good for your health. But seeing the potato chips (Cue) you feel a strong urge (Craving) for the chips and automatically or habitually you grab (Response) a handful chips to satisfy (Reward) your craving. You get an instant short- term reward- pleasure of eating the chips. And you pay the price for succumbing to the harmful craving. If you do not take the right steps in time, you will be enslaved by these harmful habits.

So, what do you do? Cue: Make the bag of chips invisible- out of sight, out of mind or get rid of it. Another example. You want to break the habit of overusing your mobile phone because it becomes a distraction every now and then when it buzzes. Keep the phone away from you or out of your reach. When you take this step consistently, you are breaking this wrong habit. Now you are in control of your craving. You are not yielding to it. This is your wise decision, the right choice. With practice you form a good helpful habit.

Cue is a stimulus that triggers craving. Craving is in the mind. You use mindfulness practice to relate to the cue and let it go without getting attached to it and bound by it. Mindfulness practice provides insight for the problem and helps us change our mindset. We learn how to respond to the cue or the stimulus wisely. This is another step for changing the harmful habit and forming the wholesome habit. When we take the right step we feel good and happy. That is the Reward. It reinforces the cultivation of good habits.

There is another model for changing our habitual patterns. It is described in the ancient spiritual book the Bhagavad Gita. It is a dialogue between Arjuna, the disciple, shishya, and Sri Krishna the Spiritual teacher, Guru. Arjun asks an important question to Krishna. He said, "I Know I should not be carried away (response) by the pull of the senses that may lead me on the wrong path, and I do not want to do that. What is the force in me that takes me on the harmful or sinful path even against my will?" Shri Krishna tells Arjuna that it is your selfish passion Kama or desire that takes you away from the right path. That is the enemy, the insatiable fire in the form of desire...Therefore, control your senses in the beginning and slay this sinful destroyer of knowledge and Self-realization."

Desire has three houses: senses, mind and intellect. Desire's favorite house is five senses. Kama or lust is very powerful. Desire for power, pleasure, prestige, and possessions are also very strong. It is the lust for power that in our modern age is much responsible for destruction and misery. We need to recognize when the desire arises, and we need to nip it in the bud before it grows bigger and stronger.

Desire's second house is the mind where it lives. We need to remain awake and aware when the desire arises in our mind. Mindfulness, Meditation and Prayer are very helpful in regulating our harmful desires.

Kama's third house is intellect. Intellect is our mental faculty that discerns between right and wrong and helps the mind in making right choices. What desires and thoughts we entertain in our mind is very crucial. As the Gita says, the mind causes bondage or freedom. So how we use our mind is very important.

Kathopanishad, the ancient book of spiritual wisdom, offers a holistic model to understand the power of senses and how to regulate them. The body is the chariot, the Self as the master of the chariot, the intellect as the charioteer, and the mind as the reins. The senses are the five horses, and the paths are sense objects. The person who is united with the body, senses and mind is the enjoyer. One who lacks understanding and has an undisciplined mind, has uncontrolled senses which are unmanageable like the vicious horses of a charioteer. But one who possesses the right understanding and has a disciplined mind has senses under control like the good horses of a charioteer.

Don't Rain On the Parade

When you have an interesting idea or a moment of inspiration, or thought of a new project, or felt enthusiasm bubbling up inside of you. Your notions are not fully formed but they have promise and you like them. Then what?

If a family member or friend responds to your idea in a neutral or positive way, even if they raise some practical questions, you are likely to feel good. But if that same person were to lead with a mainly negative response focusing on problems, constraints, and risks no matter how valid they are, you'd probably be a little bit deflated and put down or obstructed. Think about a situation that may have happened to you, as a child or as an adult. How was it perceived by someone in your family or by a friend? Was it supported or obstructed? How did it impact you? Did you pursue or did you give up?

This works the other way as well. If someone comes to you with an inspiring idea or passion, and you pour cold water on it with doubts and objections, they're not going to feel good, period- and not good about opening up to you in the future. Take a moment to consider this could have happened in some of your relationships.

And this works the same way inside your mind. If you pour cold water over your own hopes and dreams, you will live cautiously between the lines, sure, but you will never know what warmth and light might have spread if you would let them catch fire. Do you back your own play, cheer your own parade? Or are you too quick to doubt limitations, cost analyses, reasons why not? What kind of life would it be, never to rain on a parade, your own or anyone else's?

Abridged and modified version of Rick Hanson's article Don't Rain On the Parade

How Do We Use Our Mind?

“Mind is the cause of suffering, and the mind is the cause of happiness. Mind causes bondage and the mind causes freedom” - The Bhagavad Gita It’s up to us to decide how to use our mind. As Einstein once said: “You can’t solve problems with the same mind that created them.”

We create a heavy load of cognitive and emotional baggage that drain our energy. This is where wakefulness, mindfulness, and spiritual practices like Mindfulness, Meditation and Prayer are very helpful. This morning, I called APA, American Psychological Association to renew my APA membership. The operator asked me to tell her my birth date. When she heard of my age she was surprised and asked me the secret of my 99 years long life. I responded to her question in one word- Mindfulness Living. She asked me how she can get more information about Mindfulness. I told her to read my article that I am writing now.

Our mind is a great gift given to us by loving, kind, and gentle God that dwells in our heart. By practicing Mindfulness Meditation lovingly, the inner door of awakening and enlightenment opens helping us walk on the path of joy, peace, and fulfillment. Compassionate Gautam Buddha discovered the path of enlightenment by practicing Loving Kindness Meditation. This path is open to everyone whether one is gnostic, agnostic or neither of the two. It is a path of self-awareness, a path of awakening, open mindedness and inner awakening and liberation. It is about bringing new teachings. It is about embodying our learnings in our daily life. They are more like navigation aids that point to us some radical changes in the way we see, perceive our daily living life and walk daily on the right path.

Cultivating Positive Qualities

Cultivating Appreciative Joy

“Whatever you intend, whatever you plan, and whatever tendency toward, that will become the basis upon which your mind is established.” (SN 12,40)

“Develop meditation on appreciative joy, for when you develop meditation on appreciative joy, any discontent will be abandoned.” (MN 62)

The emotion indicated by the term appreciative joy is a deep one and to be distinguished from mere amusement...Once we open to all the ways others have good things happen to them, this becomes a boundless source of our own good feelings.

Daily Practice

Cultivate appreciative joy at every opportunity. Get in the habit of noticing the good things that happen around you, not as they relate to your own gain but also as they affect and benefit others. Being happy about other people being happy is a practice itself. It is good to loosen the habit of always relating what you see to yourself and to develop an appreciation for the perspective of others. Feel the joy you experience from this.

Abridged from Dharma Wheel Tricycle Online Courses

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Cultivating Gratitude

Whether you think of gratitude as the “greatest virtue” as Cicero did or “social glue” as researchers do, gratitude has the power to change our life. Gratitude is commonly defined as the recognition of receiving something positive through our own efforts or from an external source-be it a person, a pet, nature, or a power higher than you. Gratitude is a gift coming from the heart. It does not matter how small or big the gift is. It fills our hearts with joy. Like Baskin Robbins ice cream gratitude comes in lots of flavors. Or saying it in more colorful ways gratitude shows up as a rainbow. Gratitude holds a lofty place in the pantheon of positive emotions.

Like a Joshua tree in the desert, gratitude often grows in hard environments. Pain, loss, and grief can give us a greater appreciation of life’s blessings. “The way I affirm gratitude is to recognize its fragility of goodness,” said meditation teacher Matthew Brensilver. Acknowledging the impermanence of all that is good in our lives affirms their value and allows us to experience them more deeply. When I have felt grateful, it has been through the fleeting but satisfying connection to bright spots in daily life-the sun warming my back, the flower offering its fragrance, the chirping sound of a bird or a pleasant conversation with a grocery store cashier.

Feeling gratefulness and expressing it doesn’t have to be on Thanksgiving Day. Any day can be Thanksgiving Day. Offering your helping hand to an elderly person or opening the door for someone is a gift. Somebody offering a seat in a plane or offering their hand to an old person to bring his suitcase down are examples of showing gratitude. Offering food to hungry people or helping refugees leaving their country and home are great examples of showing gratitude. We feel such kindness in our bones.

Neuroscientific research shows expressing gratitude increases activity in the anterior cingulate cortex, which plays a role in directing attention and changing our mental filter based on what is relevant to us and it makes us feel good about our life. “By creating intentions and taking action in certain directions, you’re changing the way your brain perceives the world.” says Alex Korb, a neuroscientist at UCLA. Cultivating gratitude enhances the chances of heartwarming feelings emerging over time. There are many ways to welcome gratitude in our life. There are many ways to practice gratitude as there are grateful people.

Four ways to explore gratitude:

1. **Notice Beauty:** Notice something lovely and beautiful today. Write or draw about that beauty.
2. **Notice Tenderness:** Notice acts of tenderness between others-a couple, a parent and a child, a guardian and a pet or bring to mind a favorite scene of tenderness from a movie, television show, or book. How do these moments resonate for you?
3. **Notice Creativity:** Notice any good ideas you have today in any area of your life- a new way of doing something, a response to a question somebody asks you, your perception of another person's behavior, your understanding of something you read, a new recipe you invent and try. How do these good ideas feel in your belly when they arise? Write or draw about that.
4. **Notice Connection:** How does it feel to have a new idea that might help your community? Have you generated energy around ideas like that and connect with others who can move it forward? Or maybe you have been called to help someone else's new idea take off. Write or draw about how you connect to ideas that can benefit others.

Think about how to bring the practice of attitude into every area of your life.

Source: The Heart of Gratitude by Kelly Baron in Mindful, June 2020

Gratitude-The Parent of All Virtues

In our busy and stressful modern world, it can be easy to forget to slow down and acknowledge the bounties that many of us already possess, such as shelter, food, and love. In our efforts to achieve and progress, we may, at times, succumb to pessimism, and lose sight of these simpler and more essential gifts.

Practicing grateful helpful thinking helps turn our attention away from negativity and turn towards what is working in our lives, and how far we have come on our journey. This approach can lighten and brighten our outlook, releasing the pressure of constant worry and effort.

While setting goals is natural, gratitude balances this urge with the inherent message that we have and are enough. Gratitude allows us to rest and feel contentment and joy in the present.

We can develop our capacity for appreciation by starting a gratitude journal or taking a few minutes each day to reflect on all the good in our life. We may feel gratitude for a sunny afternoon, steady employment, a loved one's help, or a game to fetch with a dog. Focusing on these gifts can have a powerful and even transformative effect on our lives.

I have selected 11 Quotes on Gratitude. Making a habit of giving thanks for all we have a powerful and even transformative effect on lives:

Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others. -Cicero

Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow. - Melody Beattie

Let gratitude be a pillow upon which you kneel to say your nightly prayer. -Maya Angelou

Acknowledging the good you have in your life is the foundation for all abundance. -Eckhart Tolle

Nine-tenths of wisdom is appreciation. Go to find somebody's hand and squeeze it, while there is time. - Dale Dauten

Your bounty is beyond my speaking. But though my mouth be dumb, my heart shall thank you. -Nicholas Rowe

Joy is the simplest form of gratitude. -Karl Barth

O Lord that lends me life, lend me a heart replete with thankfulness! -William Shakespeare

When I started counting my blessings, my whole life turned around. - Willie Nelson

I know for sure that appreciating whatever shows up for you in life changes your personal vibration. You radiate and generate more goodness for yourself when you're of all you have and not focusing on your have-nots. -Oprah Winfrey

I am grateful for what I am and have. My thanksgiving is perpetual. -Henry David Thoreau

Perpetual Kindness: Core Spiritual Value

Everyone loves the idea of kindness. Thinking of themselves as a kind person, but somehow, the practice of kindness has receded into the background in a culture rife with selfing and cynicism. Yet kindness remains our best outside of the foundation of loneliness of being human. As Adam Phillips and Barbara Taylor say, "Although kindness is central to all our spiritual traditions, it has somehow become our" forbidden pleasure. Kindness consistently preoccupies us, and yet most of us are unable to love a life guided by it." These two authors define "Kindness is the ability to bear the vulnerability of others, and of oneself." As Albert Einstein says, "A hundred times every day I remind myself that many inner and outer lives are based on the labor of other men living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received, and I am still receiving." "Nothing can make our life or the lives of other people more beautiful than perpetual kindness." wrote Leo Tolstoy.

"Practice kindness all day to everybody and you will realize you're already in heaven now," wrote Jack Kerouac to his wife Susan Sontag. Half a century later, the Dalai Lama placed a single exhortation at the center of his ethical and ecological philosophy. He says, "Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible." Nothing broadens the soul more than the touch of kindness. "The kinder and more thoughtful the person is, the more kindness he can find in other people." From "A Calendar of Wisdom: Daily Thoughts to Nourish the Soul.

Kindness is like true love. Love is real when we sacrifice ourselves for another creature. Only this kind of love is true love. And only in this kind of love do we see the blessings and intrinsic reward of life.

* * * * *

Humility

Humility is a virtue that elevates our consciousness. Arrogance is a vice that diminishes our consciousness. Humility lifts up. Arrogance brings us down. Arrogant people not only tweet about themselves but also use insulting words about those who are humble. Humble people speak in a non-judgmental and kind way. What can I do for you is the voice of a humble person. What do I get from you is the voice of an arrogant and conceited person. A humble

person talks less about his accomplishments while an arrogant person brags about his accomplishments.

In chapter 13 of the Bhagavad Gita twenty characteristics are described to evolve on a higher level of consciousness. Out of the twenty characteristics three characteristics, evolutes, are mentioned in the first two verses (verses 7 and verse 8). They are amanitvam- absence of vanity or pride, adambhitvam- absence of hypocrisy, and anahamkara- absence of egoism.

James (4:100) says in the Bible, "Humble yourself before the Lord, and he will lift you up."

Zen Story: Your Cup of Tea Is Overflowing.

A scholar went to a Zen master to learn how to be enlightened. The Zen master welcomed him and made tea for him. He poured the tea from the kettle into the empty cup of the visitor. He kept on pouring and it started overflowing. The visitor asked the Zen master why he kept on pouring the tea into the cup that was already full. The Zen master told the visitor that his mind was flooded with too much bookish knowledge. He needs to learn how to be still and humble and keep his mind open and free to learn wisdom.

Nine Steps To Practice Humility by Mother Teresa

1. Speak as little as possible about yourself to avoid bragging or blowing your own trumpet.
2. Mind your own business rather than poking into others' business.
3. Avoid curiosity to find faults or shortcomings of others.
4. Accept contradictions and corrections to learn about yourself. Nobody is perfect.
5. Accept insults and injuries.
6. Accept being forgotten and disliked.
7. Be kind and gentle even under provocations.
8. Choose what is hardest to do to be stronger.
9. Don't dwell on faults or limitations of others.

The Act of Giving

When we invest our time, energy, or resources into improving another person's circumstances, we affirm their worth and potential. This can manifest in various forms, from mentoring a young person, volunteering for a cause, or simply tending an ear to someone in need.

Here is the interesting point: The act of giving not only enriches the recipient's life but also brings a sensation of fulfillment and purpose to the giver, creating a bond that transcends material and touches the essence of our shared humanity. Furthermore, the impact of such actions often goes unnoticed at the moment but can leave a lasting legacy. A word of encouragement, a moment of patience, or a display of unconditional support that becomes a corner's stone in one's life, inspiring them to overcome obstacles and strive for their dreams.

The beauty lies not just in the act itself but in the potential it unblocks within another person. We all have the power to be agents of change, to shape just not our destinies but also contribute to a kinder, more compassionate and connected community. Ultimately, when we make a difference in someone else's life, we discover the best version of ourselves and the true meaning of our existence.

The presence of a mentor in one's life can be transformative. A mentor acts as compass, guiding mentees through the complexities of personal and professional landscapes. They provide wisdom gleaned from experience, offering insights that books or formal education may not impact. That relationship is built on trust and mutual respect, allowing the mentee to explore new ideas and perspectives with a safety net of support.

Mentors can challenge their mentees to step beyond their comfort zones, fostering growth and resilience. The encouragement and constructive feedback from a mentor can instill confidence and a sense of direction, which is invaluable in navigating life's challenges. Moreover, a mentor's influence extends beyond immediate skill development; they often leave an indelible mark on the mentee's character and values. They serve as role models, exemplifying the qualities of leadership, integrity, and perseverance. Through their example, mentors inspire mentees to pursue excellence and to contribute positively to their communities. The power of a mentor lies not just in the knowledge they share, but in the self-belief they nurture within the mentee, empowering them to achieve their full potential and to pass on the torch of mentorship to others, thus perpetuating a cycle of growth and learning.

May today and everyday be a day where you share your natural gifts and wisdom!

Words of Wisdom

If you want to be happy, have zero expectations of others. Take 100 percent responsibility for your life and be grateful for what you have.

Self-acceptance could set us free. When we stop battling ourselves, our flaws, our strengths, the fragile, messy in between, we are no longer prisoners and need to prove, hide or to be perfect. In that surrender, we find peace. We find the courage to be ourselves. And from that space of authenticity, empathy arises. We want to see ourselves in the light of the divine essence that made us all. It's what gives us the strength to confront our own shadows, not with shame but with compassion. This is where our courage is born, where our voice becomes a force, where our love knows no bounds. Self-acceptance can open the door to love and acceptance. We can finally see ourselves as we truly are in the light of the Divine Essence that holds us all.

Both Spirituality and Humanistic psychology show us the path of the need for self-acceptance. That helps us become a great source of great peace. In that peace, we may deepen our capacity to truly love life on life's terms. By letting go of the ego's arbitrary standards of worthiness, we can truly see ourselves as we truly are. Seeing with such eyes makes the most ordinary person extraordinary.

Thanksgiving - A Day of Gratitude

With Thanksgiving approaching, I'm reminded of a venerable Jewish joke about gratitude. It goes like this: One summer day, in the old country, there was a decrepit old train slowly making its way across the Pale of Settlement. It was dusty, hot and miserable. But what made things worse was an old man in the back of the train moaning "Oy, I'm so thirsty...I am so thirsty." He repeated this over and over again, until finally, another passenger said, "Here, have some of my water- only, please stop moaning". The old man took a drink, and sure enough, for a few minutes, he was quiet. But then he moaned again, "Oy, I was so thirsty!" Speaking as a Rabbi here, we Jews love to complain-to kvetch, in the perfect sounding Yiddish-we cannot kvetch about something present, we can at least remember when we were kvetching in the past.

I think remembrance of kvetches past is an important part of cultivating gratitude generally, and Thanksgiving specifically.

Here are three examples:

1. Remembering how we have suffered in the past helps us cultivate gratitude for the blessings we have right now. Most of us take for granted the blessings we have right now. Normally, most of us take for granted the blessings we enjoy every day. In fact, we're evolutionarily wired to notice that which is wrong more than that which is right. This propensity-what psychologists call negativity bias-served us well in primitive times. By doing good things we can create positivity bias. So, on Thanksgiving and throughout the year, it is worth reflecting on the blessings that are present every day.
2. Cultivating gratitude also leads to empathy and solidarity...By recognizing the privilege and good fortune that we enjoy, we commit ourselves to lessening the suffering of others. If we choose to celebrate Thanksgiving (as I do), it offers an invitation to cultivate a more mature, ethical gratitude than just I am blessed, so everything is fine.
3. Especially this year there is so much to be thankful for, as we emerge from the worst of the pandemic: the astonishing advances of science, the shared sacrifices we made, the heroism of healthcare and other essential workers, and so much more. Even at our Thanksgiving gathering, we may have to practice wise communication, careful speech, and attentive listening. This Thanksgiving can be a time for reflective thinking and sharing our reflections.

Source: Jay Michaelson, Ten Percent Weekly November 21, 2021/Issue 228

Mindfulness in Relationships

Love - The Core of Relationship

True love knows no boundaries and no demands, no conditions. We all have been blessed to experience such unconditional love, love arising and emanating from pure heart, pure consciousness. Life begins with such pure love in the mother's womb. Life is birthing with such pure love. Life is nurtured and sustained with such pure love. Life blossoms by the loving and tender touch of the other person; life grows by the loving and compassionate support of the other person. In loving relationships, there is loving presence transcending the conditioned and judgmental mind. Such a loving relationship is not bound by space and time. Such relationships happen between strangers and maybe for a short time leaving the fragrance of connectedness.

Family is the cradle for creating, growing and sustaining such profound and rich relationships. In such relationships we experience oneness and harmony in spite of differences. We relate to each other mindfully with an open mind and heart, with empathy, kindness, and compassion. There is also emotional love. The pure love can be tarnished by the conditioned mind, the judgmental mind, holding on to the past grudges and unfinished businesses. Such love causes disruptions, distress and illness. It may lead to break ups-headaches and heartaches.

We need to awaken our hearts and clear our heads. Such work requires mindfulness practices on a regular basis. We need to make a wise choice for a greater good. Fear, anger, shaming and blaming hijack our positive emotions such as love, empathy. Kindness and compassion. Emotional self-awareness is very helpful to end a hijack. Emotional self-awareness is paying full and non-judgmental attention to what is happening in our mind and body. Deep belly breathing is a very effective way of regulating our emotional reactions. When we regularly practice processing difficult emotions and thoughts mindfully, it becomes easy to bounce back to our loving presence and compassion. We make a U turn, a shift from negative energy to positive energy. We return to our home, the abode of pure love.

Cultivating Mindfulness Relationship

Mindfulness Response and Impulsive Reactivity

"Between stimulus and response, there is space. In that space lies our freedom and power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom." Viktor E Frankl

"There is no need to see outside your windows; everything that you need to know is inside you."

"Life happens while you're busy making other plans." John Lennon

STOP

S-Stop what you're doing.

T-Take a breath. Breathe in, breathe out to settle down.

O-Observe, become aware of how you are feeling physically, mentally and emotionally and acknowledge what is happening in you at the present moment

P- Proceeding what you're doing.

ACB

A-Aware of what you're experiencing at the present moment.

C-Connect with the present.

B-Balance. Mindful breathing promotes balance

Autobiography In Five Short Chapters -a poem by Portia Nelson

Chapter 1: She says, I am walking down the street. There's a deep hole in the sidewalk and I fall in, and I am helpless. And it takes a long time but finally I do get out.

Chapter 2: I walked down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk, and I fall in again and I know where I am. It's my fault and I got out quickly this time.

Chapter 3: I'm walking down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I fall again. It's a habit. You know, this is kind of what I do.

(Many of us live in chapter 3 for a long time.)

Chapter 4: I am walking down the same street. There's a deep hole in the sidewalk and I walk around the hole.

Chapter 5: I walk down another street.

Letting Go- A story from Cynthia Kane

Have you seen a child playing with a toy in the basket while you were driving the car?

She said she wanted to put it down, but it was too heavy, and she couldn't do it.

I asked if he could loosen her grip and let it fall.

This got me thinking about all that we hold onto and how over time it becomes heavier and heavier. It can feel so heavy that we don't know how to put it down, to loosen our grip.

What you haven't been able to put down is what drives your interactions.

A past experience, story, belief-it all dictates how you're reacting to someone in your present. Today I invite you to see if you're holding onto something that's too heavy for you to carry anymore-that is creating discomfort and disturbance in your interaction. -Cynthia Kane

"Sitting Quietly for an hour everyday made me attentive, conscious of my multidimensional self. Now it isn't ritual but a joyous way of spending time with myself. I am fully present to the moments and also not fully present I am aware of. It's an attentive living while observing my not attentive self. Creativity, compassion, and empathy are the byproducts of this attentive Self in everyday living. In deep gratitude!"

-Gayatri Neena Nambiar

"The secret of success is doing ONE thing at a time."-Jack Palance

Mindfulness for Cultivating Wholesome Relationships

There are many ways in which we can use mindfulness practice for working on our relationships. One of the ways for cultivating relationships is to understand the relationship between our feelings and emotions with our needs. Our feelings are indicators of our met or unmet needs. When our needs are met, we feel happy, joyful, content, peaceful etc. If our needs are not met we feel angry, upset, sad, confused, irritated or sad.

Reflect on the following statements:

I'm feeling hurt because I wanted to be included.

I'm feeling confused because I need more information.

I'm feeling irritated because I want things to go more smoothly.

I feel angry because I wanted to be treated with respect.

Our feelings stand for what matters to us. Rather than getting in the way, we consider our feelings and emotions revealing information about ourselves. We consider as a reflection what matters to us. In relationships we need to recognize that my feelings are about my needs and your feelings. We take the responsibility of our feelings and needs and do not attribute it to others in our relationship.

We understand our feelings as pointers to our needs and learn to express them in statements. How it is met or not met. If it is met or not we take responsibility for what we feel and what we need. We act mindfully to take care of our needs. We do not engage in blaming games. Sadly, and unfortunately many people are caught up in reacting to each other and finding fault with others. Such transactions result in unfulfilled and unhappy relations. Life is lived superficially and joylessly.

When we learn and understand the fact of connecting or linking our emotions to our own needs and to communicate with others mindfully, our relationships start changing for the better. When we recognize and become aware of what is going inside ourselves without reacting and blaming.

Components of Healthy and Happy Relationships

Relationships are usually the most important part of our life. Healthy and happy relationships bring joy, happiness and fulfillment. Research studies on family systems have found the following components of healthy and happy families.

- Love. Love includes a wide range of emotions such as erotic or romantic love, affection, friendliness, support, encouragement, appreciation, cherishing, unconditional love and divine love agape.
- Inner freedom to love, light of love shining in our heart. Such love has no frustrating struggles trying to get love from ourselves or to receive love from others
- Self-discipline
- Respect from other members of the family.
- Absence of craziness, not slugging at each other.
- Sense of belonging.
- Sense of caring. Helping
- Empathy and kindness
- Taking responsibility for one's behavior.
- Generosity
- Flexibility
- Open-mindedness and open heartedness
- Absence of triangulation.
- Individuation and integration, oneness and connectedness
- Trust
- Authenticity
- Conflict resolution-moving from red flag to yellow flag and from yellow flag to green flag
- Mindfulness- non-judgmental awareness

Expectations and Judgements

Important relationships are like mirrors. They help us to see ourselves and others in our life. By looking at the mirror of myself clearly and candidly I see my own expectations and judgements of my personal behaviors and those of others related to me. The mirrors are our teachers. We learn about ourselves, our expectations and judgements and the impact of our expectations and judgments on us and others related to us.

Expectations are mental attitudes of how things should be in our relationships. Judgments tend to align with our expectations. They go hand in hand. If I expect myself to be on time and if I am late I judge myself in negative terms. What a stupid thing I did? How often do I make the same mistake? I should be ashamed of my behavior. I am never going to learn. I am a hopeless case. How many arrows of blame and shame I throw at myself! Sadly, we do the same things for others related to us. And the others related to us may do the same things for them and for others in their lives. It's an arrow throwing behavior which disconnects, divides us and distresses us and discourages us. We may feel hopeless and helpless. It's a lose-lose relationship cycle. It weakens and destabilizes and eventually destroys the bridge of relationship.

How do we remain connected with each other, support each other, help each other, appreciate each other, learn from each other and grow and thrive and blossom our relationships? When we recognize such self-harming and others-harming behaviors and engage ourselves in working diligently on ourselves personally and interpersonally, transformation takes place in each other and between each other. Such transformation doesn't happen quickly. It takes time, patience and perseverance. We begin our journey slowly and steadily and practice the art of harmonizing and healing intrapersonally and interpersonally. It's a process of transforming, going from "me" to "we"-" mwe" as Dan Siegel says.

Mindfulness Communication

Sammak vakka, right speaking, is one of the eight spokes in The Buddhist Wheel of the Noble Eightfold Path. Words matter. Words are very powerful. Words can heal us and hurt us, uplift us or downlifts us. Great harm is inflicted by words. Sharp angry words can break relationships. Words can be used to manipulate people on a mass scale. Words are interwoven in the fabric of our life. We share our thoughts, ideas, desires and feelings with others.

We communicate in many areas of our life such as in family, workplace, with friends and neighbors, in shopping, in schools, and in religious places. There are times when we talk to ourselves.

It is not only what we say but how we say it that is very important in interpersonal communication. How we communicate has a great impact on our relationships. We have inherited the capacity to communicate. If we are hardwired like flight and flight, we can develop other resources and different ways to handle it differently. We can't change inheritance, but we can learn and cultivate skills. How we communicate depends on us. We can cultivate skills of meaningful, constructive, and effective communication in all areas of our life.

When we communicate, it is not only the words we are saying. We are conveying our feelings and emotions, our desires and expectations, our thoughts and judgments, and our dreams and hopes. We are sharing our world with the listener. For building strong blocks of healthy and authentic relationships, we need to be mindful of our own inner world and be aware of what happens in our body, mind and heart, our psycho-somatic experience, when we communicate with another person. We need to be aware of what triggers unwholesome and harmful impulses within us. We need to pause, take a few breaths, reflect and respond rather than react. We need to be aware of the story or the narrative filled with negative and harmful thoughts and feelings. By practicing mindfulness regularly, we can change our habitual patterns of communication. An empathetic stance for understanding the other person and relating to the other person compassionately is essential for creating authentic and compassionate relationships.

This may be a new way for us. We keep our mind and heart open to learn it and practice it. It takes time to break old maladaptive patterns of communication.. Learning a new habit takes time, patience, and perseverance. Find what works for you and stick to it until it becomes your second nature, a new habit. Notice even a small change taking place in you. Remember the neurological fact: Neurons that are fired together are wired together. Even

one small change can have a far reaching effect. You need to reinforce the new habit to make it strong and sustainable. Then you take on another new habit. Practice it until it becomes habitual and almost effortless. Over time you change your trajectory.

Three Steps for Cultivating Effective Communication

Oren Jay Sofer, author of Say What You Mean mentions the following three steps for effective communication

1. Lead with presence
2. Come from curiosity and care
3. Focus on what matters

Lead with presence

Show up and be fully present in the moment. We can really feel it when someone is really here, present. We notice when someone is not present in conversation. We can pick up the signals.

As we know, communication is a two-way process-speaking and listening. We speak mindfully and we listen mindfully. For optimal communication presence is essential in both processes. There are many benefits of being fully present in interpersonal communication. We understand ourselves and each other clearly and deeply when we are present to ourselves and with others. We discover common ground and enrich and deepen it with presence. We understand our differences with an open mind and open heart, and we build bridges in our relationships.

We learn to respond and not react. We identify what triggers our reactions. When reactive thought occurs in our mind, we pause, stop. We look and understand the other person's perspective with empathy. And then move in the right way.

Tara Brach uses the acronym **RAIN** for working on interpersonal reactive behaviors.

R stands for **Recognize**. With the wakeful presence, scan your life and notice the place of difficulties that is bringing up challenging emotions in you. Recognize what is most predominantly going on inside of you. It might be a feeling of anger, hurt, or anxiety.

A stands for **Allow** what is happening. Let it be there right now. With allowing, we pause and make space for what's here. It does not mean that what's there is what we like at this moment.. It means that you are acknowledging and letting it be there. By allowing, you are able to deepen your attention.

I of RAIN is **investigating**. By asking or inquiring what most wants your attention. What is the most difficult part of it? You are investing your feelings or sensations in your body, feelings of failure, shame, fear and your dislikes. Pay attention to your throat, your heart, your belly. Do you feel clinching, aching, squeezed? Do you feel that you are disrespected, that you're a failure, that you are unlovable? Whatever you're feeling is felt in your body (felt sense). Become aware of the triggers that cause reactivity in your mind and action.

The investigation begins to move towards **Nurturing**, the **N** of RAIN. Ask that vulnerable place in you: how do you want me to be with you? Begin to sense now the possibility of responding to this place inside you from the most loving and wise part of you. As a way of getting in touch with you, you might take a few deep breaths and you may adjust your posture a little, facial expression that allows you to inhabit your higher self or called "future self", who we are really evolving into the most awakened heart. Stay in contact with vulnerability, listening, feeling, what does this place need. Rumi says, "Don't turn away: keep your gaze on the bandaged place. That's where the light enters you." Explore what it means to really let in love, let in healing, being the holder and the held.

After the RAIN, have some moments of resting in the heart's space and presence that is here. Just relax and let it fill you so you can dissolve into it. Time has come to love, to celebrate, and see the goodness you are. Don't fight. Let go and breathe into the goodness of who you are. Trusting and resting in the presence and that's your true home.

Communicating Emotions Mindfully

Conceptual Component

We are emotional beings. We experience a wide range of emotions, positive and negative. How we communicate our emotions in relationships is very important. Wrongly communicated emotions put a dent on our relationships. Rightly communicated emotions flourish our relationships. Recall a time when communicating your emotions to a person in a relationship with you created distance, disappointment, or sour feelings in both of you. What went wrong in communicating your emotions to the person in your life? What did you learn from your experience? Recall a time when your communication built a bridge between both of you. What went right in your communication with the other person? What did you learn from your experience?

Practicing mindfulness is the key for cultivating wholesome relationships. The first step is to become aware of the rising of emotions in you and you express them by making I statements. Such as I feel neglected, discounted and frustrated when I am not heard. In such communications there is no finger pointing, making accusations or blaming the other person for causing negative emotions in you. We own our emotions, understand the cause of having positive or negative emotions, and express them in a nonjudgmental and non-accusatory way. Like any other skill, we can cultivate authentic and constructive ways of communicating our emotions.

Experiential Component

Close your eyes gently. Sit in an upright, relaxed, and comfortable position to ground your consciousness in the present. Be aware of your bodily sensations and feelings. Notice how you're breathing at this moment. Breathe in and out slowly and deeply to relax your body and mind.. Use your bodily sensations or breathing as an anchor for steadying your wandering mind. Now you're ready to let any troubling or pleasant emotions arise in your mind. Remember when, where and what time of the day or night you felt these emotions. Feel those emotions again as vividly as you can. Recognize them and name them. They may be positive or negative emotions. Notice where you feel the emotions in your body- in your face, throat, chest, torso or belly. Become aware of bodily sensations such as pleasant, thrilling, exciting, light or aching or heavy you may feel at this time. As you are paying your attention to these sensations, notice whether they are increasing, decreasing or remaining the same. Stay with the sensations for a while. If they are unbearable, bring your attention to your breath or bodily sensations. Continue this practice as long as you desire. When you're ready take three deep breaths, open your eyes and reorient yourself with the surroundings. Notice how you feel at this time.

You have mindfully processed your emotions and bodily sensations. Practice this mindfulness exercise especially when you experience emotional stress. You will notice how this exercise helps you release your emotional stress and helps you to be emotionally resilient. Apply this mindfulness way of freeing yourself from troubling emotions and enhancing positive emotions. Do not let the negative emotions stay in your body and mind affecting your physical and emotional health and your relationships.

Keep a journal to notice your progress. Teach others to learn this simple but powerful method for reducing their emotional stress and for cultivating wholesome relationships.

Authentic and Compassionate Communication

How we communicate has a significant impact on our relationship. Critical, judgmental and demanding communication disconnects us and creates walls between us. Nonviolent, mindful and compassionate communication builds bridges and deeper connection between us.

PEACE

1. Specify concrete behaviors we observe that affect us such as “I see you texting when I am talking with you.” (Notice the observation. It is non-evaluative, non-judgmental, and non-critical)
2. **Pause (P)** and **exhale (E)** to create space within you so you do not react and throw a judgmental and critical angry arrow at the other person. Example: When will you grow up? How many times do I have to say the same words again and again?)
3. Be mindful of your thoughts and feelings. **Acknowledge them (A)**. Allow yourself to experience and accept them. I am really irritated. I am upset. He does not respect me. It is awful. Notice: You are no more those thoughts and feelings (non-identification). You have freed yourself from those reactive thoughts and feelings. Identify your needs, desires and values that created the disturbing thoughts and feelings
4. Make a **wise choice(C)**. Respond, do not react.
5. **Engage (E)**. Invite the other person to communicate. Express your empathetic understanding and compassion for the other person. Let the other person know how and why his behavior created upsetting thoughts and feelings in you. What specific behavior you would request him to do.

P - Pause
E - Exhale (Deep Breathing)
A - Acknowledge and Accept
C - Wise Choice
E - Engage

Acceptance

Acceptance is not passive. It is not cowardly. It is not aggressive. It is not submissive. It is not withdrawing from action. It is not resigning. It is not being a doormat.

Mindfulness practice of acceptance is a courageous act of being with what is inside of us. This is the time to pause (P) rather than react. It is time for us to take a few breaths. (E) We allow ourselves to recognize (R) our thoughts and feelings. It is an inner work. If I feel anger in me, I label the feeling as anger. If I feel anxious, I label the feeling as anxiety. If I feel sad, I label the feeling as sadness. If I feel hurt, I label feeling of getting hurt. I do not

become that feeling (N). I do not become that thought. We also become mindful of our bodily sensations and relax.

Acceptance (A) is the quality of presence. It is accepting nonjudgmentally what is unfolding within us. By processing our inner world of bodily sensations, thoughts and feelings mindfully, we become free from our conditioned and default mode of thinking and behaving. When we practice mindfulness, a shift takes place from focusing on the other's behaviors to the impact of the other's behavior on us. Mindfulness creates an open space within us to empathically understand ourselves and the other person in our relationship. We objectively investigate (I) and inquire for a clear understanding of ourselves, and others involved in the transactions. Mindfulness practice is an exercise in cultivating non-resistance. It opens our mind and heart. We invite ourselves to be with ourselves to learn how to make wise choices(C). We do this inner work compassionately.

It is always a good idea to do interpersonal mindfulness work in our relationship. Aggression, avoiding and ignoring each other, distancing from each other, giving a silent treatment, blaming oneself or the other or pretending everything is OK is not the wholesome way of resolving problems. We engage (E) ourselves with each other by inviting to do mindfulness practice with each other. We let the other person know what my need, value or desire is not fulfilled by the other person, how I felt and request to be mindful of my need, value and desire in future. We invite the other person to do the same.

Such work creates and sustains authentic and compassionate healthy relationships. We learn to accept each other's differences without creating distances. We learn how to be kind to each other and forgive ourselves and others in our relationship. We build bridges of respectful and loving relationships. We enhance each other. We blossom together.

R - Recognize the thoughts and feelings
A - Acknowledge and Accept our feelings and behaviours
I - Investigate and Inquire within
N - Not identifying ourselves with the feeling

Talking and Listening: Two Basic Processes of Interpersonal Communication

The goal of interpersonal communication is to learn and practice how to respond without causing reactive behaviors. We need to learn how to initiate and sustain connectedness, and how to maintain the clear flow of communication and relationships. The following tips are to help us be mindful of the two interrelated processes involved in interpersonal communication.

Tips for talking:

- Talking is genuinely other-oriented. Do not bring your ego-boosting stuff when the other person talks. Do not interject your own story.
- Proving that one is right is counter-productive. It breaks the connection with the other person.
- Speak mindfully so as not to arouse anger, fear, shame, humiliation, inferiority or guilt in the other person.
- Paraphrase or summarize succinctly what the other person is saying to remain engaged with the other person. This continues the flow of communication.
- Incorporate poses into your speech to allow the other person to put his input, to co-create if there is a desire.
- Make I statements to express your needs, feelings and thoughts. Such a mode of communication prevents accusatory, blaming, humiliating and fault finding expressions. Try to avoid using words and body language which are bound to evoke a reactive response.

Tips for listening:

- Don't think of a response while listening. The other person senses it and it disrupts the flow of communication.
- Be fully present. Maintain consistent eye contact. Do not engage in multiphasic behaviors while you are listening. This is a sure way of losing the other person.
- Ask open-ended questions to expand or enrich what the other person is saying or helping him to view the situation from a different perspective. It helps the other person gain insights.
- Do not patronize. Do not take a stance of I know it all or I have an answer to what you are going to say.
- Do not interrupt. Become a patient listener. Create a space with attentive silence. This way, the other person feels deeply heard.
- Let the other person feel that you are a co-traveler in the process of communication. It builds the bridges.
- Listening to the person earnestly and compassionately is a way of serving the other person. It meets the need of a human being to be bonded and connected.

Nonviolent Communication: A Bridge Building Process

Dr. Marshall Rosenberg has done pioneering work in the field of nonviolent communication.

Purpose

The purpose of nonviolent communication is to contribute to the well-being of the persons involved in the relationship. It is aimed at relating to each other with authenticity, empathy, compassion and openness. It is meant to connect with each other without judgment, to resolve dividing differences and build human bridges.

Four Steps

The following four interrelated steps are involved in learning and practicing nonviolent communication.

1. Describe the specific behavior of the person that has caused disturbing feelings in you. Describe such a behavior without using evaluating, judgmental and labeling words or phrases.

For example:

you are a liar; you are rude and insensitive; you don't care; you never listen; you will never learn; you are a nag; you are a jerk etc. Such expressions invariably result in reactive, defensive, avoiding, distancing and alienating behaviors. In other words, they are counterproductive. We need to change our vocabulary and the ways we communicate our feelings. The right way of communicating would be specific, clear, descriptive and to the point.

For example:

When I talk, you interrupt me before I finish my sentence. You do not look at me when I talk. You do not follow what we agreed upon. Describe the specific situation rather than describe it in generality.

2. Make I feel statements. For example, when you do not do what you said you would, I feel upset. I feel disappointed. Feelings and words are different from thinking words. For example: I feel you are not listening to me. I feel that he is angry.

3. **Make I need statements.** I felt upset when you did not listen to me. I need you to attend to me when I speak. I need to be recognized. Needs and feelings make us alive. How we express our needs and feelings makes our communication and our relationship helpful or hurtful, constructive or destructive.

4. **Make a request and not a demand.** I would like you to look at me when I talk. I would like you to be fully present when I talk.

Empathic Connection

What do I want the other person to do for me? What does the other person want me to do for them? How do we create and sustain our connection? This requires connecting with the needs and feelings of each other. Empathy for oneself and empathy for the other person is one of the most important ingredients of connecting with ourselves and with each other.

Empathy is the language of the heart, not of the head. Empathy creates aliveness in our communication. It creates aliveness in us and in the other person. We feel someone cares for us and is willing to understand what we are going through without passing judgment.

Why do I do what I do? What are my needs that are not fulfilled? How do I feel about it? When I am caught up in my anger or am afraid and anxious, I need to breathe, pause and create space in my body and mind to listen to my feelings without reacting and continuing telling my story in my mind. When we explore ourselves empathically, compassionately and authentically, we understand ourselves and work on ourselves. What does the other person want me to do? What are his needs that are not fulfilled? And how does he feel about it? When we explore ourselves in relationship with each other, we become more alive and explore ways and means of sustaining this aliveness in our relationship. We make it sure we do not blame us or the other person for not having our relationship alive. Blame, guilt, shame, humiliation block the flow of aliveness in our communication and relationship.

Communication is a bipolar process. Both of you, the receiver and the giver, will have an empathic and open minded stance in listening to each other. Both of you will reveal to each other your inner world of unfulfilling needs and feelings. Both of you will implement the model of nonviolent communication: describe the specific behavior displayed, specific feelings experienced, specific needs fulfilled or not fulfilled, and request to fulfill mutual needs.

In empathic communication, we remain fully present with each other. Our body language, our eyes, our posture, the words we use, and the tone of our voice are powerful indicators

of our empathic connection. Am I fully with you? - is an important awareness question for us in empathic connection. This is a very potent aspect of communication.

What we need to change in us and between us can be explored with each other openly and compassionately. Change within ourselves and the other person takes time. It takes a good amount of time, patience and persistence to get rid of years of conditioning and change our well established habitual patterns. It can be done slowly but steadily in the environment of empathy and positive regard. This way, we contribute to the well-being of each other and make our relationship fulfilling.

It will be very helpful to share and discuss one specific experience you have had with someone in your family. Make it a priority. Set aside time for it. Apply this model of nonviolent communication and see how it works. It is a good idea to keep a journal recording what worked, how it worked and what you learned from your experience. Your journal will show how your energy is flowing and creating a nurturing, supportive and growth enhancing environment in your family.

* * * * *

Ways of Listening

Abridged version of Mark Nepo's article

Listening is a personal pilgrimage that takes time and a willingness to lean into life. Unpredictable as life itself, the practice of listening is one of the most mysterious, luminous, and challenging art forms on earth. Listening is the first step to peace. We need to quiet our noisy minds and all the thoughts we inherit and store in our mind. Our mind becomes a storehouse.

When we listen attentively the differences between us move back and things we have in common move forward. We need to quiet the patterns of thinking of our past. Listening is not a shortcut, but a way to embody the one life we are given, a way to personalize the practice of human beings. In real ways, we are invited each day to slow down and listen.

Listening stitches the world together. Listening is the doorway to everything that matters. It enlivens the heart the way breathing enlivens the lungs. We listen to awaken our heart. This is the work of reverence-to stay vital and alive by listening with an open heart.

Attentive listening is our way into lifelong friendships. This is the work of being- of being human. This is the work of love., the work of being human. And our friendship with each other opens us to the wisdom of care. This is the work of love. We need to stay loyal to these three friendships: the work of being, the work of being human, and the work of love.

In a daily way, listening is being present enough to hear the One in many and the many in One. Listening is an animated process by which we feel and understand the moment we are in, repeatedly connecting the inner world with the world around us, letting the one inform the other.

All this helps us hear who we are because our identity and the reach of our gifts can only be in relationship: listening helps us discover our relationship to all that supports us in life. We can start a new place to start no matter how overwhelmed we might feel by listening to the inmost self. It helps us to think of silence as the connective tissues of life. It is giving our complete attention to the silence that holds our self that awakens us to both the soul's calling and the call of the soul. While the souls' calling is the work we are born to do, the call of the soul is the irresistible yearning to experience aliveness.

The center of our aliveness doesn't care about what we achieve or accomplish, only that we stay close to the pulse of what it means to be alive. The deeper we look at listening, the more we find that it has to do with being present, because a commitment to being fully present enables us to listen more to others, to their dreams and pain, to the retelling of their stories. It deepens our compassion. And listening to the history of our heart allows us to hear the ache of being alive. The deeper we look at listening, the more we find that it has to do with being present, because a commitment to being fully present enables us to listen more to others, to their dreams and pain, to the retelling of their stories. It deepens our compassion. And listening to the history of our heart allows us to hear and feel the ache of being alive.

Each of the ways of listening- to an innermost self, to the silence that joins everything, to the soul's calling for the meaningful work, to the call of the soul to be simply be alive, to the complete presence of others that holding nothing back opens in us, and the tug of life and its sweet ache of constant connection-is the practice that deepens our understanding of who we are and of the precious life we 're given in our time on earth.

Conflict Resolution

In relationships, two people may not be on the same page all the time. Each may have different ideas and ways of dealing with a situation or for realizing the same goal or purpose. How to be on the same page for accomplishing the common goal or intention is a challenge for all involved in the situation. I have listed 6 steps for conflict resolution.

1. Be clear about the intention or purpose or aim to be attained. Make it sure that all are on the same page. If necessary, jot it down.
2. Invite ideas of others for accomplishing the goal. Collaboration makes everyone feel important.
3. Avoid giving a long-winded lecture. It may create the “wolf and sheep” dynamics. The wolf shows his teeth and the sheep freezes. Such habitual behavioral patterns cause alienation accomplishing nothing.
4. Welcome someone offering an idea or a way which may be opposite of your idea. Express the other person’s position so well so that he feels understood. Argue for the other person’s side. Say any point on which you agree. Do not get caught up in ping-pong arguments tossing the ball “I am right.” Avoid tug-of-war.
5. When people have strong different and conflicting ideas, always refer to the intention and check whether the ideas contribute to the accomplishment of the intention. There is wisdom in letting go rather than holding on. Letting go that blocks the process of remaining on the common ground of achieving the intention.
6. Think about the effect of what you are saying and how you are saying on the other person. Remember intention and impact are not one. The intention may be the same but be aware of the way you express your ideas and the impact of your words on the other person. Words and the tone of our voice matter.

Building a bridge and not a wall should be our intention in different contexts of our life. It is wise to unlearn our harmful habitual behavioral patterns and learn healthy and healing behavioral patterns relating to others in our life. Practicing mindfulness and meditation is one of the best ways of transforming ourselves.

Mindfulness Connectedness

Intrapersonal and interpersonal relationship is an ongoing learning and growing process of cultivating and sustaining connectedness, an intimate relationship. Relating to oneself and to the other requires our full presence to ourselves and to the other person. Mindfulness is an intentional and nonjudgmental awareness of what is happening in the present moment, the existential awareness, of myself in relationship with the other person. It requires our bare and full attention to ourselves and the other person.

Unconditional positive regard, empathy and compassion, and authenticity and congruence are the essential components of such mutually growing relationships. In order to cultivate these competencies, we need to practice sitting mindfulness, taking time out from our ever-busy and stressful life. This is our quiet time to be present to ourselves to be mindful of our inner landscape. It is a holistic mindfulness of our body-body scan, bodily sensations, breathing, thoughts, feelings and emotions arising in us. We compassionately listen to, notice and become aware of our changing inner world. Such sitting mindfulness practice helps us to be free from our consciousness stuck with the past hangover and future worries and anxieties. It opens up fresh and new doors of perception; understanding and insight which helps us act constructively. Quiet mind, clear mind helps us make creative, constructive and wise choices.

We need to practice sitting mindfulness in our relationships with ourselves and others. Sitting mindfulness practice helps us to remain mindful and centered in our transactions with others in our life. Become mindful of the impact of behavior of the other, your friend, teacher, family member on you. When you remain mindful of your inner world at that time, remain centered and mindfully respond to the other (not react), you create a bridge of understanding and working together. Our transactions do not result in power struggle and disconnection.

Reacting and Responding

As we all know, our reactions cause reactive behaviors from others and they end up in hurting, frustrating, arguing, depressive and alienating experiences.

What causes reactive behaviors?

Lack of empathic understanding of each other?

Unchecked assumptions?

Being unaware of the impact of each other's reactive behaviors on oneself?
Not pausing to create space in each other to be mindful of arrow throwing behaviors?
Not listening to oneself and to the other?
Not being present to oneself and to the other?
Coming from old unprocessed old scripts?
Using judgmental, critical, blaming, ridiculing, shaming, and hurting words?
How do we express our needs, wants and wishes with an empathic understanding of the other person?
How do we respond?
How do we create inner space to listen to oneself and to the other?
How do we cultivate the skills of empathic listening and understanding?
How do we communicate with the other person to maintain connectedness?

We need to be mindful of our needs and feelings and need to learn how to express them. We also need to be mindful of the other person's needs and feelings and facilitate the expression of his needs and feelings without judging and obstructing. The four steps of Nonviolent Communication will help you to respond instead of reacting.

Learn to Respond, Not to React

What we think and how we think can bind us or liberate us. As it is stated in the Bhagavad Gita, “Mind indeed is the cause of bondage and mind is the cause of liberation.” I remember Mahatma Gandhi’s words: “The thought becomes the word. The word manifests as deed. The deed develops into a habit. Habit builds character. Character gives birth to destiny.” So, we need to watch our thoughts with care. We make it sure that they spring from love and respect for all beings. This is the law of Karma. We create bad karmas and good karmas. This is the law of cause and consequence. Our relationship gets enriched or impaired by our thoughts. Mindfulness of our mind, of our thoughts and feelings, is the key to cultivating wholesome relationship with ourselves and with others in our life. We need to learn how to relate to ourselves and others mindfully. There are six steps we take to work on ourselves.

1. Keep your mind open and unbiased. Ask yourself a question about your thoughts candidly: Is this thought true? When you realize that what you think is not true, drop it and let it go. Do not be a prisoner of your wrong thought. Mindfulness approach helps us see the light. When you compassionately confront your mind you are paving the way to see the truth and free yourself from the grip of distorted thoughts.
2. Conscious breathing helps you to be free from your self-created prison. When an angry thought arises, recognize it. Do not identify with it. Acknowledge it. Be aware of it and drop it. Do not hold on to it. And then breathe. Stop. Drop. Breathe recommended by Dr. Laura Markham in her book *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids*
3. Remember Viktor Frankl’s wise saying “Between stimulus and response there is space. In that space there is freedom and power.” Before you react, pause and take deep breaths. Deep belly breathing relaxes your body and mind. It creates a physical and mental relaxation response. It activates the parasympathetic nervous system and helps the body and mind relax.
4. When your mind is quiet you inquire and investigate what made your child get angry or defiant. Also, when your mind is quiet, notice what thoughts and feelings go through your mind that triggers your reactive behavior. You understand what triggered your child’s angry or defiant behavior and what triggered your judgmental and angry reaction.
5. Practice mindfulness meditation regularly to work on yourself. You may also do mindfulness meditation with your child. Take a day each week to do mindfulness meditation so that all your actions come from the wisest part of your being, from your higher self. You will notice how it helps you and your child to switch from reacting to responding.

6. When you regulate your reactive behavior, you empathize with your child and relate to him emphatically and compassionately. Provide a nurturing response to your child. Mindfulness teacher and psychotherapist Dr. Tara Brach has created an acronym RAIN for making the shift from reaction to response.
 - R stands for Recognition-recognizing the angry or defiant behavior of your child non-judgmentally. If judging thought goes through your mind, become mindful of it. Pause, breathe and let the judging thought go. That will stop you from reacting to your child's behavior.
 - A- Accept your child's behavior as it is. Since you're calm and in charge of your own behavior, you
 - I- inquire and investigate what makes your child angry or defiant.
 - N- stands for nurturing. Relate your child in a calming, kind and nurturing way. You can apply RAIN to yourself for regulating your reactive emotional behaviors.

When we do not react, we cultivate positive relationships with our children whom we love dearly. This is the inner work of mindful parenting. It is not that easy. As Jon-Kabat Zinn says in his book *Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting*. "Mindful parenting is hard work. It means knowing ourselves inwardly and working at the interface when our inner lives meet the lives of our children." It is difficult but it provides a blessing of wonderful moments to be connected with our children with love and kindness.

Many Faces of Love

“Love brings the greatest happiness in life, the conviction that we are loved, loved by ourselves or rather loved in spite of ourselves”, says Victor Hugo. Generations of great thinkers have espoused the virtues of this important emotion.

Trying to define love is no easy task as it can take many forms and everyone expresses it differently. Plato said, “Love is the name of our purest of kindness, for our desire to be complete.” The ancient Greeks had even different kinds of words to describe many expressions of love, including

storge, the love or natural affection for a family;

ludus, the flirtations, playful love, platonic love between friends; of youth;

philautia, the love of self;

pragma, a mature, enduring love, and

eros, a sensual and passionate or romantic love, and

agape, unconditional divine love.

In writing about her love for actor Spencer Tracy, Katherine Happpbura said, “Love has nothing to do with what you are Expecting to get- only with what you are expecting to give, which is everything.”

No matter what we call it, love-in all its forms of expression, is a fundamental human emotion that connects us all, and reminds us that we are not alone. Consciousness is that which pervades the entire universe. It is what the Greeks called “anima mundi”, the ancient Latin term for the soul of the world. We can realize it by mediation. In meditation, stillness speaks. There is something to see which is beyond our senses. It is “panpschism”- pan means all or everything that has aliveness in it, consciousness or spirit. Later on, it became very important in many religions of the world: Atman in Hinduism, Trinity in Christianity: Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Father refers to Transcendent God, the One that does not exist in time and space. The son will be the realization of that Reality. In esoteric Christianity, it is called Christ within. In certain schools of Buddhism, it is called one’s innate Buddha nature, that transcends the conditioned personality. It is everywhere, even in the blade of grass.

It is not just a belief system or a dogma. Once we realize that Reality within then and only then if not fully, but glimpses of the Reality and eventually we can recognize it fully. Hedonistic pleasures -seeking temporary pleasures give limited satisfaction, and wanting and craving for more and more generates suffering.

Egoic consciousness brings havoc in individuals and collective life. Egoic consciousness is self-centered and selfish consciousness. Awakening consciousness recognizes the wholeness and sacredness of the planet. We are a part of the planet, not apart from the planet. And that is the reality. By saving the planet we save life.

Consciousness is the Divine Light. As Alan Watts said: You're the emanation of the One. Consciousness is the light of God." That's why Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. You are consciousness, Emanation of the One. There is more to us to realize than we think; the deeper dimension of who we are, which is the consciousness of the Universe. As Adi Shankaracharya proclaims: Aham Brahmasmi - I am the Universal Consciousness.

THREE LITTLE WORDS

Some of the most significant messages we can deliver to enrich our significant relationships consist of Three Little Words. Here are those Three Little Words.

I 'LL BE THERE

Being there for the significant people in our life is a great gift we give to them. When we're fully present for other people, important things happen to them and to us. We are renewed in love and friendship. We are restored emotionally and spiritually.

I MISS YOU

Our relationships can be salvaged and strengthened if two people simply and sincerely say to each other "I miss you." This powerful affirmation tells us we are wanted, desired and loved.

I RESPECT YOU

Respect is another way of showing love and strengthening our relationships. It conveys the feeling that the other person is a true equal. It is a powerful way to affirm the importance of a relationship.

MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT

Nobody is perfect. We all at times make mistakes and let the other person know if and when we take a misstep in our relationship. Saying these three little words is highly effective in diffusing an argument and restoring frayed emotions. The flip side of saying "may you be right" is the humility of admitting "Maybe I'm wrong."

PLEASE FORGIVE ME

Many relationships can be restored and healed if people have courage to admit their mistakes and shortcomings and ask for forgiveness. All of us are vulnerable to faults, fables and failures. A person should never be ashamed to own their mistakes when they have been wrong, which is by saying in other words they are wiser today than yesterday.

I THANK YOU

Gratitude is an exquisite form of courtesy. We thank others for their expressions of kindness.

COUNT ON ME

A friend is one who walks in when others walk out. Loyalty is an essential ingredient for true friendship; it is an emotional glue that bonds people. When troubles and hardships come, a good friend is there, indicating "you can count on me."

LET ME HELP

We all need help. When a true friend sees we need help, he will offer his help expecting nothing in reward. Such selfless actions are spiritual actions. When they sport a hurt they do what they can to heal it without being asked. They pitch in and help.

I UNDERSTAND YOU

People come closer and enjoy each other more if they feel the other person accepts and understands them. Letting the other know in so many little ways that you understand him or her is one of the most powerful ways of healing our relationships.

GO FOR IT

Some of our friends may be non-conformists, have unique projects or unusual ideas. Support them in pursuing their interests. Encourage their uniqueness.

I LOVE YOU

These three words have to be reserved for those who are special to us.

When you hear an important person say these three little words to you your heart is filled with joy and ecstasy. Love creates spiritual bonds between people. Love never dies.

Source: E-Mail Ministry

Four Kinds of Love

In the first century, the Greeks had four words of love: Eros, Stergo, Philia and Agape. Four kinds of love:

Erotic: Passionate love. Kama in Hinduism.

Philia: Love of brothers, sisters, friends and close relatives. Bhava- Bandhu bhava in Hinduism. Love for mother and father, love for children, brothers, and sisters.

Stergo: Love of parents or children. Stergo means affection, vatsalya in Hinduism.

Agape: Love of mankind. Love of God. Christ's love. Divine love. In Hinduism it is called Bhakti, devotion and love for the Divine. It is surrendering to God, Ishwara samarpana.

It is important to reflect on what kind of love we are striving for by examining our motives, thoughts, feelings and actions.

Love is a word that we use a lot. I love tea or coffee. I love food, only a particular kind of food. I just love pizza. I love to talk. I love stories. Some of us may feel uncomfortable using the word love.

Philosophers, Theologians, and now neuroscientists and clinicians think about love. The Western tradition distinguishes four types of love as described before. Scientific studies show that in healthy loving relationships all kinds of love that create positive and wholesome emotions have a positive effect on physical and mental well-being. Loving relationships have few doctor visits, shorter hospital visits, have less pain and have more positive emotions. All of the positive emotions make us more resilient when hard times come. It is love that sets a very high bar, but it may be at the foundation of happiness and contentment or fulfillment.

Dr. Kirtly Parker Jones. Abridged version of the interview conducted by Health University Utah on February 11, 2020.

Parenting with Awareness and Love

What and How of Mindfulness Parenting

Parenting our children has become quite difficult in the fast moving, complex and stressful world we live in. Enjoying carefree, safe and stress free childhood has become difficult for our children. We love our children and want the best in their lives. We are interdependent and interconnected. What affects our children affects us. What affects us affects our children. We need a stress-free and mindful mindset to see, understand and respond to our children.

Mindfulness Parenting offers us such a new perspective for working on ourselves and relating to our children. ***Mindfulness simply means paying nonjudgmental and compassionate attention to the full spectrum of our inner world and awareness of the inner world of our child.*** It is all about cultivating our attention and awareness of the field of our experience and our child's experience or some specific elements of the field of the experience. Such a mindset helps us to be authentic, trustworthy and dependable in our child's eyes and helps the child to be authentic, trustworthy and dependable in our eyes. Healthy relationship grows and blossoms in such an understanding, authentic and nurturing environment- an environment in which we do not react but respond to each other. We feel cared for and not neglected, accepted and not rejected, healed and not hurt.

The ingredients of mindfulness are nonjudgmental awareness, calmness, clarity and compassion. When we practice mindfulness to work on ourselves and to work on interpersonal issues that cause and continue frustration, irritation, despair and anxiety, we come to a clearer and empathic understanding of each other. We join hands with each other to remove the walls between each other and build a bridge of empathic understanding and make wise choices to resolve the distressing issues. We use our energy creatively and constructively.

Ingredients of Healthy and Peaceful Relationship:

- Connection, bonding, healthy attachment
 - Self-regulation: Regulate your own emotions.
 - Accept all emotions. Limit actions.
 - Empathize - Acknowledge a child's perspective. The child feels understood and feels safe to express his emotions and feelings.
 - Listen to the child's feelings.
 - Listen to your child's vulnerable and threatening feelings.
 - Encourage them to express themselves.
 - Anger is mostly a defense against deeper feelings of hurt and disappointment.
 - Do not take it personally and resist the urge to escalate or retaliate.
- Mantra: This is not an emergency. Pause, breathe and respond. Do not react.
- Don't send a child away to calm down.
 - Help your child to be aware of her triggers and warning signs.
 - Teach them to pause and breathe.
 - Teach constructive problem solving, Optimism, Persistence
 - Help them build Emotional Intelligence, Resiliency, Self- esteem and self - worth

The Best Peaceful Parenting Tips

Everyday Goodness

1. We all make mistakes.
2. Let's do it together.
3. You don't have to do everything. Check-in with your body to see if you feel full.
4. There is nothing you do that would love you any less.
5. I am here for you when you're ready.
6. You get to choose.
7. You get started and come to me if you need any help.

Validating Feelings

1. All your feelings are okay.
2. It makes sense to me that you'd feel (sad/ scared/ mad). That didn't go away you wanted it to
3. Wow. You look so proud of yourself to sit quietly for a couple of minutes or for finishing your assignment in time.
4. Do you want to talk about it? No? Okay. I'm here if you change your mind.
5. I am guessing you feel (frustrated/ sad/ happy/ upset/ scared).

Problem-Solving

1. Does this game still feel for everyone?
2. What do I do to help you?
3. How can we make it fun for everyone?
4. I am not willing for you to (hurt/ hit/ yell) at other people. I'm going to put my body here so that everyone is safe.
5. This is tough. I'm going to pick you up and give you a big hug and we'll go to a place where you can have all your feelings.
6. I'm feeling flooded. It's not your fault. I'm going to take care of myself, and I'll be back in two minutes.
7. I would like to say "yes" to that solution. Here's what I am concerned about...

Teaching Outside the Moment

1. Do you have any idea about how we can solve this issue, is there anything you would do differently in that situation?
2. I wish I had not yelled, that isn't the kind of parent I want to be. Next time when I'm feeling frustrated I will take 5 deep breaths before I talk.

Connecting With Consent

1. Would you like a hug? (No.) Okay. I am here if you change your mind.
2. I've got a hug for you if you want it.
3. It looks like you haven't had enough hugs today.. Want one?

Sharing

1. Which toys are not shareable? Let's put them away before your friend gets here.
2. Can they use that toy when you're done with it?
3. There are two kids here and you both want one toy. How can we solve this?

Source: Peaceful Parenting by Cecilia Jackson

3 Simple Big Ideas for Parenting

1. Regulate Your Own Emotions

Kids learn to manage their emotions when their parents model how it is done.

2. Connect With Your Child

From tantrums to texting, the secret of happy parenting is a close relationship with your child. Without that connection we have little influence ("My kids don't listen!") and parenting becomes exhausting.

3. Coach Instead of Controlling

Coach instead of trying to control, so your child wants to cooperate with you.. Sure, you need to set limits-but if you set them with empathy and respect, you'll find your child as much more likely to comply.

Source: What is Aha Parenting? Dr. Laura Markham

What an Awakened Parent Does:

"Do" sit close to your child in complete silence.

"Do" look into their eyes and keep your gaze on them.

"Do" softly echo back their feelings to them.

"Do" show them with your body posture that you are there for them.

"Do" try to understand their experience without being intrusive.

"Do" keep your opinions, sermons, and lectures to yourself.

“Do” assure them that their feelings are important.

“Do” give them space to sit quietly and feel what they are feeling until it becomes integrated.

“Do” validate that their feelings are just fine simply because they are theirs and nothing to be ashamed of.

“Do” tap into your own anxiety and work through it.

When feelings are expressed and held sacred in a space, our children are able to process them and let them go without having to reincarnate them in indirect ways. This is a powerful gift indeed to offer our children.

Source: The Awakened Family: A Revolution in Parenting by Shefali Tsabury Ph. D. Pages 284-285

Improve Your Parenting: Less drama, more love

What do you have to lose?

1. Empathize more: Children don't always need to get their way, but they do need to feel understood. Whatever your child says or does, she has a reason. Even while setting limits, try acknowledging that reason. Instead of "Turn that screen off right now!" try "You really wish you could keep watching, I know. And still, it's time for dinner. Say 'Goodbye Screen.' Okay, let's go."
2. Tell them what they CAN do, instead of what they can't. Instead of "Stop playing with the ball in the house!" try "Balls are for outside. Inside, you can throw the stuffed animals into the bathtub."
3. Get them laughing every day. Laughter changes the body chemistry, decreasing stress hormones so kids are more cooperative and sleep better. It also increases bonding hormones, so when you laugh with your child, you strengthen your relationship.
4. Say 'Yes' more often. We're parents, so we have to set limits and say No all day long. So, when you can, say yes. Even when you have to say no, can you say it with "Yes" energy? "YES, it's time to clean up, and YES I will help you, and YES we can leave your tower up, and YES you can growl about it, and YES if we hurry, we can read an extra story, and YES we can make this fun, and YES I adore you and YES how did I get so lucky to be your parent? YES!"
5. Spend "special time" every day. If you want to strengthen and sweeten your relationship with your child, here's your prescription. Just enjoy and admire your child without controlling him. Parents often tell me that their children react to getting this one-on-one time "like they were missing an essential vitamin." They were. Every child needs this tangible expression of your love.
6. Use your pause button to yell less. Your pause button:
 - Stop.
 - Drop (your agenda, just for now).
 - Breathe.

Now, try a Do-Over: “Sorry, I was getting frustrated. Let’s try that again. It’s time to go, and you aren’t ready. What do you need to do to be ready? Right! Let’s do it!” How will they learn to regulate their emotions if we don’t regulate ours? You’re the role model.

7. Turn your screen off when you’re with your child. Many children say their parents’ phone is the most important thing in the parent’s life. They’ll remember for the rest of your life that you prioritize them by turning your phone off when you are with them.

8. Go outside and move with your kids. Research confirms what your grandmother said. Children really do need daily fresh air, greenery and movement to de-stress and be their best selves. In fact, we all do.

9. Allow emotions, limit behavior. Of course, you need to set limits. But when we allow emotions, children learn to manage them faster. Just say “You must be so upset to use that tone of voice. Tell me about it, Sweetie. We can figure this out together.” Your child will start calming down before your eyes.

10. Put yourself back on the list. You can only be emotionally generous if you take care of yourself. I know, that’s tough, but it isn’t sustainable to leave yourself off the list. Start by getting enough sleep and talking to yourself like someone you love. Monitor your well-being as you go through your day. Every day do something that increases your level of joy. You’ll see your good mood rub off on your child.

* * * * *

How to discipline our children?

1. Children give cues or signs that we need to attend to. Our child's misbehavior is symptomatic of an underlying cause. It could be tiredness, lack of sleep or the child may be hungry. We need to address the underlying causes that give rise to the disturbing symptoms.
2. We focus too much on negatives and ignore positives or take them for granted. We give a negative command 'Don't do this or that' rather than offer an alternative and give an explanation why and how it is helpful.
3. We expect too much from our kids, more than they can deliver. We assume our kids know more than they can accomplish. When a child misbehaves, show them an alternative, and let them observe a better way of behaving. We provide modeling. Children learn by what we do.
4. Apologize when you do something wrong. We all make mistakes, and we learn from them. We all are accountable for our actions. Emotions are difficult to control even for us as adults. Teach them to stop, breathe, recognize and respond.
5. At times our children do what could be irksome. We may ignore some behaviors selectively if they are not harmful. When safety is not an issue, try watchful waiting.
6. When you ask them to stop something that causes disruption, do not ignore, or react. Show them a yellow light and if they cross the line, they need to follow the consequences. They may lose the privilege of watching TV until they do what they need to do. Do not give them vague warnings. Be clear and firm.
7. Use time-out effectively. Do not use it as punishment or rejection but use it for your child to calm down and reflect. It helps to hold a child to settle him down. It also helps to co-breathe with your child when she is upset or angry. Different children respond differently. We need to figure out what works for our child.

How to handle Kids Lying?

Who doesn't lie? Yes kids do and so do adults. We are our kids' primary role models, playing a vital role in showcasing honesty-instilling a deep –rooted commitment to telling the truth.

Why do we lie?

To get out of trouble, for personal gain, to impress or protect someone or to be polite.

Address the subject of lying in an age-appropriate way. We need to learn how to respond, not react.

Toddlers and Preschoolers (Ages 2 to 4)

Toddlers do not have a clear idea between truth and lie. Toddlers are trying to display their independence, and they can make a power struggle or a battle of the wills out of any disagreement. Toddlers have difficulty expressing themselves in words. Around age 4, children become more verbal.

Explain what a lie is and why it is not okay to lie. Avoid confronting the child or digging for the truth unless the situation demands more probing and more attention.

School Age and Big Kids (Ages 5 to 8)

Children at this age will tell more lies to test how they can get away with it. Regulations and responsibilities are too much for children. Involve children in formulating rules and responsibilities they can follow and perform. Talk openly and empathically to the children. School age children are good observers. Provide good role modeling. Appreciate the positive behaviors of the children and encourage them to act positively.

Tweens (Ages 9 to 12)

Most children this age are on their way to formulating a hardworking, trustworthy, and conscientious identity. At the same time, they are more adept at maintaining lies. They may have strong feelings after lying. Be straightforward with your child to avoid mixed messages.

Teach them how to be honest and still maintain a respectful attitude.

Social interactions can be very challenging at this age. Children who have an established relationship with their parents feel comfortable talking and disclosing information. Taking

a moment to think about why they are lying will help you to respond to their lies more helpfully. Good role models are still crucial for your children.

* * * * *

Emotion Coaching

How to deal with children (and adults too) when emotions run high? We want to do the right thing. But there is a difference between wanting to do right and actually having the wherewithal to carry it right. Good parenting involves intelligence as well as it involves emotion.

Research studies show that even more than IQ, our emotional awareness and ability to handle feelings, and to empathize with others determine our success and happiness in all walks of life, including family relationships. "Family life is our first school for emotional learning," writes Daniel Goleman, author of Emotional Intelligence... "The emotional schooling operates not just the parents say and do directly to children, but also in the models they offer for handling their own feelings and those that pass between husband and wife."

Parents who are involved with their feelings are called "Emotional Coaches". Much like athletic coaches, they teach their children strategies to deal with life's ups and downs. They do not object to their children's displays of anger, sadness, or fear. Nor do they ignore them...They use emotional moments as opportunities for teaching their kids important life lessons and building close relationships with them.

Among the parents who fail to teach their kids emotional intelligence, research studies have identified three types:

1. Dismissing parents, who disregard, ignore, or trivialize their children's negative emotions.
2. Disapproving parents, who are critical of their children's displays of negative emotions. They may reprimand or punish them for emotional expression.
3. Laissez-Faire parents who accept their children's emotions and empathize with them but fail to offer guidance or set limits on their children's behavior.

How would the Emotional Coach act differently? Such a parent might start out like the Laissez-Faire parent empathizing with the child's negative emotion by letting his/her child know that he/she understands what their child feels. The parent would go further providing guidance for what to do with her child's uncomfortable feelings.

Research studies have found five steps of successful parent-child interactions:

1. They become aware of the child's emotions.
2. They recognize the negative emotion as an opportunity for intimacy and teachings.
3. They listen empathetically, validating their child's feelings.
4. They help their child find words to label the emotion their child is having.
5. They set limits while exploring strategies to solve the problem at hand.

Empathy

Empathy is the key for understanding and improving difficult relationships. Dr. Helen Reiss has created E.M.P.A.T.H.Y. acronym for creating healthy interpersonal relationships in her book Empathy Effect. She has described the following Seven Keys to Empathy which we read earlier but here I am giving again:

E for Eye Contact. When we look at each other empathically we get connected with each other without words. As the saying goes, "Eyes are the windows in another person's soul." Such a gaze releases a sort of bonding hormone, oxytocin. Feelings of love, connection, and empathy flood into the gray matter of the brain. It also activates the social brain regions.

M for Muscles of the facial expressions. Our brain is wired to automatically mimic the facial expressions of others in normal situations. When someone smiles at us, we tend to smile back.

P for Posture. A person's posture reveals a great deal about internal emotional states. Slumped shoulders may signal dejection, sadness and even depression. Sitting up tall and upright suggests confidence or happiness.

A for Affect. The human face is a critical guide in knowing the emotions a person is experiencing- positive feelings or negative feelings. Research shows that we can cultivate self-compassion and compassion for others in our life. It is not enough to notice a person's feelings and needs but how we relate to his needs and feelings is very crucial in relationships.

T for Tone of voice. Research shows tone of voice conveys over 38 percent of the nonverbal emotional content. It's a vital key to empathy. Linguists refer to the pace, rhythm, and pitch of spoken language as "prosody". Prosody infuses a layer of emotion to the spoken word. Become aware of what you convey by the way you communicate: admiration, sarcasm, contempt, surprise, fear or disgust. The tone of the voice reveals if there is empathic communication.

H for Hearing the whole person. Active or reflective listening is called “empathic listening” which means paying attention to the other person. Identifying his or her emotions and responding with compassion without judgment. Neurologically speaking, it means tamping down our own amygdala. Nothing productive happens when two people are in “the red zone”. It’s important that both people agree to take turns to speak. It’s called “talk-listen” by clinical psychologists.

Y for Your response. With deep listening comes an empathic response. When you listen to someone empathically, you resonate with the feelings of others.

Questions to reflect on:

1. What’s your Emotional Coach style?
2. What do you need to change to be an effective Emotional Coach?
3. How do you deal with your life partner who may have a different parenting style?
4. How do you deal with your children who display their difficult emotions differently?
5. How do you manage your difficult emotions? What helps you remain focused and centered when you are in the midst of emotional upheavals?
6. Out of seven keys to empathy, which ones are relatively easy for you to use, and which ones are difficult for you to use?

Recommendations:

1. Keep a journal to notice effective changes you make in your parenting style over a period of time.
2. Notice effective changes you make for creating positive empathy effects in your interpersonal relationships.
3. Share your journal entries with your life partner and learn from each other what works and what doesn’t work.
4. Be patient and persevere knowing that transforming your parenting style takes time.

References:

1. Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman PH.D.
2. The Heart of Parenting by John Gottman PH.D.

Breaking Negative Parenting Patterns

Dr. Shefali describes five negative parenting patterns to foster a healthier, more nurturing dynamic with their children.

1. **Understanding Projection:** Parents often project their unresolved issues and unmet desires onto their children, expecting them to fulfill roles or achieve goals that they themselves couldn't. This can create undue pressure and unrealistic expectations, leading to stress and frustration for both the child and parent. By recognizing these projections, parents can better support their child's needs and aspirations fostering a more nurturing environment.
2. **Embracing Imperfections:** Accepting imperfections in both parenting and children is crucial. Acknowledging and embracing mistakes and flaws allow for a more compassionate and understanding family dynamic. This approach reduces the pressure to be perfect, promoting a healthier atmosphere where children feel safe to learn and grow from their experiences.
3. **Parent-Child Connection:** Building a strong emotional connection with children requires presence, attentiveness, and empathy. By actively listening and validating their feelings, parents can create a secure and supportive environment. This strong bond helps children feel valued and understood, which is essential for their emotional and psychological development.
4. **Ego Awareness:** Often, the ego drives parents to seek control and validation through their children's successes or behaviors. By recognizing and managing their egos, parents can approach parenting with humility and openness to develop independently.
5. **Community Support:** Having a supportive community is vital for parents. Sharing experiences and seeking advice within a community helps parents realize they are not alone in their struggles. This communal support provides emotional relief, shared wisdom, and practical advice, making the challenges of parenting more manageable and promoting collective growth and healing.

Extract from Reinvent Yourself Summit offered by Dr. Shefali

Reflect on the following questions:

1. If you are parenting your child or children, think of these five negative patterns of parenting and be aware of which negative parenting patterns apply to your parenting your child or children?
2. What did you learn from this article?
3. Do you remember how you were raised by your parents and how their parenting style affected you?
4. Explain how this article relates to your family constellation?

Empathy-The Key For Connection

Empathy is a fundamental human trait. Empathy plays an awfully important part in making us who we are. There are two faces of empathy: self-empathy and empathy for another person. Empathy makes us connected with ourselves- and with others in different areas of our life, such as from family life to workplace, parenting to education, health care, business, politics, and environment-ecology ethics. Without empathy we would not have survived as humankind. Empathy is like a breath that helps us survive and flourish. Empathy is a caring feeling, an empathic concern, for oneself and for others. Empathic concern motivates a compassionate response. The good news about empathy is that it can be cultivated. Like any skill, it can be modeled, fine-tuned, enhanced, and managed.

Empathy is best understood as a human capacity constitution of several different physiological and psychological facets that work together to enable us to be moved by the plights and emotions of others. When we show empathy for ourselves and for others we are good at perceiving what we feel and what others feel, and are able to process information, and are able to respond effectively. Empathic capacity encompasses the entire empathic loop from perception to response.

When we see someone suffering, we catch the feelings by perceiving her facial expression, her pause, and the tone of her voice. When someone is going through intense suffering and is expressing the pain, we may get overwhelmed by seeing the pain on her face, the tone of her voice, and the posture of her body. This is the time to take deep, slow and quiet breaths to steady ourselves.

Dr. Helen Riess has developed a technique ABC for empathy training.

A for Acknowledgment, we are entering an emotionally difficult conversation.

B for breathing to manage our reaction, and

C for curiosity to learn more.

Neuroscience researchers have identified different regions of the brain that become activated when people feel empathy for others. Neuroscientists have identified that empathic capacity has both affective (emotional) and cognitive (thinking) parts. Putting these together, we now know that empathy is triggered when people understand the emotional plight of others and respond appropriately.

The word empathy is derived from the German word *Einfühlung* which means “feeling into.” The Greek word *empathia* from *em* - “in” and *pathos*, feeling. These words describe emotional experience. The word sympathy is often used as a synonym for empathy. In the ancient Greek language *sun* means “together” and *pathos* means “suffering”. The word sympathy means similar feelings. We can identify the feelings of others because we share them to some extent. As used today, sympathy aligns with feeling bad for others or taking pity on others and doesn’t imply the fully shared sense of feeling personally with someone’s plight. With sympathy, there is agreement that someone’s unhappiness or suffering is undeserved. Sympathy can be described as the feeling we may have when we look out of our window and see somebody shivering in the cold rain. We feel bad for this person. Empathy is as if you’re going out in the rain and standing next to this person and experiencing his distress and discomfort as if it were your own, not losing as psychologist Carl Rogers points out, the “as if” quality. “It is the ability to appreciate the other person’s feelings without yourself becoming so emotionally involved that your judgment is affected.” (Reader’s Digest, 1955). We need to be careful about the risk of being emotionally overwhelmed by their feelings. The psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut defined empathy in 1959 as “vicarious introspection” and emphasized the ability to consider as if they were our own but consider them objectively. He considered empathy to be “psychological oxygen” and a necessary component of every health promoting relationship.

Empathy is a dynamic capacity that allows us to share experience with others, feel concern, take the other person’s perspective, and motivate a caring, empathic response. We may go out in the rain in reality and offer the unfortunate freezing person a raincoat and an umbrella. By definition, empathy is not detached or abstract. It requires intimate comprehension of others’ inner lives, the context in which they live, and their resultant actions. To experience empathy, we need both perspective channels that take in the experience of others.

The Seven Keys of Empathy:

Dr. Helen Riess has coined the acronym E.M.P.A.T.H.Y. to describe the seven keys of empathy. We rarely get instructions on “how to be” and “how to let others to be”. When we focus solely on the literal spoken and nothing more, we overlook the essential role of nonverbal signals. Some researchers have found that over 90 percent of what we communicate is nonverbal and only 10 percent is verbal.

E Is for Eye Contact

In some African tribes, the word for “hello” is *Sawubona*, which means “I see you.” It means seeing the light in another person’s soul. There is a similar saying, “Eyes are the window to the soul.” Eyes speak. If we really look at someone’s eyes we may gather a wealth of information about what he may be thinking and feeling. When a mother and newborn gaze

into each other's eyes, both of their brains release a shot of the bonding or love hormone, oxytocin. Feelings of love, connection, and empathy flood into their gray matter. Studies suggest that early deprivation of eye contact can have severe detrimental effects on a child. Such children are more likely to develop "insecure attachment" along with a subsequent loss in self-esteem, difficulty trusting others, and problems regulating emotions. The research shows that how we use our eye gaze is important for making an emotional connection. Brain studies show that the brain's amygdala lights up differently when we encounter someone who is fearful or angry or affectionate or loving. In an ancient book called Vignana Bhairava, there is a meditation technique of "Looking at each other lovingly."

M Is for Muscles of Facial Expression

Our brain is wired to automatically mimic the facial expressions of others. If someone smiles at us we smile back. In his groundbreaking work, clinical psychologist Paul Ekman identified the facial expressions associated with basic emotions. Some emotions have largely universal interpretations while others have different interpretations depending on cultural background or social conditioning. Usually we associate smiles with happiness, joy, and pleasure. Sometimes a smile is used to mask suppressed emotions such as sadness, agony, upsettedness or grief. Research done on low-empathy groups versus high empathy groups seems to indicate that people in higher empathic capacity have a greater sensitivity to facial reactions and facial expressions and this ability also provides them with a higher sense of empathic accuracy.

P Is for Posture

A person's posture reveals a great deal about internal emotional states, independent of facial expressions. Postures are associated with emotional states and are designed to identify those states. Slumped shoulders can signal dejection, sadness, even depression. Quivering lips may indicate helplessness and grief. Sitting up tall and erect suggests confidence or happiness. You get a sense of how much posture and body language reveal when you talk with another person. Subtle differences in my posture have significant bearing on how the other person views me and the level of empathy.

When I sit down with my client, I turn my body toward him, lean forward, and sit at eye level. All of this conveys that I am attentive and interested on a personal level. If I sit with crossed arms, I have a signal that doesn't reflect openness.

A Is for Affect

Affect is the scientific term for emotion. We experience and express a broad spectrum of emotions and feelings such as joy, affection, love, elation, kindness, concern as well as sadness, grief, anxiety, irritation, frustration, anger, disgust, contempt or confusion. It's not

enough to simply notice a person's facial expression. We must also interpret what we are seeing which tracks through the prefrontal cortex, the center of the executive function (thinking brain) and into the primate emotional centers of the limbic system in the midbrain.

Emotions are at the core of all challenging conversations. Recall a call you had with an agent online asking for help to solve a pressing problem and you got a sharp, cold and callous response that includes "I need to put you on hold." Your emotions could have been put on simmer had you heard "I understand how frustrating this must be to you, and I'm sorry you're having this problem. I need to put you on hold, and I'll be with you as soon as possible to help you."

T Is for the Tone of the Voice

Tone of voice conveys over 38 percent of what a person communicates. It is a vital key to empathy. Linguists refer to this pace, rhythm and pitch of spoken language as "prosody." Prosody infuses a layer of emotion to the spoken word. We as humans are exquisitely sensitive to tone of voice and its prosody. The tone of the voice may convey admiration, sarcasm, contempt, surprise, fear or disgust. Tone of voice is often more important than the actual words we say. A soothing voice can go a long way to helping another person feel heard.

H Is for Hearing the Whole Person

Empathic listening means paying attention to another person, identifying her emotions, and responding with compassion and without judgment." Dr. Helen Riess, Try to understand the other person's perspective and then try to have your point of view understood. It means putting aside our own emotions and listening with an open mind and an open heart. Neurologically speaking, it means tamping down our own amygdala-driven threat sensors while listening to the other person. Nothing constructive occurs when two people are in the fight or flight "red zone." This is the "talk listen" exercise.

Many people find empathic listening difficult. They hear the "chief complaint" rather than the "chief concern." We need to realize the true concern is much bigger than the complaint. It's wise to discern the underlying issues.

Y is for Your Response

With deep empathic listening comes an empathic response that starts on a physiological level. Empathy has a physiological substrate that provides an internal experience that is shared between people. A Research study done by Carl Marci at Massachusetts General Hospital to investigate whether there was physiological concordance between doctors and

their patients during clinical visits and whether physiological concordance correlated with patients' rating of their doctors' empathy. Physiological concordance means the markers of patients' and doctors' physiology, such as heart rate and skin concordance (known as the galvanic skin response, or GSR) would vary in synchronicity, whereas physiological discordance would indicate no relationship between the individual's physiological partners. He found the highest ratings of physician empathy on a standardized reliable and valid empathy scale correlated between the highest degree of physiological concordance between doctors and their patients. This study also found the opposite case to be true. Low physiological concordance correlated with low patient rating of their doctors' empathy. When emotions are not empirically responded, the physiology between two people doesn't sync either.

The "your response" experienced by the team reflects the leader's emotional state. Your "response" is not about what you say. It is paying attention to how you feel. There are strong relationship factors in health care that lead to significant improvements in many common health conditions, some of which are among today's most important health problems. How physicians treat patients is as important as what they treat. Lessons learned in the medical field can be applied to nearly every profession, personal relationship, and human interaction. Empathic relationships form a bond of openness, trust, and respect. Our perception of others, processing it partially through our own experience, leads to a compassionate response that is made possible through emotional and cognitive empathy.

As Dr. Helen Riess writes, "And if we follow these original threads, we may be surprised to learn that they play a part in the reasons we chose our job, our hobbies-and the people we choose to love. All parties equally are enriched when we perceive and respond to each other with empathy and compassion. After all, it is the human bond that adds the music to the words in our life."

Empathy and sympathy

The word empathy is often confused with sympathy. Sympathy aligns with feeling bad for others or taking pity on others and doesn't imply the fully shared sense of feeling personally with someone's plight. With sympathy there is agreement that someone's unhappiness or suffering is undeserved. If you look out your window and see someone shivering in cold rain. You feel bad or pity for that person. Empathy is as if you're going out in the rain and standing next to that person, through your imagination and experiencing his discomfort and distress as if it were your own.

Empathy is a dynamic capacity that allows you to share experiences with others, feel concern, take the other's perspective, and motivate a caring response. You go back out in

the rain in reality and offer the unfortunate freezing person a warm raincoat and an umbrella.

In 1955, the Reader's Digest introduced the word empathy to the general public as the "ability to appreciate the other person's feelings without yourself becoming emotionally involved that your judgment is affected." This definition of empathy is a precursor to our more complete understanding of empathy today. It indicates that empathy has cognitive appreciation of others' feelings, an emotional resonance, and the ability to distinguish the other person's experience from our own so that we perceive accurately and aren't in danger of being emotionally overwhelmed by their feelings. If we do not follow this guideline we may acquire emotional fatigue or get emotionally burnt out.

Highlights from The Empathy Effect by Helem Riess, MD with Liz Neporent

Emotional Development

Emotional intelligence is as important as mental intelligence or cognitive intelligence and social intelligence. Emotional intelligence means the ability to be in the present moment to recognize and to be aware with an unconditional and nonjudgmental view of all what we are feeling and thinking right now.

Emotional intelligence has five components:

1. Self-awareness
2. Self-regulation
3. Empathy
4. Social skills
5. Motivation

We notice non-judgmentally what is happening inside ourselves before the emotional volcano explodes inside ourselves. Be aware of when it starts to build, what it looks like and tune into those feelings inside like feeling disappointed, sad, excited, agitated, nervous, butterflies in stomach, shaky. We need to tune into those feelings when they are building and build that self-awareness. And then we move into self-regulation. In order to help our children we need to help ourselves. We self-regulate first and then we co regulate. This way we help them self-regulate. It starts with us as parents or teachers.

We keep our body and mind calm by taking in breaths and out breaths and scanning our body systematically. And then we lean into empathy and social skills. Empathy is going outside of ourselves and knowing how we feel and how our children feel. We empathize to connect with ourselves and with our children.

Social skills: Self-awareness, self-regulation and empathy for others tend to teach social skills- how to build and foster healthy relationships with oneself helps our children how to build and foster healthy relationships with others.

Let us start with noticing and building self-awareness. A parent or a teacher would say, "I notice that your chest is tight. Your fits are tight. Gosh. You are frustrated." You start noticing what's happening in your child's body for creating awareness of physical sensations in his body and teaching tools for releasing tension. The child will be aware of the tension in his body and learn the skill for reducing the physical tension. It's a lesson in self-regulation. We can also help us cultivate self-awareness and self-regulation. Co-creating is a wonderful way of teaching such self-caring skills to our children. As parents or

teachers, you provide good role modeling for the children for learning and cultivating personal and interpersonal emotional and social intelligence skills.

We need to create a safe place where children feel free to be themselves. This way they learn to be self-aware and self-regulate.

For teaching self-regulation the key is safety. You can teach them how to get out of the amygdala, the reactive space into the prefrontal cortex where they feel safe and calm. This is where slow, deep and gentle belly breathing and scanning the entire body is very helpful. Taking time out, drinking water, and taking a walk are simple and doable steps. As parents or teachers, we need self-awareness and self-regulation to cultivate these skills, and that way provide modeling to the children

Empathy is a tricky one. When our child is glad, mad or sad we can show our empathy. First we notice the impact or signs of empathy in our own self. Such as empathy in our eyes, our face, the tone of our voice, our posture, our hands, our gestures and our actions.

When the child's loving grandmother comes to visit the child's family, the child feels very happy and when the grandmother leaves the child feels very sad. This is an easy and simple way of explaining empathy to our child. When you do not get what you want, you get angry. When I pay more attention to your sister you feel jealous or hurt. Recognizing what the child thinks and feels is an important step before we teach our child to self-regulate.

Handshake Practice for Healing Difficult Emotions

Buddhist scholar and mediator Tsonkyi Rinpoche has created a friendly way of working with our difficult emotions called Handshake Practice. We are emotional beings, and we experience a variety of emotions. Our challenge is how to deal with difficult emotions like anger, rage, hatred, fear, jealousy, shame, humiliation and other difficult feelings and emotions.

Handshake means feeling our emotions in a friendly way. Handshake means feeling them without resistance and reaction. Handshake means welcoming them in an open, non-judgmental, warm, loving, kind and compassionate way. To heal means to feel it, be with it and remain relaxed for a while. Since difficult emotions are hard to face, we tend to suppress them, ignore them, deny them, fix them, numb them or run away from them. Handshake is a simple method to describe but difficult to actually do it.

Try this: Sit for a few minutes, settling into a quiet, contemplative inner space. Consider the relationship between you and your emotional world. How does it feel? Is it loving and open? Is it strained or critical? Does your feeling world seem mostly numb or raw and dynamic? However you feel, be with it, and relax for a while. Think of a loving adult trying to hold a young child in a tantrum. The child screams and kicks and punches, and each time we gently put our hand, they push it away. We have to be willing to feel our suffering. Do mindfulness meditation for a while to experience handshaking.

Obstacles to Handshake

There are four main obstacles to handshaking: suppressing, ignoring and indulging, and anti-doting.. These are strong mental habits, probably the main ways we relate to our difficult emotions and feelings.

Suppressing: An uncomfortable feeling pops up and we push it under the carpet. This might work for a while, but it will find a way to pop back up.

Ignoring: Ignoring is another strategy with which we are highly familiar. Ignoring is simply running away from such distressing emotions. By ignoring our feelings and emotions, we might assume they are gone, but they are not. Suppression is a temporary Band-Aid.

Indulging: Indulging is another way we often react. Indulging believes its story, follows it, and lets it dominate. Indulging in feelings of self-doubt would be sinking into a mood of insecurity and allowing the familiar narratives of self-doubt to dominate the mind.

Antidoting: Finally, there is antidoting, which is applying some method or commentary or sense making to fix a problem. For example, we have a problem or harmful habit, we try to fix it,, just like we fix our car or our bike when it is broken. Handshaking is feeling the feeling directly, without trying to make it go away. Handshaking is feeling the sense of not-okayness and making friends with it.

Once we've met the feelings, and really felt them, we can just be with them. Once we are with them, a shift will occur. The trust will develop because we are no longer suppressing them or ignoring them. The handshake has contact with open love. It has a loving touch.

The Four Steps in Handshake

Handshake lets our awareness be with whatever is happening in our feeling world without judgment, without resistance. Handshake practice can be broken down into four steps: meeting, being, waiting, and communicating.

Step #1 Meeting

Exercise: Allow awareness to gently pervade the feeling world. Open awareness to moods, feelings, and emotions. Just meet whatever moods, feelings, and emotions are arising in your mind. If you feel angry or tense or tired, be with those feelings, and relax into them. If you feel great, peaceful, and relaxed, just be with them too. If you can't feel anything, just be with that numbness, or be with peace.

Feelings come and go on their own time. They do not remain the same. We are just meeting them and allowing whatever comes without an agenda. You are the host of a banquet, standing at the door and meeting any of your feelings that show up. You allow them to come and go. Later we extend the handshake practice to encompass everything, including narratives and inner voices.

Step# 2 Being

Exercise: Stop looking away. Stop hiding. Turn towards it. Touch it. Feel it. Listen to it. As you adopt this attitude, you are allowing raw feelings to emerge. There is nothing special to do except be with them.

Don't suppress, don't avoid, don't indulge, and don't apply an antidote, don't fix it. Just begin. Being is not fixing. If you get a slap or a punch, it's okay. Thai aggressiveness comes from suppressing the feelings for a long time. If you find yourself judging, take a step back and handshake the judgment. If you find an aversion to the emotion or an impatience, handshake that too. Keep handshaking whatever comes up.

Take a radical approach. Be fully present with your feelings and emotions, without resistance. This is a big step. It takes some guts, some courage. Jumping into the unknown water can be scary. When the time is right, though, you have to take a step. Allow awareness to feel the feeling fully, without resistance, without judgment. This is the practice of being.

Step# 3 Waiting

Exercise: Continue to practice being; give it some time. Don't rush into it. There is nothing to accomplish. You are making friends, and it takes time. Once you can be, just keep being and wait. Waiting is also kindness, compassion. Practice patience. Be patient with you. Patience means you can stay as long as you want.

This stage of waiting allows you time to refine your handshake and make sure you are not rushing to make something happen, in which case our handshake is being sabotaged by antidoting.

There is a special relief when you actually drop in and just feel the feelings. You're being true to yourself. Suppressing and avoiding can make you feel emotionally ungrounded, like you're not centered in your feeling world. To drop in and feel without judging is a special gift.

Step# 4 Communicating

Exercise: Once you are able to be with your feelings and emotions, they may start to warm up, to open up. Actually, they want to be your friends. They want to be free. They may even ask you a question. Then you can actually communicate. We may gently tell them, "it's real, but not true. Your pain is real. Your pain is real. But your narration is not true. And they will listen."

As you feel your agendas to fix something, or make something dissolve or disappear, have fallen away, you may notice a shift. Something magical and unexpected happens when we stop trying to fix, when we stop trying to make them go away. The raw emotions, the stuckness, the numbness, are not scary as they seem.

This is when true healing occurs. Now you have developed a healthy relationship between your mind and your feelings, and all sorts of communication can happen, both ways. You can share your wisdom and understanding.

Extract from Why We Meditate: The Science and Practice of Clarity and Compassion by Daniel Goleman and Tsoknyi Rinpoche, 2022

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Holding Our Child's Hand

We as parents want our children to grow and develop. Listed below are a few significant ways of helping our children.

It is never too late to extend our helping hands to our children. Start where the child is. The older your children are, the harder it will be because kids develop emotional armor and keep you from getting too close to you. Secretly, they desperately want you to love them. The even better news is your child doesn't see you as perfect parents. What your child needs most from you is a model of how to be a gracious human being. That means admitting when you have been wrong. Being willing to grow. Giving yourself support to be better, working hard to regulate your own emotion instead of acting like a crazy person.

Not so easy, right? That's why loving your child unconditionally starts with loving yourself unconditionally. We all make mistakes. How we relate to our mistakes does matter. If you use your past mistakes to guide you toward a better way in the future, that's called a learning experience, not a mistake. We are doing the best we can with whatever we know at that time. We are learning a lesson from our own mistakes we have made and learning to do the right thing. It is never too late. We can always transform our relationship with our child.

Here are five ways of transforming your relationship with yourself and with your child:

1. Lighten up

Most of our upsets with our kids stem from our own fear. What if she gets in big trouble and ruins her life? Have I emotionally damaged her forever? Remember fear never helps us make right and good decisions. You can always choose a new course now and start moving in a better direction. And the truth is, most issues with our kids are developmental, meaning that as the brain matures the child matures. So, lighten up. Give yourself some compassion, and trust that your child will be OK.

2. Make self-regulation your priority

If you can stay centered and pay attention, you can respond with love and creativity to whatever is going on with your child. It is inevitable that sometimes you will find yourself off the track. Take a deep breath, acknowledge and apologize, suggest "Do Over" and try again. That's a fantastic model for your child.

3. Focus on connecting with your child means starting where he is:

The healing comes when your child is able to show you all those hurt feelings from the past. Summon up your courage and patience and go in there with him. Let him express his emotions such as how upset he is about what happened in the past. Stay calm and centered and let him express emotions without interruptions and advice. If you can keep yourself calm and compassionate, your child will start to soften. If your child was hurt by your behavior, acknowledge and apologize. "I'm sorry that happened. I did not understand how much that hurt your feelings. That must have felt you alone and scared. I never want you to feel that way. I'm always here for you."

4. Focus on repair and not blame:

Summon up your humility, apologize and humor when you find yourself on the wrong path. STOP what you're doing, DROP your agenda just until you calm down and BREATHE. And then ask for a "Do-Over".

"I am sorry. I was starting to yell. Let us try a do-over. I am worried that you're running out of time to go to school. So, I yelled. I am sorry for doing that. How can I help you to be on time? How can we work together to make it easy?"

5. Enjoy your child:

Children need us to enjoy them. That's how they learn how they are valuable. That's how they learn what joy is, what makes life worth living.

So. Show up and lighten up. Let the past go. Accept your child's hurt. Connect now. All you have to do is to stay present and try to use love, instead of fear. Your child does not need even the red cup, or for whatever he is crying. He needs your loving acceptance. All emotions your child feels -joy and sadness, anger and fear, love and hate, upbeateness and disappointment are all ok, they all are parts of a rich emotional life. They all come and go. Stand by your children with unconditional love, acceptance and encouragement. Be a wise and happy parent. Parenting is a blessing.

May we all become gracious, loving, kind and happy parents.

When Your Child Gets Angry

“Never teach your children not to get angry; teach them how to be angry.”-Lyman Abbott

1. Keep yourself from moving into a “fight or flight” pattern of reacting when your child gets angry by taking deep breaths and reminding yourself that there is no emergency. This models emotional regulation and keeps your child feeling safer.
2. Listen. Try to see from your child’s point of view. When people don’t feel heard, they escalate.
3. Acknowledge the anger and the upset underneath. Be compassionate and acknowledge the truth in the moment.
4. Don’t get hooked by rudeness and blaming and yelling.
5. Set whatever limits are necessary to keep everyone safe, while acknowledging anger and staying compassionate. First help your child calm down. Then reconnect.
6. If your child is already in a full meltdown don’t talk except to empathize and reassure her that she is safe.
7. Remind yourself that tantrums are nature’s way of helping immature brains let off steam.
8. Remember that anger is a defense against threat. It can come from a “fight, flight or freeze” response.
9. Make it safe for your child to make past anger. If your child feels safe expressing their anger and we meet the anger with compassion, the anger will begin to melt.
10. Stay as close as you can. Your child needs an accepting witness who loves him even when he is angry. Your child needs to feel that you’re with him even when he is angry. Your empathic calm presence will soothe him and let him settle down.
11. Children usually don’t verbalize their hurts and fears. Provide your compassionate support.
12. After he is calmed down, you resist your urge to lecture. Your child needs a compassionate response, not a judgmental lecture. It makes them understand themselves and makes them feel heard.

Abridged version of the article written by Dr. Laura Markham

Building Connections With Children

Let your child follow his own direction, to navigate and flourish. Facilitate his journey. Provide support and guidance when asked for or necessary. Apply Maslow's Motivational paradigm. Let them manifest their own destiny.

See the child as he is not as you want him to be. Be a mirror for your child to let him see his own self. Be aware of the projection of your identity onto your child's identity. See your child as they are.

When your child does not comply with your wishes and desires and goes astray, become aware of your own reaction, your egoic reaction to your child. Do you fight back, flee, freeze because of uncertainty, fake and pretend everything is okay or ignore. These are different parenting styles.

When our child deviates from our expectations we need to work on ourselves and create a flow rather than an obstruction- fight, flight and freeze. When the child is behaving in a way that feels disrespectful, defiant, negligent or abusive we as parents go to our inner child and scream or fight or neglect or hate. When we react, there is a disconnect. The child feels that they are not good enough. They don't like themselves around us.. They may hate themselves and say I hate you. These are dysfunctional loops. They continue over and over again and they need to be broken by ourselves. The key is that we heal ourselves enough, so we don't put our burden on them. We do not put our junk on the table. Our inner junk may mess them up.

Parenting is inner work. Self-awareness, self-investigation, self-centering, self-caring, self-compassion and self-healing and self-wellbeing. We need to heal our inner child. How do we heal our inner wounds?

Step 1.

First We become conscious of our unconscious belief system that comes from the traditional parenting paradigm.

Step 2.

Going deeper to inquire what are typical ego patterns we have inherited from our childhood. Am I a fixer? Am I a fighter? Am I a freezer? Am I a fleer? Am I a pleaser? Am I an introvert? Am I an extrovert? This is an important step of self-awareness. We challenge our dysfunctional, counterproductive patterns to change them for better. We see our pattern, examine it and ask if it serves us. If not, we need to break it.

Step 3.

From conflict to connection. We need to do the groundwork to go there. There are four steps to attune to our children. **WARM** is an acronym.

W stands for Witness. See them as they are.

A stands for Allow. Allow them to be self-sufficient, self-reliant.

R stands for Reciprocity. Respect them as much as we ask them to respect us.

M stands for Mirror. Mirror our children as they are, mirror their isness, where they are here and now, not there and then.

How do we become a mirror to our child's self-worth? How do we understand what our child's deep feelings are and help her to navigate and negotiate these feelings? How can we be more present with our child and show up fully? How can we understand the trauma our child has been through?

How to reset and rebuild our relationships with our children? It is not too late to rebuild our relationships with our children. Make the steps and strategies a part of our blueprint in our parenting journey.

Healing Your Inner Child

We all are emotionally hurt as we grow up from childhood to adulthood. We all need to heal ourselves. How do we heal our inner wounded child?

Our inner child is the past that was formed by experiences we had in our childhood and that has a powerful influence on how we show up in the world as an adult. If we find ourselves engaging in self-harming or other-harming behaviors, sabotaging ourselves and others with negative talk or reacting impulsively to situations with anger, fear, jealousy or hatred, there is almost certainly a function of our inner hurt child acting out in pain or anger.

How do we heal our inner child so we can overcome the blocks that have been holding us back from unlocking our full potential and we become the person we would like to be. Let us first talk about who our inner child is. Basically, it is our original state of innocence- the playful, inquisitive and sensitive child we once were. It is childlike, not childish and immature. It is being childlike and experiencing life in a state of wonder and curiosity.

Sadly, some children go through traumatic experiences, and they may be easily wounded. We all know how painful and traumatic growing up can be. Even the people who love us say and do things that hurt us and impact our self-esteem. But the wounds that were inflicted on our inner child won't go away unless we acknowledge them and become aware of them and put time and effort into healing them. Sadly, most of us don't want to do that.

As grown-ups, it is our sacred responsibility and duty to work on our childhood inner wounds as well as the inner wounds of our children.

Ways of Healing Inner Wounds

1. Express unconditional love:

Let your child know and experience how much you love your child.

Do this exercise. Go back to when you were five, six, seven or eight years old. What did you want to know, what did you love to do, and what did you hope for? What kind of person do you want you to grow up to be? What kinds of experiences did you want to have? That child is still a part of you and he or she deserves all the unconditional love from significant persons in your life.

One simple way to do that is simply look into a mirror every night before you go to bed and say, “Three things I love about me are— and fill up the blank.” Or close your eyes, imagine what your inner child looks like and describe it in words.

2. Undivided Attention

All children and all of us as adults need undivided attention to ourselves and to our children. Such attention helps us to be connected with ourselves and our children. A wandering mind is not a helpful mind, It is not a happy mind. Be aware of how many times your mind is fully present with you and with your children and your mind is not multitasking. Examine the outcome of your mind when it is fully present. How do you feel when you do it and how other significant people in your life feel when you do it?

3. Provide Patience

Being patient with ourselves and our children and other persons in our life is a gift to ourselves and to others. Children are in a constant state of learning and learning involves mistakes. Mistakes are a normal part of the learning process.

Recall an incident when things did not go the way you wanted them to go, or your child did not accomplish what he or she wanted to accomplish. How did you feel about it and how did your child feel about it? How did you deal with a failure? What helped you and your child in such situations? We know achieving certain kinds of goals requires time, patience and persistence.

All of us want deeper and loving connections with ourselves and with others in our life. The path may not be clear and easy. This is where compassionate mindfulness could be very helpful. When it comes to the self, we need to tune into our inner voice, heal our wounds, and cultivate self-love and love for others in our life. It is a brave and beautiful journey.

Good Decision Making

"The way kids learn to make good decisions is by making decisions, not by following decisions." Alfie Kohn

Decision making is a life-long skill that shapes a child into a mature adult. Decisions need to be made after carefully examining the risks and rewards for short and long term consequences. We as parents are our child's model and motivator for decision making.

Here are some tips to keep in mind when guiding your child to be a better decision maker:

- Teach them good decision making and allow and encourage them to make their decisions. Popular culture has different ideas about your children's decision making. Make decisions for them: what they eat and drink, what they wear, which shows they watch, what video games they play, and what music they listen to.

- Ask your child if he has ever done anything stupid? Talk about you having done anything stupid. How did you feel about acting stupidly? What did you learn from your experience?

- This is what I hear from children when I ask them why they did stupid things:

I did not stop to think.

It seemed like fun at that time.

I was bored.

Peer pressure

I didn't consider the consequences.

To get back at my parents.

Children do stupid things. Making poor decisions and the consequences helps children learn how to make better decisions in the future. As parents or teachers, we should make them responsible for their poor decisions instead of bailing them out of trouble their decision making brings.

Ceding decision making to our children is an incremental process based on their age, maturity and decision making history. Offering more than two choices overwhelms them. As the children get older, expand the number of choices you give them. With each decision, they should recognize and take responsibility for the consequences of their decisions. Also, retain veto power when needed, but use it judiciously.

Children are notorious for making snap judgments and acting on them without thinking. The first step: Teach them to stop before they leap. When we see them about to jump without thinking, stop them and guide them through the decision making process. Also, because we can't be looking over their shoulder, we use times when they leap without thinking (and things don't turn out well) ask them how they could have made a different choice in hindsight.

One of the problems our children face with conflicting motivations is that they may know doing something is stupid, but they may feel peer pressure to do it anyway. If decision making comes down to doing right or what is popular, the majority of children will almost always choose the latter. Then the children need to ask, "What are the consequences of my actions? How much trouble will I get in?" They need to judge the risks and rewards of their decisions.

Another question that children have a difficult time considering: "How will my decision affect others?" Teaching them to ask this question can help them make decisions that are most beneficial to both them and others.

Finally, perhaps the most important question children need to ask themselves, "Is this decision in my best interests? Understanding what is in their best interests and having these concerns outweigh competing interests is the culmination of the decision making process. You may put the questions raised above in a noticeable place in your home, such as on your refrigerator.

Coaching Good Decision- Making

Help your children answer the key questions raised in this article and help them answer key questions. This will teach them to take thoughtful steps to decision-making..

After the decision, help them judge how good the decision was and, if the decision turns out to be a poor one, what they learn from it will help them in the future situations. You can also present your children with hypothetical situations, such as a moral dilemma about

lying to a friend that they are likely to face and engage them in a conversation about how they would make a decision. Of course, children won't always make the right decision, particularly when they're young. But if you coach them and give them experience with good decision-making, they will use it more as they gain maturity.

Extracted from Kindful Kids Weekly, September 12, 2020

Mindfulness in Daily Life

Staying Positive Or Staying True

Positivity is highly valued and emphasized by Positive Psychologists like Martin Seligman. Think positively, act positively, and live positively. Stay Positive is a mantra for living a happy life. How about Staying True?. Spiritual seekers and spiritual teachers value Staying True.

If we go through the process of self-examination, we find that we have dark mental and emotional clouds in our consciousness. Our inner light is covered by such dark clouds, and we may unconsciously lead a blind life causing self-suffering and suffering of others connected with us. Transpersonal Psychologists like Carl Jung show the power of such dark clouds or Shadows that have a strong impact on our mental, emotional, transactional and spiritual life. Facing our shadows, the dark clouds and working on the shadows is beneficial to us individually and collectively. Such work is not easy and comfortable. However, it is essential to fully actualize our potential for our wellness, for the individual wellness and collective wellness.

Most of us have been raised to be moral, good, agreeable, putting all our unacceptable qualities in what Robert Bly calls “The Long Black Bag” we drag behind us or what Carl Jung termed the “Shadow.” The shadow is the place within where everything we have forgotten, repressed, denied, rejected, or not yet discovered goes to live. Shadows are always influential if not always obvious. And when we try to live selflessly, spiritually, the dark side of our nature gains power and creates obstacles on our spiritual path. We have a choice either to turn away or to look for redemption. We need to create wholeness in us. As Carl Jung wisely says, “I will be whole, not good.” Wholeness is accepting all parts of myself and working through them without suppressing, repressing and denying the dark clouds.

We cannot simply get rid of the shadow all at once. It takes the light of mindfulness, wisdom, courage, and forbearance for our shadows to reveal themselves to us so they can be faced and dealt with gently, compassionately, and firmly. Let us awaken to greater truth, greater humility, and greater care for one another. Let this be our daily mantra, our daily prayer.

Mindfulness and Well-being

In 1992, Dr. Richard Davidson was asked by the Holy Dalai Lama to use tools to study compassion and kindness besides studying anger, fear and depression. In 2000 Dr. Davidson started doing compassion and kindness research from a neurological perspective at the University of Wisconsin.

Highlights of the research studies:

Human beings are wired to flourish. The innate propensity needs a nourishing environment. The human brain has neuroplasticity. Human brains change by the flourishing environment. There are four components of the nourishing environment -

Meta awareness or mindfulness. Awareness of what the mind is doing-minding the mind.

Connection. Gratitude and kindness create wholesome connection.

Insight. Knowledge of the self- narrative. Change in the negative self-belief.

Purpose. How can we derive purpose in what we are doing such as taking the garbage, or teaching or counseling, doing exercise or meditating? What is your motivation for doing such activities? Altruism.

The brain changes. The brain is plastic. The brain changes according to the kind of input it receives.

Well-being is a skill like learning to play a cello. Practice skills of well-being. According to Dr. Richard Davidson there are neurologically validated four constituents of well-being. Each of the four has received serious scientific attention. Each is rooted in neurocircuits and each of the neurocircuits exhibits neuroplasticity. If we exercise these circuits, they will strengthen and they will provide substrate by enduring changes which can promote higher levels of well-being. The four constituents of well-being:

Resilience:

Resilience is the rapidity with which we recover from adversity. Some people recover slowly and other people more quickly. Individuals who show a rapid return to the baseline in certain key neurocircuits have higher levels of well-being and are protected in many ways from adverse consequences of life. Research shows that this circuit can be modulated. It requires 6 to 7 thousand hours of practice. Practicing loving kindness 30 minutes a day for three weeks may modulate the neurocircuits.

Positive Outlook:

The second constituent is in many ways the flip side of the first one. It is called outlook vs inlook, from negative outlook to positive outlook. It is to see positive in others, to see the other being who has innate qualities of goodness, the ability to recognize these qualities in others. An individual who suffers from depression shows activity in this circuitry, but it doesn't last. This activity is very transient. Simple practices like loving kindness may alter this circuitry quite quickly even with a modest dose of loving kindness practice. Dr. Davidson conducted a randomized study of people who never meditated before. There were two groups: one group received a secular form of compassion training. The second group received a cognitive appraisal training that came from cognitive therapy. Both groups went through training for two weeks, thirty minutes a day of training. Brain scans were taken before and after training. In the compassion training group, the circuits in the brain that are important for the positive outlook were strengthened over this two week training. These changes predicted prosocial behavior.

Attention:

There is a saying, "A wandering mind is an unhappy mind." Research done at Harvard University shows that on the average 47 per cent of an adult's waking life is spent not paying attention to what they are doing. As an experiment in attention, answer the following three questions:

What are you doing right now?

Where is your mind right now?

Is it focused on what you're doing or focused elsewhere?

How happy or unhappy are you right now, at this very moment?

On the average 47 per cent of an adult's waking life is spent not paying attention to what they are doing. We can do better. That number can go down. Imagine what impact it would have on your study, work, productivity and relationship. In Professor William James' book written in 1890, there is a whole chapter on Attention. He says, "Attention is the very root of Judgment, character and will." He went on to say any education would be education par excellence. Contemplative practice is a vehicle for this kind of education.

Generosity:

There is a plethora of data showing individuals engaged in generous and altruistic behavior, activate circuits in the brain that are key to fostering wellness.

These four constituents have been investigated scientifically and the neurocircuits that are important to each of these constituents exhibit neuroplasticity. It can be shaped through training and experience.

We can take responsibility for our own mind. Most of the time our brain is shaped unwittingly. We have an opportunity to take more responsibility for the internal shaping of our own mind and through that we can shape our brain in ways that would enable these four fundamental constituents. We can cultivate the skill of well-being.

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Facing Challenges of Uncertainty

We all are facing challenges of uncertainty at this time. Uncertainty generates fear, anxiety, frustration and bewilderment. How do we face these challenges in different areas of our life? Children are struggling in schools, teachers are struggling in classrooms, parents are struggling between work and taking care of their children, small business owners are worrying about how to run their business and lots of folks are worried about how to survive without jobs and without health care. We all are experiencing chronic stress.

Strategies for Coping With Stress

● Simplification:

Simplification is about relaxing our standards to a level appropriate for the situation.

● Acceptance:

Remember The Serenity Prayer: “God grant me the serenity to Accept things I cannot change; Courage to change things I can; and Wisdom to know the difference.” Accepting things as they are under these unusual times is wise choice making. As parents we accept the reality of distance learning or hybrid learning.

● **Setting priorities:**

Recognizing, sorting out, and accepting priorities without grumbling or complaining. As parents our priorities are helping our child to do homework if necessary and helping our child to learn how to manage his mental and emotional stress. And how to take care of our work and our stress. These are competing priorities. We need to strike a balance between the two.

● **Expectations:**

Our expectations need to be realistic. We do not expect ourselves to deliver things we are not capable of delivering and the same standard applies to having expectations of others in our life. Our expectations need to be tailored to the changing times. Academic learning is secondary. Creating safety, belonging and connection, creating a calm environment and helping our children to cope with the ongoing stress is our priority.

● Simplify our to-do list. Let us ask ourselves: “What is the one thing I need to do? What is the one thing I need to let go of?” Try to shorten your to-do list and expand your “not-to-do” list. Notice how much energy we can save by making wise choices.

● Start the day with some positive appreciation or gratitude. When you feel gratitude as your day begins, your whole day is primed for looking for other positive things.

● Keep calm and structured. If you google to get an answer to your question “How to help my kid?” The first suggestion will be: Create a schedule. When we create a relatively flexible schedule and routine with the collaboration of our child, it creates a sense of calmness and steadiness. Create a daily schedule not only for academic work but also for creating a time for play, connection, exercise, and fun activities. Do not forget to get your child involved in creating a schedule. Let him know and feel that his voice matters.

● Provide modeling. Parents’ stress trickles down to their child’s stress. Children observe us and learn from us. It is important to provide good modeling to our children. Remember Mahatma Gandhi’s advice: “Be the change you want to have in the world.”

● Shift from “What if” to “what is.” Delete the “f” and make it “s”. Examples: “What if my child gets the coronavirus?” My child does not have the coronavirus now. My child is coronavirus free. “What if I lose my job?” The fact is you do have a job right now. “What if” mindset creates anxiety and apprehension. “What is” mindset creates calmness and serenity. We need to learn to make wise choices. Learn not to arrive before you arrive.

● Information and transformation. Information is useful but if we do not apply it and practice it, it has not much value.

I would like to conclude this article by contemplating on my beloved prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

Lord make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where there is despair, hope.

Where there is darkness, light.

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

To be consoled as to console,

To be understood as to understand,

To be loved as to love.

For it is in pardoning that we are pardoned.

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Holistic Paradigm of Gratitude

Gratitude is simply recognizing all positive things in our life and how they make our life better. It could be as simple as stopping for a moment to soak the beauty of a flower we pass on a walk or to say thank you to a service worker. Lots of things can create super feelings of gratitude if we notice them, acknowledge them and appreciate them. Studies have shown that gratitude has a positive effect on our physical, mental, emotional, and relational well-being.

Whenever we receive and express gratitude, we will get a feeling good hormone, a neurotransmitter dopamine. It's a chemical messenger that gives us feeling good, pleasant and helps us to be happy, motivated and focused. And the more often we practice gratitude, the more often the dopamine is produced in our brain. It is good to know that we can create pleasure, happiness and remain focused by feeling and expressing gratitude.

Gratitude has been shown to contribute to positive mental and emotional health. Studies have shown that feeling and expressing gratitude helps improve depression and anxiety. Being grateful is linked to improving our moods. When we are less anxious and less depressed, we feel less stressed. Lower levels of stress are good for our immune system. Gratitude can improve our physical health. Studies have shown that there is a link between gratitude and lower risk of health failure. Feeling more positive and optimistic comes with its own benefits that include healthy aging.

Choosing an attitude can improve the quality in us and the people around us.

Now the question is how we can create habits of gratitude. There are myriad simple and free methods to incorporate gratitude into our daily routine:

Keep a gratitude journal. Write one or two things we are grateful for in our daily life. It's a good habit to go back and spend a few minutes reflecting on some items from the journal. We can create a map of gratitude as a visual mood board we can display in our own house and share our experience of gratitude with our life partner or our family members. This can be done in a classroom. It can be done at a desk as a reminder of everything we are grateful for. Another way is to have a gratitude jar and write down what we are grateful for on slips of paper and put them in a jar. Write down what we are grateful for and reflect on it.

If we are a religious person a prayer can be a great way to practice gratitude or we can express gratitude to a higher power, or even the universe for the air we breathe, for the air in our lungs, or for our functioning body, or the beauty of nature around us.

Meditation is another way or technique to become aware of things we are grateful for in our life journey to this point. Volunteering for others is a very good way to increase gratitude in our life. Another way involves setting aside for ten minutes at our bedtime to write down three things that went well throughout our day and why they went well. Studies show that people who try this exercise see noticeable improvement in depression and anxiety.

Another method is enjoying nature. Being in nature we feel the presence of divinity. Being in nature also promotes peaceful reflections. Nature also helps us to be with mindfulness-being present in the moment.

Excerpts from the article on Gratitude by Mark Hyman MD.

Reflect on this article and write what resonates in you, what applies to you.

Which method appeals to you to cultivate gratitude?

Which way have you tried and how has it helped you?

Which method will you recommend to someone close to you to cultivate gratitude?

Inner Work for Cultivating Four Limitless Qualities

In these challenging times we are finding it hard to be the compassionate, kind, and open hearted person we would like to be. We feel stuck amid constant fears and frustrations that seem to never end. Do you yearn to love and connect with others more deeply-but just can't? Are you struggling with matters of the heart?

I have learned four limitless qualities of working on oneself and working with others-loving kindness, equanimity, composition, and joy and how to apply them to my life and share them with others. There are four obstacles to cultivating the four limitless qualities-closed downness, fear, a sense of lack or jealousy, and prejudice/bias. These obstacles are used as steppingstones to discover the four timeless qualities which are their opposites.

Loving kindness, compassion, joy, and acceptance-we all hold all these qualities basic goodness within. It is our natural state. We simply have to uncover what we already have. When we are not clouded by emotions, not shut down by old habits and fears, even if for a moment, we realize what is best for ourselves. We go in the direction of healing and openness. And we discover the freedom to love."

In the Buddhist contemplative tradition, we are taught that our fundamental state of being is one where we are wide open, awake, and possessing an Immense capacity for love.

What if you chose gentle acceptance of yourself and others over harsh judgment?

What if you could learn to embrace the full spectrum of your experience
with unconditional warmth, openness, and kindness?

What if you extended that love, compassion, and joyfulness to your home, to your workplace and your community- creating a ripple effect that ultimately benefits the entire globe?

By learning how to open your heart and stay present to whatever arises in your mind, you can experience these shifts-in yourself and in those around you.

My deepest hope is that you will learn how to treat yourself-and those who may be causing you frustration and suffering-with the same love and support you offer to your truest

friends. And that you begin to unravel your habitual patterns-fear of vulnerability, aversion to discomfort, nagging self-criticism-you will discover your true nature: one filled with loving kindness, compassion, happiness, and limitless potential.

Extracted from Prema Chodron

Mindfulness For Transforming Negative Mindsets

We all have a mindset, a belief system which affects us personally and relationally. Positive and growth mindset fosters personal and relational growth and development. Research studies show that people with a positive and growth mindset are resilient, have higher performance levels, have better relationships, low stress and low anxiety and improved brain functions. Having a clear and strong mind is super important for how we do well in our life. Mental health is what helps us tackle problems, stick to our goals and face challenges with determination.

Practicing mindfulness fosters and enhances positive and growth mindsets. I have listed ten negative mindsets and have discussed how practicing mindfulness and Buddhist teachings transforms negative mindsets into positive mindsets.

1. Awareness of a negative mindset: A negative mindset is like a cloud that covers the bright sun of our happiness. It makes us mentally weak because it colors everything in our life with the shades of gloom and despair. When we focus on the bad things we miss out the good stuff happening in our life. It's like wearing dark glasses. Everything appears dim, even the beautiful moments. Such a mental outlook becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy influencing our actions and decisions. When we practice mindfulness we pay attention to our thoughts without judging them. Instead of letting negative thoughts take over us we can acknowledge them and then choose to focus on positive aspects. Practicing Metta-Loving Kindness meditation, directing warm and positive thoughts towards us and others also can help us overcome negative mindset. This way we can face challenges with a more resilient mindset.

2. Complaining about things outside our control is like holding onto a hot coal. It only hurts. It weakens our mind as it puts our attention on what's wrong rather than finding

solutions. It is like being stuck in a quicksand. The more we complain, the deeper we sink into negativity. When we complain we often forget about impermanence. Impermanence means everything is changing. Complaining tends to make us believe that things will never change. We get trapped in a cycle of discontentment. To overcome this mindset of complaining, we can practice acceptance. This means that life has ups and downs and we cannot control everything. Acceptance is like learning to dance in the rain instead of complaining about the storm. We can focus our energy on things we can control. It is like steering a boat in a storm. We may not control the weather, but we can navigate our vessel, by taking action where we have power. We move from a passive complaining mode to an active problem solving mindset.

Letting go is another powerful practice. Letting go doesn't mean giving up. It means releasing the tight grip on complaints and allowing space for positive change. This way we learn to approach challenges with a balanced mind. Accepting the impermanence of situations and focusing our efforts where we can make a difference is the right thing to do. In doing so, we liberate ourselves from the grip of complaints and cultivate mental strength that propels us forward even in the face of adversity.

3. Not expressing yourself is like having a treasure chest but keeping it locked away.

This mindset impoverishes our mind because it stops us from sharing our thoughts, feelings and ideas with others in our life. It's like trying to navigate a dark room without turning on the light. Expressing ourselves authentically is considered eventful for building a strong foundation for mental wellbeing. When we hold back our thoughts and emotions it's like bottling up a fizzy drink. The pressure builds up and eventually it might explode. This explosion could be in the form of stress, anxiety or feeling of being overwhelmed because we have not let it out what's inside.

Buddhism encourages us to communicate with truth, kindness, and mindfulness. It's like planting the seeds of positivity when we speak. Our words can grow into a garden of understanding and connection. By aligning our words with these principles, we build a bridge between ourselves and others creating authentic relationships. To overcome the habit of not expressing oneself, mindfulness becomes a valuable tool. Mindfulness is like a mirror. It reflects our thoughts and helps us become aware of our feelings. By being present in the moment, we can observe our thoughts and feelings without judgment and express ourselves with clarity and compassion. Expressing oneself is not just about words. It can also involve non-verbal communication such as body language and gestures. These unspoken expressions are like a secret language covering our thoughts and feelings even when we do not say a word. By integrating these Buddhist teachings into our lives, we learn that authentic expression is not only liberating for ourselves but also it contributes to the wellbeing of those around us. It's like opening a window to let fresh air in. Expressing ourselves allows the light of understanding and connection to brighten our mental space. In

breaking free from the habit of not expressing ourselves we embark on a journey toward authenticity building a resilient and empowered mind.

4. Blaming others for your problems is like trying to run a race with a backpack full of rocks. It weighs us down and slows our progress. This mindset weakens our minds because it takes away our power. It's like handing the steering wheel of life to someone else instead of driving ourselves.

The teachings of Buddhism illuminate why this mindset makes us mentally weak and how we can untangle ourselves from the blame game. In Buddhism the concept of Karma, action, teaches us that our actions have consequences. Blaming others is like ignoring this law of cause and effect. It's refusing to recognize that we play a role in the unfolding of our own lives. When we blame others we become spectators rather than active participants in our journey of life. Taking personal responsibility is about understanding that we have the ability to shape our experiences. It is like the captain of the ship. We may face storms, but we can navigate through them. We empower ourselves to make positive choices. To overcome the habit of blaming others, forgiveness plays a crucial role. Forgiveness is not what others did was okay. It's about releasing ourselves from carrying the burden of resentment. It is like setting down a heavy backpack. We feel lighter and freer. Forgiving others and ourselves is a powerful step towards reclaiming our personal responsibility. Mindfulness is a key practice in Buddhism. It helps us become aware of our thoughts, feelings and actions. It's like shining a light on a dark path.

By being mindful we can see where we're going. By being mindful we can catch ourselves when we are tempted to blame and choose a more empowering response. This shift from blame to responsibility is like trading the rocks in our backpack for wings that help us soar.

Incorporating these Buddhist teachings into our lives invites us to step into our own power for making a shift from a negative to a positive outlook. Such teachings invite us to step into our own power and take charge of our journey. Breaking free from blame games is not just about holding others accountable. It's also about recognizing our agency and ability to shape a positive and resilient mindset by steering away from blame and embracing personal responsibility, we embark on a journey towards mental strength and self-empowerment.

5. Fantasizing instead of visualizing is like building castles in the air. They may be beautiful, but they lack a solid foundation. This mindset weakens our mind because it disconnects us from the reality of the present moment. It is like chasing mirages in a desert. Thai habit weakens our mind because it disconnects us from the reality of the present

moment. We may never reach what we are yearning for. The teachings of Buddhism offer insights why this mindset makes us mentally weak and how we can shift from fantasies to visualization for a more grounded and positive mindset.

Fantasies often involve unrealistic scenarios and wishful thinking. It is like expecting a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow- a beautiful idea but not based on reality. Lost in fantasies is like daydreaming. We are missing the beauty of the present moment. This mindset weakens us because it leads us to disappointment when reality doesn't align with our imagined scenarios. Visualization on the other hand involves creating mental images of achievable goals. It's like having a treasure map. We can chart a course to reach our aspirations. Buddhism emphasizes the importance of right intention and right action which aligns with visualizing positive outcomes and taking practical steps towards realizing them. By grounding our aspirations in reality, we bridge the gap between dreams and achievable goals. The teachings of impermanence in Buddhism reminds us that change is constant.

Fantasies often involve clinging to a fixed idea of the future while visualization adapts to the shifting landscape of life. It is like riding a wave instead of holding on to the shore. We move with the flow of life by acknowledging the impermanence of all things. Accepting this truth, we develop a more flexible and resilient mindset. We become aware of our thoughts and gently guide them towards positive and realistic visualization. Mindfulness allows us to appreciate the beauty of the present moment while actively working towards goals. Incorporating these teachings into our lives encourages us to shift from fantasy to visualization fostering a more positive and grounded mindset. By embracing the principle of impermanence, right intention and mindfulness we break from the mindset of constructing castles in the air. Visualization becomes a powerful ally helping us manifest positive realities and navigate the path of life with purpose and resilience.

6. Not taking time for personal relationships is like having a garden but forgetting to water the plants. Over time neglecting watering the plants everything withers away. This mindset weakens our minds because humans are social beings, and meaningful connections bring joy and support. It is like trying to sail a boat without wind. We might move but it is a slow and lonely journey. The eighty four years (and counting) of Harvard study boil down to a single principle of happiness: Good relationships keep us healthier and happier. Period.

The teachings of Buddhism guide us to understand why this mindset makes us mentally weak and unhappy and how we can cultivate stronger connections through the gift of time. Neglecting personal connections is like closing the door to a warm and welcoming home. We miss out the comfort and support that relationships can provide. When we don't take time for our loved ones it's neglecting a garden. The weeds of misunderstanding and

distance start to grow. This kind of mindset weakens our mind and makes us mentally and emotionally poor. The weeds of misunderstanding and distance start to grow. We may feel isolated without the nourishment of love and compassion.

Building, nourishing and maintaining relationships requires time and effort much like tending to a garden to make it flourish. To overcome the habit of neglecting personal relationships we can start by being present. Presence is like the sunshine for relationships. We can start by being present not only physically but also mentally, emotionally, socially and spiritually. Presence is like sunshine for relationships. It helps relationships thrive when time is spent qualitatively with our loved ones. It is like watering the plants regularly, not once in a while.

It nurtures the bonds and strengthens our connection. Communication is another vital aspect of relationships. It's like the wind that fills the sails of the boat. It propels us forward. Taking the time to listen to share our thoughts and feelings is like the water that keeps the garden of relationships vibrant and alive. By being open and communicative we foster understanding and deepen our connections.

Buddhism encourages us to recognize the impermanence of life including the time we have with our loved ones. It's like savoring a delicious meal. We appreciate it more when we know it won't last forever. By understanding the fleeting nature of time, we become motivated to prioritize relationships. And invest the gift of time we have with our loved ones. Incorporating these teachings into our lives reminds us that personal relationships are like the threads that weave the fabric of our wellbeing. By taking time for our loved ones, we cultivate a support system that strengthens our minds and hearts and enriches our lives. Breaking free from the habit of neglecting personal relationships allows us to navigate the journey of life with companions by our side, making the voyage more joyful and fulfilling.

7. Letting our emotions rule us is like being carried away by a strong river current. We lose control and direction. This mindset weakens our minds because emotions, when unmanaged, can become overwhelming and lead us astray. We might get lost in the turbulence.

The teachings of Buddhism guide us to understand why this habit makes us mentally weak, and how we can develop emotional intelligence to navigate the current of our feelings. In Buddhism, mindfulness is the powerful practice that encourages us to observe our emotions without getting swept away by them. It's like standing on a riverbank and watching the river flow. We can witness our emotions without being pulled under. When

we let our emotions rule us, it's like being caught in a storm without an anchor. We get tossed around and it becomes challenging to find our way.

The concept of emotional intelligence involves recognizing, understanding and managing our own emotions, as well as empathizing with the emotions of others. It's like having a compass in the storm. It helps us navigate through challenges and maintain a steady course. When we let our emotions control us, it's like handing over the steering wheel to a turbulent force, risking getting lost in the chaos. To overcome the habit of letting emotions rule us, mindfulness becomes a valuable asset. Mindfulness is like a sturdy boat. It helps us navigate through the waves without capsizing. By being present in the moment and observing our emotions with curiosity and non-judgment, we gain the ability to respond wisely instead of reacting disruptively. Buddhism encourages us to cultivate a balanced mind through practices like, loving kindness meditation. It's like planting seeds of compassion into our hearts. The seeds grow into a garden and allow us to respond to the emotions with kindness, both towards ourselves, and others. By embracing emotional intelligence, we develop a skill that empowers us to understand, navigate, and learn from our emotions. Incorporating these teachings into our lives helps us to be free from the habit of letting our emotions rule us. Instead of being at the mercy of emotional storms, we become captains of our emotion ships steering with mindfulness and compassion. By cultivating emotional intelligence we navigate the seas of feelings, with resilience, maintaining a steady course towards mental health, and wellbeing.

8. Trying to control everything is like juggling too many balls. It's exhausting and eventually we might drop them all. This mindset weakens us because it sets us up for frustration and disappointment. It's like attempting to catch the wind, impossible and frustrating. The teachings of Buddhism guide us to understand why this habit makes us mentally weak, and how we can find empowerment in the paradox of surrendering control. It's by surrendering control that we become empowered. In Buddhism, the concept of non-attachment teaches us to let go of the illusion of control. It's like realizing we can't hold on to the clouds. They are always changing and shifting. When we try to control everything, it's like trying to hold on to water. It slips through our fingers, leaving us feeling powerless. Surrendering control doesn't mean giving up. Instead, it means recognizing the meanings of our influences. It's like planting seeds in a garden. We nurture them, but we cannot control the weather. The weather may bring rain or shine.

Our role is to tend to the garden with care. When we accept that some things are beyond our control, we free ourselves from the constant struggle, much like releasing a clenched fist to overcome the habit of trying to control everything. Mindfulness becomes our ally.

Mindfulness is like a steady anchor. It keeps us grounded in the present moment. By focusing on what we can influence, and letting go of the rest, we will navigate the seas of uncertainty with grace and resilience.

Buddhism encourages us to embrace the paradox, that surrendering control leads to true empowerment. It's like by losing our grip, we gain the strength to face life's challenges. When we surrender the need to control, it's like opening our hands and to recognize what life has to offer rather than clinging to our preconceived notions. Incorporating these teachings into our lives, we realize the burden of trying to control everything. By surrendering the illusion of control, we paradoxically find empowerment, like a sail catching the wind and propelling us forward with the sense of freedom. Breaking free from the habit of micro-managing every aspect of life, we discover the strength that comes from embracing the ebb and flow of existence.

9. Dwelling on the past is like carrying a backpack full of old stuff. It slows us down and makes the journey harder. This mindset weakens our mind because it keeps us stuck with what is already happening, preventing us from fully enjoying the present or- looking forward to the future. It's like driving a car while constantly looking in the rear- view mirror. We're likely to miss what's ahead. The teachings of Buddhism help us understand why dwelling on the past makes us mentally weak, and how we can break free from these chains. In Buddhism, the practice of mindfulness teaches us to be present in the here and now.

It's like opening the windows to let in the fresh air. It clears out the stuffiness of the past. When we dwell on what is behind us, it's like trying to walk backwards, we might stumble and lose our way. By letting go of the past, we clear space for new experiences and opportunities. Dwelling on the past also ties up old wounds and grievances. It's like keeping a wound covered in a bandage, long after it has healed. It hinders us from fully embracing life. Buddhism encourages us to practice forgiveness, not only for others, but also for ourselves. Forgiveness is like opening the door to release the past. It allows us to step in the present and unburden us. The teachings of impermanence in Buddhism remind us that everything changes. It's like watching a river flow. The water never stays the same. When we cling to the past, it's like trying to freeze the river. It becomes stagnant and loses its vitality. By acknowledging the impermanence of all things, we free ourselves from the chains that bind us from past experiences. To overcome the dwelling of the past, self-compassion is crucial. It's like opening a kind word to a friend in need. We deserve the same kindness by treating ourselves with compassion and understanding. We break free from the self-imposed prison of regret and guilt. The past becomes the teacher rather than a jailer.

Incorporating these teachings into our lives empowers us to let go of the chains that bind us to the past. By embracing mindfulness, forgiveness and self-compassion, we create a path towards liberation. Breaking free from a habit of dwelling on the past allows us to step into the present with lightness and openness. We are ready to embrace the unfolding moments of our lives.

10. Worrying about what others say and do is like carrying around a heavy backpack, filled with other people's thoughts. It burdens our minds and hinders our authenticity. This mindset weakens us because it ties our self-worth to external opinions. It's like sailing a boat, tossed around by every passing wave. The teachings of Buddhism offer insights as to why this habit makes us mentally weak and how we can liberate ourselves from the shackles of constant judgment. In Buddhism the practice of equanimity encourages us to remain balanced amidst changing times. It's like standing on solid ground.

While the winds of opinion blow, we stay steady. When we worry too much about what others say we build our house on a shaky ground. It becomes vulnerable to every passing storm. By cultivating equanimity, we develop resilience in the face of external judgments. Judging ourselves based on other's opinions is like letting someone else hold the mirror. We see ourselves through their eyes, not ours. Buddhism teaches us the importance of self-acceptance and authenticity. It's like wearing our favorite clothes, instead of trying to fit into someone else's wardrobe. We express ourselves genuinely by letting go of the need for constant approval. We break free from the limitations imposed by others' expectations.

Mindfulness is a central theme in Buddhism. It helps us become aware of our thoughts and reactions. When we worry about what others say, it's like being lost in a maze of opinions. Mindfulness acts as a guiding light, helping us to find our way back to our true selves. By being present in the moment, we can observe these worries without getting entangled in them. To overcome our habit of worrying about others' opinions, self-love becomes a powerful antidote. It's like planting seeds of kindness within ourselves. The seeds grow into the garden of self-acceptance. By recognizing our intrinsic worth and embracing our unique qualities we build a shield against the arrows of external judgment. Incorporating these teachings into our lives liberates us from the mental weakness tied to worrying about what others say and do.

By practicing equanimity, embracing authenticity, and cultivating self-love we break free from the chains that bind us to external opinions.

Breaking the habit of constant judgment allows us to navigate our own course, steering towards life guided by inner authenticity. The teachings of Buddhism provide a

comprehensive guide to overcoming habits that make us mentally weak. By weaving mindfulness, compassion and wisdom into the fabric of our daily lives we can transcend negative patterns and cultivate enduring mental strength.

This exploration serves as an invitation to embark on a transformative journey integrating the profound teachings of Buddhism into the tapestry of our existence. May the wisdom of these teachings illuminate the path to a resilient and empowering mind inspiring a life filled with purpose, compassion, and joy.

Source: Buddhist Teachings

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New Year's Resolutions For Families

"Tomorrow is the first blank page of a 365 page book. Write a good one"

-Brad Paisley

New Year is a fresh start, a celebration of life, especially after such a tough Year. Make everyday a family gathering day to share an inspiring and uplifting sentence or a paragraph that is meaningful to you.

Try these simple inspiring ideas to provide us both roots and wings as we head into the New Year.

1. Say goodbye to the year ___ with love and appreciation. It was a hard year but even in hard times there is so much to be grateful for. We can go around the table and have each person in the family say what one thing happened for which they are grateful.
2. Leave the past as you greet the future. Most of us carry some baggage we don't need to carry whether it is fear, anger, exhaustion, self-judgment or simple clutter. Ask everyone in your family what one burden they would like to leave behind as the year turns.
3. Finish by asking what everyone is looking forward to in the New Year. Every New Year's day, take a family photo intended to be a slice of life. Frame them and put them on your wall. It shows how much everyone has changed over the years,
4. Discuss and model how to make actual change. Most New Year's resolutions fail because they're goals that are tough to keep us on track. It is advisable to set a goal or goals that are attainable. So, start small and specific. Have a plan to measure your success. Give yourself the support and ask for it from someone in the family or a friend to actually keep your resolution. Check in daily with your family about whether you are making progress in the specific area of your life. It's helpful to get feedback from someone who knows you.
5. Take a few moments to lavish what you have done right, small or large, in your life. Open yourself to do more in the coming year.

May our New Year be filled with every blessing for you and your family!

Questions to Ask in the first week of the New Year:

Day 1:

What do I most want to feel this year? This question takes goals and resolutions out of the “task frame” into the “experience frame.” Pick up one real reason you want to achieve this goal this year.

Day 2:

Whom am I going to love unconditionally this year to the best of my ability? Yes, it is easy to say your child, your spouse or your friend. Pick a relationship that needs some loving intention, kindness, forgiveness, patience, or time spent on it. Unconditional love means no judgment. It is quite simple to accept of the person as they are. What follows is a breakthrough through and a new way of relating to each other.

Day 3:

How am I going to go back on track when life gets harder? Focus on a technique called the Three R's: reflection, recovery, repair.

Day 4:

Who is someone you could help achieve their most important resolution? This pulls the focus off me, me, me and helps you contribute to some else's life.

Day 5:

What word do I pick as the quality I most want to focus on this year? This question asks you to look at the quality I must want to focus on this year. Qualities such as you could be more grateful, patient, forgiving, patient, courageous, authentic, resourceful etc. The word you choose will be your guide. This kind of soul goal will make you feel far better than any external goal.

Extracted from Mindful365 by Arianne de Bonvoisin

Spiritual Growth and Awakening

How to Live Spiritually

We live in a world with different religious orientations. Sadly, for thousands of years countless people have fought, tortured and killed over the differences between the world's religions. No wonder why many young and not so young people are drifting away from their religions. Scholars all over the world call the essential, common core of different religions the perennial wisdom or perennial philosophy. It is a treasure house of humankind's accumulated wisdom. Which offers deep insights into the nature of love, kindness, compassion, health and happiness, suffering and liberation or salvation.

1. What is real? What is our true nature? There are two realms of reality. The first is the realm of physical objects and living creatures. This realm is accessible to us via sight and sound and studied by sciences like physics and biology. Beneath lies another realm far more subtle and profound: a realm of consciousness, spirit, mind, the Tao. This domain is not limited by space or time or physical laws, and hence it is unbound and infinite, timeless and eternal.
2. We partake of both realms. We are not only physical beings but also spiritual beings. At the core of our being, in the depths of our minds, we have a center of transcendence awareness. This center is described as pure consciousness, spirit, or Self by such names as Atman in Hinduism, the Buddha nature in Buddhism, neshamah in Judaism, and the divine spark in Christianity. This is the sacred ground or foundation of all reality. We are not divorced from the sacred but eternally and intimately linked to it.
3. Human beings can recognize their divine nature and the sacred ground that is its nature. The claims of the perennial philosophy do not have to be accepted blindly. Each one of us can test them for themselves and ascertain their validity based on our direct experience. This is not easy. We may be graced with spontaneous glimpses. Realization of our true nature or reality requires significant practice called sadhana in Hinduism. It is a spiritual journey. The path is like a razor's edge, difficult to cross over. When our mind is quiet and calm we can have a direct experience of our Self. It is an immediate knowing, a direct intuition in which we may not only see the divine spark, but we identify with it and recognize that we are the divine spark. Sages from Judaism, Sufism, and Hinduism, from St John of the Cross and St. Francis of Assisi, Plato to Buddha, from Eckhart to Lao Tzu have agreed on this.
4. The perennial philosophy's fourth claim is that our spiritual nature is the ultimate goal or purpose of life and the greatest good of human experience. This is not a wild dogma to be accepted by the word of others or on blind faith. Rather, it is an

expression of those who have tested these fruits themselves. It is an invitation to all of us to test and taste for ourselves. The central ringing cry of the perennial philosophy is this: We are sadly mistaken when we see ourselves as temporary bodies instead of timeless spirit; as separate, suffering selves instead of timeless spirit and blessed children of God. Look within, and at the center of our mind, in the depths of our soul, we will discover our true Self intimately linked to the sacred. All wisdom traditions exist to help us discover our true Self.

Seven Spiritual Practices

"Little by little, wean yourself.

This is the gift of what I Have to say.

From an embryo, whose nourishment comes in the blood,

move to an infant milking drink,

to a child on solid food,

to a searcher after wisdom,

to a hunter of a more invisible game.

-Rumi

There are certain practices common to all religions. The first hint came from Ram Dass, the only Harvard professor to drop out and become a spiritual teacher. He suggested that all spiritual traditions emphasize three qualities of mind and contain practices to develop them: practice of developing ethics, concentration, and wisdom. If we live unethically and deliberately hurt others, we also hurt ourselves, because our minds become ridden with guilt and fear. Concentration is necessary in order to calm our restless minds and to disentangle from the countless worries and obsessions that typically preoccupy us. Wisdom must be cultivated if we are to understand life and ourselves and to live well.

There are other essential common practices. How do we transform unwholesome emotions such as fear and hatred and cultivate beneficent emotions such as love and compassion? The results of such techniques are slow, but they transform emotional life and develop emotional wisdom.

Next is the practice of shifting motivation. Most of us focus on and even become addicted to things like money, possessions, praise and power. They offer only temporary solace and distort our values. "Even wise men cannot deal with fame and wealth. So how can you?"

asks Taoism. The spiritual traditions offer techniques to reduce such cravings and to replace them with healthier and more satisfying desires.

Usually, our perception is clouded by our fears, craving, and wandering mind. We see as St. Paul said, “through a darkened glass.” Spiritual traditions provide methods for clearing our awareness and awakening spiritual vision so that we can see ourselves and the world sensitively and accurately.

Finally, we begin to see the importance of selfless service, contributing to others called lokasangraha in the Bhagavad Gita. Deep spiritual practice is not done for oneself alone, but also for the welfare of others. Mohammad, The founder of Islam considered helping others the “most excellent of all virtues.” The Vedic Rishi proclaims, “Seva paramo dharma. Serving others is the Supreme righteous way of living.”

The seven perennial practices can be done in any order. The following sequence is particularly helpful for learning and cultivating them.

- Transform your motivation, reduce craving and find your soul’s desire.
- Cultivate emotional wisdom: heal your heart and learn to love.
- Live ethically: feel good by doing good.
- Concentrate and calm your mind.
- Awaken your spiritual vision: see clearly and recognize sacredness in all things.
- Cultivate spiritual intelligence: develop wisdom and understand life.
- Express spirit in action: embrace generosity and the joy of service.

Source: Essential Spirituality: The 7 Central Practices to Awaken Heart and Mind. by

Roger Walsh, MD., PH.D.

Let me conclude this writing by The Tale of Two Wolves: A Cherokee Indian Legend

A Cherokee grandfather is teaching his grandson about life. A battle is going on inside me, my dear child. It is a story of two wolves One is black, and the other is white. The black wolf is evil. He is anger, envy, sorry, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, lies and false pride. The white wolf is joy, peace, love, hope, certainty, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith. The same battle is going on inside of you, and inside every other person. The grandson listened to his grandfather, thought about it for a while and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf wins?” The old

Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.” This story has been passed down through Native American tribes. A man or woman who has peace inside has everything. A man or woman who is pulled apart by the war inside him or her. How to interact with the opposing forces within you will determine your life.

Pragna Paramita

The core of all religions is spirituality. As seekers of Truth and Peace we practice spirituality. By practicing spirituality, we cross over the flood of suffering and reach the safety of the other shore called Nirvana, Moksha, Liberation and Salvation. There are different ways of reaching the other shore.

In Mahayana Buddhism, ten inner qualities are prescribed to attain Perfect Wisdom, Pragna Paramita. The Buddhist path is a way of perfecting human nature, both by eliminating toxic imperfections and gradually cultivating and maturing the inner qualities of heart and mind that can help us cross over many difficulties we face to arrive safely on the further shore.

The following ten qualities or paramis are prescribed for reaching the other shore.

1. Giving
2. Virtue
3. Renunciation- letting go of attachments
4. Wisdom
5. Energy
6. Patience
7. Truthfulness
8. Determination
9. Loving Kindness - Metta, forgiveness
10. Equanimity

The perfection is applied to these qualities needed to attain awakening (Jagruiti), to be Buddha. One needs to cultivate and perfect these qualities often over multiple lifetimes. Only reading and talking about these qualities will not take us on this path of liberation from suffering. It requires consistent practice. Even mastering only one of the ten qualities will create noticeable change or transformation in our consciousness. Let us begin with one quality that you would like to cultivate in you. Check in and notice the progress you will notice in yourself and how it has a positive impact on your relationship with others in your life.

Compassion

"Just as a flower gives out its fragrance to whoever approaches or uses it, so love from within us radiates towards everybody and manifests as spontaneous service." - Swami Ramdas

Most of us find it difficult to be compassionate to ourselves and to others. Caring for oneself and caring for others is a wise way of practicing spirituality. If I use my energy unmindfully for taking care of others, I may do a disservice to myself. I get compassion burnt out. I need to learn how to be balanced, even minded. The less we dwell on ourselves, the more sensitivity will open to the needs and feelings of others. "Every time we hurt someone and grieve inside because of it; we are attending a valuable seminar on sensitivity. It is a seminar at the deepest and most personal level." says Eknath Easwaran. Self-examination, self-honesty and self-awareness can be powerful tools for internal transformation.

Daily Practice

"When we take our seat on our meditation cushion we become our own monastery. We create a compassionate space that allows for the arising of all things: sorrows, loneliness, shame, desire, regret, frustration, happiness."
- Jack Kornfield "Take the One Seat"

If you feel remorse about something you have done in the past because it has caused harm to you or someone else, it can be helpful to acknowledge the harm it caused and undertake a commitment to refrain from such behavior in the future. Self-compassion and self-correction are the doorways to internal transformation. The same way, if you feel someone has harmed you, be empathetic and compassionate to the other person. Loving kindness-Metta meditation heals the hurt caused to us and also the hurt caused to others.

Renunciation- letting go of attachments

Attachment is a kind of emotional involvement, our desire for certain things to remain the same as they are. For example, we are in a pleasant place like a beautiful beach of the sea. We like it very much and we want to hold on to it, we get attached to it. We get attached to sensual pleasures. We get attached to someone we like or love. There is a negative side of attachment called aversion. Aversion is a kind of negative attachment.

Basically, there are two faces of attachment. Our desire for the pleasant things as they are. And our desire for the unpleasant things to change. We know pleasant things will change and end. If we do not realize it and keep on craving for things that are changing or going to change or going to end, we go through mental suffering. If we realize that nothing stays forever and accept the reality, we will not suffer. It is hard to let go of attachment to things, position, power and people in our life.

We identify ourselves with things like cars, political persuasion, national persuasion, sports. Such identification has its pleasant aspects, but it leads to longer term suffering. I see some of my friends identifying themselves with a certain football team. No team always wins. They go through victory and defeat, ups and downs. My friends emotionally go through ups and downs along with the team's ups and downs. Identifying ourselves with a certain team in the longer term brings suffering to us. Attachment to a person whom we love makes both persons miserable. We need to learn how to overcome our attachment caused by identifications.

The opposite of attachment is non-attachment. It's a state of mind in which we minimize or release our attachment to whatever we are attached to. It's a kind of equanimity, upeksha, mental state of non-attachment to the worldly wind of success or failure. It does not mean that we should not be successful or strive to be better.. It is wise not to identify with the outcomes which are not guaranteed. We find joy in the process. If the outcome is great, that's great. If the outcome is not great we accept it with equanimity and move on. Samatva Yoga uchyate. Yoga is defined as equanimity in the mind. Non-attachment has a "near enemy." It is indifference or disinterest, a "near enemy" of non-attachment. That's not the right way to practice non-attachment. Indifference is like emotional divorce.

*"...the mind of non-grasping is the essential unifying experience of freedom"-
Joseph Goldstein.*

It's a free mind, a non-attached mind, a non-grasping and non-craving mind, a mind of non-identification. An attached mind is not free. A skillful state of mind operates in non-attachment. But it operates on the basis of kindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity.

Supreme Wisdom

We have an ordinary mind which is conceptual, delusional, and dualistic. The Enlightened Mind is also known as the awakened mind. It is a pure mind untarnished by dualistic concepts, unhealthy emotions, and obsessive sensations-particularly strong clinging and craving- of our ordinary mind. These obsessive thoughts and sensations are the coverings that obstruct us from realizing and manifesting our true nature like the clouds covering the sun.

Wisdom is defined as insight knowledge endowed with virtue. It abolishes the darkness of delusion. It emerges by following the spiritual path of awakening, realizing and manifesting our true nature. A wise mind understands the three characteristics of all things:

1. Anicca- impermanence
2. Dukkha-dissatisfactions or suffering
3. Anatta-non-self, the understanding of sunyata-emptiness.

There are three types of pragna or wisdom:

1. Learned pragna- knowledge and wisdom acquired from books or listening to teachers. (Skt-sravana)
2. Reflective pragna-by asking questions, by using logic and reasoning until you fully understand the true nature of reality. (Skt-manana)
3. From a higher state of meditation, from direct spiritual experience. (Skt-nididhyasana)

Energy

Energy is the fifth pragna paramita. According to the Buddha suffering arises in the mind by holding on to and getting attached to unwholesome cravings called tannaha. When Gautam became the Buddha he wanted to teach his wisdom to the people living in Sarnath. As he was walking on his way to Sarnath, he met a young boy. The young boy saw the radiance on the Buddha's face. He asked the Buddha, "What are you? Are you a man? Are you an angel? Are you a God?" "The Buddha said," I am the Buddha-the awakened one."

When do we feel uplifting energy? When do we feel down grading energy? Awakening is one of the ways of understanding our energy. When we are "sleeping" we take wrong steps and hurt ourselves and others in our life. When we get stuck with and attached to unwholesome desires and cravings, we suffer and drain our energy. When we forget the first noble truth, anicca-impermanence and live under the delusion of permanence, we get disappointed and depressed, and we drain our energy.

The Buddha taught the Noble Eightfold Path to reduce and end our self-created suffering-physical, mental, emotional, and relational.

1. Right understanding -samma ditthi
2. Right thought-samma sankalpa
3. Right speech-samma vaca
4. Right action-samma kammanta
5. Right livelihood or right earning-samma ajiva
6. Right effort-samma vayama
7. Right mindfulness-samma sati
8. Right concentration-samma samadhi

Reflect on the wise teachings of the Buddha. Use them as a mirror to see yourself, understand yourself. Identify what causes suffering and drains your energy. What reduces or ends your suffering? What creates wholesome energy? What restores your energy? How do you bounce back? What inspires you? What supports you? Keep a journal. Spend five minutes every day to reflect on what blossoms your energy and what hinders your energy. Keep on working on your journal to learn from yourself the wise ways of enhancing and preserving your energy.

Patience

The Buddha considered Patience as one of the highest spiritual qualities. What is patience?

Patience means being here. Not going somewhere.

Being fully present with yourself, with some others, with activities, place and time. In a relationship, patience means embracing the present with a cool head and a warm heart.

Waiting in this moment is patience.

Waiting on others and serving others with no expectation in return is patience.

The more we are in the moment, the more patient we are, we learn faster and better.

Patience helps us from making errors.

Waiting for something yet to come in the future may cause anxiety and apprehension.

What if and when mindset hijacks us from the present and makes us impatient? There is an interesting story about what happens when we lose our patience and when we are captivated by impatience. It was time to plant seeds in the garden. The father gave a handful of seeds to grow in the garden. The son planted the seeds in the soil. He waters them every day. After a few days little green shoots came out from the ground. He decided to water the green shoots two times a day so that they grow faster. His mind was captivated by impatience. He decided to stretch the green shoots to make them grow faster. He killed every one of the green shoots. I want it now, not later. He paid the price for his impatience.

The Buddha formulated the two arrows theories for understanding and reducing mental suffering. We have two kinds of pain: physical pain and mental pain. Our physical pain is the first arrow. It hurts. How we relate to the experience of physical pain makes the difference. If I become anxious and worry about the physical pain I create mental pain. This is the second arrow. The pain is in the mind. If I patiently relate to the physical pain, acknowledge it with loving kindness, I stop the second arrow.

In one of Tolstoy's stories, the emperor is asked three essential questions:

1. When is the most important time?
2. Who is the most important person?
3. What is the most important thing they do?

Answers:

1. Now is the most important time.
2. Not self, but the other person with you.
3. The most important thing to do is to care for the other, serve the other. If we follow these simple rules of living our heart blossoms and our relationships also blossom. Patient life is calmer and richer.

Patience creates good will. Impatience creates bad will. Patient lifestyle helps us to be free from anger and irritability and regrets. We get many opportunities every day for cultivating patience especially at our home, with our friends, neighbors and colleagues.

Four Noble Truths and The Noble Eightfold Path

First Noble Truth

We all suffer.

Second Noble Truth

There is a cause of Suffering. The cause is unhealthy craving.

Third Noble Truth

There is a Way to End Suffering called Dhamma-Dharma- Pada- Path of Righteous Living

Fourth Noble Truths

Walk on The Path Consistently

With the fourth noble is found the guide to end the suffering. The eight parts of liberation are grouped into three essential elements of Buddhist practice- moral or ethical conduct(sila), mental discipline (samadhi), and wisdom (panna). Ethical conduct is based on the vast conception of universal love and compassion for all beings. Here compassion (karuna) represents love, charity, kindness, tolerance-the qualities of the noble heart. While wisdom (panna) stands for the intellectual qualities of the mind. One should not be a good-hearted fool or a hard-hearted intellect. To be perfect one has to develop both head and heart equally.

The Noble Eightfold Path:

1. Right understanding (Samma ditthi)
2. Right thought (Samma sankappa)
3. Right speech (Samma vaca)
4. Right action (Samma kammanta)
5. Right livelihood (Samma ajiva)
6. Right effort (Samma vayama)
7. Right mindfulness (Samma sati)
8. Right concentration (Samma samadhi)

They are to be developed simultaneously. They are linked together, and each helps the cultivation of the others. The eightfold noble path is a way of life to be followed, practiced and developed by each individual. It is self-discipline in body, word, and mind, self-development, and self-purification. It has nothing to do with belief, prayer, worship, or ceremony. In that sense, it has nothing which is popularly called religious. It is a Path leading to complete freedom, happiness, and peace through moral, spiritual, and intellectual perfection.

Abridged by Dr. Dave from Walpola Sri Rahula's article on The Eightfold Noble Path

Four Noble Truths

1. The Truth of Dukkha. The truth of suffering and dissatisfaction. There are different kinds of suffering, birth, aging, sickness and death-janma, jara, vyadhi and mrityu; not getting what we want
2. Cause of Suffering is the second Noble Truth. It is tannah, craving, desiring, wanting or greed. Craving for things that we want and getting rid of things we don't want. Craving for materially, mentally, emotionally, relationally and spiritually: craving for permanency, and stability. We suffer when our desires do not match reality. Origin of suffering is our mental state - craving (raga), abhorrence or aversion (dwesha) and ignoring (agnana).
3. The Third Noble Truth: Cessation of dukkha, suffering. There is a way, an alternative to end suffering. Suffering can be extinguished if we remove the cause. To quote the Buddha: "Cession of suffering, as a noble truth is this: It is remainder less, fading and ceasing, giving up, relinquishing, letting go and rejecting that same craving." If we let go of craving, we can extinguish the fire of our suffering. The fire is burning in our mind. It is mental fire. We must train our mind in a different way. That is the Fourth Noble Truth.
4. To quote the Buddha: "The way leading to cessation of suffering, as the noble truth, is this: It is simply the noble eight path, that is to say right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. The Buddha taught that by learning to use our three doors, body, speech and mind skillfully, it would remove a lot of suffering. By controlling our body, speech and mind in ways that help others, instead of harming them, and by generating wisdom in our mind, we can end suffering. Therefore, true happiness is achievable through personal endeavor.

A question is raised. Are there good wholesome cravings or desires? Desire to live a life of virtue and non-violence, wanting to meditate, to discover peace, and discover what we deeply and truly. To learn how to be fully present in the moment.

Exercise:

What cravings can you identify in your life that might be causing unnecessary Suffering?

What cravings do you need to let go?

Out of the Noble Eightfold Path, which steps would you like to work on?

Determination - Addhitthana Paramita

In order to achieve a goal, we need to cultivate determination. Setting the right goal is very important. In order to achieve the goal, we have to walk on the path with determination. If we want to reach the top of the mountain we need to keep on climbing with a firm determination.

Sometimes we may lose our hope for attaining our goal. We may feel despair and think; it is impossible to go any farther. Will you become apathetic, or will you stand up with an unyielding spirit? The battle is decided by firm determination.

When we have chosen a path to pursue the goal, we move steadily toward our chosen path, step by step, whether or not others are watching us. We meet difficulty with the steady relentless strength of ceaselessly flowing water. Such firmness of purpose, such integrity and perseverance builds a foundation that can never be compromised. Having a firm solid resolve is what secures the path of victory. Dedication helps our resolve to continue. Build life from inside out. Let not outside forces control you.

Start with a goal that is relatively easy to accomplish. Then select a little difficult one. And keep on selecting and working on goals that have increasing difficulty. It is like climbing on a mountain. The supreme goal is attaining Enlightenment. Reflect on the following questions as you are walking on this spiritual path:

1. Have you lost hope when you don't make progress on your path?
2. Are you hesitant or unsure about moving on the path?
3. Are you resisting your efforts to move on?
4. Do you feel stuck or deadlocked?
5. Have you become complacent and not to rock the boat?

Get help from advanced fellow travelers and be grateful to them. Practice Mindfulness Meditation regularly. In life when we feel we have reached a limit, that's when the true battle begins to go beyond the self-restricting limit. When we decide to live each moment fully, with all our might, to live true to ourselves and make the present moment shine, we discover and bring forth immense and unlimited strength.

Metta, Loving Kindness

Metta, Loving Kindness is one of the ten virtues of wisdom. There are three ways of cultivating skills of loving kindness. Before we learn how to practice loving kindness we need to know what hinders or obstructs the cultivation of loving kindness. There are five hindrances.

1. Ill will
2. Greed or craving
3. Sleepiness and tiredness
4. Doubt
5. Monkey mind.

We need to work on these hurdles before we cultivate the skill of loving kindness. Otherwise our progress will be slowed by the hindrances.

The first way or version is for the monastics. As the Metta Sutta describes, "Come, monastics, give up these five hindrances, corruptions of the heart that weaken wisdom, and meditate spreading a heart full of loving kindness to the whole world-abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will. "

The second way or version is for the worldly people. As the Metta Sutta describes, "Just as a mother would protect her only son, with her own life, so one should develop toward all beings a state of mind without boundaries."

We broadcast these emotions of loving kindness like a conch blower or horn blower spreading the sound everywhere, in all directions. This practice is to change the way our unmindful mind works. It is to make our mind malleable and fluid without bounding, spreading all around in all directions; to shift the focus of our mind from unskillful emotions like ill will, resentment, anger or hatred to the skillful emotions like loving kindness towards all beings. Changes do not happen in a short time. We need to practice loving kindness on a consistent basis. You may select one person per day and expand your circle slowly. Do not rush. It is like planting the seeds of loving kindness in a small pot and slowly expanding the pot.

The word love has many faces. In ancient Greek language there are three different words for love: Agape-pure, universal Divine Love. Philia-brotherly love. Love for family, mother child love, love for friends, even strangers who extend their helping hands unconditionally. Romantic and sexual love. Loving kindness is pushing us toward agape and philia from the

limiting romantic and sexual love. It does not mean not to enjoy life. In fact, life becomes more joyful when we free ourselves from the shackles of unmindfulness and unawareness.

When we start practicing Metta, we begin with being kind and loving to us. May I be safe. May I be healthy. May I be kind. May I be peaceful. May I be at ease. May I be loving. Select three areas of your relational life which are relevant to you at this time in your life. Then replace them and expand the areas. From the self we expand to family, friends, neighbors, strangers and others. The last circle is our enemy or adversary. This is not easy to do. This is our spiritual practice that embraces all beings without boundaries and barriers.

Upeksha - Equanimity

To remain still, unwavering, centered and rooted in the midst of small or big changes taking place in our life. Upeksha is also considered a vihora out of four viharas. They are Loving Kindness, Compassion, Peaceful Joy and Equanimity. We can use one word for Equanimity- Even Mindedness. We all know how difficult it is to remain centered and rooted when all of a sudden a season of life changes. How can we remain steady and solid in the midst of life's seasonal changes? How can we remain rooted like a mountain facing dark clouds and bright clouds, rain and snow? The Bhagavad Gita uses the word Sthitaprajna. A sthitaprajna is a person who is well established in wisdom. Rumi describes equanimity poetically in his poem The Guest House. We will read it at the end of our experiential equanimity session.

Dharma

Dharma is an ancient Sanskrit word that has many meanings such as religion, duty, ethical conduct, charity, compassion, altruism and the list goes on. I have selected definitions of Dharma from different ancient books of spiritual wisdom that describe what Dharma means.

Kathopanishad defines Dharma as a Yogic way of living.” Only when mind (manas) with thoughts and five senses(indriyani) stand still, and when intellect (buddhi) power to reason and determination does not waver, that they (sages) call the highest state. That is, one called Yoga.”

The Bhagavad Gita defines Dharma as, “The proper conduct that ensures we remain sovereign seekers of the ultimate Reality, ultimate liberation, moksha, even as we go about our daily lives.”

Mahabharat, the ancient epic states, “It is most difficult to define Dharma. That which helps the uplift of the planet and welfare of living beings is surely Dharma. The learned sages have declared that that which sustains is Dharma.”

The other ancient epic Ramayana states, “Dharma ensures material well-being and spiritual progress of humanity.”

Vaisesika Sutra says, “The highest Dharma is to wipe out the tears from the eyes of living beings.”

The Vedas explain that all the diverse goals of humanity can be categorized under an umbrella of four universal desires known collectively as purushartha:

1. Dharma, which is the pursuit of virtue.
2. Artha, which is the pursuit of prosperity.
3. Kama which is pursuit of pure pleasure.
4. Moksha, which is the highest pursuit of a Higher Truth, of Self, Liberation, or God.

According to Sage Manu, Dharma has the following ten attributes:

1. Patience,

2. Forgiveness,
3. Mental steadfastness,
4. Non-stealing,
5. Cleanliness,
6. Restraining of senses,
7. Cultivating wisdom,
8. Knowledge,
9. Truth, and
10. Non-anger.

* * * * *

Who am I? What am I? What is God? How do we know that?

Philosophers, Spiritual seekers, Mystics, Scientists and ordinary people have asked these fundamental questions for ages. One of the ancient Upanishadas named Taittiriya Upanishad has explored these perennial questions a long time ago.

The second chapter of this Upanishads begins with a profound assertion. Brahmadev apnoti param. The knower of Brahman attains the highest knowledge. The Upanishad says it is a spiritual journey not in space, not in time. It is a journey of knowledge from ignorance, from darkness to light, from divisive consciousness to unitive consciousness. It is a spiritual journey. You don't have to go to a holy place, not even to heaven, not in the next life. You don't have to wait for the second coming, Divine incarnation. The presence of God is not in a particular place and at a particular time. So, it is neither in time nor in space. It is a journey from ignorance to knowledge, from bondage to freedom.

What is ignorance? What is knowledge? Ignorance about my Real Self. It is not about secular knowledge, but it is about spiritual knowledge. We do not know who we are, our True Nature, our True Self. Swami Vivekananda used to say with a tinge of sadness to his disciples "If you really knew who you are, if only you would see yourself as you truly are."

What is Brahman? The Rishi says, “Satyam jnanam anantam Brahma.” Brahman is Reality (Truth), Consciousness, Infinity.”

Where is Brahman’s Existence? The Upanishad mentions 5 locations- five Koshas -sheaths of human personality. The five sheaths of our being are poetically compared to a cave of five interlocking systems of human personality. The Rishi starts from the gross or sthula body or kosha and goes to the subtle or suksma kosha or body. It is a journey from exterior to interior.

Anyonantaratma annamayya. Since we are more familiar with the outer body -bahir anga-, let us start with it. It is called Annamaya Kosha-the food sheath, pervaded by food we eat and liquid we drink. We have skin, bone, flesh and different biological and neurological structures and functions. Take a close look at this annamaya kosha. Are we really the body? The body goes through changes from baby age to old age. It is changing -vikari. Vachspati Misra, the 10th century scholarly philosopher explains the changing body in the following way, “Once upon a time I was a little boy sitting in the lap of my grandfather. Now I am with my grandson sitting in my lap! Yet inwardly I am the same person.” The body is certainly not the same. The Upanishad says, “The real you is different from annamaya kosha.” All five senses operate in the body. I am the knower of the body. The body is the known object. I am the seer-drishita-, the body is drishya-seen. How can I be the body?

The knower and the known, the seer and the seen are two different entities. The body does not know me. I know the body. My hand doesn’t see me, I see the hand. We are not the body. We have the body. Ignorance is the identification of I with the body and getting attached to the body. The body is not me. The body is vikari, changing. I am nirvikara, unchanging.

Anyonyantaratma pranamayya. The second sheath of the personality is Pranamaya Kosha-Vital Sheath. Let us go deeper, more interior, antara. We come to prana, life forces. What pervades the body? Prana, the life force. Food is converted into different parts of our body as energy or vitality. We breathe in and breathe out. It is because of prana, the life force. Prana is called chi in China and ki in Japan. Prana is our breath energy. Breath energy maintains the body and keeps the first sheath, annamaya kosha alive. Our experience of thirst and hunger is due to prana kosha. We are healthy not because of the body but because of prana. Look at prana clearly and deeply. Sometimes we are energetic, sometimes we are lethargic, sometimes healthy, sometimes sick. Prana is changing, vikari. I, the witness of breathing, does not change-avikari. Prana is drishya-seen, and I am drishita-seer. I know I am breathing. I am the knower. Breath is known. I am the subject. Prana is the object. Look deeply and clearly. You must be deeper and subtler than Prana. Life force is subtler and more pervasive than annamaya kosha.

Anyonanataratma manomaya. The third sheath is called Manomaya Kosha. Most of us stop here. We identify with our mind- our thoughts, desires, ideas, dreams, emotions, feelings, likes and dislikes, and memories-the mind stuff. Mind is something we experience. I am not the mind. I have the mind. Mind is the subject and what the mind sees is an object. The subject is different from the object. The experience of the mind is drishya-seen, and the experiencer is drishta - seer. Mind changes-vikari. The observer of the mind is the same, unchanging. The mental scenario changes. The seer remains the same.

Anyonanataratma vignanamaya. The fourth sheath is called Vijnanamaya Kosha-Sheath of Intellect. Intellect is a subtle object shining in the light of consciousness. Intellect is a discriminating faculty that helps the mind make wise choices. I am the unchanging witness consciousness.

Anyonataratman anandamaya. The fifth sheath is called Anandamaya Kosh-bliss sheath. We experience this sheath when we are in sound sleep- Sushupti. There is blankness. All sheaths are in a quiet state. It is a state of deep restfulness.

You go deeper. Upanishda keeps quiet and silent. It's like when you peel onion and when it is completely peeled off there's nothing to see, touch, smell, taste or hear. It is a state of emptiness or a state of fullness. It is a state of completeness, wholeness or holiness. This is our True Self called Atman. It is neither known nor unknown. It is the knower. It is unchanging, omnipresent, omniscient and infinite- Brahman. And this is our real self. In this state we experience unitive consciousness. The distinction between subject and object gets dissolved. A person who has reached this state is called a Self-realized person, a person freed from the bondage of ignorance, an enlightened being. Adi Shankaracharya succinctly describes Self and the World in the following verse:

"Brahma satyam jagan mithya, brahmaiva jivo naparaha." Brahman is Real. The world is an illusion.. Brahman indeed is jiva or atman and is not separate from Brahman.

We come to this conclusion.

Consciousness is illuminating the five sheaths. Consciousness is not separated from the five sheaths. The sheaths arise in our consciousness. They have no existence apart from consciousness. It is like somebody saying, "It's a huge wave. The reality is water. How do we discover it? We go deep inside the wave. We will find water. A large wave and a small wave are just the form and name." In the same way these five sheaths -forms of the body, life force, mind, intellect and the blankness beyond intellect arise and shine in our consciousness and subside in our consciousness. Discover your consciousness and see the entire system as a system of interlocking caves. Names and forms arise and shine in

consciousness and subside in consciousness.. All of it is existence, consciousness. Satyam jnanam anantam brahman. And that is our true nature. Once we discover it, we realize that we are an immortal unchanging reality. We are immortal, pure, infinite consciousness right now, right here. All of spiritual life is meant to bring us to this understanding. Let us conclude by quoting Swami Vivekananda's saying to his disciples, "If only you would see yourself as you truly are."

Spiritual Journey

The Bhagavad Gita is the most influential Hindu scripture to come down the ages in India. It is the quintessence of the Upanishads, giving us perennial wisdom in a manner that can be systematically practiced. Reading the Bhagavad Gita is helpful in the spiritual journey of life. But it should be accompanied by practicing the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita in daily life to transform character, conduct, and consciousness.

Eknath Easwaran offers the eight-point program which he has found in his own life.

The Eight-Point Program

1. Meditation:

The heart of this program is meditation: half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening, preferably at the very end of the day. Set aside a room or a corner for practicing meditation and reading spiritual passages. Sit in a straight-backed chair or on the floor. Keep your head, neck, and spine column in a straight line. Close your eyes and begin to do breath meditation. Begin with a 10 minutes meditation and then you may increase the span of time up to 30 minutes. For spiritual reading and contemplation, select a passage from scriptures or the great mystics like St. Francis of Assisi or a spiritual poem.

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.

Where there is hatred, let me see love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

*Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, there is joy.
O Divine Master, grant that I may not as much seek
To be consoled as to counsel.
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
It is in dying (to self) that we are born to eternal life.*

There are many spiritual sources for us to read and reflect such as the Bhagavad Gita, Lord's Prayer, the Twenty-third Psalm, the Beatitudes, St. Paul's Epistle of Love, and the first and the last chapters of the Dhammapada of the Buddha.

To me Rabindranath Tagore's poems in Gitanjali are very inspiring. Here is one of them.

Light My Light

Light my Light, the world-filling light, the eye-kissing light, heart-sweetening light.

Ah, the light dances, my darling, at the center of my life, the light strikes, my darling, the chords of my love: the sky opens, the wind runs wild, laughter passes over the earth.

The butterflies spread their sails on the sea of light. Lilies and jasmines surge upon the waves of light.

The light is shattered into the gold on every cloud, my darling, and gladness without measure.

The heaven's river has drowned its banks and the flood is abroad.

Read *God Makes the Rivers Flow* by Eknath Easwaran which contains many passages from different spiritual traditions. The secret of meditation is simple: we become what we meditate on, which means that we find constant expression in what we do, what we say, and what we think.

2. Repetition of a Mantram

A mantram is a profound spiritual formula which, when repeated silently in the mind, has the capacity to transform consciousness. Every religious tradition has a mantram or matrams. Mahatma Gandhi's mantram was Rama, Rama, Rama. At the moment of his death, the last words he uttered were Rama, Rama, Rama. For the Christians Jesus, for Catholics Hail Mary or Ave Maria, for Jews Barukh atah Adonai, 'Blessed art thou, o Lord,' or the hasidic formula Rabona shel olam, 'O Lord of the universe.' For the Muslims Allah or Allah Akbar, 'God is great' or for the Buddhists 'Om Mani padme hum' referring to the 'jewel in the lotus of the heart'. Repeat your mantram silently.

3. Slowing Down

Hurry causes tension, insecurity, inefficiency, and superficial living. When you find yourself beginning to hurry, repeat mantram to slow you down.

4. One-Pointed Attention

Multitasking divides attention and fragments consciousness. Everything we do is worthy of our full attention, like reading, eating, talking with someone. Attention is the cornerstone of practicing mindfulness.

5. Training the Senses

We have all kinds of sensual desires. If we do not use our discretion and get carried away by our unwholesome desires we will become slaves to our desires, and it will thwart our spiritual practice. We need to regulate our desires, so they do not take us astray.

6. Putting Others First

Dwelling on ourselves builds a wall between ourselves and others in our life. The simple but effective technique is to put other people first. In Hindi we say "pehle aap." which means "you are first". It removes the barrier of ego-prison.

7. Spiritual Fellowship

The Sanskrit word for this is satsanga, 'association with those who are spiritually oriented'. When we want to transform our life, we need the support of others with the same goal.

8. Spiritual Reading

It is very helpful to give time to read the scriptures and writings of great mystics of all religions. Reading, reflecting, and integrating the message of such readings facilitates our spiritual progress. We realize that all life is one.

Excerpts from The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living by Eknath Easwaran

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Four Stages of Spiritual Growth

Eknath Easwaran has talked about four stages of spiritual growth that he went through in his forty years of sadhana- spiritual practice. I have briefly described these four stages in this writing.

Ekanath Easwaran has used Sanskrit words to describe the four stages:

Salokya, Sarupya, Samipya and Sayujya. Each stage represents the ascending development of the self.

The word **salokya** means moving from the outer- focused world to inner-focused world. It is the beginning of transformation taking place in four dimensions-physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual. It represents the expansion of the inner room, inner space. We may notice how our interest in reading books changes- from entertaining readings to mystical and spiritual readings such as reading Upanishads, Dhamma Pada, Bhagavad Gita, Gospel of Ramakrishna, poems by Rumi or Saint Kabir, Mira or writings of St Francis of Assisi, Aldous Huxley, and other mystics. We feel quiet stirring inside and a deep longing to be with the Lord of Love.

The word **sarupya** conveys the inner process of dissolving distractions and attachments and merging into pure consciousness. Long hours of meditation takes us to the supreme state of our Being called samadhi. We can use one line from St. Francis of Assisi such as “Lord make me an instrument of thy peace.” for meditation. When our mind distracts us we bring it back by repeating the prayer line.

The word **samipya** means to be closer to God, as if God stands behind us and holds our arms to help people who go through suffering. There is the Divine Power right behind us that moves us to be in the presence of that power. We experience that Divine closeness right in this life. We are not separate from our creator who is the source of joy, love and power. Experiencing the presence of the Divine love and joy is indescribable in words. As Adi Shankaracharya says, “How can you describe that which is indescribable?”

The word **sayujya** means being united with God, being one with God. This is the final stage of spiritual growth. We move from Alpha to Omega. The self merges with the Self. We may call it Self-realization or Moksha, Liberation. If we do not attain liberation in this life, our spiritual journey continues, and we may attain Self-realization or we get Self-realized in our next incarnation. There is always hope for being one with our creator.

Shraddha (Faith)-Door To Awakening

Shraddha is a Sanskrit word. Saddha is a Pali word. Both words mean Faith. The literal meaning of the word Shraddha is to place your heart upon a spiritual practice. We practice spirituality wholeheartedly. Faith opens our heart and takes us beyond our limited, self-centered concerns. In Buddhism it is called “gateway to all good things.” Faith is like a rock that upholds our ongoing spiritual practice.

Faith is not a mindless belief called “blind faith”, or allegiance to a creed or doctrine and then fear of being judged for our degree of compliance. Faith is a heartfelt confidence in the possibility of our own awakening. We experience faith on many levels. In a Buddhist classical text entitled “The Questions of King Milinda” a monk named Nagasena uses an allegory to illustrate this. A group of people gathered on the edge of a flooding stream wanting to go from the near shore to the far shore but were afraid to jump to the other shore. They do not know what to do. They saw a wise man taking a leap and jumping to the other shore. Seeing the example they say, “Yes. We can do it too.” And they also jumped. In this story the near shore is our usual confused condition. The far shore is the awakened mind. Inspired by witnessing another, we say, “Yes, it can be done.” That is one level of faith. After we have jumped ourselves and when we say, “Yes, it can be done” is another level of faith.

The first instance is an example of what is called “bright faith.” It happens when our hearts are opened by encountering somebody or something that moves us. We are inspired by a person’s qualities of love, kindness or wisdom. It could be someone we know or a historical figure like the Buddha, Jesus Christ, Lao Tzu, St Francis of Assisi, Rumi, or Mahatma Gandhi. Knowing such beings help us to sense the possibility of going beyond the near shore to the other shore, a happier way of living. “Mature faith” is anchored in our own experience of the truth, centered in the deeper understanding of the nature of the mind when our mind is open, calm, centered and clear. This deeper level of faith is called “verified faith”, which means it is grounded in our own experience, rather than coming from someone or something coming outside of ourselves. This is also called “embodied faith.” When we go from intellectual appreciation of a path to the heartfelt confidence that says, “Yes, it is possible to awaken. I can do it too.” A tremendous joy accompanies this confidence. When we place our hearts upon the practice, the teachings become alive. This is the turning point, which transforms an abstract concept of a spiritual path into our own personal path and that is Shraddha, Saddha or Faith.

—Excerpts from Sharon Salzberg’s article published in *Tricycle*, Spring 1997

Spiritual Practices For Spiritual Growth

Little by little, wean yourself.
This is the gist of what I have to say.
From an embryo, whose nourishment comes in the blood,
move to an infant drinking milk,
to a child on solid food,
to a searcher after wisdom, to a hunter for more invisible game.
-Rumi

Metaphors are figures of speech to which we describe one thing-usually subtle and difficult to grasp. Spiritual experiences and transformations, by their very nature, are often subtle and indefinable. Each of the metaphors listed below illustrates an aspect of spiritual development, and together they paint a rich, multifaceted picture of the ways spiritual practices work their many effects. These are the “metaphors of transformation.”

Awakening: Spiritual practices awaken us from our slumber, from our usual semiconscious condition.

Hypnosis: Our slumber is a kind of a trance or hypnosis. Hypnotized people suffer a constricted state of consciousness. They do not recognize the fact they have been hypnotized. Only when dehypnotized do they become free and know that they were entranced.

Enlightenment: According to this metaphor, we stumble about in inner darkness, but spiritual disciplines bring understanding, light, and vision.

Uncovering: Our true nature or Self is said to be covered or veiled from awareness. Spiritual disciplines dissolve these veils and restore awareness to our true identities.

Freedom: We are said to be enslaved by our wayward motives and emotions but taming them brings freedom.

Metamorphosis: As nature transforms the caterpillar into an exquisite butterfly, so too do spiritual practices transform us.

Unfolding: The beauty of the rose may be hidden but is already present within the bud. Likewise, our transcendent beauty and potential are hidden within. Spiritual practices help us unfold and blossom.

Wholeness: Our minds are sadly splintered and dissociated into warring fragments. Spiritual practices heal and whole the mind and restore to us unity of mind and purpose.

Journey: The metaphor of journey implies that we are traveling to a goal. This goal may seem a far distant place, but spiritual wisdom reveals that the goal is our Self, and it is forever here and now, awaiting only our recognition and remembrance, in this and every moment.

Death and Rebirth: The old, false self must yield to make way for the new and true to emerge. Spiritual practices make us strong enough to be willing to die-the surrender of our former self-image can feel like dying. Out of the ashes of the ego arises, phoenix-like, a new self-image. The new self-image will itself die and be reborn repeatedly, until we finally recognize that who and what we really are is far beyond self-images and concepts. Then there is no self-image left to die, and only the deathless remains.

Excerpts from Essential Spirituality by Roger Walsh, M.D., PH. D

What Is Detachment?

Detachment or letting go is a core component in Eastern spiritual wisdom traditions. What is detachment? Is it non-attachment? It is a powerful concept often misunderstood by a lot of people. The Oxford Dictionary defines detachment as a “state of being objective or aloof.” When you are emotionally aloof, you’re disconnected from your feelings. You are not engaging in life. In Zen Buddhism detachment means deep involvement in life because there is a lack of attachment to the outcome. In Hinduism detachment is described as not being attached to the fruits of one’s actions-sarva karma falatyga.

The spiritual author Ron W. Rathbun writes, “True detachment isn’t a separation from life but absolute freedom within your mind to explore living.”

The Indian spiritual teacher Osho describes detachment as follows: “When you are growing in detachment you will become healthier, happier, your life will become a life of joy. That is the criterion of all that is good. Joy is the criterion. If you are growing in joy, you are growing, and you are getting towards home...If you are moving into detachment, love will grow, joy will grow, only attachments will drop- because attachments bring misery, because attachments bring bondage, because attachments destroy your freedom...Nothing will be growing in it. You will simply shrink and die... Love is not an attachment. That is possessiveness, domination, fear, greed. How can you know if you are attached? Osho says that when you are attached to an object, a goal, a dream, or another person, there are feelings that tell you, “If I don’t have that, I won’t be whole. “These can be feelings like anxiety, jealousy, hopelessness, sadness, despair, disconnection, pride, or vanity. In order to acquire something, you have to relinquish your attachment to having and owing it. When you recognize that the only genuine source of security is living as your true self you can more easily detach.

What does attachment look like in everyday life? Attachment is connected to the ego. The ego is a construct of yourself that you have built through years of conditioning. It is who you believe yourself to be, and it is also what separates yourself from all other things or people. Your attachment causes pain. Attachment in life is a lot like expectations. When your life doesn’t live up to expectations, you feel pain.

Five steps to detach and let go

It is important to remember that detachment is a state of mind. The detached mindset is one that realizes the importance of living with the natural flow of things and respecting the impermanence of all life. There are many ways to go about adopting this mindset more consistently in our daily life. Here are five ways:

1. **Observe your mind.** Try to take a step back from your mind and observe your thoughts. What are you identifying with the most? You will begin to notice that the mind or the ego isn't really you which will give you enormous liberation. Observing is the first step to change. Here is a great passage from Eckhart Tolle: "Stay present and continue to be the observer of what is happening inside you. Become aware not only of the emotional pain but also of "the one who observes." the silent watcher. This is the power of the Now, the power of your own conscious presence. Then see what happens."
2. **Embrace uncertainty** -Easier said than done but embracing the unknown actually provides security. Embracing uncertainty ultimately leads to freedom. When nothing is certain, everything is possible. To embrace uncertainty, what you need to realize is that you can't control everything. In fact, in such a complex world, we really have little control. There is only one thing we can control, and that is our attitude. Deepak Chopra has some great words to ponder: "Those who seek security in the exterior world chase it for a lifetime. By letting go of your attachment to the illusion of security, which is really an attachment to the known, you step into the field of all possibilities. This is where you find true happiness, abundance, and fulfillment."
3. **Meditate** - Meditation is a fantastic practice to take a step back from your mind. Observe what's going on. Our mind is conditioned to desire and get Unhappy when things don't go our way. You will observe your mind and take an objective view of the reality of what's happening. If you're beginning to start meditation practice, it is easier to use breathing exercises to get yourself going. There is an easy breathing technique. Firstly, inhale through the nostril to a count of 4, then exhale from the nose for a count of four. Yogis generally do 6-8 counts per breath. Your main goal is to equalize your breathing. As you become more experienced, you'll feel more comfortable increasing your Inhales and exhales which will make you even more relaxed.
4. Try to **live in the present moment**. There is only one thing that exists: the present moment. Yet so many of us spend our days lost in the regrets of the past or worries about the future. As Akiroq Brost says, "Focus on the opportunities not setbacks, Focus on what you can do, Not on what you can't. Focus on the present moment, not on the past or the future. Empower yourself." This is where mindfulness can come to help live in the present moment. In the book Mindfulness for Creativity Danny Penman says that mindfulness practices can help you be more open to new ideas, can improve attention, and nurtures courage and resilience in the case of setbacks.
5. **Don't beat yourself up**. When you experience negative emotions don't get upset with your life. Embrace all the facets of life and be Thankful that you're aware of what you are feeling. We only get life once so bask in life in all possible ways-the good, the bad, the bitter- sweet, the heartbreak and everything. Osho explains why embracing our emotions is so important: Sadness gives depth. Happiness gives height. Sadness gives roots. Happiness gives branches. Happiness is like a tree growing into the sky, and sadness is like the roots going down into the womb of the

earth. Both are needed, and the higher the tree goes, the deeper it goes, simultaneously. The bigger the tree, the bigger will be its Roots. In fact, it is always in proportion. That's the balance."

6. Distinguish between the voice of the ego and the actual situation. Here are a few examples of what ego might think, and what thought you can instead substitute it with.
 - Ego: I am a victim of circumstance.; Think instead: I create my own reality.
 - Ego: I am in competition with the world.; Think instead: I am in harmony with the world

Extracts from various authors.

Who Am I?

This morning, I read this sentence by Richard Rohr in his weekly blog Daily Meditation, "We have got to get 'who' right." In other words, to know who I am, my True Nature, My True Identity. Discovering who we are is an important theme in Hinduism and Buddhism.

Tara Brach is a clinical psychologist and Buddhist meditation teacher. She writes about our basic goodness. "For decades a prayer has circulated in the background of my daily life: May I trust my own goodness. May I see the goodness in others. This longing emerged from a deep place of suffering I went through as a young adult. During that dark time, I felt anxious and depressed, separate from the world around me. I was continually judging myself as falling short, not good enough, doubting my basic worth. That of course kept me from feeling close to others and to the world. It blocked me from feeling creative, stopped me from being fully alive.

It feels like grace this "trance of unworthiness" led me onto a spiritual path (Buddhism) that showed me how to hold myself with compassion. This allowed me to see through the layers of judgment and doubt and discover beneath them clarity, openness, presence, and love. Increasingly over the years, my trust in this loving awareness as the essence of who we are has become a guiding light. No matter how wrong or lacking we may feel, how caught in separation, or how trapped by the messages, violations, and inequities of the society we live in, this basic remains the essence of our Being. Source; Tara Brach, Trusting the Gold: Uncovering Your Natural Goodness (Sounds True:2021) 1-2

Theologian Paul Knitter has explored both Buddhism and Christianity extensively. He writes: The underlying reason why people cause themselves and others so much suffering... is because we are ignorant about who and what we are.. Our problem is not inherent sinfulness but inherent ignorance... But- here is the really good news: if ignorance is our fundamental problem, we are dealing with a flexible problem. This problem is not within us as part of our human nature. Rather, it's around us..... The antidote for ignorance is to wake up to what we really are.

So, what are we really? ... Following Tibetan and Zen teachings, we can say that our true nature, our real nature, is Buddha nature, what Thomas Merton called the "true self" or Christ-self. Our real self is not our individual self. Our individual self-minds are really part of a big Mind.

Once we wake up to our Buddha-nature, once we realizes the Space in which and out of which we live and move and have our being, then no matter how much it hurts or disappoints or frustrates, can destroy the strength of our inner Peace, our ability to both to endure and respond to whatever happens. Source: Paul Knitter and Roger Height.

Jesus and Buddha: Friends in Conversation (Orbis Books:2015), 41-42

Conquering Kama

“Undisciplined love dwells in the senses, for it is still entangled with earthly things.... Disciplined love lives in the soul and rises above the human senses and forbids the body of its own will.”

-Mechthild of Magdeburg (1207-1282) She was a medieval German mystic poet. She had a religious vision at the age of 12. Book: Mechthild of Magdeburg: The Flowing Light of the Godhead

In Hindu scriptures, the Sanskrit word Kama means selfish desire, selfish craving or selfish passion. Or any kind of private gratification. The opposite of Kama is Prema, pure love and perfected, a selfless love that does not ask what it can get but what it can give. The first leads to spiritual starvation, the latter nourishes and heals.

In Hindu mythology Kama is sometimes personified as the god of Kama-Kamadeva. He is a little like the Greek Cupid. Like Cupid, Kama is armed with a bow and has five arrows: five things we need to acquire in order to love.

The first is time.

Second is a one-pointed mind, which is the capacity to direct attention we choose.

Third comes energy, vitality.

Fourth, we need discrimination-Viveka.

Fifth, we must have awareness of the unity of life.

-Eknath Easwaran's Thought for the Day, Nov 23, 2021

Notes on Cupid:

In classical Greek mythology, Cupid (Latin Cupido) means “passionate desire, erotic love, attraction and affection. He is often portrayed as the son of love goddess Venus and the god of war Mars. He is also known in Latin as Amor (“Love”). His Greek counterpart is Eros. His iconography has acquired the bow and arrow to inspire romantic love, often as an icon of Valentine’s Day.

Meditative Inquiry

We all in varying degrees go through dark times in our intrabeing and interbeing world. Meditative inquiry plays a huge part in understanding and working on the suffering we go through during these times. Meditative inquiry fosters greater inner freedom and allows us to loosen up and let go of conditioning.

How do we do this? In meditative practice we calm our minds and then we look into the true nature of things as they are, which leads to greater understanding. This understanding brings about inner liberation. Investigating or inquiring is another key aspect of practice. To investigate is to contemplate with a silent mind. It is to illuminate that which is cloudy and confused. It is to discover what we have not yet noticed or understood.

This kind of deep inquiry provides us with the tools to free the mind from suffering. That is the point of the practice at the core of the Buddha's teachings. Asking questions with an open and clear mind and open and clear heart is a way to allow intrinsic wisdom emerge, wisdom that is there within each of our hearts, that has not yet found a chance to come forth and inform our lives. Asking questions, inquiring, is a part of the Buddha's injection to practice *ehipassiko*, a Pali word that means "Come and see for yourself." We learn to know for ourselves what brings about liberation and what does not, what further mires us in misery or confusion.

Deep inquiry does not mean constantly questioning oneself, obsessing or running after thoughts. Questioning in a meditative way does not demand an answer. We come to this art of inquiry with an attitude of open heartedness. We familiarize ourselves with silence, because questions and fruitful responses arise out of silence. We practice relinquishing our preconceptions of how things should be. Instead, we look at things as fresh, as free as possible from these assumptions and let something deeper arise than our usual habits of thinking. In other words, we are open to what is with humility, gentleness, honesty, and sincerity. We cultivate an attitude of non-grasping and non-attachment. Meditative questioning is a tool we use in order to explore the unknown-the parts of lives we have not yet noticed. This is called "affectionate curiosity". We encourage ourselves to rest in what is sometimes called "don't know mind" which means open to whatever emerges. We ask then we listen. We listen and we talk.

Questions to reflect:

1. When upset, ask who is upset right now? A basic question that orients us to what is happening in the present moment.

2. What is my mind aware of right now? What is happening in the present moment?
3. How am I reacting to this experience? Is it possible to approach with wisdom and with compassion?
4. What do I want to contribute?
5. What is the wise effort?
6. What is the quality of my heart right now?
7. What does love, free of grasping and attachment, look like?

Reflect on these questions. Your questions will lead you to even greater practice and a release of suffering. Let the right questions, wise questions, the meditative questioning, bring you to a depth of silence, allowing for an authentic responsiveness of heart.

Extracted from Narayan Helen Liebenson from Dharma Talk Series

Four Prerequisites For a Spiritual Aspirant

In school when we want to take upper level classes we are often required to take prerequisites. In Vedanta Sara, an ancient Indian spiritual text, there are four qualifications for a spiritual aspirant outlined.

Let us look at these four qualifications outlined in Vedanta Sara.

1. Discernment:

In Sanskrit it is called Viveka. It is knowing the difference between what is real and what is unreal, between what is permanent and what is transitory. In short, anything that changes is not “real”. It doesn’t last. It is temporary. Vedanta says that Brahman, the Divine (or whatever name of God you prefer to use) alone is permanent. As it is stated in the Bhagavad Gita Chapter 2, “The Atman can’t be cut or burned. It can’t be wet or withered. Eternal, all pervading. It is the same forever.”

2. Renunciation:

In Sanskrit it is called Vairagya. It doesn't mean renouncing everything. It is about giving up the attachment to the fruits of our actions in the world. Instead of working for the paycheck, or prestige, pleasures or possessions, we understand that there is a higher purpose to our work, and our work doesn't define who we are. Because we know that money, status, and material items are transitory. We can have them or leave them without any pleasure or pain. We have grown from being the kid wanting a toy, to understanding what is really important in life. We become spiritually mature. As it is stated in the Bhagavad Gita Chapter 3, "When you work in this way, unattached to rewards. There is no effort or strain, peace and freedom are yours."

3. The Six Treasures:

- 1). The ability to control mind and senses, not to be tempted by material items or the things that are not real
- 2). Forbearance, the ability to endure the pairs of opposites, such as pleasure and pain, heat and cold, etc. knowing that any perceived conditions come and go.
- 3) Faith. The ability to turn the mind to the Divine knowing that presence is always available to us. And trusting that the Divine has our back. As stated in the Bhagavad Gita Chapter 2, "You can control your actions, so do your best. You cannot control the outcome. Trust Brahman to do the rest."
- 4) Desire for spiritual freedom is called Mumuksha in Sanskrit. This is one desire that is actually good for us. It leads us to enlightenment, self-realization, more important than anything in our life. We should yearn for it in this very life; when we have a desire for spiritual freedom as a priority in this very life called jivanmukti in Sanskrit. Listen to what Sri Krishna says to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita in Chapter 3:

*"I cannot make you do anything. You have a purpose, and you have a choice.
How you live your life is up to you. This purpose is yours, and so is your
choice."*

How do we know that we meet these qualifications? It shows in our thoughts, words and actions-manasa, vacha, karmana. Look at our priorities. Look at how we spend our time, where and with whom. Look at the choices we make.

What Is Faith?

Faith is the foundation of living a religious life or spiritual life. What is Faith?

Philosophers, theologians and thinkers have defined faith according to their conception and comprehension of faith, I have selected ten people of different religious orientations. Read and reflect on their statements and discuss what is your takeaway from these statements. Select the ones that resonate in you and explain how they resonate in you:

Faith is not clinging to a shrine but an endless pilgrimage of the heart. - American Rabbi Abraham Jesua Heshel

Faith is an understanding of trust in something divine - Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

God has given us many faiths but only one world to coexist. May your commonalities feel enlarged by our differences. -English Rabbi Jonathan Sack

*You will not complete your faith until you love another. -Muhammad
To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible. -Thomas Aquinas, Dominican friar and philosopher*

My faith helps me overcome such negative emotions to find my equilibrium. Compassion is my religion. -Dalai Lama

Faith grows when it is lived and shaped by love. -Pope Francis

Faith is not belief without proof, but trust without reservations. -Elton Trueblood Quaker theologian and Chaplin

Faith is taking the first step, even when you don't see the whole staircase. - Martin Luther King Jr

Faith brings you stability, centeredness, calmness and love. -Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

The Path to Self-Realization: Manifesting Inner Divinity

Om asato Ma sadgamaya.

Tamaso Ma jyotir gamaya.

Mrityor Ma amritam gamaya.

Om Shantihi Shantihi Shantihi.

Lead me from unreal to real.

Lead me from darkness to light.

Lead me from death to immortality.

Peace. Peace. Peace.

Swami Vivekananda famously defined religion as “the manifestation of Divinity present within us.” Vedantic message is subject for anybody. Who am I? How can we be happy? How can we attain fulfillment? How can we overcome suffering and sorrow? What is spiritual life? What is Moksha, liberation? Who is not interested in this subject?

There was a paper read at Harvard University. In that paper two different models of enlightenment were discussed. The first model was Paradigm Shift of enlightenment. This is a Vedantic idea of who I am. Am I a body? Am I the mind? Am I a personality? Body changes from babyhood, childhood, adolescence, middle age and old age. Mind also changes. Our thoughts and ideas change. Our personality changes. I am none of these changing ideas. The Greek word personality is made of two words: Persona means mask. Sona means sound. Am I a mask? I am the one who is wearing the mask. I am not the mask. I know that I am the nature of consciousness. As Shankaracharya says, “Mano buddhi ahamkara chittani naham. Chidananda rupa shivoham shivoham.” I am not mind, intellect, ego and intelligence. I am Shiva, I am Shiva.” I am pure consciousness. This is one aspect of enlightenment.

In Buddhism, the word bodhi, awakening, is used for enlightenment. We expect the qualities of enlightenment such as compassion, perfect self-control, fearlessness, the feeling of oneness, sacrificing oneself for others. We expect all these Divine qualities in an enlightened person. These qualities must manifest in day to day life, in our behaviors, actions and not on an auspicious day or Sunday. There are two aspects of enlightenment: knowledge and manifestation, expression in our daily life, in thought, speech and in actions,

in behaviors. I may be Brahmagnani but only knowledge is not enough. Knowledge must be manifested in actions.

Ethical and Divine Manifestation model of enlightenment

One model is Paradigm Shift from body-mind to pure consciousness. The other is the Divine qualities which we find in almost all traditional religions. These qualities must be expressed in our daily life. The purpose of this model is atyantik dukkhanivrruttim paramanda praptisch-complete cession of sorrow of transcendence of sorrow and attainment, of fulfillment, happiness and bliss. I may be sage in a Vedanta class but afterwards I may act like a demon. I may be quiet in meditation but after meditation I may be very angry. The divine qualities must be manifested in all situations.

There is a beautiful story about manifesting Divinity. It's from Yoga Vasistha. The story is about a dialogue between a king and a queen. The queen was enlightened. She was Bahmagnani. The king said to the queen, "My dear you look so peaceful, happy and content.. I have a question for you," How do you attain it? Tell me the secret." The queen said, "Ah. I was waiting for the question.". Then she taught him the Vedanta teachings. The great secret is we don't know who we are. When we realize our true identity, we go beyond sorrow. We get peace, happiness, and contentment. You are not the body, not the mind. You're witnessing consciousness. She taught this wisdom to her husband. The king said, "Very good. I must realize it myself. Since I am going to learn it and acquire it, by practicing meditation. So, I'm going to transfer the power of the king to you. You rule the kingdom. I am going to take study leave." The king left the capital to study meditation and practice it until he got self-realization, Brahmajnana. After some time, he returned to the capital and told the queen, "My dear, what you taught me was true. Before I went out of the capital to learn how to meditate it was like a poster on the wall. There must be a seeking, and the answer will be given to you."

In the Bhagavad Gita, Arjun says so many wise things. Only when he tells Sri Krishna that he was confused. He didn't know what Sri Krishna was talking about. He was not ready to understand the wise teachings of Sri Kishna, You are the only one who can teach me. Please teach me. Then Sri Krishna started teaching Brahmajnana in the form of a dialogue between the teacher and the student, between Shishya and Guru. Brahman is in all walks of life. Where you are the same Brahman is there. There will be a full manifestation of Divinity.

In Chapter 2 verses 54 and 55 of the Bhagavad Gita Arjun asked Sri Krishna, "What are the characteristics of Sthitaprajna,," Sthitapragnya ka bhasa samadhistasaya Keshav! Shithathidhii kim prabhaseta kimasit vrajet kim. Pajahati yada kaman sarvan Partha manogatan. Atmanyeva ataman tushta sthitaprajna stadochyate."

Keshava, what is the mark of a God-realized soul, stable of mind and established in Samadhi (perfect tranquility of mind?) How does this man of stable mind speak, how does he sit, how does he walk?

When a man renounces all cravings of the mind and is satisfied in the self by the self, then he is called stable minded-Sthitaprajna.”

These teachings are not only for enlightened people, but they are for us. Whatever are the characteristics of the enlightened person, they are powerful practices for all of us. If we practice them, we will reach full enlightenment, the manifestation of the Divinity. How do we overcome suffering? How do we attain peace? How do we manifest our Divinity in this life, in our day to day life?

Gautam Buddha was a master spiritual teacher. As a prince he went in a chariot to visit the town. He saw a man suffering from disease. He saw an old man walking with a cane to keep him stable, and he saw people carrying a dead body. He saw people suffering. Then he saw a luminous face of a sanyasi who had renounced the world. Seeing the suffering of the people his search for suffering began. After meditating for a long time, he discovered four noble truths. There is suffering in life. There is a cause of suffering. It is craving, tannah. There is a way to end the suffering. There is a method to end suffering. It is madhyam marg, the middle way. Buddha was awakened; He was enlightened. He became a teacher and taught the way to thousands of his followers.

Once Buddha told his disciples. The nature of sorrow and suffering is like a man beat by an arrow. There are two arrows. The first arrow is thrown at you by the world-the painful and unpleasant things, old age, disease and death. The second arrow is your reaction to all these things. Suffering lies in the second arrow. What I have taught you O Bhikkhus is to remove that suffering from the second arrow. There is nothing you can do about the first arrow. Buddha said my teaching will take care of the reaction of the second arrow.

Sri Krishna describes Aruna important marks of a person of a stable mind, sthitaprajna, in Verse 55. Atmanyeva atmanatustah sthitaprajna tadochyate. He is satisfied in the self by the Self. Joy comes from within. It is in Atman. It comes from Atman. Bliss is within us. Body, senses and mind are meant for spiritual purpose. They are means, not an end. The Self-realized person transcends vitaragabhayakrodha, attachments, fear and anger. Dukhesu anudwignamanha sukhesu vigataspruha. He is not perturbed by adversity. He doesn't crave happiness. He attains liberation, Moksha, the ultimate purpose, artha, of life.

Excerpt from a talk given by Swami Sarvapriyananda.

Coming Home

When we lose self-control we are not at home. Home is the place where we feel safe and calm, where we can be ourselves and let others be themselves without fear and worry, where we find shelter, peace and ease. Sadly, self-alienation and alienation from significant people in our life is becoming a norm and we all pay a heavy price for it physically, mentally, emotionally and relationally. Our home becomes a house. How can we turn our house into our home?

Here are a few recommendations for coming back home.

1. Identify your triggers that have potential to create emotional storms in your interpersonal relationships. For example, "When my life partner doesn't pay attention to what I am saying, I lose my cool." Or "When my son fights with my daughter" or "When my son throws a temper tantrum and does not follow my instructions or advice." If their behaviors cause reactive behavior in you, Stop from reacting. When you start reacting, know that you're moving into a "fight, flight, and freeze zone". Deep belly breathing creates a shift from stressful reactive behavior to relaxing responsive and calm behavior. Your priority is to give yourself a break to melt the knot in your chest. If you can't stay calm, how can you expect the other person to be calm?. Calmness in you creates calmness in others. Anger in you creates anger in others.
2. If it is hard for you to be calm, let the other person know you need some time to calm yourself to listen to him and work on stress causing behavior. Make it sure to go back to work things out. You are not copping out or escaping by taking time out. In fact, you're providing a role model to your children or to your significant other. When we break the reactive cycle and let each other communicate without reactions, we give a valuable gift to each other-the gift of connecting with each other. There is a wise saying: Connect before you correct."
3. When someone is misbehaving, keep in mind that it is not to get you or to retaliate. Misbehavior is an indicator of the person's inability to regulate himself in a given situation. If we do not let it trigger reactive behavior in us, we can be very helpful to him to learn how to regulate his maladaptive emotional behaviors. Once we restore ourselves to a state of calm, the other person will be more reasonable too.
4. All behavior is communication. We take misbehavior as communication and listen to what the other person is saying, what he wants us to hear and understand it, and let him know without judging him what he thinks and how he feels. Then both of you work together for common good and for healing. When we listen with an open mind and empathic heart, our social and emotional intelligence sprouts and flourishes. When we listen to the other person empathically and by softening our heart, we get connected with each other warmly, sweetly and constructively.

5. One of the most effective ways of cultivating wholesome relationships is practicing intrapersonal and interpersonal mindfulness. Mindfulness is a way of listening to what is happening in the present moment within us and others and responding without judgment with loving kindness.

How can we turn a house into a home? Below are a few tips:

- What triggers emotional storms in you in your relationships?
- Use Stop, Drop and Breathe technique to prevent you from your reactive behavior.
- Become aware of the mental and emotional heat arising in you in emotionally stressful situations. Use abdominal breathing for not getting caught up in your stress response - Fight, Flight and Freeze. Do not let your emotional brain or reptile brain, amygdala, hijack your thinking brain, your prefrontal cortex.
- If needed take a short break to chill out and then go back to work on the stressful situation.
- All behavior is communication. Try to comprehend what the other person is expressing and let him know nonjudgmentally what seems to be bothering him.
- Misbehavior is an indicator of the other person's inability to regulate his emotions and thoughts in a given situation. Make it sure that you respond and not react. If you don't regulate your hurting thoughts and emotions, it results in hurtful arrow throwing behaviors.

Be mindful of what is happening in your body, breath and mind by the other person's behavior. Process mindfully what's happening inside yourself to be free from reactive behaviors.

Assignment: Identify a recent experience you had when you did not feel at home. What happened that made you leave your home? What did you do to bring yourself back home? To what extent were you able to come home? What will you do more to come back home fully?

Transcending Individual Identity

Cultivating and maintaining healthy relationships without losing one's identity is a challenge in interpersonal relationships. Naturally, we all want to be attended, liked, appreciated, admired, valued and loved. There is uniqueness in each of us. In interpersonal relationships it is important that we recognize it in each other, appreciate and support it. This way we enrich each other's life. It is a balancing act. If we do not relate to each other this way, the uniqueness of each other becomes a barrier or a threat to each other and that could break our relationships. If we want to thrive in our relationships we must accept that "I" and "we" coexist peacefully, we become "weemee", I-Though and not I-It We should neither ask others to embrace what we hold dear to us nor feel compelled to embrace what they hold dear to them.

Are barriers and boundaries or drawing a line necessary and helpful in relationships? What kinds of barriers need to be established and followed so that they make relationships safe and secured? Healthy barriers will give you freedom to pursue your development without being afraid, reluctant or hesitant. Be specific about those areas and share them with each other. How do you relate to differences without arguing, disregarding, devaluing and criticizing? How do you relate to each other when one of you does something wrong? Do you deal with the wrongdoing? Are you holding onto it, suppressing your feelings or letting go of such feelings? How do you process your hurt and anger?

What is the common ground in your relationship? And how do you grow together? Be specific about the components of the common ground. How do you relate to each other's strengths and grow in the areas where you may have some shortcomings?

Read the article on Five Languages of Love. Enrich and deepen the language that both of you are good at. Work on the language that needs to be sharpened and deepened. And work on the language you are deficient in. It may take a lot of time and effort. There is no need to rush. Be patient and diligent.

Another handout on Goal Setting will also be very helpful. If you work on one handout deeply you will find common threads among other hand outs and a few new ideas to learn and work on. It will be a good idea to write an ongoing journal and share with each other. Transparency, authenticity and honesty are pillars for cultivating wholesome and rich relationships. Wholesome relationships facilitate the development of Cosmic Identity in which all man-made differences and our socially and culturally conditioned identity causing divisiveness gets dissolved and we become citizens of the universal family. We come home!

Emotional Resilience and Letting Go

Nine Pillars of Resilience

I have compiled Nine Pillars of Resilience and Success written by Stephen Sideroff

Relationship with Self: Perhaps this is the foundational pillar on which other pillars rest. How do you feel about yourself and how do you treat yourself? Do you relate yourself with love, respect, compassion and support, and care? This pillar is about developing an internal voice.

Relationship with Others: This is about communicating and establishing close relationships with your family members, friends, and neighbors to receive support in which positive affect (emotion) is expressed. Such relationships generate and enhance the flow of positive energy. At the same time this pillar is about setting appropriate boundaries so you or the other is not hurt by toxic energy.

Relationship With Something Greater: This can be a spiritual emphasis like prayer, meditation and loving kindness or it can be your involvement with community charity or other forms of service. It is based on belief in something greater than oneself. This dimension of relationship takes focus away from your self-created problems and channels your energy in serving and helping others.

Physical Balance and Mastery: This is the ability to develop physical relaxation and to quickly recover from stress in proportion to the demands of the situation and not to overreact. It is conducive to restful sleep.

Cognitive Balance and Mastery: This pillar is about having a positive attitude and positive expectations. It is also the ability to control and regulate your harmful or destructive thoughts. When you practice mindfulness meditation regularly you are able to let go of harmful thoughts and worries that drain your energy.

Emotional Balance and Mastery: Unexpressed emotions make you more sensitive to hurts and to inappropriate over reactions. They are accompanied by physical holding patterns, anxiety, and stress. This component involves awareness of one's feelings, the ability to appropriately express these emoticons, and then the ability to let go and not to carry around excess baggage or unfinished business.

Process How You Engage the World: This process is being fully present in the moment, aware and in contact with your environment, and distracted by thoughts, worry, or other preoccupations. It is also about the quality of the energy that you project out into the world and how well you are received by others.

Flexibility: This is about the ability to adapt to the changing circumstances that minimize frustration, anger, and tension. It also includes flexibility in your perception of the world and how you respond. It is the ability to learn and adjust in order to meet your needs.

Power: Power is your ability to get things done. This includes courage to take action, and persistence in the face of obstacles and frustration, and to keep the goal in view. It also involves the ability to make decisions as well as planning and being strategic. This component enhances your sense of control, self-trust, and confidence.

Turning Toward Each Other

Professor John Gottman has done phenomenal work on relationship dynamics. He writes about relationships between couples. The couples that physically “turn towards” each other are more likely to stay in their committed relationships. He found that 86 percent of the couples who looked towards each other stayed together and 33 percent of the couples who did not turn toward each other were separated.

When you are crossing your arms while communicating with your partner or colleague, when your heart rate is beating fast, or your jaw is clenching—all these are signs of adversarial relationships. Try to angle your body toward your partner and speak gently and calmly. In other words, commit to facing the concern literally.

The “turning toward” is physical. It can be verbal as well. Emotional validation is probably one of the most essential ingredients when building any kind of relationship. Validating language between two people creates empathy and creates mutual respect. And when you have these two things, you are inclined to be more magnetic toward one another. Phrases like “I am hearing that you are stressed for XYZ reason.” or “That would have hurt your feelings.”

Conflict resolution: Coming back together after a dis-connect is a key to success in building and sustaining and maintaining healthy relationships. Strong partners take some time to think and then initiate repair and restoration. The willingness and ability to restore it is very important to heal the emotional wounds.

If we are not vulnerable, then we are not going to be able to have an emotional connection, not only to our life partner but also to ourselves. Vulnerability helps with emotional connection and trust building. It helps with intimacy with our relationships, and that can make our partner recognized and appreciated. The ability to reconnect, reconvene and overcome gridlocks will also offer you and your life partner or colleague a sense of shared meaning. After all, this “relationship” thing is a marathon project that requires care from both parties. This is a situation that calls for constant collaboration.

Denial, sucking it up, and always “soldering on” does not generally facilitate profound healing and authenticity. This week I encourage you to “turn toward each other”, listen with a keen ear, and communicate your needs clearly and compassionately as well. You might be surprised how embracing the awareness and remaining open and non-judgmental overcomes obstacles in wholesome relationships and creates harmony and joy in your close relationships.

We celebrate our profoundly evolving and changing relationships with ourselves and with others in our life.

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

Apocalypse is a Greek name for the book of Revelation. In Revelation Christ uses four Horsemen to represent the first four of the seven Seals. He opens from the scroll of His hand.

Professor John Gottman uses the four Horsemen for representing four disruptive and destructive behaviors in interpersonal relationships. They are Criticism, Contempt, Defensiveness, and Stonewalling.

1. **Criticism:** Criticism attacks the character of the recipient instead of focusing on a specific behavior. The antidote to criticism is to talk about your feelings using the “I” statement.

2. **Contempt:** Contempt is an expression of superiority that comes out as sarcasm, cynicism, name-calling, eye-rolling, sneering, mocking, and hostile humor. Contempt is the highest predictor of relationship failure and must be eliminated. The antidote to contempt is to treat one another with respect and build a culture of appreciation within the relationship.

3. **Defensiveness:** Defensiveness is self-protection through righteous indignation or playing the victim. Defensiveness never solves the problem, and it is an underhanded way of blaming your partner. The antidote to defensiveness is to accept responsibility even if only for part of the conflict.

4. **Stonewalling:** Stonewalling occurs when the listener withdraws from the conversation without solving anything.. It takes time for the negativity created by the first three Horsemen that result in stonewalling. But when it does, it can become a habit. The antidote to stonewalling is to take a break for at least 20 minutes, calm down, then return to the conversation.

Apologizing

Apologizing is an expression of affection. By apologizing we are telling that person that we care about them more than some temporary comfort.

Most of us get along with people around us, most of the time. But every so often, a conversation or a situation can go sideways; an argument blooms, or feelings get hurt. Conflicts and disagreements are natural parts of connecting with other people. So, it is important for us how to handle these fraught moments. And a crucial part of working through any clash is to acknowledge the hurt between us and the other person-often through apology. It can be difficult to apologize when we're feeling wounded or angry.

Research shows that the presence of an apology makes it much more likely that the relationship can be repaired and restored. Really, apologizing is an expression of affection.

Reflect on the following words of wisdom and think about how these words heal the wounds caused by our hurting words.

"I have learned to accept my responsibility and to forgive myself first, then to apologize to anyone injured by my misreckoning."-Maya Angelou

"An apology offered and equally important, received is a step towards reconciliation and, sometimes, recompense. Without that process, hurt can rankle and fester and erupt into their own hatred and wrongdoings." - Margaret MacMillonn.

"An apology is the superglue of life. It can repair just anything"- Lynn Johnson.

"Apology is a lovely perfume; it can transform the clumsiest moment into a gracious gift."- Margaret Lee Runbeck "

"Sorry doesn't take things back, but it pushes things forward. It bridges the gap. Sorry is a sacrament. It is an offering. A gift."- Craig Silvey

"Mistakes are always forgivable if one has the courage to admit them."- Bruce Lee

Reactivity is enslavement. Responsibility is freedom

Taking responsibility is not accepting blame. It simply means consciously responding to the situation. Once you accept the responsibility, you will invariably start exploring ways to address the situation. You will look for solutions... your ability to craft your life situations will keep enhancing itself. If you look at your life closely, you will find that you have done the most idiotic and life-negative things when you were angry...it is singularly unpleasant for you and for those at the receiving end. It is also counterproductive and therefore inefficient.

Stress is entirely self-created and self-inflicted. Once you take charge of your inner life, there is no such thing as stress. You only mess up your situations by getting angry. Once you see that clearly, you've taken the first step toward change... in a state of anger, you are literally poisoning your system. When you are angry, your chemistry is altered, and your system turns toxic. The choice is always before you: to respond consciously to the present; or to react compulsively to it.... Responsibility is born in awareness, in consciousness. Reactivity is born in unawareness, unconsciousness. The first is freedom, the second is enslavement. Being responsible is taking ownership of your life.

Responsibility is not reaction but is not action either. Responsibility and action belong to different dimensions. The ability to respond gives you the freedom to act. It also gives you the freedom not to act. It puts you in the driver's seat of your life. Responsibility is not compulsive action. It offers you the choice of action. Action has to be judiciously performed. If responsibility is "response-ability," the capacity to be responsive to situations can be limitless.

Homecoming

We all need to have a space within us and also between us where we can escape or be free from the stress, the noise, and the hassles of daily life; where we can ascend into the welcoming embrace of the home. It is like our haven where we can fully be who we are, be true to ourselves. It is our home where we can shed the masks we wear in front of others or faked behaviors required by the outside world. It is a place where we can reveal our secrets, dreams, desires and longings without having fear of being rebuked, ridiculed, humiliated, laughed at, rejected or punished. It is an inner world moving from bondage to freedom, from darkness to light and from the untruth to the truth. It feels like we have ascended into the heavens, and we are able to tap into a higher awareness. We can find our home by Mindfulness Meditation. We can close our eyes and visualize ourselves ensconced in our welcoming home. We can practice daily, even short visits to our inner home.

* * * * *

Learning to Let Go

There are times to hold on and there are times to let go. Our growth, like a tree, requires both roots and branches-the horizontal and vertical dimensions of growth. Like trees, we need to have barks to protect ourselves. We need protective structures and boundaries as we go through the delicate process of growth. Like trees, we need to let go of the barks when they are no more needed. We need to let go of our protective defenses when they become restrictive and constrain our growth. It is not easy to step out of our comfort zone to make room for further growth. It is wise for us not to carry the boat on our heads when we are no longer in the river. Such an awakened state of self-awareness frees us from the trap we create in our lives.

It is difficult to get out of that zone that makes us feel secure and at ease. We also get stuck with the painful experiences and feelings of our past relationships and our hurts. We all have the shadow that part of ourselves we do not like or are scared of. Running away from me, hiding it from myself and from the significant people in my life is not the right way to heal myself and grow from my experiences. I am the one who is keeping me in my prison.

We all go through the dual aspects of ourselves: wanting and not wanting, liking and disliking, ebb and flow, darkness and light, gains and losses, hope and despair, life and death. How do I transcend this dualistic mode of living to become a whole and an integrated person? This is a challenge for all of us. In order to be illumined, I need to go through the dark side, the shadow, of myself. Avoiding it, fighting it, hiding it or running away from it is not the right answer. I need to face it, go through it and release it, let it go. We transcend, go beyond the stuck energy within and between ourselves. This is a process of freeing me from me. This is the ultimate freedom. This self-work is the key to living fully. It is described in different ways, such as **“Be, here and now”, “Living in the Being Zone”, “The Now Consciousness”**. It is usually **“a road less traveled”**.

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Anger Management

How to deal with this strong affliction affecting us in many ways? To vent or not to vent is the question.

Anger is energy. How do we use it, how do we manage it? This is a big challenge for all of us.

There are four ways we deal with anger:

1. Release angry feelings in an intense and explosive way. Type A personalities display this pattern, and these patterns become habitual. We may describe them as “hot heads”.
2. Then there are those who consciously suppress such feelings and stuff them. We may describe them as “suppressors”.
3. There are those who unconsciously suppress their anger-filled feelings. We may describe them as “repressors”. People who stuff their angry feelings and do not deal with them constructively often display passive aggressive behaviors.
4. And there are those who mindfully manage their angry feelings in constructive ways. We may describe them as “cool heads”.

Anger is a normal emotion. We need to keep an open attitude to understand and work through our anger and another person’s anger. The following ten steps are derived from numerous scientific studies made on anger.

1. Recognize and acknowledge the anger you are feeling. Denying this feeling turns inside where it festers.
2. Decide what makes you angry. Is it worth getting angry over? Ferret out the underlying cause of your angry feelings.
3. Give the “provider” the benefit of doubt.
4. Count to ten. Calm down first. Do not let your angry feelings hijack your rational mind. Respond to the anger causing situation rationally. Deep abdominal breathing helps you calm down. Learn to turn reactive behaviors into responsive behaviors.
5. Make sure your gripes and grievances are communicated without attacking the other person. Learn to make I statements to express your feelings. Avoid blaming games.
6. Develop empathic understanding by listening attentively. Let the other person feel that you understand him/her.
7. Forgive yourself and the other. Through forgiveness we once again experience the love that is the essence of our relationship. By forgiving the past, by letting it go, we embrace the present moment, the now consciousness.
8. We all make mistakes. Use them as opportunities to learn from them to avoid repeating them.
9. Become mindful of the impact of other person’s angry behavior on you. Learn to process mental stuff, your thoughts and feelings arising in you by letting them come and go without getting stuck with them. This is a mindfulness way of doing inner work to create space within you and cleanse yourself.
10. Use simple and easy to do stress management techniques to release the harmful tension built up in your mind and body. Practice such techniques consistently and regularly even when you do not go through angry experiences. Learn to pro-act before you react.

Emotional Regulation

We all experience a wide range of emotions, positive and negative. Our emotions have an impact on us and others associated and connected with us. It is wise to learn how to regulate negative emotions for personal and interpersonal health and happiness.

Emotional regulation is the ability to identify, manage and respond to intrapersonal and interpersonal emotional experience in a growth promoting way. It is an intra-being and inter-being work. It is from inside out and from outside in kind of work. The intention is to turn the negative energy into positive energy.

Cultivating Emotional Regulation Skills

- Non-judgmental emotional awareness. Identify which specific emotions you are experiencing. Label such emotions.
- Identify which specific emotions the other person is experiencing.
- Do mindfulness processing of your own emotions. Recognize, pause, breathe, empathically understand, inquire, and respond wisely. Learn how to respond, not to react.
- Learn and use active listening skills. Ask what is on their mind? Invite them to share with you what is happening that is causing their emotional distress. Have and demonstrate cognitive and effective empathy. Let the other person feel that they are heard and understood. Demonstrate your genuine interest. Hold back your advice until asked for.
- Be fully attentive and present. Be mindful of your body language. Do not move quickly and impatiently. Ask questions to elaborate their thoughts and feelings. Avoid making judgments. Remain open and relaxed.
- Ask them if it is OK to offer your perspective. Do not insist if they resist or show reluctance. Use it for further empathic exploration. You are inviting and not imposing.
- Learn how to soothe and relax yourself when you feel distress and help the other to relax and soothe herself when she feels distress.
- You may start with a short mindfulness meditation and conclude with it.

Mindful Aging and Stress Reduction

Aging healthily, Aging Gracefully

As we grow old, we usually live a sedentary life. To maintain our health and wellness we need to make physical activity a part of our daily routine like brushing our teeth or getting dressed.

Make a commitment. I suggest you take an important step by committing out loud as you read “I commit to make my physical activity a routine.”

Repeat it three times.

Know which physical activity is safe for you. Pick up the activity you enjoy like walking a dog, walking with someone like your family member or a friend or walking by yourself. If you like what you are doing, you’re more likely to stay with it.

Do some physical activity for half an hour a day for five times per week. You may start with 15 minutes. The important thing is to do some physical activity during the day. Even 15 minutes a day can get you fit and stay healthy. You may miss a day or two. Don’t make a big fuss of it. You don’t have to be too hard on yourself. Instead restart.

Make a plan, stay with it, and keep track of what you and how you feel about it. You do not need to wait until you reach senior citizen status. You can remain biologically healthy as you are advancing in chronological age. Besides doing physical activity, there are many other ways you can maintain your biological age as you are chronologically aging.

Aging Wisely

Aging is universal and is beyond our control. We may try to ignore it or deny it. But the bell of aging rings for everybody. How we relate to it is in our hands. The Buddhist tradition encourages reflecting on our own death every day. When I do this reflection, I think about letting go of many things that I do not need to possess any more. And I ponder what it would mean to let go of everything.

Aging is a mixed bag. Wisdom, perspective, gratitude-so many things grow stronger as we get older. But there is also distressing, growing incapacities from our body; the fear of forgetfulness; the sheer indignity of being treated as unimportant by some; and taking a lot of time on websites for finding something that I need to know. And there is the painful fact that our aging body's immune system is not as strong as before. As a result, our body tends not to mount as strong an immune response to illness as before..

We also feel the joy of aging. For example, I do not feel ambitious and do not feel competitive. I do not feel haunted by the folly of youth as I might have been one time. While aging we openly acknowledge all aspects of our experience. We don't need to deny the difficulty, of course, but we also don't need to be completely overwhelmed by it. We need to recognize all aspects of our experience and remember the positive forces in our lives.

So how might that work in practice?

First, while the difficult parts of aging are unavoidable, we can try not to add to them. For example, the tendency to rehearse some catastrophe and thereby live it several times. The first question to ask, "What are we adding onto a situation which is already hard enough?" Not being able to do something I used to be able to do, or being in physical pain, or losing people we love-these are already hard. But we often add more suffering onto them, like thinking it shouldn't be this way, or feeling shame or fear.

In a retreat led by the Tibetan master Tsoknyi Rinpoche had noticed many of his students were confronting the challenges of growing older. One afternoon, someone in the retreat was waxing on about the tremendous joys and delights of growing older. Exhilarating insights, followed by a litany of pleasures, followed by impressive triumphs, all spoken faster and faster, until Rinpoche interrupted her. He said, "Don't make a poem out of aging. It can be really hard sometimes." He wasn't encouraging cynicism or despair-more an invitation to see and acknowledge all aspects of our experience. We don't want to deny the difficulty, of course, but we also don't need to be completely defined by it. It takes some

intentionality to recognize all aspects of our experience and remember the positive forces in our lives.

First, while the difficult parts of aging are unavoidable, we can try not to add to them. For example, there is a tendency to rehearse some catastrophe and thereby to live it several times. So, the first question is always, “What are we adding onto a situation which is already hard enough?”

Not being able to do, or being in physical pain, or losing people we love-these are already very hard. But we often add more suffering onto them, like thinking it shouldn’t be this way, or feeling shame or fear. One possibility of mindfulness is to notice where we’re adding to the suffering that’s already there and try not to fall so much into it.

Second, combine loving kindness meditation and a body scan. Go through the body, part by part, wishing each part well: May my head be happy, may my eyes be happy, and so on through the whole body. It can counteract our tendency to add bits of shame or resentment, even subconsciously, to whatever is already there.

Finally, there is the perspective of wisdom, perspective on change, on the inevitable ups and downs of meditation. This is the way to relate to life in general. Things change, there are ups and downs, and with practice of mindfulness and loving kindness, we can learn to let go, again and again.

Modified Aging Wisely by Sharon Salzberg, Ten Percent Weekly, May 22, 2022//

Issue 254

Aging Self-Assessment

The purpose of Aging Self-assessment is to help you recognize where you are in different aspects of your aging and work on those aspects of aging to maintain your wellness. Rate from 1 to 5 (please circle the number). Based on the score (1 to 5) of each answer, add up all the points and identify which aging group you belong to.

Question 1: Have you noticed a decrease in muscle mass or physical strength?

1. Yes, significant
2. Yes, more than I'd like
3. Some
4. Very little
5. No, I'm stronger and fitter than ever

Question 2: Have you had trouble walking at a fast pace or for long periods of time?

1. Yes, significant
2. Yes, more than I'd like
3. Some
4. Very little
5. No, I am walking with no trouble.

Question 3: Have you noticed greater susceptibility to disease or infection?

1. Yes, significant
2. More than I'd like
3. Some
4. Very little
5. No, I am pretty healthy and rarely get sick.

Question 4: Have you noticed more inflammation (Chronic and acute)?

1. Yes, significant
2. More than I would like
3. Some
4. Very little
5. I am doing quite well.

Question 5: Have you noticed more gastrointestinal upset (bloating, gas, diarrhea, constipation) than usual?

1. Yes, more than I would like
2. Some

3. Very little
4. No more than typical
5. My gut bacteria is doing a great job of keeping my digestive tract healthy.

Question 6: Have you noticed weight gain?

1. Yes, significant
2. Yes, more than I would like
3. Some
4. Very little
5. No, I am pretty healthy and simmering

Question 7: Have you ever been diagnosed with any cardiovascular issues?

1. Yes, a severe condition, one that required surgery or medications.
2. Yes, but it is a manageable condition
3. Yes, but I have managed it under control and restored full heart health
4. I have occasional heart palpitations
5. No issues, and I have made an extra effort to improve my diet and exercise more to enhance my cardiovascular health.

Question 8: Have you been diagnosed with diabetes, pre-diabetes, or high blood sugar?

1. Yes, and the condition is serious
2. Yes, but I'm managing it via medication and diet
3. Yes, but I got it under control, and I have been given a clean bill of health
4. No, but I have spikes in blood sugar
5. No, I've implemented a healthy diet to control my blood sugar.

Question 9: Do you feel low energy and sluggish?

1. Yes, I lack energy every day to perform basic tasks
2. I feel low energy a few times a week
3. Yes, but occasionally and with a reason
4. No, I am pretty energetic most of the time
5. No, I am full of energy all the time.

Question 10: Do you struggle with memory, have a short attention span or have negative thoughts and feelings?

1. Yes, I experience all of these symptoms on a daily basis; I take medications to manage my mental health.
2. Yes, I frequently experience at least one of these symptoms
3. Yes, occasionally I experience these symptoms, but I've got it under control
4. No more than typical
5. No, these are unfamiliar feelings

Question 11: Do you exercise?

1. never exercise
2. I exercise frequently
3. I exercise a few times a month
4. I exercise at least 30 minutes a day
5. I exercise every day.

Question 12: How much sleep do you get?

1. I sleep 4 and 5 hours a night, falling asleep after 12 am
2. I sleep between 5 and 6 hours a night
3. I sleep between 6 and 7 hours a night at least 3 times a week
4. I sleep 7+ hours of sleep most of the time
5. I get 7-8 hours of uninterrupted sleep every day.

Question 13: Do you drink soda and carbhydrated drinks?

1. Yes, everyday
2. Yes, a few times a week
3. Yes, but only occasionally
4. Yes, but no more than a quarter
5. Never

Question 14: How much time do you spend in front of the screen every day?

1. More than two hours
2. Between one and two hours
3. Less than one hour a day
4. Yes, but no more than once a quarter
5. I don't have electronic devices at all.

Question 15: What are your daily stress levels and how do you manage it?

1. I am exposed to stress all the time, and I am on medications
2. I get a good amount of stress every day; I do not manage stress systematically
3. I get some external stress occasionally but do not feel it affects me very much
4. I meditate every day to manage my stress
5. I live a stress-free life.

Results:

If your score is 66 to 75, you are Aging Gracefully.

If your score is 41-65, there are some Age-Related Risks Found.

If your score is 15 to 40, an Aging Alarm should be going off.

First White Hair

The thought of your eyes
heather brown,
make my pale blue
eyes glisten, and
I wonder how God
chose which strand
to grant your first white hair.

You make an artform
of disappearance,
and teach me that life
is second nature.

I reach out at your request,
finding the strand between
my thumb and finger.

Stillness while you wait
for the pinch of the pluck.

Your eyes widen
as I rip the strand
from its root and realize
you are determined
to live, be free and
love what you love
unabashed, like a baby
in the shade,
gurgling.

Oh, most alive thing changing

before my eyes, let me change
with you, let your scalp be
the loom of my life, and
let your white hairs weave
a seam of double stitching
to bind us.

This silver strand
I hold is momentous,
for it is the last thread
I shall ever pluck from your head.
And letting go of this white hair
in the warm and shining sun,
I watch it float upon the air
and turn with time,
and times begun.

This poem, First White Hair, is an ode to aging. The moment in which we cease trying to stem the tide of change in the ones we love and loving them even more in their changing. This acceptance of change in others allows us to embrace change in ourselves.

Life Skills for Well-being

How to Be Stress-free

We know that we cannot escape stress. We also know how stress has a strong negative impact on our physical, mental, emotional, relational and spiritual well-being. We may often feel despair that we do not know how to get a handle on such things. We experience chronic anxiety and worry about the impact of chronic stress on ourselves and those who are related to us. Too many of us are buried under an avalanche of stress. Many of us may feel overwhelmed and worn out.

There is a way to reduce our stress and to be free of stress. Scientists and researchers have found the causes of stress and ways of being free from stress. There are ten scientifically proven LifeSkills, stress management coping skills, to reduce stress and increase happiness. Every week I will introduce and teach you one LifeSkill to work on your stress. There are three significant steps to follow to be stress-free: Knowing what stress is and its impact on our well-being; Learning LifeSkills and Practicing them regularly. These three steps are interlinked. We need to know them and apply them regularly. When we regularly practice and apply LifeSkills we will notice changes taking place in all five dimensions of wellness: physical, mental, emotional, relational and spiritual. We become healthily integrated human beings.

In a famous BBC interview with Carl Jung toward the end of that psychologist's life, the interviewer asked Dr. Jung if he believed in God. Jung peered over his glasses and said, "I do not believe... I know." Let us reach a point in our life where we come to go beyond belief and arrive at knowing and transforming.

Physical Effects of the Stress Response:

Fight-or-flight response is the specific way the body prepares to face a threat. It's a perfectly normal healthy expression-in fact we need it to survive. Our body reacts with the fight or flight response when we feel overwhelmed, perceive ourselves in danger, or simply having too much to do and too little time. When we're experiencing the stress response:

- Our heart pumps faster to get more blood in our muscles.
- Our blood pressure rises up as our arteries narrow and our heart beats faster.
- Our breathing becomes faster to move more oxygen to our blood.

- Our muscles tense up to get ready for action. This can result in muscular pain and stiffness or even in muscle spasms or back pain.
- Our blood flow to the prefrontal cortex (or higher reasoning center) of the brain diminishes as more blood flows to the limbic (or more primitive) part of the brain.
- Our digestion stops so that more blood is more available for our brain and muscles. The result can be an upset stomach or even “irritable bowel syndrome” or abdominal discomfort and bloating.
- We sweat more to help cool off our body and also to become lighter in preparation for a potential physical confrontation.
- Our pupils get bigger, and our sense of smell and hearing become stronger to be sure that we have the heightened senses to perform at our best.
- Our arteries around our heart develop increased inflammation and strain.
- Our immune system which protects us from bacterial and viral infections is diminished.

Our life may outwardly appear successful at work, may appear happy having a couple of lovely children, and have sustained a good marriage. But from our perspective our life may be far from being successful. The stress and fatigue that we experience on a daily basis makes it impossible for us to enjoy our family and accomplishments. Our life may look good from outside, but on the inside it may feel hollow and empty. Our chronic stress makes it almost impossible to enjoy the gifts and blessings we have in her life.

The good news is that reducing and managing our stress is in our hands. Belly Breathing is the first LifeSkill for reducing and managing our stress.

Stress Stressors and Managing Stress

In the 1950's Hans Selye published his findings on stress in his classic book *The Stress of Life*. In his quest to understand stress, he observes problematic changes in body systems and organs as result of persistently high levels of adrenaline and other hormones recognized as stress hormones.

Stress is a response to physical, mental and emotional demands of what Selye called stressors. Stress has gotten a bad name. It is important to realize that stress is not always bad or even undesirable. Many things we experience that are pleasant are actually the outcomes of stress. Stress can also be a lifesaver as when we encounter a life threatening situation and be able to flee or fight off the danger. When we talk about stress we are usually referring to unpleasant or bad stress which sets in motion by adverse events or circumstances or exacerbated through our perceptions and thoughts.

Everyone experiences stress more or less on a daily basis. It is not something we can avoid. So, it's a good idea to learn how to handle it, how to reduce it, and how to manage it. Jon Kabat-Zin developed a mindfulness-based stress reduction program 35 years ago. It is a scientific research-based eight week program. It is a very successful program that helps us in managing our day-to-day stress.

There is a whole range of possibilities to shift our experience of stress in our life. You learn techniques that will help you better manage the stress you face. There are strategies for structuring your lifestyle that will enhance your internal and external coping resources and habits that can increase your resilience to stressors you inevitably encounter as you move through life. This is a collection of stress management tools that have been very helpful to people who go through mundane life hassles to serious crises and major life changes. Even a small step toward stress relief can give you great benefit.

The term stress is used to express many things. It can be used as a noun. (I Am dealing with too much stress in my life.). It can be used as a verb. (I am stressing about getting all these things done in time.) or as an adjective. (This is so stressful. I have a stress headache.)

Stressors:

A stressor is a situation that causes need to act. Your stressor is a trigger for you to react or respond.

Questions for reflection:

- What are your stressors?
- How do you relate to your stressors?
- Are you reacting or responding to your stressors?
- What happens when you react or respond?
- What helps you to respond?

Identify the changes that take place in your breath and different parts of your body and mind when you encounter a stressful situation.

How do you manage and reduce your stress?

What is the impact of stress on you and on the people close to you?

When we do not know how to manage our stress, we are more likely to snap at people we care about. We may make mistakes that we may not normally make, we may eat foods that we know aren't good for us and do things that can actually create more stress in our lives. We may throw an arrow of anger and blame at others. Much of stress management is about maintaining the internal and external resources, to manage the stressors that come to life.

Changes can make a difference. We need to understand stress, look within and make healthy changes. You need to have a foundation of understanding about stress and managing your stress. If you do not look within yourself, you may not have an adequate understanding of which changes would work best for your particular situation, and you may not be able to adequately troubleshoot when you encounter roadblocks in your path toward change. And without making actual changes in your life, you will see no results.

Activity to do on your own:

Identify situations that increase your bad stress and lead to poor decisions, describe them. Identify your patterns of relating to such situations.

LifeSkills Exercise: Breathe from Your Belly

Purpose

The purpose of this Life-Skills Exercise is:

1. To teach you the simplest form of stress management.
2. To remind you that you have a remarkable body that can be taught how to relax.
3. To help you to balance your nervous system.
4. To show you that belly breathing helps you think in more positive ways.

Practice

1. As you inhale, you imagine that your belly is like a big balloon that you're slowly filling with air.
2. Place your hands on your belly while you slowly inhale.
3. Watch your hands as they rise with your in-breath.
4. Watch your hands fall as you slowly breathe out, letting the air out of the belly balloon.
5. As you exhale, make sure your belly stays relaxed.
6. Take at least three more slow breaths, making sure to keep your attention on the rise and fall of your belly.

Tips

Make sure you practice every single day.

Sometimes, practice for five to ten minutes at a time.

You can practice when you are not under stress. Practice a couple of minutes doing this belly breathing exercise. This will keep your mind focused while you're eating and may stop you from overeating.

Application:

Use this LifeSkill

1. When you feel angry.
2. Before getting on an airplane if you're nervous.
3. When you communicate with someone about a controversial topic. Breathe before speaking to avoid saying something you might later regret.
4. When you need help falling asleep.
5. Whenever you notice your breathing is shallow, rapid, tight and tense.

Breathing slowly and deeply into your belly is a signal to your mind and body to let go of stress and improve your health and happiness.

Keep a daily journal to help you practice the belly breathing exercise. It may also help you to check your progress.

* * * * *

Tense to Relax

Tense to Relax sounds contradictory.. One of the interesting things about the muscles in the human body is that they relax after they have been tensed. Let us try it right now. We clench our fist for a few seconds and then completely relax our hand. We will see that our hand goes from feeling light to feeling heavy. This is because muscles relax the most after they've been tensed or contracted. Tensing and relaxing is a skill so simple that we can practice by gripping and relaxing the steering wheel of our car at a stop light or in a traffic jam. Whenever we practice, we will notice how quickly the shift from muscle tension to muscle relaxation happens.

Fortunately, the mind and body are so closely related that relaxing one will relax the other. Notice that when we practice this technique regularly, our headaches get decreased in frequency and intensity and we do not need to take Advil to reduce our headache.

The idea behind tensing to relax is based on the research of a physician named Dr. Edmund Jackson. He discovered that people could activate specific muscles just by imagining doing an activity. He placed electrodes on the body to measure muscle activity while people imagined performing various activities. He found that when people imagined they were walking, for example, the electrodes measured activity in the actual muscles used for walking. When he had people imagine what they were eating, their jaw muscles became more active, though there was no obvious chewing motion. Dr. Jackson concluded that many medical problems were the result of people creating muscle tension without being aware that they were doing so.

To help reduce the muscle tension, Dr. Jacobson developed a stress management training that focuses on tensing and relaxing specific muscles. Although tensing to relax may seem simple, there's a great deal of medical research showing that this skill can positively affect a great variety of stress-related conditions, including chronic pain, muscle strain, tension headache, back and neck pain, and dental problems such as grinding one's teeth; enhance rehabilitation from stroke; and improve athletic performance ranging from running to golf.

Dr. Edmund Jackson presented his research findings in 1908 at Harvard University. In 1929 he published the book *Progressive Relaxation* which contains detailed procedures for managing muscular tension. His research led to the use of the word "relax" in the sense of "to become less tense or stressed, to calm down." Progressive Muscle Relaxation technique is used for some cases of insomnia. They are meant to reduce physical tension and interrupt racing thoughts that affect sleep.

- Progressive Relaxation technique is suggested to lead to an increased blood flow which supplies more oxygen, thus enhancing a decrease in generalized level of anxiety.
- A decrease in anticipatory anxiety
- Reduction in the frequency and duration of panic attacks
- Improved ability to face phobic situations through graded exposure.
- Improved concentration
- An increased sense of control of moods
- Increased self-esteem
- Increased spontaneity and creativity.

We can settle on a routine of practicing tension to relax for a few minutes each morning, then a couple of times during the day, and again a couple of times every evening. With regular practice we can minimize our everyday stress. Such practice adds life to years and years to life.

LifeSkill Exercise: Tense to Relax

Purpose

The purpose of doing this LifeSkill exercise is:

- To experience the difference between muscle tension and relaxation.
- To relax deeply and fully.
- To teach your body to become stress free.

Practice

- Take slow, deep belly-breaths.
- On the third inhalation, tighten your right arm from your shoulder to your hand.
- Hold tightly for two to three seconds.
- As you exhale, relax fully and let your arm drop.
- Repeat the first four steps with your other arm, each leg, and then your entire body.
- As you practice, repeat a relaxing affirmation, such as, “I have all the time in the world” or “I am relaxed and at peace.”

Tips

- When you tense your muscles, you really tense them; when you relax, really relax.
- When you inhale, fill up your belly with air.
- When you exhale, let your belly relax and stay soft.
- Remind yourself how calm and relaxed you are and remember that you’re capable of this kind of relaxation at any time. Pay attention to what it feels like to be relaxed.
- Think often during your day, “I am relaxed and at peace.”
- Sometimes practice with only your arms or legs, and sometimes your entire body.

Application

Use this LifeSkill...

- Before you go to bed.
- To feel better when you awaken in the morning.
- Before physical exercise.
- When your necks and shoulders are tight.
- When you're sitting at your desk.
- When you're stuck in traffic.
- When you're sitting in an airplane.

"TENSE TO RELAX" LifeSkill.

When you tense your muscles, letting go allows you to relax deeply.

* * * * *

So Much to Appreciate

Stress is everywhere. We struggle with demands at home, at workplace, illness, traffic, annoying bosses and other irritations. Then there are hassles like not being able to find the car keys or dealing with a rude salesclerk. According to Richard Lazarus of the University of California at Berkeley, the little hassles really add up over the course of a day per week. These minor hassles have a cumulative effect.

Fortunately, belly breathing creates peace in our mind as well as in our body. Belly breathing is the foundation of a stress management program. The skill, the art of appreciation, does as much as belly breathing to improve our life.

Appreciation is the simple act of noticing the good in our life. It means seeing the love represented by family and friends. It means being grateful and not taking for granted the routine material blessings of home, car, and food. It means really seeing your beautiful surroundings. It means being able to notice the good in each remarkable day. It means being able to marvel at the simple things our bodies do, such as moving, eating and sitting. It means being able to really appreciate the smile of a child and the profound gift of lifetime friendship.

Learning to see the simple blessings sounds easy, but for most of us it's much harder than we would think. We become overwhelmed by our struggles and stress and lose sight of how much we have to be thankful for. We stop counting blessings and see our cups of life half empty rather than half full. Too many people are so used to being stressed that they find it hard to smell the roses. The huge cost of this type of stress is that we have a difficult time letting go. The over stimulation of the stress response makes frustration, tight shoulders, and a grouchy mood the status quo.

The practice of appreciation reverses this trend. It teaches us to treasure the good and spend time thinking about our blessings. Appreciation takes advantage of our parasympathetic nervous system to reduce stress response and triggers our optimal performance zone. Looking for things to appreciate reduces stress and actually retrains our nervous system to make it easier to relax. The good thing is that our body and mind respond differently. We can learn to notice the good things that surround us, and think positive, loving thoughts. We can reverse the stress response, stopping its tracks and begin a healing process. Our nervous system is set up to make sure that we're safe. However, our nervous system is also there to help us appreciate the beautiful things in our life, if we would let it. If we spend a few minutes thinking lovingly and kindly of our family, for

example, we can engage the parasympathetic nervous system, and it will calm down our body and mind.

A number years ago, Dr. David McClelland demonstrated the benefits of positive thoughts in what he termed the “Mother Teresa effect”. He showed a group of students a film about Mother Teresa caring for sick and impoverished people in the slums of Calcutta. After viewing the film, the students showed an increase in the functioning of their immune system.

When we see goodness or think positive thoughts, the message sent onto our body is that life is good. The power of appreciation is as simple and profound as belly breathing. The question is: How do we develop and practice appreciation? The answer is simple. Learn to focus our attention on things that are good and beautiful. Times when we have felt love in our heart, instances of gratitude for the kindness people have done for us. Learn to see good in life as readily as we see ugliness; and in particular learn to see kindness as readily as we see unkindness.

* * * * *

LifeSkills Exercise: So Much to Appreciate

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is

- To help you acknowledge the good in your life, which will give you a warm feeling inside.
- To help you feel more peaceful and less stressed.
- To improve your relationships.

Practice

- Review the things you need to get done during the day.
- List two specific things to be thankful for.

During a stressful time:

- Take two slow, deep belly breaths.
- When inhaling for your third breath, think of someone you love, a beautiful place, an act of kindness done for you.

During the day:

- For fifteen to thirty seconds focus your full attention on someone you love.
- For fifteen to thirty seconds appreciate a place you find beautiful.
- For fifteen to thirty seconds think fondly about kindness someone did for you.

Tips

- When you think about a person you love, think of someone with whom you're in a good relationship.
- When you think of a place, think about a place that evokes good memories or is particularly beautiful.
- When you think about a kind act, think clearly about someone who did that with love.
- Appreciating positive things is enhanced when combined with belly breath.

Applications:

Practice this LifeSkill

- When stress and difficulty pile up.
- When there is too much to do.
- When you have to make a decision.
- Before making a difficult phone call.
- When you feel unappreciated.
- When talking with a family member, lover, or friend, or remember how much that person means to you.
- When feeling lonely or isolated.

Appreciating other people, the beauty of nature, and the joys of everyday life may be the simplest and most immediate way to create both health and happiness.

Appreciate Yourself

There are two sides of the coin of appreciation: Appreciating oneself and appreciating yourself. In both situations we count the blessings. As we know, the purpose of learning LifeSkills of stress management is not only to reduce your stress, the wear and tear of life, but also to help you become a happier and a healthier person. Developing many facets of the skill of appreciation is a cornerstone of a happier and a healthier life. This simple practice is helpful for reducing stress and increasing happiness. This LifeSkill focuses on appreciating you-the good you do, the love you offer, and the ways you make the world a better place.

Appreciating yourself helps you enjoy and relish your everyday life. This practice asks you to notice and appreciate the many things you do each day that are loving and/or helpful. Many people struggle to appreciate themselves; they rarely acknowledge the good they do and the routine talents they demonstrate. We all do a number of things each day that are worthy of recognition. If they learn to appreciate those things, they will avoid one of the primary causes of unhappiness.

Reflect on these two questions:

1. What would the world you are involved with lose if you stopped doing all that you do?
2. Do you wish to see the cup of your life as half or as half empty?

These two questions are linked. The first asks to look at who is helped by your actions. The second question implies that each of us has some degree of choice about how we feel. What we appreciate about ourselves doesn't have to be a big deal. We all contribute more than we might imagine to our family, our friends, our community, and ourselves. It's a good idea to pay attention to your self-talk. How do you see yourself? Do you tell yourself that you're a failure? That you have not accomplished enough. When something goes wrong, do you imagine that you've Blown it big-time? Remember: you have a choice what and how you feel about yourself.

The point of self-appreciation is to get into the habit of feeling positive things to think about yourself. Remember the good you do and acknowledge yourself.

Remember the good thing you do and take a break from self-created stress.

Remember the good you do and feel happier. You deserve it.

LifeSkills Exercise: Appreciate Yourself

Purpose

The purpose of this LifeSkill is...

- To notice the many good things, you do.
- To learn to appreciate your talents and skills.
- To remind yourself that you work hard and are worthy of praise.

Practice

Reflect back on your day:

1. Think of one or two things you did that were helpful or that you are good at.
2. Appreciate your talents and willingness to help.
3. Realize that offering kindness, help, and support are all positive changes that you make.
4. Even little things need to get done. Appreciate yourself for not having blown them off.

Tips

- It's easy to forget how much good we do, such as visiting someone who is sick, listening to a friend, doing the laundry, or making dinner.
- We are often critical for things we do wrong rather than praised for things we do right.
- It can be difficult for others to acknowledge that someone is doing things well or being kind. Sometimes you have to do it for yourself.
- Remember that appreciation isn't the same as conceit.

Application

Use this LifeSkill ...

- You feel inferior at a social or business meeting.
- At the end of the day, if you're wondering what you accomplished.
- When you feel that your abilities are not being appreciated at work.
- When you feel overlooked by others.

- When doing a hobby.
- When caring for your children or your parents.

Appreciate Yourself LifeSkill:

Learning to appreciate your own worth and value isn't an indulgence; it's seeing clearly your own unique character and gift.

* * * * *

Slow Down

We do not have enough time is the universal mantra in the world we live in. There are so many things to do. We live in a “do do world”. As Swami Satchidananda says, “Human Being has become Human Doing.” There are so many demands on our time. We get overwhelmed. There is so much to do and there is not enough time. We live in a time shortage world. This constant hurrying creates more stress we can handle.

There is a wonderful line from a Simon and Garfield song, “Slow down, you move too fast, you’ve got to make the morning last.” Learning to do things more slowly is simple, really, Yet in our hectic lives this approach is often neglected. Do we know what we are missing when we are hurrying? Think about it. Recall a situation when you missed or lost something when you were rushing and running. You did not find time to smell the roses. Think about such situations when you did not have time to enjoy the fragrance of the roses right in front of you.

The dilemma each of us faces is how to accomplish all that we have on our plates without losing our peace and joy in our busy lives. This is not an easy task but a necessary task. We do not benefit when we rush around like chickens with our heads cut. It is by slowing down we get a glimpse of life’s deepest gifts. Think about which precious gifts you miss when you do not find time to acknowledge and appreciate such gifts. Both the giver and the receiver miss the joy of giving and receiving gifts.

Dr. John Laragh of Cornell Medical School is one of the world's foremost blood pressure researchers. He was featured on the cover of the Time magazine in 1975 for his discovery that renin, an enzyme released by the body when we are under stress, leads to increased blood pressure. Despite that background, Dr. Laragh has been a major proponent of using non-drug therapies such as relaxation methods to help reduce blood pressure. One such method is the LifeSkill of slowing down, which has been shown to be a highly effective and efficient way to reduce blood pressure.

A number of studies have consistently shown that people who are hurried and, in particular, interrupt conversations, have a much higher risk of both heart disease and heart attack. This finding was first published by Dr. Meyer Friedman and Dr. Ray Rosenman, two eminent cardiologists in San Francisco. In their pioneering book *Type A Behavior and Your Heart*. The researchers identified being rushed as the main problem. Later research has refined that idea and found that both time pressure and hostility are dangerous.

One recent study at Duke University found that people who are rushed and routinely interrupt conversations are up to seven times more likely to develop heart disease. These researchers found that such people are competitive, controlling, rushed, and hostile—all risk factors of heart disease. To change their negative pattern, the researchers created another study that incorporated the LifeSkill of slowing down. Patients were asked to slow down and listen rather than rushing and interrupting to go to the next topic or to control the conversation. That simple change had a powerful effect: results of the LifeSkills research showed that participants' blood pressure was lowered and their level of stress chemicals such as renin was reduced simply by slowing down and listening.

One of the negative effects of hurrying is that you fail to make time for your family and friends. You also miss the beauty of nature. Slowing down is very simple. Daily and sustained practice of this LifeSkill enables you to develop a level of emotional competence that will successfully guide you through life's ups and downs.

Ask yourself these few simple questions:

- Recently I had a conversation with someone and moments later I forgot what we talked about.
- Recently I had eaten my food so fast that I had a queasy stomach afterward?
- Can I remember what I had for lunch yesterday?
- At the end of the day, I wonder what I accomplished in the preceding hours?
- Do I often find myself saying, "I simply don't have enough time?"

- Do I feel that I often am missing something even when doing things I enjoy?
- When I'm talking to people, do I often think not about their words but something I have to do?

Even if a couple of questions elicit a yes response, you may be going too fast on the lane of your life. If rushing through things is normal for you, your health and happiness will suffer unless you change your ways. You need to learn to S L O W D O W N. You need to practice this LifeSkill faithfully. Slowing down is a wonderful practice. It is very important for the most important area in our life, our family. When we find such quality time with our family, our family ties get stronger. Knowing that somebody is concerned about us makes the hard times easier to bear. Research shows that people involved with other people are not only happier but also healthier and live longer. Unfortunately, too many people let their hurrying and busyness keep them from creating rich and enduring relationships.

Learn how to slow down and smell the roses.

* * * * *

LifeSkills Exercise: Slow Down

Purpose

The purpose of this LifeSkill is...

- To put less strain on your body
- To free up energy to accomplish what you need to do.
- To allow time to appreciate all that you need to do.

Practice

1. Do a common activity, carefully, and with focused attention. Start by taking a couple of slow, deep breaths. Then pay attention to how good something smells (could be a rose or some food); notice how beautiful something is (nature, a loved one or a piece of art; look at every aspect of something (the marvel of your hands, for example).
2. When you are in a hurry, tell yourself, "I have all the time I need."

Tips

- Sometimes speed up what you're doing so that you can notice how uncomfortable that feels.
- Practice doing something the usual way and then slow down and practice again. What did you notice? How did you feel about slowing it down?
- Notice slower breathing and greater calmness whenever you practice slowing down.
- Observe that food tastes better when eaten slowly.
- You will notice that your family and friends appreciate you when you slow down to talk and listen to them.

Application

Use this LifeSkill...

- When waiting in line in a grocery store or airline security area.
- When rushing to an appointment.

- When you notice you are driving too fast.
- When drinking juice, smoothie, or wine, or eating food items, so that you can really taste the flavor.
- When you feel impatient.
- When you feel bored.
- When making dinner for yourself, your family or your friends.

“Slow down” LifeSkill

Slowing down and being absolutely focused on what you’re doing is one of the most effective ways

Smile Because You Care

Life is not always a bed of roses. We all are hurt by the thorns of the roses. Most of us are good at telling what's wrong with our lives. Such a negative perspective on our life drains our energy. It's important to know what's wrong with our lives, and it is equally important to recognize what's good with our lives. It's also important to realize that there is goodness in us, and we do care about people in our life and do whatever we can to be helpful to them and to have a desire to make the world a better place. Sadly, we are not taught the simple skill of tuning into our own goodness and care to buffer us from life's inevitable stress.

It's important to appreciate what skills we have and recognize the good that we do to serve others in our life. We smile because we care. We help others because we love and care for them. The power of underlying love makes hard work meaningful and opens our hearts to the kindness inside us. These strong feelings of love and care, if brought to the surface and remembered, can provide energy to work hard, be creative, endure difficulty, and pressure. The power of underlying love and care makes hard work meaningful and opens our hearts to the kindness inside us. We are not taught the skill of tuning to our own goodness and care to buffer us from life's inevitable stress.

A Russian researcher (sorry, I forgot his name) who investigated a monastery that was having remarkable results with patients plagued by all forms of degenerative disease. Part of the therapy used at the monastery was smile therapy. Each individual, visitor and permanent residents alike, was required to have good posture and wear a smile at all times. That's right, they were required to smile-and it was powerfully effective. We now know that adding a smile to appreciate creates happiness and well-being-positive states of mind.

A smile is the expression of contentment, joy, and happiness. When you are content you smile. When you are joyful you smile. When you are happy you smile. No other part of the body registers such a visible change.

Research by Dr. Paul Ekman shows that smiling registers in that part of the brain called the hypothalamus, where endorphins are produced, and many hormones are regulated. Endorphins are naturally occurring opiates that relieve pain and give a sense of pleasure, peace, and well-being.

Try a smile right now. Think of the love you offer, and smile. Hold that smile for a while and see how you feel. You feel happy when you smile and when you are happy you smile. Happiness creates smiles and smiles create happiness.

Have you ever grimaced after watching someone bang her knee or elbow? Have you smiled back at a child when he smiled at you? This is an empathy response that's part of the wiring of the human brain. This was revealed in a study by Dr. Christian Keysers at the University of Parma in Italy. He and his fellow researchers used a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) instrument to observe the brains of the test subjects who were watching short movies of people expressing both positive and negative emotions. In each instance, positive and negative, the part of the subjects' brain that experiences pleasure and pain (the anterior insula) would lit up. That response showed that people were empathizing with the people in the movies-that is, sharing their feelings. If we are all connected and influenced by the expressions of people...what compelling reason could there be to smile! A warm, sincere smile will give someone you love and care about a real boost. Do you want to enjoy your friends more? Smile more. Do you want to have more friends? Smile more. Sincere smiles based on love help you get along better with your spouse, children, and other family members.

Sadly, so many of us are lost because our lives lack meaning and purpose. We get overwhelmed by the daily grind that we lose sight of the purpose of living. Only when we reconnect with the deep reservoir of love we can see that our ship of life is pointed in the right direction. Love and compassion are our driving force. A regularly practiced loving smile will increase our happiness, improve our health, and put us on the path of a peaceful and healthy life.

So let us Smile Because We Care.

LifeSkills Exercise: Smile Because You Care

Purpose

The purpose of this LifeSkill is:

- To reflect on the positive reasons, you do most of the things in your life.
- To remind yourself that you care about people and show it.
- To realize the value of even your mundane tasks.
- To remember the loving reason behind all the good things you do.

Practice

Reflect back on your day:

1. Take a couple of deep breaths.
2. Think of some tasks or chores you did today.
3. Ask yourself why you did these things.
4. When you remember that you did them because you care, smile.
5. Think about how much you care about the people you did things for and smile.
6. Feel your experience of love and care and let it warm the area around your heart-and smile again.

Tips

- Remember that often we do things because we want to be helpful.
- Reflect on how much you care for the people around you.
- Remember how much help you are to them.
- Think about how what you do would be missed if you stopped.
- Smile when you think about caring for others.
- Smile whenever you can for a mood lift.
- Smile at people, and they'll be more likely to smile at you.

Use this LifeSkill...

- When you're feeling discouraged.
- When you're feeling overworked.

Stop Doing What Doesn't work

We all make choices. The question is what kinds of choices do we make? We all know that making wrong choices and getting stuck with them is an energy draining way of living. We need to get out of such an energy sucking cycle. We need to change our habits and behaviors to lead a healthy, happy and peaceful life. It boils down to making right and wise choices.

How do we break such an energy draining cycle? Self-awareness is the first step: an honest look at our habitual behavioral patterns. Awareness of how such patterns cause physical, mental, emotional, behavioral and relational problems. The next step is to stop doing what doesn't work -defending, complaining, and blaming. Learn how to reduce chronic stress. We have discussed six ways of managing our stress for living a stress free, healthy and happy life; Breath from Your Belly, So Much to Appreciate, Tense to Relax, Slow Down, Appreciate Yourself, Smile Because You Care. The seventh way for managing stress and becoming stress free is Stop Doing What Doesn't Work. Learning and practicing this LifeSkill will make our lives run smoothly. What we need to do is to keep our mind open and receptive and practice this way to create this stress-free way of living.

The good news is that once we identify our habitual patterns of doing what doesn't work and learn how to break such energy drawing practices we can invest our energy on what works. Relinquish what doesn't work and persevere doing what works. Stick to it. Have patience and trust. Let us choose the right way and follow it with patience, perseverance, and courage.

Living a stress-free life is a blessing to us and others connected with us. It's a portal to health and happiness.

So let us Stop Doing What Doesn't Work.

LifeSkills Exercise: Stop Doing What Doesn't Work

Purpose

The purpose of this LifeSkill is...

- To learn to recognize when what you're doing is not successful and to stop.
- To learn to try new strategies that may have better result

Practice

When faced with a difficult challenge:

1. Shift your attention fully to your belly.
2. Take a few slow, deep breaths into and out of your belly.
3. Then fill your mind with an image or visualize someone you love.
4. Hold the positive feelings that emerge around your heart.
5. When calm, ask yourself if the way you've handled the problem so far has worked.
6. If the answer is no, ask the relaxed part of you for a new solution to the problem.

Tips

- Feeling stressed isn't your major problem; it's your frustration over not knowing what will solve your difficulty.
- You will never know which solutions work if you keep repeating ones that don't.
- Have patience: it will take time to discover what is successful.
- Getting stressed over and over makes you feel helpless.
- Solutions that don't work add a second problem-a bad solution- to the first problem of a difficult solution.

Applications

Use this LifeSkill

- When you're frustrated.
- When you feel you've tried everything.
- When you're bored with your life.
- When people say you need to change.

- When you're judging yourself harshly as a failure.
- When you have a bad habit.

"Stop Doing What Doesn't Work" LifeSkill:

When what you're doing isn't working, calm down and find a better solution.

Accept What You Cannot Change

What is the most important thing in your life? Almost all of us would say: Peace. Finding peace is a necessary and ongoing part of the human quest. Life can be hard at times, and there are times there is nothing we can do to alter the way things turn out. We have to learn to make peace with such situations. Things happen that we wish had not happened. Life is often unpredictable and painful. We don't always know how things will work out the way we hope. Instead of accepting what we cannot change we react with anger and outrage. At the heart of this LifeSkill is the challenge to make things better when we can but also to recognize those times when we don't have the power to change reality.

The Serenity Prayer is a simple but profoundly wise prayer which calls people to distinguish between things and events we can change and those we can't. We need wisdom to know the difference and act accordingly. Here is the perineal wisdom of the Serenity Prayer:

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference.

For some people, the Serenity Prayer is about surrendering to a higher power or God. Whatever the form of the belief, it's not as important as the acknowledgment that ultimately we must accept that which cannot be controlled.

Think about a situation when we are stuck in a brutal traffic jam caused by an accident. We are abruptly forced to slow down and then stop because the cars up ahead stop. We are in the middle lane, and it's still a couple of miles to the next exit. To make things worse, it's hot outside, and the air pollution is high. Worse still, we have an important emergency meeting in twenty minutes.

If we cannot control the traffic, we can control ourselves instead of ranting and raving about how unfair the traffic jam is and how awful it is to live in such a crowded area. Would any of these responses help our mood or the traffic? It is obvious that they wouldn't. So, what is the best response when we can't control the traffic? First, we accept the fact as it is, and we choose the most helpful available alternative. We have some control over how

upset we get. We do belly breathing. We may listen to our favorite music or our favorite podcast to count our blessings.

The Serenity Prayer is a wonderful tool for making peace with reality. It works very well when we have struggles with family members and other people to whom we are close. The Serenity Prayer is a reminder to accept what cannot be changed and work hard to change that we can.

Let us conclude with Celtic blessings of peace used by ancient sailors to help them cope and come to peace.

Deep peace of the morning wave to you.

Deep peace of the flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the quiet air to you.

Deep peace of the shining stars to you.

Deep peace of the gentle night to you.

Moon and stars pour their healing light to you.

Deep peace to you.

LifeSkill Exercise: Accept What You Cannot Change

Purpose

The purpose of this LifeSkill is....

- To learn to choose battles you have a chance of winning.
- To learn to practice peacefulness whenever you can.
- To learn to accept things you cannot change.

Practice

If you feel controlled by your circumstances in a particular situation-a traffic jam, for example, or by a threatening disease-it's important to assess whether you have alternatives or whether there's nothing you can do to alter the circumstances. If the latter, you need the serenity to accept that you can do nothing to change your situation.

Try the following to help yourself achieve serenity:

1. Take a few slow, deep belly-breaths and think of something beautiful in your life.
2. Remind yourself that to solve the problem you need serenity and wisdom, not anger or despair.
3. Ask yourself, "If I can't change this situation, what can I do to make peace with it?"
4. Fully accept your life in body, mind, and spirit.

Tips

- Trying to change a situation that isn't in your control leads to frustration.
- When you feel frustrated and continue to argue with things that cannot be changed, you feel helpless and angry.
- Your mind and body suffer when you get angry.
- Feeling less frustration allows you to focus on the things you do that might make a difference-if not to the circumstances, then at least to your response.

Application

Use this LifeSkill....

- When you find yourself getting frustrated by a situation that won't go away.
- When you find yourself getting frustrated by a friend's or family member's irritating behavior.
- When you have a financial setback.
- When you don't get the promotion you deserve.
- When things don't go the way you want.
- When you're trying to cope with a chronic illness.
- When you're experiencing changed circumstances, such as retirement or a move.
- When someone you love dies.

Accept What You Cannot LifeSkill:

In the words of the Serenity Prayer, "Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Visualize Success

Mind plays a very important role in achieving success or failure. There is a wise statement about the power of the mind. What we bring to our mind affects success or failure. Our mind can bind us or can free us. How we use our mind is in our hands. We can make our mind our friend or our enemy. Choice making is in our hands.

Let us examine our mind. What kinds of thoughts and images are going through our mind? Negative thoughts and negative images result in self-defeating behaviors causing helplessness and hopelessness which drains our energy. Positive thoughts and positive images create helpfulness and hopefulness which energizes us.

There is a mind-body connection. What goes in our mind has an impact on our body. Self-defeating thoughts are accompanied by headaches, neck spasms, back pain and muscle tension. If we do not wake up and if we continue such self-defeating habitual patterns we will feel helpless and hopeless which will exhaust our energy, and we may create chronic illness. Our relationships are affected by the chronic stress we create by our own selves.

When we hear an unknown noise in our basement, our mind pictures an intruder. When we see that intruder in our mind's eye, our body reacts as if there were a real intruder, not just a cat. We humans think not just in words but in sounds, pictures, and textures. These mental sounds, pictures, and textures are very powerful, and they can be used both to stress us out and heal us from stress.

Here is the simple experiment we can easily do to experience firsthand how imagery can affect us physically. Imagine yourself in your kitchen, standing over a cutting board. You have a knife and a basket of delicious fruit like a beautiful orange, fragrant and heavy with juice, and place it on the cutting board. Now slowly cut the orange in half, and then in quarters. Notice the difference in color and texture between the cut surfaces and the peel. In your mind, watch yourself pick up one piece and slowly raise it to your mouth. Notice how you anticipate the taste and fragrance. Now visualize yourself biting into the orange to capture its sweetness.

Most people feel an actual release of saliva from the back of their cheeks when they do this. You can give your mind a powerful image of a pleasurable experience of the sweetness of the orange, because you can draw on your body's memory and give your mind a powerful image of a pleasurable experience. This kind of positive imagery can be healing to your

body and mind. If you focus again and again on a difficult situation, this conveys a powerful negative message to your nervous system, and all the muscles and organs of your body respond.

One of the most basic responses to stress is for the muscles of the entire body to clench and become rigid so that you can remain upright for fighting or use the strength to run away. Since the muscles of the back are some of the largest and most powerful of the body, they're particularly sensitive. That's why back pain is a common response to stress. The negative messages we have about ourselves have the power to create negative experiences in our bodies. That's why we use phrases such as "a pain in the back" or "a pain in the neck."

Symptoms such as headaches, backaches and neck aches are the body's way of communicating with us. Symptoms are the body's way to alert us so that we can take action to prevent further injury and damage. Symptoms are not our enemy. Rather, they are clear signals that something needs to be changed. If we do not listen to them and don't do something, our symptoms could worsen or multiply. Discard the negative images of failure and instead picture themselves being successful. Visualizing success relaxes and calms the body and leads to calmness and peace.

Visualizing success is in our hands. How we use our mind and what kinds of images we create determines our failure or success. It's our choice. It's in our hands. We can empower ourselves by making the right and wise choices.

LifeSkills Exercise: Visualize Success

Purpose

The purpose of this LifeSkill is...

- To find better ways to achieve your goals.
- To feel successful about things you do.
- To create better choices and options.

Practice

1. Think of some part of your life at which you're not successful.
2. Take a few slow, full belly-breaths.
3. Picture in your mind succeeding at your chosen activity.
4. Describe to yourself what the successful picture showed you about how to succeed.
5. Think about how success was different from the things you usually do.
6. Now plan how you can put into practice what you saw.

Tips

- Start small and then gradually move on to bigger challenges.
- Practice this exercise at least three times for any one problem- more, if what you're working on is important.
- Write down the ideas of success that come to you.
- Take the time to really "see" the specific positive outcome you desire.

Application

Use this LifeSkill...

- Before going into an important meeting.
- When asking your boss for a raise.
- Before an important conversation with a friend, family member, or colleague.
- When working to develop a better golf swing or tennis return.
- When dieting or changing exercise patterns.

- When in a conflict that you'd like to see end with a win-win outcome.

“Visualize Success” LifeSkill:

Research shows us that when we picture ourselves being successful,
we're more likely to accomplish our goals and dreams.

Just Say No

The phrase “Just Say No” was introduced in the 1980s as an admonition to resist illegal drugs. The need to resist destructive behaviors is critical to living a healthy and happy life. When we act in ways that go against what we think, feel, and want to do, stress and illness often result. We need to cultivate the courage to say no. When we say yes but really mean no, it is analogous to driving a car with one foot on the gas and one foot on the brake. Such a split causes stress and has been noted since Freud and confirmed by modern research.

When we inhibit our true thoughts, feelings, or actions, that initiates a physical response that results in Type 2 stress. Under stress like this, the immune system does not work properly and there’s an increase of stress hormones such as cortisol in the body. On the other end of the spectrum, when we acknowledge, express, and act upon our genuine thoughts and feelings, this congruence has positive benefits of equal weight.

Learning to say no is learning to be assertive; learning to say no and express our needs and feelings without stepping on other people’s feelings. Almost any situation can lead to stress if we don’t clearly state our opinion. Both work situations and personal relationships are made worse by swallowing our tongue. Consistently failing to express our thoughts and feelings can be destructive to the mind and body alike. In psychotherapy this is termed suppression, and it can be very damaging, as Dr. William Boyd, an eighteenth-century physician, warned: “The sorrow that hath no vent in tears may make other organs cry.”

Becoming assertive is not easy. If saying no to things we don’t want to do is a habit, then that habit will have to be changed. The way to change a bad habit is by making a clear intention, rehearsing what we want to do differently, and then regularly practicing that new behavior. There may be discomfort when we start a new habit. We may be concerned that saying no is rude or selfish. We may think it’s unseemly to state what we want or feel; we worry that our opinions and feelings don’t count as much as those of other people around us. Many of us confuse stating what we want or don’t want with being aggressive. Being assertive-not aggressive- helps us feel better about how we deal with people. It raises our self esteem.

There are three things that make learning to say no more effective:

1. Be aware of when saying no is appropriate and when you actually have a choice. We have the right to be treated respectfully, to be listened to and to be taken seriously. Being assertive means standing up for our rights, expressing our opinions and

sharing our feelings in direct, honest, and appropriate communication. There may be situations where we need to comply for the right reasons.

2. Know the difference between being assertive, being non-assertive, and being aggressive. We are being aggressive, not assertive, when we violate other people's right in standing for their own. The same goes on for ignoring or dismissing the wants, opinions, and feelings of others. Being nonassertive means saying yes when we want to say no and say no when we want to say yes. Being nonassertive is getting along-even when we don't want to.
3. Practice saying no in simple, nonthreatening situations first, and then move on to bigger challenges. There are a number of ways to practice the LifeSkill of saying no. We visualize ourselves what we want to say and picture ourselves saying it kindly, but firmly, or write down what we want to say. There is a growing body of research that indicates that the ability to express feelings, especially in writing, is of great benefit and improves the health of both mind and body. Trying out saying no with a friend in a role-playing situation is an ideal and easy way to begin this LifeSkill.

Afterword

You have received ten powerful LifeSkills Exercises for living a Stress Free life for creating health and happiness. The specific LifeSkills range from the simplest (Breathe from your belly) to more complex (Just say no). They are distinct LifeSkills, connected with each other. The bottom line is simple: “All roads lead to Rome.” In other words, all LifeSkills stop stress and create greater happiness, increased fulfillment, and optimal health. Each LifeSkill exercise takes about ten minutes to learn. Think about how little time it is.

You may think that sounds overly optimistic, but research and clinical practice confirm that each LifeSkills can be learned in ten minutes, and it works. Once learned, each LifeSkill takes a minute or two to feel positive results. The LifeSkills that offer the most immediate benefit are dealing with appreciation-appreciating other people and life itself, and appreciating yourself (when you focus on the good that you do). You can get immediate results from this very brief practice no matter where you are or what you’re doing. Remember this mantra: ten minutes to learn, two minutes to practice, and a powerful result in fifteen seconds. Time factor may vary from person to person, but it does work. Cultivating these LifeSkills is so important for the health of our body, mind, and relationships.

Each of the LifeSkills is deceptively simple but amazingly powerful. They have been proven to work in research and in clinical practice. These LifeSkills practices reduce suffering and improve health. Passively reading about these ten LifeSkills and the benefits of these practices may inspire you, but you have to practice and apply the specific skills to your life to get the full benefit.

Reading a diet book won’t result in weight loss, DMV manual on rules of the road won’t teach you how to drive, reading a cookbook won’t fill your belly, and watching a Yoga video won’t create holistic health. It’s not enough. It’s a good beginning though. You need to put it into practice.

Learning by doing is the way to master LifeSkills.

Remember to practice belly breathing when you’re under stress and you need to calm down. Try practicing self appreciation when you’re in a good mood and want to make a nice moment better. Cultivate appreciation when you’re feeling overwhelmed: the few moments spent really noticing the colors of a beautiful sunset or allowing your child to

melt your heart. When it's hard to see what path to take, visualize success and experience the gift of seeing that a good outcome is possible. Learn to just say no, when appropriate, to reduce stress and assert the value of you. Practice tensing to relax as a means to calm yourself in a very difficult situation. Work hard to improve your lot but accept what you cannot change and accept it without feeling defeated. Remember the Serenity Prayer.

There is a wonderful story involving the meditation teacher Ram Dass about the importance of regular practice. After one of his talks in New York, a woman from the audience asked Ram Dass how long he meditated each day. He replied, "Three minutes." There was an audible gasp of disbelief from the entire audience. Three minutes and you're a famous meditation teacher! With a smile, Ram Dass said, "Yes. I meditate every single day for three minutes, which is better than not meditating everyday for three minutes."

A few minutes of peace, a moment of appreciation, the ability to see good things in the future-these are your goal and your reward. The experience of peace, a moment of appreciation, the ability to see good things in the future-these are your goal and your reward. The experience of peace, calm, and appreciation often leads to better health, reduced tension and muscle pain, and fewer headaches.

It is the journey that counts, not the destination. The journey is our life.

These essential LifeSkills will change the lens through which we view our life. For most people, that lens becomes more clear the longer they practice, and with a clear lens life's beauty emerges. Stress free living,

Each LifeSkill provides the calm, and the inner balance required for making any lasting life changes. All you need is the tools and a willingness to practice.

Transformative Practices for Inner Peace

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space, lies our freedom and power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our happiness. -Viktor F. Frankl, author of Man's Search for Himself

This idea that we can learn underneath our emotions, if we feel a sense of guilt, if we feel a sense of anger, there's often something that is instructive to us. Now, the very clear distinction here is that our emotions are data, not direction. We can always learn from them, but we don't need to obey them or be dominated by them. - Susan David, author of Emotional Agility

My father taught me Meditation and Breathing practice when I was 5 years old, and I have been practicing them ever since. Numerous research studies including the one I did for my doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology have clearly shown the wholesome effect of these techniques for physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual well-being.

Before I describe these techniques, let me share with you the chanting my father used to do to wake us up early in the morning. I still chant it every morning and feel his presence in my heart center. It is about 1200 years old chanting in Sanskrit.

*Pratah smarami hrudi samsfurat tatmatatvam
Sachit sukham paramhansagati turiyam
Yet swapnajagarsushuptam aveti nityam
Tad Brahma niskalamaham nacha bhoota sangaha*

Let me remember every morning,

The energy that vibrates in my heart center is the same energy that vibrates in the heart of the whole cosmos.

It is Truth, Pure Consciousness and Bliss.

It is the substratum of all the three states of consciousness protecting me in my wakeful, sleep and dream states of consciousness and it is the beyond-the Fourth, the

Transcendental state of consciousness.

I am that and not the sum total of matter.

There are three integral components of this holistic health program:

First is Sitting steadfastly and comfortably-sthira sukhasanam as Patanjali, the Yoga master says. Second is Breathing, pranayama and the third is Meditation, Dhyana.

Sitting

In the Yoga system, the body is considered a significant means for creating and sustaining overall wellness.

Select a place where you feel at home. It is your sanctuary. Keep it clean and uncluttered. Do this program with a light belly and an empty bladder. Avoid distractions. Do it when you do not have demands on your hand. This is your time, your quality time. And you use it well.

Sit in a comfortably relaxed position in a chair or on the floor. Keep your head, neck and trunk erect. Slowly, take a couple of natural breaths. Feel your breaths while you breathe in and breathe out. Notice how your body feels when you mindfully inhale and exhale. As you breathe in slowly and breathe out slowly, let your breath deepen and relax and soften your body. Notice the impact of this gentle and relaxing breathing on your body and mind.

Gently close your eyes. Let them settle down slowly, slowly. As your eyes are settling down slowly, slowly, remain aware of important changes taking place in your eyes. The movements in your eyes are slowly, slowly fading away. Your eyes are becoming calmer and calmer. The tension in your eyes is melting away slowly, slowly. Your eyes are becoming more and more relaxed. As your eyes are getting more relaxed and calmer, they are becoming more tender, softer and gentler. Your eyes are also getting clear, clear like the blue sky. Notice how your body and mind are getting more relaxed and the energy flows more smoothly in your body and mind.

Handling Emotions Exercise

Take your time to settle down and let the strong emotion or feeling you have experienced recently, or you are experiencing now show up in your mind. Be centered and consider the emotions to be data rather than directions. What do they tell you about yourself? What is the impact of the other person's behavior on you? How do you choose to respond and not to react? Be the change you want to see in the other person.

Recall an event where you were derailed by your negative or destructive emotion. Set your intention and apply mindfulness to respond rather than react. Discern the signposts, the core values that you care about in your relationship with the other person. What is the other person telling you? What are they implying about their values and needs by expressing their anger? What do they really want you to hear? How can you help them listen to their own underlying wants or values?

Be mindful of minimizing or pushing or rationalizing your thoughts and emotions away. Let us not second guess when things go wrong. Let us not put it aside, forget, or ignore it, hoping things will be alright. Instead, let the thoughts and emotions show up. How do we relate to the content, how do we deal with what is critical. Do we allow ourselves to get stuck with them or be bound by them? If we do not relate to them mindfully, it will perpetuate the harmful cycle and the opportunity to learn and grow from the experience will be lost.

Self-vision Quest - An Exploratory Exercise

We all have our vision about how I can be a better person, make progress and feel good about myself. In this exercise, we will make this inquiry and write explanatory and functional statements about what are your goals and intentions and how you are going to accomplish them. You may write these statements or draw them or do both.

Examples:

I want to learn how to regulate my emotions.

I want to learn how to respond rather than react.

I want to eat more healthy and nutritional food.

I want to cultivate my listening skills. I want to be more assertive.

I want to cultivate my focusing skills.

I want to learn Yoga or Tai Chi or martial arts.

I want to do more acts of kindness.

State how you are going to accomplish your goals. What kind of support or help you need to accomplish your goals? You will do this part of the exercise on your own.

In the second phase of this exercise, you will present your self-vision to a small group. The group members may ask you questions for clarification or elaboration. You may do this exercise in your family too.

Breathe and Relax

This simple, time honored yet powerful technique of relaxation is easy to learn and practice. Even five minutes of this mindfulness breathing exercise leads us to a deep state of relaxation, calmness, serenity and well being.

1. **Belly breathing-Diaphragmatic breathing:** As you inhale slowly, deeply and softly, let your belly rise and as you exhale slowly, deeply and softly, let your belly fall and release toward the spine.
2. **Keep the upper body quiet:** When we are stressed, we breathe through the chest and hold the muscles in the jaw, throat, neck and shoulders tight. Our breathing becomes short, shallow and irregular. When we do the belly breathing, we relax the jaw, throat, neck and shoulders that facilitate the relaxation response.
3. When we do the belly breathing, our breathing rhythms feel like a lullaby, soft, smooth and flowing. Let our breathing become easy.
4. **Extend the exhalations:** When we are stressed, our breathing becomes short, shallow and choppy. When we are relaxed, our exhalations extend and get longer than inhalations. To create a deep relaxation response, gently extend exhalations by two to four seconds.
5. **Linger in the pause:** When we are deeply relaxed, each exhalation is punctuated by a short, sweet and restful pause. Lingering in this pause evokes a profound sense of calmness and stillness.

When you do this exercise, you may progressively start with the lower parts of the body and end with your head. It is a good idea to conclude the exercise by letting the whole body breathe. The success of this exercise depends on how consistently and regularly you practice it even for a short time.

Practicing Mindfulness

Mindfulness is paying attention non-judgmentally to what is happening internally and externally. There are four dimensions of mindfulness: Body Mindfulness, Breath Mindfulness, Thoughts Mindfulness and Mindfulness of Feelings and Emotions. Practicing mindfulness also includes Mindful Eating, Mindful Walking, Mindful Talking, Mindful Listening and Mindfully Relating.

Let us begin with Body Mindfulness.

Let us sit on the floor or in a chair in an upright position, our head, neck, and back placed in alignment. If you feel comfortable, gently close your eyes or gently glaze on the floor. Sitting this way makes our body grounded, relaxed and alert. Take slow, deep and gentle breaths. You may place your hand on your belly. Notice the movements of your belly as you are breathing in and out slowly, gently and deeply. Let us take five deep breaths.

Pay your total attention to your body right from your toes to the top of your head. Our body is a gift of God. It is very precious. Scan your body in a compassionate and friendly way. Become aware of different bodily sensations you are experiencing at this moment. Some of them may be pleasant and some of them may be unpleasant. Without judging them, be mindful of the play of different sensations you are experiencing at this moment. You may notice your bodily sensations changing. Continue breathing slowly, gently and deeply. Notice how the energy flows in your body. Remain open to receive feedback from your body as you are slowly journeying through your body. If you feel tension in any part of the body, feel it nonjudgmentally, relax the parts of your body where you feel tension. Continue your belly breathing.

Pay attention to your eyes. Allow them to settle down slowly, slowly, slowly. Notice changes taking place in your eyes as you are breathing in and out slowly. Notice how the movements in your eyes are fading away. They are getting quieter. You experience stillness growing in your eyes.

Silent and deep listening

“The intimacy that arises in listening and speaking truth is only possible if we can be open to the vulnerability to our own hearts. Breathing in, connecting to the life that is right here, is our first step. Once we have held ourselves with kindness, we can touch others in a vital and healing way.” –Tara Brach

Listening to oneself silently is a profound dimension of awakening and awareness, a way of knowing the truth of our self and being intimate with ourselves. Listening silently to the other is a profound way of knowing the other and being intimate with the other. Genuine bonding takes place when we listen to ourselves silently and deeply and to others silently and deeply.

Silent and deep listening has the following qualities: curiosity, caring, compassion, courage, friendliness, non-judging, interest, openness and receptivity. We can wisely respond to the other if we silently and deeply listen to the other.

Why do we not listen to ourselves and others silently and deeply? Not enough time? Preoccupied mind? Fear of finding something we do not want to see? Fear of changing our default habitual patterns? Hearing the truth? Fear of being our true self?

Intentionality is the door that opens the door to listening. I intend to listen silently and deeply to uncover myself, to know the different layers of myself and become an integrated whole and wholesome person.

Exercise 1: Bring to your mind someone you know who is a good listener. What qualities do you see in that person that helps you to be open to that person? Explore how such an experience helps you to be yourself and be connected with that person.

Exercise 2: Bring to your mind someone you know who is not a good listener. What qualities do you see in that person that blocks the flow of communication between both of you? What can you do to remove that barrier between both of you?

Have an anchor to cultivate the skills of deep and silent listening. Use your breath as an anchor to be consciously present. When the mind wanders, bring it back to your breathing. Listen with the ears of your caring, open and compassionate heart.

Reflect and Apply

Take your time to settle down and get centered. Let the strong emotion or feeling you have recently experienced or you're experiencing now visit you. Be centered and relate to the emotions to be data rather than direction. Listen to your emotions and hear what they are telling you about yourself. You're learning the art of responding to your emotional experience rather than reacting to your experience. You're learning how to work through your emotional experience and grow from it.

What is the impact of someone's unwelcoming or disturbing behavior on you? How do you choose to respond and not react? How can you be the change you want to see in the other person?

Recall an event when you were derailed by your negative or destructive emotion, when your negative emotion hijacked you. Your intention is to respond, not to react. Your intention is to safeguard, preserve and nourish your core values of a healthy relationship.

Be mindful of your habitual counter-productive ways of dealing with such situations. Do you relate to such situations by minimizing, ignoring, brooding, bottling or rationalizing rather than working on such situations mindfully? Do you allow yourself to get stuck or bound by the thoughts and feelings you have experienced or you're experiencing now? If you do not relate to them mindfully, the harmful cycle will perpetuate. The opportunity to learn and grow from such experiences will be lost. It's your choice and I hope and wish you will make the wise choice though it may be difficult to begin with.

Breath is the universal place to focus and deepen our attention. Breath is the portal to be with the presence. Breath brings us here and now from there and then. Breath is the anchor for our wandering mind to be present, steady and grounded. Breath brings us home. Breath becomes our home base. Deep, long and full belly breathing creates and sustains relaxation response.

Listen to your breath moment to moment, this breath and another breath, and connect yourself with your breath. Resting on our breath restores and saves our energy. Gentle relaxing breath creates a flow in our body and mind. Where attention goes, energy flows. Gentle, soft and deep breathing creates space within us to relate to our bodily sensations, thoughts and feelings mindfully and compassionately. Breath helps us open the two wings of our self: awareness and compassion, authenticity and empathy.

As the presence grows in our consciousness, we let the waves of thoughts and emotions come in the foreground and the breath be in the background. Put your caring hand on your belly and feel the subtle movement of your breath. Put your loving hand on your heart and feel the subtle movement of your breath. Feel the rising and falling, the inflow and the outflow of the breath. If your attention gets drifted, gently relax back into the flowing stream of your breath. Allow yourself to breathe with the life that is here and now. Be intimate with the present. Love it. Welcome the gladdening heart. Welcome the showering of joyful flowers. This is the season of life, the celebration of life. Savor it. Cherish it. Be grateful for such a gift coming from your heart.

We know our mind, the monkey mind, the wandering mind, dwelling on the past and worrying about the future. We are familiar with our not-enough syndrome, striving for more, looking for something more and living in the mental world of discontent. This is described as chasing the mirage. We strive to fill the cup of life by chasing things from outside, by trying to achieve this and that not knowing the source of contentment and fulfillment is within us. Our mind is conditioned to look out for the source of happiness. Our mind is also conditioned to be shameful for not doing the right thing. It is also conditioned to blame others when things go wrong for ourselves. Our work is to decondition the conditioned mind to create new pathways to peace, happiness and our well-being.

Take a U Turn. The practice of mindfulness creates self-awareness. It opens our inner eyes to see where we are going. It helps us realize we are going on the wrong way, the way that hurts us and others in our life. It drains and depletes our energy. It is a downward path. Daily mindfulness practice wakes us up from our slumber. And we take a U Turn. We discover our right way, the way that slowly and gradually helps us regain our lost identity. We find our true self, our essence, our original self. As the saying goes, know thyself and thou will be free, freedom that evokes compassion and love and brings deep contentment, fulfillment, joy, peace and happiness. We feel at home.

Serving others without expecting any external reward and recognition is also a way of deconditioning our mind, going beyond the ego-formulated self-centered boundaries. Feeling for others is innate in all of us. As we become free from the ego-centered consciousness, feeling for others, kindness and compassion naturally arise in our heart and we extend our helping hands to others who need our help. Serving others unconditionally brings blessings to us. It takes us out of the low energy depressive cycle. Research studies support the benevolent effects of serving others. Giving away small 29 gifts in 29 days changes our biochemistry and neural circuits. It positively affects energy vibrations. It creates a shift from lower and weak energy frequencies to higher and vibrant energy frequencies creating feelings of joy and happiness, a sense of belonging to a greater whole.

Take time to savor and cherish such consciousness expanding and uplifting feelings and bodily sensations. We just naturally and spontaneously feel happy for no reason.

Regular mindfulness practice gladdens our heart and radiates joyful energy. Practicing mindfulness practice in a group creates and widens positive energy vibrations. That's why satsanga, doing contemplative spiritual practices with others is very beneficial. It is like one lamp enkindles the other generating an enlightening presence. In satsanga, we learn from a spiritual teacher, inquire with an open mind and a grateful heart, feel inspired, share our highs and lows, get support and encouragement from others as we are going through the journey of awakening. As we are experiencing more and more turmoil and stress in the world we live in, we need to have an oasis of satsanga to keep our mind and heart open and filled with positive energy. As we walk on this path regularly, there is going to be a ripple effect, and others will be touched by it. The virtuous circle will expand to do greater good.

Centering-The Art of Concentration

Centering is the art of concentration. This is the foundation of almost all meditation practices. It is a very powerful technique for learning how to be free from a variety of distractions our mind goes through every day. We are very familiar with these distractions. Our mind gets distracted by the past events usually filled with regrets and sorrow or future projections usually causing anxiety or anger. We arrive before we arrive! Our mind ruminates on these events. Our mind goes through a running commentary or narration which drains our physical, mental, and emotional energy. These distractions drain our physical, mental, and emotional energy. We can train our mind to be attentive and centered, and steady. We gracefully say goodbye to the past and hello to the present. It's a gentle process of returning, coming back home in a whole-hearted and enthusiastic way.

We may use an external object such as a sound to cultivate the skill of paying our full attention or an internal object like our breath. Breath is always with us. It is easily portable. It is private and personal. We can use our breath for centering anywhere and at any time. Breath meditation is very simple and powerful. We may do the formal breath meditation for 5 to 10 minutes and slowly and gradually increase the duration of our focused breathing. We can also do breath meditation as an informal practice in our everyday walk of life like walking, working, showering, resting, studying etc.

In formal breath meditation we gather our full attention and rest it on breathing. Our mind has a tendency to take a hike. It is called a wandering mind or a monkey mind jumping from one branch of a thought or feeling to another. We don't push the mind or run away from it. We use our breath as an anchor. With practice we tame our mind to be focused. It takes time to master this simple technique. We need to be patient and persevering.

It is helpful to keep a journal to record our meditation experiences. With regular practice of breath meditation, we notice positive changes taking place in our mind, body and actions. We notice change in our energy as it is not drained by the chronicle patterns of distractions and diversions. We feel less tired and feel more fresh, lively and vibrant. We also notice changes taking place in our relationships.

Taking In Joy

According to evolutionary biologists, we are wired to predominantly look for danger or threat, or what's wrong in our lives. It takes some conscious effort or intentionality to take in the good and be able to acknowledge it, pay attention to it, to savor it, taking delight in it. This is a powerful way in finding resilience. It is a way of appreciating a gift even if it may be small and be grateful for it.

Practice of taking in joy

To begin with, gently close your eyes, sit in an upright relaxed and alert position. Breathe in and breathe out slowly, gently, and deeply. Rest on your breathing for a minute or so. Notice where you feel your breath clearly and notice how your slow, gentle, and deep breathing relaxes your body and mind. Allow yourself to savor the pleasant sensations you feel in your body. Pay attention to your bodily sensations and notice how they feel. Feel the flow of energy as you're going through this mindfulness exercise.

Bring to your mind a pleasant experience you had today or sometime ago. It could be spending time with your kids, someone you love, helping someone, seeing a sunrise or a sunset, listening to music, reading a poem, or noticing a purple flower blooming in your garden. Notice and acknowledge what kinds of feelings arise in your heart- feelings like joy, wonder, comfort, contentment, and gratitude. Savor these feelings in your heart. Notice how your body feels as you recollect your joyful experience. Feel the flow of energy as you're going through this experience.

Let us conclude this exercise by returning to our breath and by letting in the good. Find some time in a day for opening to joy and feeling gratitude.

Goal Setting

In order to be healthy and happy, you need to identify what makes you healthy and happy and what comes in the way for you to be healthy and happy. You need to identify your short term and long term goals and identify the ways and means of achieving your goals. You need to do this assignment individually at first. After you have completed it, share your assignment with each other or as a family. You categorize your goals such as physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual.

Sit quietly without any distractions to think about your short term and long term goals. List them separately. Be specific about your goals.

List the ways and means you are going to employ to attain your goals. Come up with timelines for achieving your goals. Be realistic, reasonable and candid in describing your goals and ways and means of attaining them.

Do Mindfulness Meditation before you do this assignment. Do it consistently. You may do breath awareness meditation for a short time before you start working on this assignment.

Goal Setting

Step 1: Take 100 percent responsibility and ownership for your life. You are the only person for both your achievements and shortcomings. Give up blaming and complaining. Acknowledge that you create everything that happens to you, and you get control over things that create problems for you for others.

Step 2: Decide upon your major definite purpose of life and a clear vision of what you really want in your life. Identify your life purpose. Make sure your vision of what you want to accomplish is in alignment with your vision and purpose. The purpose of your life can bring joy, peace, contentment and fulfillment in your life. Without a clear and definite purpose, it is easy to get sidetracked and frustrated, wander and drift. It's like you go to the top of your ladder only to find that you had it leaning against the wrong wall. It is never too late to wake up and set your ladder on the right wall. We all sometimes fall down. Wisdom is to acknowledge our misstep and learn from the falling down. As Winston Churchill said, "Courage is what it takes up and speaks. Courage is what it takes to sit down and listen."

Step 3: Set a smart goal. Make sure that the goal you set is closer to achieving your vision. Your goal must be precise and detailed, not only to you but to others as well. Your goal must be attainable. You should be able to attain it within the constraints you have in your life.

Step 4: Your goals should be relevant and aligned with your vision. Set specific deadlines for the completion of your goal. It creates accountability and provides you motivation to keep moving forward.

Exercise: Select a goal that you want to accomplish. It may be taking care of your physical health or mental health, or emotional health or relational well-being or spiritual development or environmental well-being. Apply the four steps mentioned above for selecting and working on your goal. Each day take a step towards attaining that goal, what strategies you use and how they work. Keep a journal to note how you are moving towards attaining the goal and make necessary modifications for attaining your goal.

Happiness Workout

1. Acceptance

Be still and silent and be present. Accept what arrives in the present moment without resistance and judgment: our bodily sensations, our thoughts and emotions and our behaviors. It's by facing what comes nonjudgmentally, empathically and compassionately.

2. Gratitude

Appreciate and be grateful for even small gifts we receive from others, whatever gifts come from the heart. We receive them gratefully. It may be a kind look, a kind word or kind actions we receive from others. Brain research shows that when we feel grateful for the gift given to us dopamine and serotonin are released in the brain. These are happiness creating enzymes with no adverse side effects.

3. Intentional kindness

Focus on your intention. When you intend to be kind to others, act on it. It may be a small act of kindness like sending a text message expressing kindness. Or helping someone going through tough times.

4. Sense of meaning

We ask a fundamental question of our life. What is the purpose of our being in this world? Why am I here in this world? What fulfills me? What brings joy to me? What makes me happy? And what can I do to serve others that can reduce their suffering and make them happy?

5. Self-care

Treat yourself with kindness and compassion. Caring for yourself helps you take care of others. And that is not selfishness. Think about how you can take care of yourself physically, mentally and emotionally. How can you nourish yourself? How can you fill the cup of your life and fill the cup of life of others close to you? I love the saying, "Charity begins at home but does not end it." It goes beyond ourselves.

Discover and Share Your Gifts

As seasons change from Winter to Spring and go through the renewal process, so we do. We let go of the past which is already gone and wisely embrace the change taking place at this stage of our life. There is a natural rhythm that yearns to shake off the slumber. It is time for awakening and we welcome it.

We are also endowed with special unique gifts and talents. Let us reflect on how we can cultivate our unique talents within us and how we can offer our gifts to others?

As we journey through life, we may find ourselves drawn to certain activities we feel called to do along the way. We begin to resonate with a specialty or calling and therein lies the profound elegant simplicity to identifying our gifts. We carry within us certain qualities and attributes that contribute to our personal and social welfare called loka sangraha in the Bhagavad Gita. Everything we do has an impact on us and others in our life as we as the natural world.

Sometimes it may not be obvious to us what gifts we have.. Below are listed four ways to discover our unique gifts. It may be helpful to journal about or discuss with a trusted friend or family members the following:

1. How did you love to spend your time as a child? What did you enjoy doing the most? How did you pass the days and what types of activities were exciting and fulfilling to you?
2. What are you passionate about as an adult? What lights you up and gets you totally motivated? What kinds of things do you enjoy doing so much that you lose track of time?
3. What is important to you about life? What areas of your life draw your mind and heart (like health, career, family, relationships, personal development, religion/spirituality, recreation). Make a list of all these things that are important and meaningful to you in each of these categories. This will reflect your values, what you value in your life at this stage of your life. Knowing your values helps you direct your energy towards your passion and purpose.
4. Ask your family, friends, and coworkers or the five people you spend the most time with and identify one or two things at which they are gifted.

Likewise, the people who you know well or spend the most time with will easily be able to share with you the qualities they see as bringing your strengths.

Once you have identified your passions, values, and talents, it's time to put them to work by exploring the ways of building your life around them. You need to take some time to

contemplate the words and phrases that come about from your self-reflection and inquiry. At the end of the day realize who you are, what you do, and how you show up in the world. Everything you share-whether it's your bright smile, your compassionate heart, your keen intellect, or your quality of presence-has a ripple effect on everyone around you and beyond. When you think big, show up boldly and share your compassion, you become a gifted role model for all.

Emotional Healing

The process of emotional healing requires us to tend the garden of our consciousness. First we have to clear out the weeds of negative thinking and negative emotions we have allowed to take root. Our awareness is clouded with judgments, self-criticism, and regret. We need to create a quiet, tranquil and clear space within us. Then we fertilize the potent soil of our inner world with holy -unfragmented, wholesome, and healthy thoughts. When our heart is quiet and pure, it becomes a fertile field for Divine consciousness to blossom. This is called Conscious Cleanse. It is a way to purify and rejuvenate the soil of our inner world. It is vital to take time out to weed and tend to the soil of our psyche to clean out; to stabilize it so it is fertile to grow new seeds- the seeds of our higher and nobler desire. To change, we need to be aware of what we need to change and do it. Cleansing is both letting go and taking in.

Exercise

Reflect on the people you have affected in a negative way. Recall the words, phrases or statements you had used - the arrows you had thrown towards them. Such words darken the light of our consciousness or build up toxicity in our consciousness. Such words or statements create little black beads in our awareness. How much of our energy gets drained by such toxicity?

Now reflect on the toxic things you have said to yourself. How many black beads are there? How thick are they? How are they affecting you and others in your life? How will you cleanse your consciousness?

Reflect on the wise saying by Matthew, "Clean the inside of our own dish." and by Luke, "Physician, heal thy self." And the wise saying of the Buddha, "Polish your inner mirror to see your Being." And the saying by an ancient Vedic sage: "The essence of spiritual living lies within us." We must move to the laboratory of meditation and contemplation where radical changes occur inside our mind, heart and cells of the body.

How to Meet Difficult Moments

We all know from our daily experiences that we all go through tough and rough times. Life is not a straight line. We go through ups and downs, turns and twists. To go through painful experiences by ourselves alone is very difficult. We need people in our life who can emphatically understand us, hold our hand, and help us go through difficult times. We can get support from our own selves as well as from others who care for us.

Radical acceptance and radical kindness are two powerful ways of reducing pain and learning and growing from pain. In the Buddhist tradition there is a way of meeting difficult moments in our lives. It is called Metta Meditation. Metta means friendliness, kindness, and compassion. We relate to our difficult emotions in an empathic, friendly, kind and compassionate way. We befriend ourselves. We practice Metta Meditation for ourselves, and we do the same when someone in our family, our friends, and even the people whom we do not know personally or even for people who hurt us.

Let us do a ten minute Metta Meditation.

Place your body in a comfortable, relaxed and alert position. Gently close your eyes or gaze softly down on the floor. Allow yourself to be fully present to this moment. Take slow and gentle breaths three or four times to create a relaxation response in your body and mind.

Think about you going through difficult times such as chronic pain in your body, anger, fear, worry or anxiety or having relational difficulty. Acknowledge your difficulty. Breathe in slowly and say to yourself I know I am breathing in and breathing out slowly and say to yourself I know I am breathing out. Do this three times. Now say the Metta prayer three times. May I be safe, peaceful and free from suffering. May I be safe, peaceful and free from suffering. May I be safe, peaceful and free from suffering.

Now think about someone whom you know is going through difficult times. Acknowledge his or her suffering. Breathe in and breathe out slowly and say to yourself I know I am breathing in and breathing out three times. Now say the Metta prayer three times. May you be safe, peaceful and free from suffering. Finally, expand your compassion to all. May all be safe, peaceful, and free from suffering. We conclude our Metta meditation by praying may our hearts be fully awakened. Before we open our eyes repeat the breathing in and breathing out cycle three times. Breathe in slowly and say to yourself I know I am breathing in, breathe out slowly and say to yourself I know I am breathing out. Repeat the process two more times.

Gently open your eyes.

You may also do Metta meditation for someone who may be giving you a difficult time.

Facing Difficult Emotions

As human beings we experience a wide spectrum of emotions- sad, mad, guilty, helpless and hopeless and many other difficult emotions. How to face them without denying, rationalizing and reacting is a challenge for us.

Practicing mindfulness on a regular basis is one of the most effective ways of working on our difficult emotions. Mindfulness practice has a positive impact on our physical, mental, emotional, relational and spiritual well-being. Let's get started.

Take a comfortable, relaxed and alert position. Gently close your eyes or keep them open with a gentle downward gaze. Be aware of how you feel right now. Take your time. You may feel a difficult emotion in your heart or a flurry of painful sensations in your body. Simply notice what you're experiencing right now, Take your time.

Now take 5 or 6 deep, gentle and slow inbreaths and outbreaths. Feel the presence of such slow, gentle and deep inhalations and exhalations. Try to do this in an inviting way rather than forcing it. Easy does it. It may take some time to flow with the incoming and outgoing breath. Take your time. No need to rush.

Now pay your loving and kind attention to your body. Are there any parts tense? Typical areas of tension could be eyebrows, jaw, neck, shoulders or belly. Pay your loving and kind attention to these parts of your body and invite them to relax. You can do this by practicing metta meditation. May my body relax and rest. May my eyes relax. May my neck relax. May the tension in my shoulders and belly fade away. May the tension in my whole body melt away. Take a minute or so to savor good sensations and feelings in your body. This is a miracle of mindfulness.

Now tune into surroundings with your eyes open. Become aware of sounds you are hearing. Become aware of the air touching you. Try not to get lost in what you're sensing. Let the sensations come and go. You become an observer or a witness. Become mindful of whatever thoughts are floating in your mind. Let them come and go. Let not your mind be clouded by your thoughts whether they are pleasant or unpleasant, positive or negative. You let them come and go and create an inner space to experience emptiness and joyfulness. If a storyline comes up related to your sad, mad or guilty emotions, redirect your attention back to your bodily sensations and breathe in and out slowly and gently.

When you encounter difficult emotions use the acronym STOP.

S stands for stop. Pause to refrain from reacting. Create space within yourself.

T stands for taking slow, gentle and deep breaths.

O stands for observing what you sense, feel and think.

P stands for Proceed. Proceed to walk on your daily path without being hijacked by difficult emotions.

We Are Not Alone

Metta or loving kindness is a practice of friendliness or benevolence towards ourselves and others. Metta is also a protection from fear, guarding against anxiety. This practice is not just only for our well-being but it also connects us with the well-being of others.

Let us practice metta meditation together. We may use stillness of ground or the rhythm of your breath or our bodily sensations as an anchor. You can close your eyes or keep them open with a gentle gaze on the floor.

Metta can be cultivated in a number of ways. In this session we will practice metta by remembering a felt sense of warmth when we are in an environment that feels loving and kind, or a place where we feel protected, loved and cared for. It could be particular people, animals or perhaps a special place in nature or we may evoke an image of someone who loves us and cares for us unconditionally.

Notice how you feel in your body. Maybe a sense of warmth, tingle, or feeling of serenity, or a sensation of openness in your chest. Stay for a while in this loving and serene environment. Feel the sensations of loving kindness in different parts of your body. Soften your jaw, your cheeks and chin, eyes, muscles of your forehead, and up to the crown of your head and of your shoulders and arms, and your belly as fully as you need to.

Can you feel the goodness and benevolence of your body? Feel the presence of the people who care for you and who have held your hands with love and compassion? Allow the circle of loving kindness and protection to expand with gratitude and thankfulness. Thich Nhat Hanh has said anything that protects and supports your wellness practice is sangha which is a Buddhist word for community of well being and awareness. See if you can expand this feeling of wellness out into the world to the people, places and parts of nature and they become your sangha to replenish and fortify yourself. Let us conclude the metta meditation by bowing to the sangha who supports us in this life journey of loving kindness.

Smile

Smiling is one of the ways of communicating our inner emotional world. When we smile our face lights up with joyful affection. Sharing a smile opens our hearts. In that moment we are truly present. Smile is a way of reassuring others that we are friends and not foes. A warm and loving smile says, "I see you. I welcome you. I am happy to be with you. You are safe with me." It's a precious gift we give to us, to others and receive from others.

This week, consider making it a priority to offer a smile to yourself, to your life partner and your children and other members of your family, friends, neighbors and even to a stranger passing on the street. Check how you feel when you offer such a gift to you and to others.

See you smiling!

Wisdom and Reflection

Words of Wisdom from Thich Nhat Hanh

Thich Nhat Hanh is the father of Mindfulness. He pioneered Mindfulness in the Western world. We can use his teachings to raise our consciousness on a higher level as the compassionate Buddha expresses in the teachings in Heart Sutra: Gate, gate, para gate, parasamgate Bodhi svaha. Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone beyond the gone. What a blissful awakening!

Quote 1:

"When we walk like we are rushing, we print anxiety and sorrow on the earth. We have to walk in a way that we only print peace and serenity on the earth. Be aware of the contact between you and the earth. Walk as if you are kissing the earth with your feet."

Waking slowly and feeling the connection between the earth and our feet brings down the volume of our obsessive, repetitive and habitual patterns of thinking. It helps us to come into place of greater peace and ease.

Quote 2:

"Today anything is possible because you are alive."

This is a quote that is filled with hope, a sense of flexibility of mind. When our mind is possessed by worrisome or depressive thoughts and emotions and our brain becomes rigid or chaotic. To break this negative thought cycle, we may take a mindful walk or call a friend instead of dwelling and wallowing in our energy draining experience. Because we are alive everything is possible.

Quote 3:

"Feelings come and go like a cloud in a windy sky. Conscious breathing is my anchor."

Feelings and emotions are energy in motion. They come and go. They are like clouds in the sky. Energy shifts, comes and goes. When we feel anger or sadness or even joy, heaviness or lightness, we begin to recognize that these feelings have an impermanent nature to them.

When I allow myself to come down from the business of my mind and allow myself to be aware of my breath, it becomes an anchor to the present moment. Mindfulness breathing, when we are just with the breath, it turns the volume of the worrying part of the brain. We can use breath as our anchor in the present moment, storms in the bodies and minds subside, shift and change.

Quote 4:

The ocean of suffering is immense, but if you can turn around, you can see the land...When one tree in the garden is sick, you have to take care of it. But don't forget to look over healthy trees, the beautiful sunset, the smile of a child, the many flowers and healthy trees. Don't be imprisoned by your suffering."

This quote reminds me of the wise words of Jon Kabat- Zinn,

"Wherever your focus goes, your energy goes."

"Wherever you go there you are."

"As long as you are breathing and living, there is more right with you than wrong with you."

Quote 5:

"Breathing in, I'm aware of my body.

Breathing out, I celebrate my body.

Breathing in, I feel calm in my body.

Breathing out, I release the tension in my body."

Quote 6:

"For things to reveal themselves to us, we need to be ready to abandon our views about them."

We need to step aside and bring a beginner's mind, a sense of curiosity to the moment. We learn things differently. Let us investigate what we are avoiding. We can break from that rigid set of mind. We can bring a new sense of curiosity and bring a beginner's mind to life.

Quote 7:

"Today, be in the present moment. The present moment is filled with joy and happiness. If you are attentive you will see it."

To be more present, walk outside. Listen to sounds of birds, a stream flowing by. There is so much green around us, but we do not see it because our brain defaults to the negative bias.

Quote 8:

"You can choose what to focus on, and therefore what to be.

You can choose to be your in-breath and out-breath.

You can choose to listen with your whole being to the sound of the rain or the wind, and in some way to be one with the rain or the wind.

Listening to the sounds this way can be very joyful.

When you are in touch with these refreshing and healthy elements, you are being, not thinking."

You can choose to be your in breath and out breath. We often get caught in dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. Thinking, thinking, thinking. We want to be free from the number one bad habit.

As Viktor Frankl, the holocaust survivor psychiatrist, says, *"Between stimulus and response there is a space and in that space lies the power to choose our response. In that response lies our growth and freedom."*

Like Rumi says, *"Beyond the right and wrong there is a field. I will meet you there."*

We can make a choice to focus on things that feed us, nurture us, that bring us joy and fill us with wonder. All of these gifts are here. We can choose them with our focus and full attention.

Quote 9:

"Spirituality is not religion. It is a path for us to generate happiness, understanding, and love, so we can live deeply each moment of our life.. Having a spiritual dimension in our lives does not mean escaping life or dwelling in a place of bliss outside this world but discovering ways to handle life's difficulties and generate peace, joy, and happiness right where we are on this beautiful planet. Life is lived only here. It is through the wonders of being human we can bring a sense of interconnectedness."

Quote 10:

“What we do in life has ripple effects and impacts on others we know and even on strangers. When you walk with mindfulness, you set an example for everyone who sees you, even if you don’t realize it. When we see you walking with freedom, with peace, with joy, we may be motivated by the desire to mirror you. Together, without effort we create more of an atmosphere of peace and happiness.”

This way of living peacefully and happily is not only for us. It is for people whom we love, our family, our friends, and for people in our workplace. It is also for strangers who view us, see us.

Khalil Gibran (1883-1931)

1. God made truth with many doors to welcome every believer who knocks on them.
2. If you must be candid, candid beautifully.
3. In the sweetness of friendship, let there be laughter and sharing of pleasures. For in the dew of little things, the heart finds its morning and is refreshed.
4. Say not, “I have found the truth,” but rather, “I have found a truth.”
5. The lights of stars that were extinguished ages ago still reach us. So, it is with great men who died centuries ago but still reach us with the radiation of their personalities.
6. It is well to give when asked but it is better to give unasked through understanding.
7. Perplexity is the beginning of knowledge.
8. The optimist sees the rose and not its thorns; the pessimist stares at the thorns, oblivious of the roses.
9. I have learnt silence from the talkative, tolerance from the intolerant, and kindness from the unkind; it is strange, I am ungrateful to those teachers.
10. “A word I want to see written on my grave: “I am alive like you, and I am standing beside you. Close your eyes and look around, you will see me in front of you.”
11. But let there be spaces in your togetherness and let the winds of the heavens dance between you. Love another but make it not a bond of love: let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls.”

Six Principles Followed By Mahatma Gandhi

Perry Garfunkel has written an interesting book *Experimenting With Becoming Gandhi*. In this book he has described six principles followed by Mahatma Gandhi. In his book he narrates how he experimented practicing these six principles and he discusses how these principles are universal and applicable in the divided world we live in. I learned a lot by reading this book for self-work and self-transcendence-inner work and for living in a world which has lost its moral compass.

Six Principles

1. Truth
2. Nonviolence
3. Vegetarianism
4. Simplicity
5. Faith
6. Celibacy

All these principles are interwoven. It is like the Tao of Gandhi. Gandhi asked basic life questions that intelligent sentient beings ask:

Who am I?

Why am I here?

What is the purpose?

What can I do for the world?

How can I correct injustices?

First Principle: Truth, Satya

Gandhiji's term is Satyagraha - an insistence and holding firm to the truth. In his autobiography, *Satyana Prayogo - Experiments With Truth* he says, "God is truth." And then he says, "Truth is God." Truth can be the guiding force, the guiding principle that leads you to God. There is a higher force than us. The Absolute Truth, the Unconditional Truth, The Reality.

Looking in the mirror and looking at your foibles, looking also at your strengths, acknowledging them, working with them, dealing with them, is the kind of Truth Gandhiji is talking about Truth- Satya and insisting and holding it -Satyagraha. When you lie, tell yourself authentically, "The truth is, I lie." To be free from the web of lies, to be honest with

your thoughts, feelings, words and actions - manasa vacha karmana. Gandhiji was a role model for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, Nelson Mandela, and Barack Obama.

Second Principle: Non-violence Ahimsa

We feel and see violence within ourselves and in the world. How do we cultivate nonviolence? Violence can be in thoughts, feelings, words leading to actions. And we see violence in the world. We need to taper it down. We can avoid watching violent movies, violence displayed in video games, listening to violent songs and participating in violent movements. Self-awareness is the key that unlocks violence and paves the path to non-violence. Gandhi fought nonviolently against social, racial, religious, political and military violence.

Third Principle: Vegetarianism Shakahara- Eating food which has no meat or fish

Gandhiji was born in a strict vegetarian family. Vegetarianism is interrelated to nonviolence. Eating nonveg food entails killing the life of animals, fish and life in eggs. When Gandhiji was studying in England he became the chairperson of the Vegetarian Society in London which still exists today with another name and another place. There is a belief that nonveg food makes people strong. Gandhiji in his high school days tried to eat non-veg food to develop strength to fight against British rule. It was a trial experiment as his family was completely vegetarian. He confessed his mistake. It took a lot of courage to tell the truth.

Fourth Principle: Simplicity Saralta

Simple living became Gandhiji's mantra. If you visit Gandhi's Ashram in Sabarmati, a suburb of Ahmedabad, you will find how he and his wife Kasturba lived a simple life. Three small rooms, an open space in the front area which had a spinning wheel and sitting area. They ate very simple and nutritious vegetarian foods.

Fifth Principle: Faith Shraddha

Faith drives our moral compass- Compass of right things to do. To Gandhi, faith was not a leap of faith. Faith emerges from living a moral life. Faith is a conviction that there is a higher being. The experience of faith comes from meditation, from heartfelt prayer, Faith in what you see and how you see, hear, feel, and experience. We rise in faith by living faithfully. It is discovered by living faithfully. We exhibit faith in our actions. Faith is manifested by our actions. It is a living faith.

Sixth Principle: Celibacy Brahmacharya

To live a life with no sexual desires and actions. The energy is not focused, bound by the lower chakra-by the energy center of sexuality. Celibacy does not mean suppressing or repressing sexual energy. By remaining celibate one channels the energy to creativity, to pure love-the heart center. It is called sublimation. Eventually sexual energy moves to the Crown Center- the center of fully blossoming consciousness. To observe celibacy is not easy. If a man relates to a woman or a woman relates to a man from the heart center and connects with his or partner lovingly and affectionately such loving experience raises human consciousness on a higher level. This is a hard principle to follow. The process of tapering down can be helpful. You may start from 20 and slowly and gradually taper down to one or zero. The cold turkey approach may not work for most of us. There is no one size approach that fits all.

Please go through these six principles and apply the principles to you. It is a learning process which requires patience and perseverance.

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Reflect On Wise Teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh

Vietnamese Buddhist Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh passed away on January 22, 2022 at the age of 95 was one of the foremost teachers of Zen Buddhism, mindfulness, and meditation. Having joined a monastery at the age of 16 in 1942, the spiritual leader spent most of his life studying, practicing and spreading the Buddhist principles of non-violence and awareness. He was an author, poet, artist, and peace activist with a gift for distilling ancient Buddhist philosophies into accessible daily practices. His teachings helped people all around the world to slow down, catch their breath, and enjoy the present moment.

Over the course of his long life, Thich Nhat Hanh wrote more than 70 books and founded several movements and organized the Plum Village monastery in Southern France welcoming anybody to stay in the peaceful village meditating alone and together, creating harmony, and serving the community. He initiated “Engaged Buddhism” or “Active Buddhism” to take actions against social injustice, and for environmental wellness. He unites personal spirituality and social action.

I have selected a few teachings from Thich Nhat Hans’s books for reflecting on and practicing in our daily life. Here they are.

1. “The first exercise is to identify the in-breath and out-breath. Breathing in, I know this is my in-breath. Breathing out, I know this is my out-breath.” -Chanting from the Heart
2. “Love is treating your heart with a great deal of tenderness, with understanding, love, and compassion.”- You Are Here
3. “Everyday we are engaged in a miracle... a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black, curious eyes of a child-our own two eyes. All is a miracle.”- The Miracle of Mindfulness
4. “Sitting alone can be very enjoyable. Sitting and doing nothing. Just enjoying your sitting, enjoying your breathing.”- Sitting, Resting, and Not Worrying
5. “Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I smile.”- Being Peace
6. “You can see everything in the universe in one tangerine when you peel it and smell it, it’s wonderful. You can take your time eating a tangerine and be very happy.”- Peace is Every Step
7. “Walk as if you are kissing the Earth with your feet.”-Peace in Every Step
8. “From time to time we look at each other and smile. It is the smile of awareness. It proves that we are happy; that we are alive.”-The Path of Emancipation

9. "Sitting is an art. The art of resting first. It's very important that we learn how to sit."-Sitting, Resting, and Not Worrying.
10. "If we set aside time each day to be in a peaceful environment, to walk in nature, or even just look at a flower or the sky, then that beauty will penetrate us and feed our love and joy."- How to Love
11. "Our breath is also like a wave, gently rocking us into deep peace. In this state of rest, our body and mind can release their burdens. A lot of healing happens just by letting go and sinking into this state of total relaxation."-Buddha Mind, Buddha Body
12. "Feelings come and go like clouds in a windy sky. Conscious breathing is my anchor-the Present Moment Wonderful Moment-We are safe...come with me and be in the present moment."-Reconciliation
13. "As a free person I always come and go. Not caught in ideas of is and not. Not caught in ideas of being and non-being. Let your steps be miserly.

Three books recommended to read and reflect"

1. Peace In Every Step
2. Living Buddha, Living Christ
3. The Miracle of Mindfulness

A City With Five Gates

“The enemy is more easily overcome if it be not suffered to enter the door of our hearts but be rested without the gate at its first knock.” -Thomas a Kempis. Thomas a Kempis, a medieval age German Dutch Christian author renowned for his book The Imitation of Christ. Born 1380, died 1471

“The body is rather like a city with five gates, the five senses. We are fairly fussy about what enters the gate of the mouth. But just as food enters the mouth and goes to nourish or damage the body, sense impressions enter consciousness through our eyes, ears, nose, and skin, and in most of us the traffic is unregulated. We all want to be open to experience, but we also need to check IDs.” -Eknath Easwaran: Thought for the Day Feb 12, 2022

In Jainism there is a tradition of reciting Navkar Mantra every morning. The mantra begins with a bow to those who have conquered inner enemies. There are six inner enemies: Kama-lust, Krodha- anger, Lobha-greed, Moha-delusion, Mada-arrogance and Matsara-envy. Those who have conquered these inner enemies are called Arihanta-the destroyer or conqueror of inner enemies. Practicing this navkar mantra and applying it in everyday living liberates us from the cycle of birth and death.

In the Bhagavad Gita, there is a beautiful shloka which shows the importance of nonattachment to impure physical, mental, intellectual and sensory urges for the purification of inner life. Verse 11, Chapter 5.

Kayena manasa buddhya kevalaihi indriyaihirapi.

Yoginaha karma kirvanti sangam tyaktva atmashudhhaye.

Those who follow the path of selfless service renounce their selfish attachments and work with body, senses, mind and intellect for the sake of self-purification. There is an illuminating verse in the Heart Sutra which contains the Buddha’s teachings, showing the way of inner transformation and transcendence.

Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate Bodhi svaha.

Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone beyond the beyond there is an awakening. What a bliss!

Science and Religion

There is a beautiful harmony between science and religion. There are two levels of human life: external and internal. We relate to the external world by senses. We have experiences beyond the sensory level, ESP-extra sensory perception. Physical sciences explore and investigate the outer world. Meditation explores and investigates the internal world. Physical sciences collect sense data, organize and analyze the sense data and find laws that govern nature. This scientific knowledge gives us control on the physical forces. We utilize the knowledge to improve our life. Scientific discoveries have been very helpful to us in many areas of our life.

If we do not use sense organs and sensory experiences wisely, we create problems for us and also for others. I remember the wise words of my professor: Nuclear energy may be widely used but it should be wisely used. He also said: Do not become a slave to your sensory organs but become a master of sense organs. He advised us to explore and understand our inner world-world of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, emotions and actions generated by the inner world. The knowledge of physical sciences has made our life comfortable but not contented and fulfilled and peaceful, free from difficult emotions like fear, anger, jealousy, hatred and other destructive emotions. They are our inner enemies causing harm to us and others. We live in a world of stress and strain.

A good practical question to ask: with comfort and convenience that we derive from the outside world, why should I remain peaceless, unhappy, unfulfilled and tense? Mindfulness meditation, deep introspection and applying lessons we learn from spiritual sources can be very helpful to us. This is adhyatmik vidya, spiritual knowledge of Atama-soul. It is an exploration of the inner world beyond the body, beyond the senses, beyond intellect, beyond ego. Thai is the Infinite Self, Atman, Divine Self. Divine Light is within all of us. Swami Vivekanand used to tell his students: Each soul is potentially divine. Goal of life is to manifest the potential divinity. It is covered by the ignorance of our Real Self, Atman. That is our true nature, ever pure, ever free, ever fulfilled, ever illumined. The senses cannot reveal it, the mind cannot reveal it and yet it is a part and parcel of our experiences. This is the profound truth of man. It is the truth, not an opinion.

Science covers objective truth. Religion/Spirituality covers subjective truth. Julian Huxley, the noted biologist made a significant statement at the University of Chicago conference of scientists in 1959 to celebrate Darwin's centenary. In his lecture he said we have many sciences today, but we want a new science, the Science of Human Possibility. If you read the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, you will realize that that is the science that was developed. This is the science of Human Possibility. It provides a deep insight about why we get distracted, depressed, despaired, bored, hopeless and helpless and lose interest in

living. That is the Science of Human Possibility. It is important to understand and appreciate the science of the external and material world and also the Science of the internal and spiritual world. There is no conflict between the physical sciences and the science of human depth. It is a continuous quest for Truth. We can experience it. We can realize it. Swami Vivekananda said: We must combine both-science of physicality and spirituality. We need this beautiful combination.

Knocking On the Door

"Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be open to you." The Gospel According to Saint Matthew

"My friend! You are looking for God outside of you. Open the door of your heart.

You will find Him right within you." says Saint Kabir

Most of us have not tried knocking on the door that Jesus is talking about. We have not tried to open the door that Kabir is talking about. We are content to spend all our time exploring the outside of our inner house. All our attention is outside, and we hardly get inside to seek out the One who is waiting there to be with us. We paint and repaint our house, but never so much as knock on the door, not looking for the One who is inside the house. If we open our ears, we can hear the murmurings from within and a voice hauntingly beautiful.

Once we hear that voice, we will pound on the door with all our might, so that we can enter and meet the One who has been waiting so long. We meet our own Divine Self who is right within yourself.

Purpose of Life

"Everyone has a longing to be significant, to make a contribution, to be a part of something noble and purposeful."-John Maxwell.

Professor Anothony L. Burrow, Professor of Human Development at Cornell University defines purpose "is a foreword looking directionality, an intention to do something that is deeply meaningful." In his book Purpose Work Nation Brendon Peele takes a step further and defines purpose as "a transcendent identity beyond the concern of self and family that includes many aspects such as one's vision for the world, mission, craft, greatest gifts, and most cherished values."

Research shows that purpose not only correlates to psychological well-being and physiologic health, but it may help us live longer. A 2019 study including nearly 7,000 people over the age of 50 found that a strong purpose in life is significantly associated with decreased mortality. How do we make our life abundantly purposeful? How can we find purpose? In the book "Designing Your Life: How to Build a Well-lived Joyful Life" authors Bill Burnett and Dave Evans suggest that you begin by creating your own compass by taking time to write out your "Workview" or why you work and your "Lifeview" or thoughts about the meaning and purpose of life. These are some of the journal prompts they offer for covering your "Workview".

1. Why do you work?
2. What's work for?
3. What defines good or worthwhile work?

These are some of the prompts for covering your "Lifeview".

1. Why are we here?
2. What is the meaning or purpose of life?
3. What is the role of joy, sorrow, justice, injustice, love, peace, and strife in life?

Once you consider these questions, you can recognize if you have overlap between your Worldview and Lifeview. If you don't see overlap, you can begin working toward it by having your Workview and your "Lifeview" in harmony with each other, you increase your own clarity and ability to live a consciously coherent, meaningful life.

Steps to Creating a Purposeful Life:

Living your purpose will look and feel different for every person on the earth because your purpose is unique. You may find that your purpose does not have to do with your job or your career. Purpose or your Dharma makes you connected with what makes you transcend and serve from your higher self. Purpose means allowing yourself to create space for expansion, to renounce mediocrity and popular thinking, and to honor a life evolving in service and pure joy.

Release Social Expectations:

Society fills our mind with ideas about what jobs we should have and how we should act in the world. Our mind gets conditioned by social expectations. When we absorb and store these expectations then there is no room to explore what our true purpose is. These messages and expectations end up clouding our inner vision and pulling us away from our truth and ultimately our purpose. When we cultivate an intentional practice of turning inward and forming deep connections with our heart, we start uncovering the desires born from this place. These heart-centered desires can be guiding lights on our path to discovering and fulfilling our purpose, our dharma. Our inner knowledge guides us to discover our true nature.

Discover Your True Nature:

Connecting with our purpose requires us to cultivate a practice of opening an internal dialogue and inquiry deep within our heart. When our mind gets scattered, or we are pulled away from our purpose we meditate to regroup us and align ourselves with our purpose.

Follow Your Joy-Mudita:

Often in the modern world, our Dharma or purpose of life is associated with external things such as hedonic pleasures, power, and prestige, with name and fame and work for acquiring more and more things. Our Dharma cannot align with such desires. When we are in tune with our purpose we feel more joyful, ease and harmony. With our experience of joy, we create moments of connection with nature and people throughout each day. These days full of joy become weeks, weeks turn into years, and years become a lifetime, As we deepen our connection to the center of our being and our truest purpose of our life becomes a blessing to us and to others.

Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it. - Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273)

Less Is More

Less stress, more peace.

Less technology, more nature.

Less worry, more joy.

Less complaint, more gratitude.

Less judgment, more love.

-Mary Davis

Faith Is Different From Belief

Faith is like the roots of a tree. Faith is firm and steady. Faith is like an anchor that helps us to be grounded and balanced. Belief is like a leaf of a tree. It gets blown away by external forces. It changes colors according to seasons. Beliefs change as they don't have firm roots.

I may believe in someone for some time in certain situations but not necessarily in every situation. I may believe in someone for some time and disbelieve at other times. I have faith in people who love me and care about me unconditionally with no strings attached. Non-attachment is a core virtue in all wisdom traditions. Non-attachment frees us from self-willed and self-centered actions.

Living this way fills the cup of my life with deep contentment, fulfillment and profound serenity. May we all cultivate the divine way of living truthfully and faithfully!

Isness

There is an ancient story that teaches us isness. The Buddha, the Awakened One, was holding up a flower in his hand in front of an audience of monks and nuns. Most of the people looked at the Buddha quizzingly at what the Buddha was doing. However, a monk named Mahakashyapa simply smiled. The Buddha said that Mahakashyapa understood the true teaching. "If you keep thinking, you miss the flower." If we are not fully ourselves truly in the present moment, we miss everything.

The flower has an "isness" that only can be appreciated if we are in touch with that isness in ourselves. The isness is inherent in life. A flower doesn't have more "isness" than a tree. It does not increase if we are successful in the eyes of the world or decreases if we are not. It has nothing to do with our bank account or position. A CEO has no moreness than a janitor.

We live immersed in our thoughts. Walking in a store, and actually seeing the clerk or waiter, can shift the entire encounter. Presence is felt even without words. Like the monk in the story, when given a chance or connection, we can step out of thinking and smile, not because of anything special, but simply appreciate the "isness" that is present. "Isness" is in the here and now consciousness. "Isness" is awareness of what is. The Buddha uses the word *tahata* for isness, seeing things they are in the present moment.

Extracted from Soren/Wisdom 2.0

Parable of the Lost Sheep

“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that was lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.” Luke (15-8-32)

Reflect on the following questions:

1. How do you interpret this parable?
2. How do you relate to the notion of the lost sheep?
3. Share an example of your personal experience of getting lost and being alone? How did you feel when you were alone?
4. What helps you when you feel lost and down by being alone?

Resting in God

Taking refuge in God, resting in God can happen right now, right here. Our body needs rest after working hard. It is time to rest. Not to think about it. But to do it right now, right here. We listen to our body and follow its voice right now, right here without postponing, right now, right here.

Our body suffers. Allow your body to rest, right now, right here. Our body goes through stress and tension. When we allow our body to rest, we are making our body restful and relaxed.

Our perception creates distorted and judgmental thoughts, and we miss seeing reality as it is. Distorted and judgemental thoughts create painful feelings and disrupt our connections and relationships. They break wholeness and harmony.

We make peace a reality not by thinking about it and dwelling on it but by acting, by taking steps in the right direction patiently and persistently. Be mindful of obstructions coming in the way. Be aware of what arises in your mind nonjudgmentally, lovingly and kindly and let it come and let it go. And this way be free from the grip of judgemental and critical thoughts and feelings. This way we become masters of ourselves and not to be slaves or victims.

How to live peacefully and joyfully? We begin with ourselves. We cannot offer peace to others if we do not have peace within ourselves. By cultivating peace in our own selves, we become instruments of peace for others. Imagine you're a wave looking for water in the ocean. If you are a wave, you are water. You are an integral part of the ocean. There is a saying in my language: Bindu is Sindhu-a drop is the ocean.

God is not something out of us. God is right inside of ourselves. We need to come home, to our resting place, our refuge. We need to surrender by freeing ourselves from the grip of our ego. We don't have to find our refuge outside of us. It is right inside of us. As Saint Kabir says, "Don't look for God outside of us. God lives within us." Resting in God means taking refuge in the ultimate, the infinite. We can call that ultimate as Atman, God Buddha hood or Alha.

Extracted and modified from Resting in God a talk by Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village in France.

Zen Wisdom Saying

Here are listed core teachings of Zen Buddhism:

1. **Simplicity and Directness:** Zen practitioners to engage with their experiences without embellishment or conceptual complexity.
2. **Non-attachments:** By letting go of attachments and expectations, individuals can experience a deeper sense of freedom and acceptance in their lives.
3. **Impermanence and Transience:** The teaching highlights the transient nature of life. By recognizing impermanence, individuals can cultivate a deeper appreciation of the present moment and navigate life's changes with equanimity.
4. **Authentify:** Authenticity is being true to oneself and embracing one's experiences without pretense or self-deception. Authenticity is central to the transformative power of Zen.
5. **Embracing Challenges:** Challenges are an integral part of life. Rather than avoiding difficulties we face them directly as opportunities for growth and self-discovery.
6. **Cultivating Stillness:** Zen teachings emphasize the importance of cultivating inner stillness. Through meditation and awareness individuals can access a deep sense of peace and clarity, in the midst of life's chaos.

Extracted from To You: Zen Sayings of Kodo Sawaki

Reflect on these Zen teachings

Out of these six teachings, which teachings resonate in you?

Which teachings are close to your heart?

And what is the impact of these teachings in your life?

Spiritual Insights and Teachings

Art of Ikebana

Ikebana is a Japanese word which means flower arrangement. Ikebana is a five hundred years old Japanese natural and spiritual ceremony. In traditional Japanese culture women learn and master three things: Flower arrangement ceremony, tea ceremony and cooking. There are three processes involved in doing these ceremonies: Knowing, Doing and Being.

Practicing these ceremonies creates balance, deep listening, deep connection and deep reverence for life and tradition, nature and human beings.

Mayuka Yamazak is a gentle artist, the founder of Ikeru Initiative, a high-level business executive who sits on the boards of three Japanese public companies, a change maker and a teacher of Ikebana. I have selected a portion of her two hours workshop on Letting Flowers Lead arranged by the Awakin Calls community.

"I love the concept of letting flowers lead. In order for us to let flowers lead, we have to calm ourselves and empty our mind. Otherwise, we cannot hear, listen to the voice of the flowers. And if you can listen to the voice of flowers, you just know where you should put your flowers. You just know it. Your body spontaneously starts moving. It's beyond your head, and I really love that...It's not like you have to empty your mind and then you can listen to the flowers. If you try to listen to the voice of flowers, you naturally start emptying your mind. For me ikebana is a practice of the mind."-Mayuka Yamazak

Take a fifteen- minute walk outside attuning to Nature in whatever forms it is present in your environment and discerning to the best of your abilities which flowers, twigs, branches or leaves would like to be brought back home to play. Create your own Ikebana-inspired flower arrangement, keeping some of the core principles in mind. Share your creation with others, as well as reflections and learning from the experience. If you find old branches or twigs, be aware of your thoughts and feelings about old age.

Soft Belly Concentric Meditation

We all go through small or big cycles of stress and trauma, acute or chronic stress. Meditation is the antidote to chronic stress and trauma cycles. Meditation frees us from the chains of our painful past and worrisome and apprehensive grip of the future. Meditation brings us into the present moment.

There are many kinds of meditation, one of the ancient Indian tantric texts Vijnana Bhairava Tantra describes 112 different types of meditation. They can be divided into three groups: Concentric, dynamic, and mindful meditations.

Soft Belly Breathing Meditation is a concentric meditation because you breathe in slowly, softly and deeply in through your nose, and out through your mouth, with your belly soft and relaxed. It is, like its name, unpretentious, and non-denominational. It is also powerful; body relaxing, brain rewiring, mind quieting, connections enhancing and hope promoting. Research shows that 70-80% of those who practice meditation- even though those who have lost family members or are mourning a lost relationship or struggling with chronic diseases like cancer or have survived a natural disaster or rape- report quality changes after only 10-12 minutes, tightened shoulders relax and the torrent of disturbing thoughts abates. After the meditation, the meditator says they feel calmer, happier, more stable, more present, and more hopeful.

If you meditate before going to bed, many people sleep better than they have for years. It relaxes their body, calms their mind, and makes it easier to connect with others who can help or heal you.

So here we go.

Find a comfortable chair. You will enjoy sitting in it. It's better if the lights are dim, you may tune into 10-12 minutes of meditation, slowly and deeply.

Become aware of yourself, and how you're sitting in the chair, breathing in slowly and deeply, in through your nose and out through your mouth. Allow your belly to be soft. Let it expand when breathing in, relax every move on the outbreath. You can say to yourself, "Soft as you breathe in and "Belly" as you breathe out. This will keep you focused on your mind and remind you all that you want, your "Belly" to be soft and relaxed.

Close your eyes if it's comfortable to you, this way you eliminate a great deal of external stimuli and will help you to relax even more. This will help you focus your mind and remind you that you want your belly to be soft and relaxed.

If thoughts come, let them come and let them go. Gently bring your mind back to the phrase “Soft... Belly”, “Soft... Belly”. Breathing in and out like this, with your body soft and relaxed, will activate your vagus nerve.

Vagus means “wandering” “in Latin. The Vagus is the tenth cranial nerve. It’s long and has many branches. It runs up from your abdomen through your chest, back to your central nervous system, to your brain. It’s the antidote to fight - or flight- response of the sympathetic nervous system and to the stress response. Breathing in and out, slowly and relaxing the larger muscles in your body, slowing your heart rate decreases your blood pressure and improves your digestion. The vagus nerve is also quieting activity in the amygdala, the part of the emotional brain that is concerned with fear and aggression. It promotes activity in the frontal cortex, an area in the brain concerned with judgment, self-awareness and compassion.

As you continue Soft Belly Breathing, you are relaxing your body, quieting your mind, decreasing your fear and anger, and enhancing your right judgment. You are becoming more of a companion to yourself and to others, allowing yourself to connect easily and closely to others.

Breathing slowly and deeply, in through your nose and out through your mouth with your belly soft and relaxed, sets the stage for relaxation in all your muscles. Practicing soft, slow and deep belly breathing, you’ll be able to relax deep muscles.

Continue breathing slowly and deeply for another few minutes, feeling your whole body relaxing with each exhale. To encourage and deepen this process, continue to say to yourself “Soft” as you breathe in “Belly” as you breathe out. If thoughts come, let them come and let them go. Gently bring your mind back to “Soft...Belly” I recommend you begin to do Soft Belly Breathing once or twice a day for about 10 minutes each time. I love using the words Soft Belly because they remind me specifically of the parts of the body I need to relax. Reservations in South Dakota, the teacher tells the third grade students to say, “Smelling Roses” as they breathe in and “blowing of candles” and they breathe out. You can do Soft Belly Breathing any time; when you’re anxious, or agitated, in traffic (closing your eyes is not an option here). “Soft Belly” breathing will keep your mind free from painful thoughts and memories and relieve preoccupation with what has happened to you or how “bad” you have been or how hopeless your situation seems and helps you gently back to sleep, if you are awakened in the middle of the night, breathing this way, with your belly soft and relaxed is grounding. As all your muscles relax, you’ll be connected calm and stable in your mind.

When you're doing Soft Belly Breathing, don't try to resist; painful or unpleasant thoughts force them away. That will only give your painful thoughts more power than they deserve. It will perpetuate the struggle against them and actually reinforce the memory of the stress you have created. The idea is to let all thoughts, pleasant or unpleasant, come and let them go, to relax with them, to accept them.

Meditation is not having a totally empty mind, though occasionally those moments of grace will come. It's about allowing the thoughts to come and go. The idea is to let all thoughts come, and let them go, to relax with them, to accept them.

Research by the University of Wisconsin's Dr. Richard Davison, and the experience of many people clearly show the stress-dissolving power of meditative practices like Soft Belly: disturbing thoughts gradually lose their hold on you, becoming what Davidson describes as "less sticky". Your mind clears. It functions better. Your mood lifts. You can realize you can help yourself.

If you practice Soft Belly Meditation regularly, you'll likely decrease your stress hormones and improve your mood, along with your concentration and sleep. Soft Belly Meditation will help you to respond rather than react to anger and fearful and scary situations that happened in the past. Regular practice of Soft Belly may give you the first experience of freedom from the crippling worry that the future will repeat the traumatic past.

In addition to its direct benefits, Soft Belly breathing brings you an additional blessing: it tells you, every time you do it, that you're not helpless and hopeless. And Soft Belly Breathing creates a calm and hopeful attitude.

Condensed and modified extract from Transforming Trauma: The Path to Hope and Healing by James S. Gordon, MD

Care Taking

Human beings are multidimensional: physical, neurological, mental, emotional, social and spiritual. We need to nurture all these dimensions. They all are interconnected. How do we nurture them? How do we take care of them? Self-awareness is the key to nurturing all these dimensions.

Let us begin with the physical dimension. How is your body functioning? How is your physical energy? Are there aches and pains in your body? Is your body getting enough nourishment? What kind of food are you eating? Are you drinking enough water? Do you move and stretch your body? Do you allow your body to rest? Explore these questions candidly and discover what you found. What do you need to nurture your physical being? What do you need to change? We all know our body changes. It is up to us to make a wise choice for taking care of our body. Start taking small steps to begin with but walk consistently and firmly.

During the last 25 years we have been learning many amazing things about our brain functioning. Like our body, our brain changes. The scientific word for the changing brain is neuroplasticity. Our brain is wired to change.

Neurons in our brain change. Brain research shows that new neurons are born even when a person is eighty years old. Like our body, our brain needs nourishment. If we do not nourish our brain it gets weaker as we age. So, it's up to us to provide nourishment to our brain. We can train our brain. Calm and restful mind, managing stress, rational decision making, critical thinking, and positive emotions such as compassion, kindness and altruism are the nutrients for the brain.

Like the body and the brain our mind can be trained. Like our body and brain, we need to be aware of how we are using our mind. Are we using the faculties of our mind for making wise choices? Do we give rest to our mind as we give rest to our body and brain? Do we practice mindfulness breathing, mindfulness meditation for calming and clearing mind, for making wise choices? There is a well known spiritual saying that says, "Mind is the cause of bondage, and mind is the cause of suffering?" Mind is the healer and mind is the killer. We can use our mind for generating prime human values such as harmony, happiness, compassion, kindness, meaningfulness and freedom. Mindset can be changed from negative outlook to positive outlook, from negative perspective to positive perspective. We can control and regulate the mind like a horse out of control, running amuck.

Like body, brain, and mind we can cultivate positive emotions such as kindness, empathy, compassion, feelings of gratitude, forgiveness and regulate our difficult emotions like anger, rage, hatred anxiety, shame, fear and jealousy. We can use our emotional energy to fight against all kinds of discrimination and injustice. We can use our emotional energy to become agents of climate change and to save the planet. We all are aware of how much pollution is created in small measures and big measures by us and by big industries.

Our duty or dharma is to take care of ourselves, for our families, for our communities and for the welfare of humanity at large. We need to work for personal well-being, and we need to go beyond the individual level to the social and universal level. Taking care of oneself and others is a spiritual dimension of living a full and happy life. All wisdom traditions teach us to go beyond self serving to other serving, for the welfare of humanity. We need to wake up, take a stand to go from me to we.

Tonglen Meditation

Tonglen is an ancient Tibetan Buddhist practice that trains the mind to acknowledge and accept the vulnerability of being human and offer heartfelt wishes to lessen our own suffering and that of others. It is medicine for the soul.

Tong means giving and len means receiving or accepting. We empathetically understand suffering of our own and suffering of others.

Tonglen can be practiced in different ways. The Tonglen Meditation session is conducted by Pema Chodron. Pema Chodron is an American Buddhist nun. She has authored many books on Meditation and Spirituality. This session was recorded at Sounds True studio. I have made a few changes for our Mindfulness Meditation Satsanga class.

The technique has three stages.

First stage:

Touching with stillness and openness of mind. Resting your mind with stillness and openness. Listen to the sound of the gong at the beginning of Tonglen Meditation for being still and opening your mind. The sound of the gong awakens you, opens your heart. Listen to the sound until it fades away. Then breathe in and become aware of the texture of the sound. Breathe into the heart or the whole body or whatever you feel in the body. Become aware of the bodily sensations. Give the inbreath and the outbreath equal time to stay there until it synchronizes.

Second stage which is the main part of the Tonglen Meditation. Visualize your mother or anyone you feel close to taking away her distress, pain and suffering by conveying verbally compassion, strength, happiness and contentment. Such words have the emotional meaning of wishing your mother free from suffering. The inbreath is for conveying loving kindness and the outbreath is for releasing pain and suffering.

Expansion stage. In this stage we breathe in for all people: You move from intrapersonal well-being to interpersonal well-being to universal well-being, a boundless space of loving kindness and compassion.

Tonglen meditation concludes with Loving Kindness-Metta Prayer:

May I feel safe, loving, kind and compassionate and caring for me.

May my family feel safe, loving, kind, compassionate and caring for all the members of my family.

May my neighbors feel safe, loving, kind, compassionate and caring for all neighbors in my community.

May we all feel safe, loving, kind, compassionate and caring for all regardless of cast, class, color and outward differences.

How to Practice Gratitude

Gratitude, especially as it relates to a higher sense of well-being, is a way of being that habitually focuses on noticing and appreciating the positive aspects of life. It's being thankful for the people and experiences that make up your life.

People who score high on measures of gratitude understand that they have basic things such as food, clothing and shelter. They realize that things could be worse, that life is short and that it's important to enjoy life as it is.

Gratitude does more than just create positive feelings. In surveys on Gratitude, a disposition toward thankfulness predicted a decreased risk of mental disorders. It also helped people overcome trauma. A number of studies support a link between a good mood and feeling happier and more satisfied with life. Gratitude has also been linked to self-acceptance.

Independence from peer pressure, personal growth, and a sense of purpose and control over your circumstances. One study even found that higher levels of gratitude resulted in better sleep. Results show that grateful people sleep better because they worry less and have fewer negative thoughts before falling asleep. They also tend to focus on positive things before falling asleep, which protects the quality of their rest.

How to practice gratitude:

Do you want to spend more time practicing gratitude but not sure how to begin? Consider these ideas:

1. Keep a gratitude journal, writing down the things you're grateful for each day.
2. Think about people in your life who you are grateful for before getting out of bed in the morning.
3. Write a letter to a loved one, expressing your appreciation for them.
4. Meditate or pray for the things you're grateful for before going to sleep at night.
5. Write thank-you notes for the gifts in your life.

Healthy choices daily play a huge role in keeping our internal systems healthy and in balance.

Extracted from Mayo Clinic Press

Coming Home-Guided Mindfulness Meditation Practice.

In these fifteen to twenty minutes of guided meditation you will learn the art of coming home. Sit upright in a relaxed, comfortable, uplifted and dignified position on a chair or on a cushion. You may find it helpful if you close your eyes gently or rest your lower gaze in a relaxed manner four to six feet in front of you.

I invite you to simply explore your present moment experience in your body without judgment. Just be aware of your bodily experiences with openness and curiosity. Welcome whatever sensations you are experiencing in your field of awareness without any judgments, without chasing them or rejecting them, without fighting them but letting them come and go. Doing this you gradually let yourself come home more and more, breath after breath.

Mindfulness of Physical Body

Begin your attention to your physical body, just noticing how you feel without judging your bodily sensations. Feel them as they are without reacting to them. Notice your breath flowing slowly and gently. With gentle curiosity, become aware of your feelings of comfort or discomfort, pleasure or pain, relaxation or tension, and everything in between. Just noticing how it feels to be present right now, moment to moment and accept what you are sensing without judgment. So, the invitation is simply to sit and appreciate being alive in your body, including any discomfort, as best as you can, with equanimity and ease. If your attention wanders, gently bring it back to the sensations of your body and breathing as they come and go: Arising and falling away continuously.

Mindfulness of Emotional Body

Now, bring your attention to your emotional body, to your heart center. With genuine interest and curiosity bring your attention to your emotional body. With genuine interest and loving kindness, simply notice your moods, feelings, and emotional tones that may be present. Be curious about and willing to feel whatever arises moment to moment—feelings of contentment, sadness, anger, boredom, frustration, gladness, peace, joy and so forth. We are emotional beings. We feel a spectrum of feelings and emotions. Of course, it matters quite a bit how we act or react to our emotional experiences, but there is no reason to feel bad about any emotion we might be experiencing, even uncomfortable feelings such as envy, jealousy, or hatred. The important thing is how to relate to such feelings and emotions.

Try sitting for a few minutes, appreciating these feelings as they ebb and low moment to moment. If your attention drifts, just gently bring it back to your body and breath and then turn it once more to your body and breath, and then turn it once more to whatever moods, feelings or emotions are for you at this moment.

Mindfulness of Mind (Thoughts)

Our minds are very busy. Our mind produces lots of thoughts and we get distracted by the endless stream of thoughts. So, what do we do about that? The classic instruction for working with thoughts is mindfulness meditation, to just be as they are, moment to moment.

Like all the sense perceptions-tactile, visual, auditory, olfactory, and gustatory- thoughts come up, stick around for a while, and then fade away. With this flow in mind, we simply do our best to let it happen trying to avoid suppressing or chasing thoughts as they come and go.

And whenever we notice that we have become involved in our thoughts, we simply notice that and gently return to the immediate experience of aliveness in our body and all the sensations.

Mindfulness Meditation is not about suppressing or eliminating thoughts. Rather, it's about changing our relationship to thoughts. It's becoming aware of thoughts rather than remaining lost in them. Over time, if we just let thoughts be and do not react to them, the mind tends to quiet down all by itself.

Try sitting for a few minutes, grounded in awareness of your body and breath, just noticing and feeling your thoughts come and go of their own accord. If you space out or get lost in your thoughts, gently bring your attention back to your body and breath, noticing the flow of thoughts as they arise and fall away.

Innate Goodness and Worthiness

This is the last stage of this session. As best as you can, bring your attention to the entirety of your experience-physical, mental or cognitive, and emotional-noticing whatever arises in your awareness moment to moment. See if you can relax the conditioned mind and its endless preferences for things it likes and its aversion for things it doesn't. And there is nothing wrong with it or you. Your self is not broken. You don't need fixing. You are a human being with a basically good body, heart, and mind. And you are completely worthy

to be alive and present right here, right now, breathing the air and sitting on the earth. This is your home, and you belong here.

In the next few minutes, relax. Give yourself full permission to be just as you are. Feel your humanity, your inner worthiness, your unconditional goodness. If your attention wanders, gently bring it back to the felt experience of your body and breath and do this basic quality of being and feeling your innate worthiness, grounded in the experience of shared humanity.

I recommend trying this practice for fifteen to twenty minutes every day. You do your best to experience whatever arises in your field of awareness during the session. When you finish, reflect on what happened. Remember, it is not a matter of evaluating or critiquing your meditation or your mindfulness practice. The point is to simply become aware and increasingly familiar with workings, rhythms, and patterns of your own mind, heart, and body.

Mindfulness is a way of befriending ourselves and our experience. -Jon Kabat-Zinn

Extracted and modified version of the article written in Radical Responsibility by Fleet Maul, PhD

Four Pillars of Well-being

Excerpts from the talk by Dr. Richard Davidson

Dr. Richard Davidson, Neuroscientist at University of Wisconsin, was asked by the Dalai Lama to use tools of modern Neuroscience to study kindness and compassion by practicing Mindfulness Meditation.

Insights gained from prior research studies provided a framework for this research study.

Discoveries from prior research studies:

1. **Neuroplasticity:** Brain is constantly changing wittingly or unwittingly. The brain changes in response to the training of the mind. We can actually take more responsibility for our own brain by cultivating healthy habits of the mind. When we nurture our minds in a healthy way, it turns out that our brain changes structurally and functionally to support our enduring well-being. This is an amazing key discovery.
2. Research done by Dr. Richard Davidson and Dr. Daniel Goleman shows that changes take place in the states of our consciousness described as Altered States of Consciousness. Changes that stick, changes that are enduring, changes that become traits-like. It has a long term impact. It does not wear off. These changes are supported by neuroplasticity.
3. **Epigenetics** is the science that shows how our genes are regulated. Each of us comes with a sequence of base pairs. They are DNAs. For the most part that sequence will not change over the course of our lives. Life circumstances, our demeanor, our emotion-they all affect our epigenetics. It's like how a caring and loving mother nurtures her child. Loving the child will actually influence the epigenetics of her offspring. These are hard scientific facts showing the impact of nurture on nature. Meditation actually induces epigenetic changes that promote our physical and mental health.
4. Every human being is born with basic goodness. By that we mean when we come into the world we have an innate predisposition for prosocial behavior. We have a predisposition for caring and kindness. This predisposition can be seen and observed in very young infants. Research studies show that if you take a six months old infant and show him puppets playing together. In one case the puppets are playing very kindly and unselfishly, and in another case the puppets are playing selfishly and unkindly. And ask which one the six months infant will prefer. The six month infant strongly prefers the cooperative and prosocial encounter. In another scientific experiment the puppets of two different colors were presented to the infants to observe them. The infants prefer the puppets playing unselfishly and

kindly regardless of the colors of the puppets. Research shows that if we nurture kindness early on the propensity of kindness doesn't deter or diminish.

These are the pillars on which the research work is done. This is a framework for understanding the plasticity of well-being and for learning the skill for cultivating well-being. Cultivating well-being is a skill like any other skill. If we want to learn how to play piano, we need to practice. The same is true for cultivating the elements or pillars of well-being.

Four Elements or Pillars of Well-being:

The First Pillar is **Awareness**, where we put our awareness.

It involves the capacity to regulate attention and also it involves meta-awareness. Meta awareness is knowing what our mind is doing, knowing where our mind is. The mind may be lost in doing something other than what we are doing or focusing on at the present moment. The moment we recognize that our mind has been lost, that is the moment of awakening. This is the moment of meta-awareness where we can bring our mind back to the present moment.

The Second Pillar is **Connection**

Connection is those qualities that support healthy social relationships, qualities like kindness, appreciation, compassion. This is the glue that forms critical human bonds.

The Third Pillar is **Insight**

This is insight into the self. We all have a narrative about ourselves, a set of beliefs and expectations about who we are. We carry that narrative in our mind. What is this I in me? At the very extreme, people may have a very negative belief about themselves such as that they are not intelligent, that they have nothing to contribute. And if they take that belief as the description of who they are, that is the prescription for low self-esteem and depression. To have a healthy relationship to this narrative is to see the narrative as it is. It is not about changing the narrative but rather changing our relationship to the narrative. Insight is very important for cultivating resilience, the ability to recover from adversity. People who recover quickly are more resilient.

The Fourth Pillar of Well-being is **Purpose**

It is finding our sense of direction (our North Star) in life and aligning our everyday behavior more and more toward this sense of purpose. Can we envision even the mundane

tasks of life such as dishwashing, taking out the garbage, doing jobs as a part of our overall purpose in life?

These four pillars are informed by contemplative spiritual practices and by modern neuroscience research. Below are listed a few scientific studies, scientific underpinnings of the four pillars of well-being.

Each of these pillars can be cultivated by training. A ten years old study of 3500 people from different parts of the world was conducted using smartphones as a way of collecting data. At different times of the day, they were asked the following 3 questions:

1. What are you doing right now? Check off from the list of activities,
2. Where is your mind right now?
3. Right at this moment are you happy or not?

This was the assessment.

1. The average adult spends 47 percent of his or her waking life not paying attention to what they are doing. There are mindfulness tools for cultivating awareness, for being fully present.
2. People who were not paying full attention were significantly less happy. A wandering mind is an unhappy mind.

We have simple tools for training the mind to be more fully present on objective measures of attention, awareness, and meta-awareness. We can cultivate qualities such as appreciation and kindness for healthy and rich social relationships. We can nurture these qualities to be sustained.

Well-Being and Personal Mastery

Sleeping Sound

Sound sleep is fundamental to our health and well-being. Research shows that the habit of ruminating about important matters at bedtime is strongly associated with poor sleepers. Finding ways to clear and calm our mind at bedtime can produce substantial sleep improvement. Here are three techniques to try:

1. **Gratitude practice.** Practice a ritual of being thankful for three things at the end of the day. This practice increases optimism, and if practiced regularly, reduces the risk of heart attack. Focusing on gratitude also creates a relaxation response and helps to forget about the things that didn't get accomplished that day.
2. **Mindfulness meditation.** This stress reduction technique is simple and effective. The idea is to cultivate an acute awareness of the present moment and let go of everything else. Focusing your awareness onto the sensations of becoming restful—the sinking of our body into the bed, the softness of the pillow, the slowing of our breath—and keeping the awareness there helps to dissipate stressful thoughts.
3. **Schedule worry time.** If you are worried about work, school, family, health or other concerns that keep us awake at night, try to deal with them before bedtime. Set aside a dedicated time to write down concerns and then brainstorm possible solutions.

Good sleep rejuvenates us, rests us, replenishes our energy and immune systems, and restores our mental sharpness. Healthy choices made daily play a huge role in keeping our mental systems healthy and in balance.

Source: Foundation for Medical Education and Research, Mayo Clinic Rochester, MN

Welcome Joy

Why?

Research studies demonstrate that positive emotions- such as feelings of gratitude, love and confidence- strengthen the immune system, protect the heart against loss and trauma, build relationships, increase resilience, and promote success.

Technically, emotions can be organized along two dimensions: intensity (how strong they are) and hedonic valence (how good they feel). Tranquility, for example, has low intensity but can feel really, really good, a profound inner peace. Low intensity positive emotions are great. They're the bread and butter of everyday well-being.

These high intensity positive emotions have special benefits. They actually lengthen the lifespan. They steady the mind and improve concentration by engaging steady and high levels of the neurotransmitters, dopamine, which stabilize the contents of working memory and block out distractions-perhaps a reason why "bliss" is recommended in Buddhist Meditation training as a factor of non-ordinary states of consciousness and awakening together. And they can pull us out of numbing, blah, and meanness of ordinary routines, stresses, disappointments, and frustrations.

Intense positive emotions include delight, passion, rapture, thrill, triumph, head over heels in love, exuberance, elation, and rejoicing. In a word, joy. Finding and protecting joy is worth doing at any time. Joy is a reminder that you are not defeated in the sanctuary of your own mind. No matter how anguished we are, how hopeless and helpless we feel we can always turn to joy. We can always turn to joy, claim it, and welcome it. Consider the joy in these lines from Dylan Thomas.

"Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea."

It's a kind of triumph, lighting at least a single candle no matter the gathering darkness.

How?

Positive emotions are not about suppressing or covering pain, anxiety, or outrage on behalf of others. Positive feelings can be present in the mind alongside negative ones. In fact, they help us cope with the hard things and hard feelings of life and fuel us to keep on going for the sake of others. The worse a person's life is, the more important it is to find and feel authentically positive emotions-including joy.

One way to evoke joy is to value opportunities to feel it that naturally appear in daily life. Holding your baby in your hand, looking at her and enjoying those delightful moments. Taking a walk quietly, greeting your neighbor with a smile, helping someone carrying a heavy load in his hands and even smiling at yourself for no reasons-smiling spontaneously. Taking time to listen to your favorite songs and dancing along with the music or thinking about someone you love or someone who loves or loved you. Or saying a loving kindly prayer for you and for others safety and happiness.. Joy may have a spiritual aspect to it, perhaps a joyful sense of something divine like chanting divine songs by yourself or in a satsanga, a spiritual gathering of like-minded and like-hearted folks.

In whatever way you find it, the possibility of joy, and of course, the experience itself- can be a refuge at all times, especially during hard ones.

Joy-like flashes of light again and again even in dark and stormy skies.

Modified version of Just One Thing-Welcome Joy by Rick Hanson.

Stress-The Hidden Enemy Within

Many of us are trapped in a perpetual and chronic cycle of stress-and it has substantial repercussions when it comes to our well-being. From triggering inflammation within the body to inducing cognitive impairments like brain fog, stress wreaks havoc on our health. We all struggle with stress. But long-term stress adds an enormous strain on our body and overall health.

Chronic stress creates the biggest toll on our immune system, leaving us more vulnerable to any infection that's going around. And when we are already feeling anxious and worried, the last thing we need is a stressed-out immune system. Stress sets us up for long-term health conditions that develop over time, like cancer, heart disease, and diabetes.

Stress is not just a feeling-it's a whole system of physical reactions that are supposed to keep us safe from imminent danger. These reactions protect us when we are facing imminent, temporary threats like avoiding a car crash. Their sole purpose is to help us survive by stimulating "fight" or "flight" action. When the danger passes, the system turns off and rests. But when we face chronic stress, stress all the time-work deadlines, traffic jams, breaking news, or arguing relationships, the system can't be turned off. It stays alert around the clock and never slows down. Constant stress knocks our whole body off the track, causing physical, mental, and emotional distress.

Coping with stress is exhausting and depleting, and our body and brain need all the support they can get. There are holistic strategies for calming down in the moments of stress to support our body's resilience to stress and improving our coping abilities.

Proven Strategies to Calm and Manage Stress

Meditation

Time in Nature

Yoga and Mind-Body Exercises

Eat a Healthy Diet

Exercise

Benefits Of Routines

There are many benefits of creating routines in our life. Routines are important things that are actually key to leveling up our life and health in myriad ways.

A routine is simply a habitual or established action or actions. Routines are usually triggered by an external cue, such as a certain event or time of a day. Routines are more internal cues, while habits are automatic. Routines support cognitive function. When our routines are built in our daily life, we actually free up more mind space to devote to more creative and complex tasks because a routine lessens our decision fatigue. Routines also help us manage stress more effectively. They help us to de-stress better. Exercise, sleep, and self-care routines are especially helpful to us.

Routines provide our life with meaning. For religious people, going to a church service everyday can be a big part of their faith experience. For others listening to or watching their favorite podcast brings and sustains meaning in their life.

Like so many areas in life, there is no one right way. There is no one-size-fits-all to build a routine and that is okay.

- Write plans down: That makes it more likely that you stick to them. That forces you to concretize vague thoughts and desires.
- Build slowly. Pick up one routine or even a small part of it. Then another piece once you have mastered it.
- Track your progress with a wall calendar to keep track of your progress. Check it every day.
- Do not fret if you miss a day. We are humans not machines. Don't beat yourself up. Just get back on track the next day.
- Enlist a buddy. A friend's power is more than willpower.
- Be flexible. Work routine may change for many valid reasons: work hours change, the kids change schools, managing parents get sick. Unfortunately, that's life.
- Exercise in the morning with a friend.
- Staying hydrated. Keep a water bottle on your work desk.
- Sleep hygiene, Our sleep outlines are possibly the most critical for our overall health. Go to bed and get up at the same time each day.

- Maintaining time for self-care: Build purposeful self-care outlines into your schedule for hobbies like reading a book, doing Yoga, and meditation.
- Making time for friends and family. We are social creatures. Joining a health and wellness group, Friday night a movie night with your kids and life partner or friends.

Such well-established routines help us not to survive but to thrive.

Extracted and modified from Mark Hyman MD Mark's Picks, October 22, 2023

Making a TO-Don't List

Most of us have a daily to-do list full of tasks, commitments, and intentions. We check off items one by one as we go through our day, which gives us a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. It may demonstrate we are making on our goals. Sometimes we may wake up feeling as if our to-do list runs our life leaving little time for us to do what we really need to do and want to do, for taking care of ourselves. It is a wake up call. It is time to consider a to-don't list, a list of items you would like to go off.

When we do a to-don't list, it is helpful to identify activities that eat up our time, keep us trapped or offer a minimal reward. A to-don't list brings intentionality to do what we want to say no to and to say yes to and create a balance between the two lists. Balancing is knowing what to embrace and what to let go of as we move to a higher level of living. We embrace the to-do list and let go of the to-don't list. Balancing them requires us to give conscious attention to how we manage our work responsibilities, our relationships, our behaviors-what matters and what doesn't.

Source: How Women Rise by Sally Helgesen and Marshall Goldsmith.

How to Change HRV - Heart Rate Variability

Source: Longevity Roadmap by Mark Hyman M.D.

When we listen to our favorite play list, every song sounds different. Some tracks may be more upbeat and energetic; others might be slower and more melancholy. Just like songs vary in tempo to match the meaning behind them, a healthy heartbeat changes its tempo to match our physical and emotional environment.

Heart rate variability (HRV) is the variability or spacing between each heartbeat. We actually don't want the timing in between each heartbeat to be totally consistent. In fact, the most consistent HRV would be a flat line and nobody wants that.

A high HRV means we can adapt and respond to stress with more resilience, which means less cortisol (our main stress hormone), less inflammation, and healthier aging. Our vagus nerve, the longest cranial nerve that runs from the base of our head down to our gut, innervating our heart, intestines, and other organs along the way. Our vagus nerve regulates our psycho-spiritual-emotional well being. It is responsible for turning off our stress response (our sympathetic nervous system) and activating our relaxation response (our parasympathetic nervous system).

This system is also deeply connected to our HRV. Having a high HRV means we can more easily respond to both stressors and times of relaxation-we can bounce back and forth more effortlessly. Another name for it is vagal tone. The problem is most of us are in a state of constant stress and hyper responsiveness to our surroundings and very few of us know how to hit the pause or reset buttons. This failure to self-regulate is a sign of low HRV.

How To Increase Our HRV

Here are some of the best strategies to increase our HVR:

1. Exercise, Aim for three 45 minute moderate-intensity exercise sessions per week, as tolerated. Try walking, yoga, jogging, hiking, swimming, or find something appropriate for your fitness and health level. If possible, mix in strength training a couple of times a week.
2. Breathing exercises - Our breath and heart rate are intimately connected. When we inhale, our heart rate speeds up and when we exhale, our heart rate slows down. Try alternate nostril breathing and see how it affects our heart rate between breaths.

3. Meditation. Meditation increases our interception, calms the mind, and reduces anxiety. Studies show that even 5 minutes of mindfulness meditation a day can significantly improve HRV.
4. Yoga - Yoga marries mindfulness with meditation and our breath, which will directly affect our HRV. Studies support regular yoga practice with an increased vagal tone and HRV.
5. Good quality sleep. Snoring, sleep apnea, mouth breathing, and insomnia are all signs of low HRV.

Some simple tips to help to improve sleep:

1. Cut out alcohol, especially before bed. Even the occasional alcoholic beverage disrupts our sleep and puts our HRV in an unfavorable zone.
2. Don't eat big meals before bed. Give yourself at least two hours between your last meal and bedtime.
3. C. Eat a whole foods diet. Standard American Diet (SAD) disrupts your sleep and is linked to lower HRV. Eating an anti-inflammatory diet rich in omega-3 fats, polyphenols, B vitamins, prebiotic fibers, and probiotic foods increase HRV.
4. Try mouth taping. Nose breathing increases nitric oxide, the molecule that relaxes our blood vessels and increases circulation. High levels of nitric oxide are associated with having a high HRV. If you know that you're a mouth breather when you sleep, try a special tape made to encourage you to breathe through your nose.

A high HRV is linked to better resilience to stress, physical fitness, sleep quality, and all around health. Focusing on ways to improve your vagal tone and increasing HRV allows you to more effortlessly respond to all life throws at you. It helps you to better regulate your internal environment to match your external environment, which is critical for optimal health and aging.

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Power of Meditation

Meditation is a potent transformative practice with countless benefits for body, mind, heart and spirit. Wisdom traditions have long taught meditation as a path to spiritual awakening and modern science is demonstrating how this ancient practice can improve our health and well-being across dozens of life areas.

Simply sitting quietly and doing belly breathing meditation and focusing our mind on in-breath and out-breath rhythms can transform our consciousness and our lives.

What are the obstacles to deep meditation? Is it our busy, restless mind? Is it an endless stream of thoughts that prevents us from really going deep in meditation? Meditation helps us to quiet and clear our mind. And from the quiet and clear mind creative, constructive and compassionate thoughts arise on their own. By meditating we get awakened to our true nature.

Our minds give us troubles because they are deeply conditioned to react in habitual ways based on past experiences. We all are embedded in countless habits of mind that dictate much of our behavior. Meditation has the potential to liberate us from the conditioned mind. Freedom from the mind means freedom in the face of the mind. It doesn't mean freedom from having a mind. It means we are no longer enslaved to our conditioned mind.

So, when we sit down to meditate, instead of trying to find a way to quiet our mind, we simply make a decision to not to engage with our mind. That means when thoughts arise, even if they are interesting thoughts, we choose not to give them attention. We discover that we are not our thoughts. From this vantage point, we begin to see that there is a choice we have, which is to engage with the thought or to leave it alone. Spiritual liberation begins to dawn when we discover that our thoughts and feelings have no control over us.

Cultivating Meaningful Relationships

Giving a Gift

Can you remember a time you gave a gift to someone? Gift like a holiday present, or a treat to a child, or taking time for a friend. How did this feel? Researchers have found that giving stimulates the same neural networks that light up when we feel physical pleasure. Long time ago, the Buddha said that generosity makes one happy before, during, and after giving.

Then there is receiving. Can you remember a different time when someone gave you a gift like a moment of warmth, or a smile, or a book, or undivided attention, or treating you like you matter or an apology? Whatever it was. How did it feel?

Research studies show that when you give more to yourself, you have more to offer others when your cup runneth out. When people experience greater well-being, they are usually more inclined toward kindness, patience, altruism, and other kinds of “prosocial behavior. As Bertrand Russell wrote,” The good life is a happy life. I do not mean that if you are good, you will be happy. I mean that if you are happy, you will be good.”

Gifting yourself comes in many forms, most of them in small moments in everyday life. For example, as I am writing this, I take a few deep breaths, look out the window, and relax. This is a doable gift. When we are in a Mindfulness Meditation group or in the Bhagavad Gita group, we learn from each other. We take in this gift of appreciating how fortunate we are to learn from the other people in the group. Not doing so can also be an important gift. Not overeating, not interrupting when someone is talking, not staying late watching the TV, not rushing about while you drive. Then try to actually do it.

We can see how many opportunities there are each day to offer ourselves simple yet beautiful and powerful gifts. Focusing on a longer time frame, ask yourself: What gift do I want to offer myself today? This week? This year? Try to stay with the listening to the answers, letting them ring and ring again in the open space of awareness. Out of kindness and wisdom, let your gifts flow to those who need your gifts.

Abridged and modified from Just One Thing-Gift Yourself by Rick Hanson

Building A Strong Foundation

We need to build a strong foundation for whatever we build: a relationship, a career, personal well-being, or spiritual practice. Know what is basic for you.

- Relationships: Respect, non-harming, empathy, caring and support
- Child rearing: Love, quality time, reasonable authority
- Job: Getting to work on time, fulfilling responsibilities
- Physical health: Good sleep, nutritional and balanced diet and plenty of pure water
- Mental health: Stress management, clarity, mental peace, and mindfulness
- Emotional health: Love, empathy, compassion, calmness and self-esteem
- Spiritual well-being: Unconditional love, gratitude, forgiveness, humbleness, selfless service, altruism and faith

Pick one from the list above, act upon it all week, and notice the results. You give your full attention, make a sincere commitment, and make a plan to achieve it. Appreciate the benefits to you and others of handling this foundational thing. Let the felt sense of its rewards keep drawing you forward continuing to take good care of it. When we take care of the basics, everything else usually takes care of itself.

Modified version of Just One Thing card deck by Richard Hanson, PhD

Mindfulness and Compassion

Tara Brach is a practitioner and teacher of Mindfulness Meditation. She has created RAIN, a practice of mindfulness and compassion. It is an easy-to-remember tool for bringing mindfulness and compassion to emotional difficulty. The acronym RAIN means Recognize, Allow, Investigate, and Nurture.

R-Recognize What's Going On:

Recognize means consciously acknowledging in any given moment, the thoughts, emotions, feelings, bodily sensations that are affecting you. This can be done with a simple mental whisper, noting what you're most aware of.

A-Allow the Experience to be There, Just As it Is:

Allowing means letting the thoughts, emotions, feelings, and bodily sensations you have recognized. Simply be there without trying to fix or avoid anything you might recognize such as fear. Allow what you have recognized by mentally whispering "it's Ok." Allowing creates a pause that makes it possible to deepen attention.

I-Investigate with Interest and Care:

To investigate, call your natural curiosity-the desire to know the truth, and direct a more focused attention to your present experience. You might ask yourself. What most wants attention? How am I experiencing this in my body? What am I believing? What does this vulnerable place want from me? What does it most need? Whatever the inquiry, your investigation will be most transformational. It will help your first step away from conceptualizing and bring your primary attention to the felt sense in the body.

N-Nurture with Self-compassion:

Self-compassion begins to naturally arrive in the moments you recognize that you are suffering. It comes into fullness as you intentionally nurture your inner life with self-care.

To do this, try to sense what is wounded, frightened or hurting in your most needs, and then offer some gesture of active care that might address this need. Does it need a message of reassurance? Of forgiveness? Of companionship? Of love?

Experiment and see which intentional gesture of kindness most helps you to comfort, soften or open your heart. It might be a mental whisper; I am here with you. I am sorry and I love you. I love you and I am listening to you. It is not your fault. In addition to a whispered message of care, many people find healing by gently placing their hand on their heart, or by envisioning being bathed in or embraced by warm, radiant light. If it feels difficult to offer yourself love, bring to mind a loving being-family member, friend, a spiritual figure or a pet- and imagine that being's love and wisdom flowing in you.

Trust in your goodness. Release the phrases now. Whatever you experience in this very moment gently let it be. No need to judge it. Simply rest with the inbreath and outbreath. As we conclude, take a few moments to notice whether saying these phrases change your experience at all. Do you feel differently than before you practiced? Remind yourself throughout the day not to take your life for granted but to appreciate it to benefit yourself and others.

You can take your time to explore RAIN as a stand-alone meditation or move through the steps whenever challenging feels arise.

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Two Gardens

You have two gardens: Your own garden and that of your beloved. First you have to take care of your own garden and master the art of gardening. In each one of us there are flowers and garbage. The garbage is the anger, fear, discrimination and jealousy within us. If you water the garbage, you will strengthen the negative seeds and if you water the flowers of compassion, understanding, and love, you will strengthen the positive seeds. What you grow is up to you... In cultivating your garden well, you also help to cultivate her garden.

If you have a difficult relationship, and if you want to make peace with the other person, you have to go home to yourself. We have to create the art of creating happiness. If during your childhood, you saw your parents do things that created happiness in the family, you already know what to do. But many of us didn't have role models. The problem is not one being wrong or right, but one of being more or less skillful.

Living together is an art. Even with a lot of goodwill, we can still make the other person very unhappy. Mindfulness is the paintbrush in the art of happiness. When we are mindful, we are more artful and happiness blooms.

Extracted and abridged from Fidelity: How to Create a Loving Relationship That Lasts by Thich Nhat Hanh

Arrows of Judgment

Our mind has a tendency and habit of throwing arrows of judgment to ourselves and to others. Opinions and judgments swirl around our minds most of the time and will run the show if we let them. Judgemental thoughts running through our minds can often be misleading or even flat-out false. It is essential for our happiness that we learn to shift our relationship with our judgemental thoughts and refrain from hurting ourselves and others in our life.

Non-judgemental attitude is an important part of mindfulness. Our mind is full of opinions and judgements. A steady stream of likes and dislikes is flowing through our mind. We do not accept everything and everyone with discernment. We need to cultivate discernment so that we do not get hurt or hurt others by the arrows of judgment.

How do we free ourselves from the shackles of judgements? The first step is to non-judgmentally recognize what's happening in our mind or minding our mind compassionately. We do not let our judging mind be our master.

We regulate our judgemental mind. With awareness of what is going on in our conditioned mind, we make a wise choice.

Once I heard Swami Satchidananda saying, "I do not teach Hinduism. I teach undoism." We know how isms have created internal and external walls and divisiveness in our mind and enslaved us and others who are different from us.

Be aware of you judging yourself and others when a judgmental thought passes through your mind. "I should not judge" or "He should not judge". It is like judging judgments!. It is like throwing an arrow of judgment at me and at others. Awareness is non-judgemental. We become mindful of our mind judging. This non-judgmental attitude liberates us from self-judging and other judging. As it is said in the Bhagavad Gita, "Mind is the cause of bondage and mind is the cause of liberation." Let us be mindful of our mind. We use our mind with discretion. We use our mind wisely.

I AM: Why Two Little Words Mean So Much

Hello my friend:

Do you know who I am?

Listen carefully to this rhyme and try to guess if you can.

You are like a candle lit from my bright flame

My light is your light-we are one and the same.

I am the voice that you hear

When you are quiet and still.

I am the little bird on your windowsill.

I am in everyone you see-young or old, big or small,

Believe it or not, I am in them all.

Who can I be? I AM GOD, your best friend.

And there's really no line

Where you start and I end.

Along the way you will find great happenings and love.

And you will learn that wishes come true

From within, not above.

So, don't look at the sky

When you're looking for me.

Look right at yourself...

And that's where I'll be.

When you say, "I am bad at this, I am ugly, I am stupid" these words will take you farther and farther from the part of you that is God. When you choose to say, "I am happy, I am kind, I am perfect," you keep the light of God inside you to grow and shine.

Try saying or writing "I am" sentences. See how different words make you feel.

I am_____

I am_____

I am_____

Source: I AM Why Two Little Words Mean So Much by Dr. Wayne W. Dyer

* * * * *

Four Qualities Of Relationship

Relationships are wonderful. The challenge for all of us is to create, sustain and enrich our relationships. *I have abridged the written portion from The Hard Questions authored by Susan Piver.*

“The rock is me. You are the feather. Fly. Let me be constant and steady. We can hold it in our heart”. This short saying contains a lot of wisdom for creating, cultivating, nourishing and sustaining love relationships. Susan Piver lists four qualities for initiating, maintaining and flourishing love relationships:

- Honesty,
- Good manners,
- Compassion, and
- Courage.

These qualities are intertwined.

Honesty:

Honesty means knowing the truth about yourself, your genuine and authentic self. Be honest about who you are, your inner self. This is the foundation quality for building a good and loving relationship. Honesty creates trust. Without trust, love relations become fragile and unsteady. In healthy relations we do not hide ourselves from ourselves and from the person who loves us.

Good manners:

In loving relationships good manners do not mean courtesy and etiquette though they have their place.. Good manners mean thoughtfulness. If guests come to stay with us, we make it sure that we make their stay comfortable and make them feel at home. In good relationships both partners are thoughtful and considerate. They feel at home with each other.

Compassion:

In wholesome relationships both feel deep compassion and kindness for each other. Self-compassion and compassion for the other person reduces pain and creates healing. Compassion deepens connectedness and strengthens relationships.

Courage:

To be oneself requires courage to be oneself. To be honest requires courage. To be truthful requires courage. To reveal yourself requires courage. To be vulnerable requires inner strength and courage. To take a stand requires courage. To admit and own one's fault or mistake also requires courage. Cultivating and sustaining healthy loving relationships is an ongoing journey without an end. It requires commitment and courage.

Listening:

I will add an important quality for strengthening a loving relationship. And that is listening. There is an interesting statement that describes listening. "Listening is when you stop your thinking thoughts and start thinking mine." When you speak, ask four questions:

1. Is it kind?
2. Is it necessary?
3. Is it timely?
4. Is this the right place?

Your words may be kind, necessary and timely but be mindful of where and when you are talking. Allow each person to answer fully and avoid judging the other person. This is called mindful listening. Environment matters. Minimize external and internal distractions. Listen with focused attention.

Do not ask too many questions and do not try to answer all questions. It is a good idea to communicate deeply. Too many questions and too many answers may impede deep and truthful communication. Allow each person to respond to the question without

interruptions. Each of your answers contains important information about yourself, who you are, what you believe in, how you were raised, and what you value. Talking about yourself is not always easy but it is essential for building and enriching your loving relationship.

In loving relationships, the couple makes a conscious effort to create a shared vision. Sadly, we may not have good models to emulate. The percentage of divorce rate is growing. That means we have to create our own model for building loving and wholesome relationships.

* * * * *

Inner Work

Acceptance-based inner work is one of the core components of the Mindfulness paradigm. We know the flowing water of a river is far less likely to contain impurities than trapped water. Trapped water is an incubator for harmful bacteria and is often contaminated. We need to let the river of feelings flow to avoid the harmful effects of trapped feelings. Our feelings are experienced in our body and if we do not let them come and go mindfully, they become toxic and cause physical illness. Since body and mind are interconnected the blocked toxic energy creates mental stress and causes mental health problems. In order to prevent and avoid the harmful effect of suppressing or blocking emotions we need to do the inner work for our physical, mental, and emotional well-being. And so, when we are open to our feelings as they arise, we recognize and acknowledge them, accept them, investigate and let them go mindfully. This is the way we free ourselves from the grip of our negative and harmful feelings and emotions. This is the way we cultivate skills of emotional regulation and emotional resilience. This way we can cultivate our Emotional Intelligence.

We are social beings. We are connected with people. We have a variety of interactions with people in our life. Our inner work is essential for our personal well-being as well as our relational well-being. When we do the inner work we create a wholesome environment within ourselves which facilitates the creation and the sustenance of healthy interpersonal relationships. This way we can cultivate our Social Intelligence. Social Learning and Emotional Learning are as important or perhaps more important than Intellectual Learning. And this is what we need to do in schools and families and the community at large. We know the cause of suffering in our personal and interpersonal life and also in the social and political arenas. We need to wake up and work on these problems diligently.

We are also spiritual beings. We have the potential to self-realize and get enlightened. The light of wisdom shines within us. It is our own inner light that removes the clouds of delusion and opens the door to seeing Reality-Truth- that liberates us from the self-created suffering. This is a spiritual journey. All wisdom traditions teach us different ways of liberating ourselves from ourselves. As the Rigvedic sage says, "Truth is one. Paths are many." The Bhagavad Gita shows four Yogas - spiritual paths- of awakening, self-realization and enlightenment:

Path of Self-knowledge called Gnana Yoga.

Path of Selfless Service called Karma Yoga.

Path of Devotion is called Bhakti Yoga and

Path of Meditation is called Dhyana Yoga.

Gautam Buddha realized and taught the Eightfold Path of liberation. One has to find one's spiritual path and follow it earnestly, patiently and diligently. This is also inner work. Such inner work cultivates Spiritual Intelligence.

Inner work is for physical, mental, emotional, relational and spiritual well-being. And as we know sometimes for doing this inner work we may need a Guru to guide us, or we may find our own path by ourselves. Satsanga, compassionate presence and support of like-minded people can be very helpful. May we find our path of liberation to live mindfully, freely and fully!

Let me conclude with the wise words of a wise teacher Thich Nhat Hanh.

Embrace Strong Emotions

Do not fight against pain, do not fight against irritation or jealousy.

Embrace them with great tenderness, as though you were embracing a little baby.

Your anger is yourself, and you should not be violent towards it, the same thing goes for all your emotions.

Two Faces Of Love

Right from our birth to the end of our life we are hungry and thirsty for True Love for our survival and growth. When we get it we feel fulfilled and full. Such love nourishes us and thrives. True love is a gift we receive from others, and we offer it to others. Such love is transcendental. It is selfless love. It goes beyond our conventional love. Conventional love is conditional love. It has self-created boundaries. It is limited. It is like saying I will rub your back if you rub my back. It creates satisfaction for a while and then the flow of love gets shallow or gets dried up.

In conventional love we get attached to the other person. It is a clinging emotion which causes suffering in our life. In true love we experience freedom. In true love we are fully present. In conventional love we lose our presence and feel bound by expectations and selfish desires. In true love there is the presence of the light of consciousness.

When we identify ourselves with our body and mind we are moving in the zone of separation from ourselves, and the people close to us. We are unconsciously creating clouds of darkness. We hurt ourselves and others related to us. How do we dispel the darkness and see the light?

Awareness is the light that opens our inner eyes and frees us from darkness. How do we describe the experience of awareness? It is like space. Our experience of awareness is like our experience of space. Awareness is like openness. Our experience of openness is like our experience of openness. Our experience of freedom is like our experience of freedom. Resting in awareness is like resting in freedom. Another metaphor of awareness is like the sun. It's constant, and it shines on everything without bias. We are aware of feeling happy as we are feeling sad. Awareness has no agenda. Awareness has no preferences. It's always there. It is always present. We need to keep our eyes to see it. We need to be awakened to see it.

Questions to reflect on.

1. Do you experience Transcendental Love? Please describe it in your own words. Can you cite examples of experiencing Transcendental Love? How long does it last? What stops you from experiencing the flow of Transactional Love? What brings you back to the flow of such love? How does Transcendental Love enrich your relationships?
2. What is the difference between conceptual knowledge and experiential knowledge? Can you give examples of both kinds of knowledge?
3. Which spiritual practices cultivate Transcendental Love in you?

Forgiveness

Anger and fear are hurtful emotions that add to our and others suffering. We are advised and asked to forgive us and others who go through these hurting emotions. Forgiveness does not mean condoning what has happened in the past. But by forgiving we are letting go of all these heavy feelings. It may not make things better right away, but it is the right and direct way to practice acceptance-knowing that something happened in the past and learning not to hold onto to the past that cannot be changed but moving forward in the way we choose. It's a way of opening the space in our heart to forgive.

Why do we carry anger and resentment? We all make mistakes. We do hurting things to others and others do hurting things to us. It could be a trivial or traumatic experience. We add to the suffering with judgment, anger, and blame. As the Buddha says we are adding a second arrow after being struck by the first. Something unpleasant happens, but then we add more suffering with judgement, anger, and blame. We let go of the extra baggage,

There are three ways to begin opening the space in our heart for forgiveness:

1. Make peace with our pain. We know that it is not easy to accept pain in our heart. It is relatively easy to ignore our pain. Accepting pain is the key to a peaceful mind and heart. As Elisha and Stephanie Goldstein write, "It is important to give permission to acknowledge and honor the pain that's very real for you. Notice where you feel in your body and ask yourself, "What do I need right now?"
2. Offer yourself all the compassion we need. Metta meditation, a loving kindness meditation, is one of the effective ways of treating ourselves and others more kindly and creating space to accept our wrong doings, as well the wrongdoing of others.
3. Accept our own imperfections with love. We spend a great amount of energy wishing we were different. From a mindfulness perspective of nonjudgment, writes Ronna Kabtznick, "Everything is equally forgivable whether it's our laziness, self-hatred, impatience, large thighs, or tendency to overeat." We show ourselves the same grace and forgiveness that we offer to others.

Guided Mindfulness Meditation to Foster Forgiveness:

Find yourself a comfortable and relaxed posture to settle down. Bring you loving, kind and nonjudgmental attention to the physical sensation of breathing, noticing whatever is

grabbing your attention. And without judgment, bring your attention to the rising and falling of your breath.

Visualize something that comes to your mind that you judge yourself for. Maybe you feel regret, irritation, or sadness. Notice how it feels. Bringing it to your mind. Then focus on these three phrases: I forgive myself for misunderstanding. I forgive myself for making mistakes. I forgive myself for causing pain and suffering to myself and to others. Letting go of the tendency to add resentment and judgment avoiding the second arrow

Bring to your mind someone that caused pain and suffering in you. Notice how you feel. Then focus on these three phrases: I forgive you for not understanding. I forgive you for making mistakes. I forgive you for causing pain and suffering to me and to others. Let go of the tendency to add resentment and judgment avoiding the second arrow.

Forgiveness doesn't mean being passive or not taking action. We can develop loving kindness on a regular basis, practicing everyday to strengthen our ability to feel kindly, and this will slowly incline our mind toward feeling kindly more often and for longer periods of time. Or we can intentionally practice loving kindness. Whenever we feel ill toward someone, in which case, loving kindness can act as an antidote to the poison of hatred. Or of course, to both.

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Forgiveness: Self and Other

Forgiveness has two faces: Self and the Other. We forgive ourselves for harming ourselves and for harming others. Forgiving is freeing ourselves from what we have been holding inside us—grudges, resentment, anger as well as feeling guilty and ashamed. These are strong emotions called poisons in Buddhism. Forgiveness is a process, a practice of letting go, releasing the poison within. It takes time. It requires determination, commitment, patience and perseverance like a fruit to ripen.

Self-forgiving is the first step. It is inner work and outer work. Inner work involves candid, empathic and compassionate confrontation with us. We need to face ourselves and be aware of my wrongdoings done knowingly or unknowingly. Own them. Explore the reason that motivated you to do it and go through the self-healing process. It is not only a rational approach, but it is a heart-opening and heart-healing process. When the hurt is deep it takes more time to understand it and heal it. When we face our hurt mindfully, slowly, slowly, darkness within us vanishes and the light of wisdom shines within us. When the hurt is not deep, it is relatively easy to let it go rather than getting obsessed with it.

Forgiving the other for causing our suffering is as important as self-forgiving. We emphatically understand the other as if the other is me. When we relate to the other empathically, we understand what led the person to hurt us. It is important to be clear about our intention for working on self-hurting and other-harming behaviors and empathically. Our intention is to heal our suffering. So, what we do is in accordance with our intention.

Forgiveness is a central virtue in the Christian faith. Jesus Christ represents the supreme example of forgiveness. We are also familiar with the wise saying, “To err is human. To forgive is Divine.” Compassion is a central virtue in The Buddhist teachings. According to the Buddha there are three poisons in us that poison us intrapersonally and interpersonally. They are anger, greed, and delusion. In the Buddhist faith, true forgiveness, as Barbara Brunner writes in her book *Inspiring Forgiveness*, “is a natural outgrowth of life lived on the Eightfold Path”. Our goal is to be free from these internal poisons or as Sri Krishna tells Arjuna in *Bhagavad Gita*, they are our great enemies. We need to conquer them to have peace, contentment, fulfillment and joy in our life. Practicing Metta Meditation in everyday life is also very helpful.

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Love Never Dies

Let us read and reflect on this short poem.

I want to describe myself like a painting that I looked at closely

For a long time, like a saying that I finally understood.

Like a pitcher I use everyday,

Like the face of my mother,

Like a ship that carried me

Through the wildest storm of all.

-Rainer Maria Rilke

I read a short story, in which a son comes to see his dying mother. He asked her what she considered to be the most important thing in life. Without a second of hesitation, she said "Love. The other things we consider important come and go at times really fast." The son came to realize that his mother could never be separated. She and his ancestors live together in the depths of his Being. He came to realize that there is an eternal light within all of us that never gets extinguished. That Divine Light shines forever. It is most visible in a state of inner stillness.

* * * * *

Which wolf do you feed?

The story of the two wolves is very illuminating. We have two wolves in our heart, a wolf of love and a wolf of hate. Everything depends on which one we feed each day. Who among us does not have both a wolf of love and a wolf of hate in our heart? The wolf of hate shows up in small ways as well as large ones such as I get judgmental, irritable, pushy, or argumentative. Even if it is inside my own mind-and sometimes it definitely leaks out.

We have got these two wolves because we evolved them, because both wolves were needed to keep our ancestors alive. Until just 10,000 years ago, for millions of years primates, hominids, and early humans lived in hunter-gathering groups competing intensely with other bands of scarce resources. Therefore, genes got passed on that promoted better cooperation inside a band and better aggression between bands. The wolf of love and the wolf of hate are stitched into human DNA. Researchers have found that about 12-15% of hunter-gatherer men died in conflicts between bands -compared to just the 1% of men who died in the many bloody wars of the 20th century. So, it is natural to fear strangers. Today, we can observe the wolf of hate all around us, in thought, word, and deed.

While the wolf of hate was vital back in the Serengeti, today it breeds alienation and anger, ulcers and heart disease, and conflicts with others at home and work. So, what can we do? We can't kill the wolf of hate because hating the wolf just feeds it. Instead, we need to control this wolf and channel the fire into healthy forms of protection and assertiveness. And we need to stop feeding it with fear and anger.

Meanwhile, we need to feed the wolf of love. This will make us stronger inside, more patient, and less resentful, annoyed, or aggressive. We will stay out of needless conflicts, treat people better, and be less of a threat to others. There are lots of ways to feed the wolf of love. We can feed it by taking in the good of everyday experiences of feeling seen, appreciated, cared about, even cherished and loved. We can feed the wolf of love by practicing compassion for ourselves and others, and by letting these experiences of compassion sink into our hearts. We can feed the wolf of love by recognizing good in other people- and then by taking in the experience of goodness in others. Similarly, we can feed the wolf of love by sensing the goodness inside our hearts. Last, we can feed the wolf of love by seeing the good in the world, and the good in the future that we can make together-in the face of so many messages these days that are dark and despairing. We feed the wolf of love with heart and hope.

So let us stay strong and hold on to the good that exists all around us and inside us. Let us stay strong enough to take in the good that feeds the wolf of love each day.

Excerpts from Simple practices for resilient happiness by Rick Hanson, PhD

My Freedom is in Your Hands

I wash my hands for you.

Every time I wash my hands, I think of you, the other, as myself And I smile.

My freedom is in your hands and yours is in mine.

Every bit of care I bring to this gesture, I dedicate to the mystery of you, the other, who invites me to connect with you.

I reach out to hold you and rejoice in how the water blesses both of us in this practice.

I can no longer disregard you.

I can no longer wash my hands of you, and your fate;

I wash my hands for your fate.

My freedom is in your hands, exactly where it belongs.

-Jacques Verduin

Jacques Verduin is a subject expert on mindfulness, restorative justice, and transforming violence. He is a community organizer and teacher. He is founding director and Minister of Transformation for "Insight-Out" which helps prisoners and challenges youth to create personal and systemic change to transform violence and suffering into opportunities for learning and healing.

Questions for Reflection

- How do you relate to the notion that "My freedom is in your hands and yours is in mine?"
- Can you share a personal story of a time you became aware of your responsibility toward others, and theirs toward you?
- What helps you remember to consider the fate of others when making your decisions?

Drop the Stone

By Rick Hanson

So, what do I mean by “drop the stone?”

Most of us are lugging around at least one thing that is a needless burden. Such as holding on to resentments, worrying over and over about the same thing, or trying to make someone who love you who won't. It's like a load on your back, a weight in your hands, that you really don't have to carry each day.

Perhaps it's an unrealistic standard you keep failing to meet, an old quarrel you keep rehashing, or something addictive you can't do in moderation, so you're always thinking about it. Or maybe it's an old shame, disappointment, or loss. Or perhaps a chronic tension in your body or armor around your heart. Or a rigid belief or righteous indignation.

I'm not suggesting we turn away from pain, stop caring about others, or avoid ambitious goals. It's healthy to allow sadness, hurt, or worry to flow through your mind, and good to keep faith with yourself, bet on yourself, and dream big dreams.

But it's stressful and harmful to get sucked into repetitive preoccupations, to keep looping multiple times around the same track. I heard that the great Tibetan teacher, Tsoknye Rinpoche, had once said essentially: “Thinking the same thought again is OK – but ten is enough!”

In your brain, negative preoccupations tend to engage the “default mode network” centered in the back half of the midline cortex. As this network evolved over millions of years, our ancestors used it as a simulator in which they could review past actions and imagine future possibilities and thus learn from their mistakes and make good plans. But when the simulator uses you, it's more like a “ruminator” in which you are trapped, feeling bad, and reinforcing negative neural circuits.

Instead, it's OK to step out of the movie inside and OK to drop the load.

How?

Pick one “stone” you’d like to drop this year (and you can repeat this process with other things if you like). First, decide for yourself what if anything is reasonable or useful about it. Know in your heart what is worth taking into account . . . and what is just needless, worthless, excess suffering. Know that you are and can be a good person without pouring rocks on your head.

Second, for a few seconds or longer, deliberately “carry” that stone – think about it, worry about it, get sad or mad about it – so you can really know what that feels like.

Third, try to be very aware of when that particular weight comes back. Regular mindfulness practice can help. Building up the trait of steady present-moment awareness is like strengthening what’s called a “strange attractor” in complex systems theory. This kind of attractor is like a planet inside your mind, whose gravitational force pulls you naturally in a good direction. The greater your trait mindfulness is, the more you’ll stay grounded in it and the faster you’ll return to it if you get distracted.

Fourth, resolve to stop picking up the stone. Determine to disengage from it, to stop allying with it and getting hijacked by it. It may keep mumbling away in the background, but at least you can stop adding to its weight.

Be strong inside your own mind. In much the same way that you could step back from someone who’s being harmful, you can step back from old habit patterns. It’s OK to build muscularity inside, with a sense of healthy entitlement to reasonable well-being: “No, I don’t have to keep listening to and agreeing with that voice inside my head!”

Shift your attention to other things, ideally those that are the opposite in some way to the “stone.” Such as forgiving yourself for old shame or turning toward healthy pleasures and away from unhealthy ones or seeing the big picture of everything that’s working if you’ve gotten preoccupied with something that’s not.

With repetition, these new objects of attention will grow like “attractors” where you increasingly dwell. Last, let yourself feel and know that this life is precious and short – even if it lasts a hundred years. In the long run, what will those stones matter? Imagine what it will feel like to lay your stones down. Tell yourself it’s OK to do this. Tell other people it’s OK for them to lay down their own stones.

As you shed your stones, feel the lightness that comes, the room in your heart for good things. Like growing flowers of inner peace, self-worth, ease, inner freedom, an unburdened and undivided mind, and love.

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Two-Way Mirrors

Winter is over, I want to say: all my life/ I was a bride married to amazement/ I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms. - Mary Oliver, "When Death Comes"

How we see, which deepens our capacity to be amazed. Moments of awe and wonder are the only solid foundation for the entire religious instinct and journey... Moses takes off his shoes and the very earth becomes holy ground. (Exodus 3:2-63) because he has met "Being Itself" (Exodus 3:14).

I must admit that we are usually blocked against being awestruck, just as we are blocked against great love and suffering. Early stages of contemplation is largely about identifying and releasing ourselves from the blockages by recognizing the unconscious reservoir of expectations, assumptions, and beliefs in which we are already immersed. If we don't see what is in our reservoir, we will understand all new things in the same old-patterned way- and nothing new will return. An old idea. A new idea held by the old self is never really a new idea, whereas even an old idea by a new self will soon become fresh and refreshing. Contemplation actually fills our reservoir with clear, calm water that allows us to encounter experiences free of old patterns.

How we see will largely determine what we see. And whether it can give us joy or make us pull back with an emotionally stingy and resistant response...What we see in the outer world is a mirror of our inner world and state of consciousness at that time. Most of the time, we just do not see at all but rather operate on cruise control.

It seems that we as humans are two-way mirrors, reflecting both inner and outer worlds. We project ourselves onto outer things and these very things also reflect back to us our unfolding identity. Mirroring is the way that contemplatives see, subject to subject rather than subject to object.

Adopted from Richard Rohr, Just This When we are in awe, there are no deeds or words to be said, a simple ecstatic surrender.

Favorite Readings and Takeaways

Be Still

Extracted from Simple practices for resilient happiness by Rick Hanson, PhD

The world we live in is increasingly volatile and unreliable. It is important to build up strengths and resources inside ourselves so we can stay centered, loving, joyful, peaceful, and fulfilled, no matter what life throws our way. The challenge is how to remain calm, still and centered in the midst of the cyclone.

Things keep changing. The clock ticks, the night comes, trees grow, leaves turn brown, hair turns gray, children grow up and leave home, attention skitters from here to there, from this to that. Life changes. It is lovely to watch grass waving in the wind or a river passing. If there were no change, nothing would happen, everything including reality would be frozen forever.

On the other hand, many changes are uncomfortable, even awful. Body gets creaky and loses its charm and strength. We lose those we love and eventually lose life itself. Families drift apart. Nations go to war. The planet warms at human hands, and each day we pour a billion tons of carbon in the air. Countless species are becoming extinct. As the British poet William Yeats wrote: "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold." And change itself is stressful. Each moment of now decays and disappears in the instant it arises-it can feel rather alarming. In stillness we can find a refuge, an island in the stream of changes, a place to stand for perspective and wisdom about events and our reactions to them, a respite from the race, quiet amidst the noise. Perhaps even find a sense of something transcendental, outside the frame of passing phenomena.

Situations change, but our good intentions persist. In relationships, love abides. More subtly, there is a space between exhalation and inhalation, the silence in which sounds occur. In our mind, there is always an underlying calm and well-being that contains emotional reactions, like a riverbed that is still even as the flood rushes over it. We may not be aware of this, truly, with practice we can find and stabilize a sense of it. There is also an unchanging field of awareness, like a clean surface of a mirror reflecting what is happening without getting attached to the phenomenal world, the thoughts passing through it. We may have a sense of something unchanging transcendental, divine.

Whenever we find it, enjoy the stillness and let it feed us. It's a relief from the noise and hustle and bustle, a source of clarity and peace. We need to give the space, the permission, to be still. There is a traditional saying: May that which is still be that in which your mind delights.

Questions to reflect:

1. We encounter all kinds of noises, pleasant and unpleasant coming from outside and inside of us. Identify such noises and how do you relate to them.
2. Which resources do you have that help you reduce such noises and keep you centered?
3. The word stillness is used in all wisdom traditions. What does that word mean to you? What helps you become still?
4. What takes away stillness from you? How do you deal with it?
5. What big changes have taken place in your life? How do you deal with big changes? What did you learn by going through these difficult times? What made you resiliently happy?

Remaking Ourselves Is an Inner Work

“If we had to seek for virtues outside of ourselves, that would assuredly be difficult; but as it is within us, it suffices to avoid bad thoughts and to keep our souls turned towards the Lord.”- Philokelia

“To remake ourselves, we don’t have to bring goodness, love, fearlessness, and the like from without and force them into our hearts somehow. They are already present in us, deep in our consciousness. If we work to remove the impediments that have built up over many years of conditioning, to dislodge the old resentments and fears and selfish desires, our life will become a fountain of living waters, it was meant to be.

An old fountain may be clogged so that not much water can get through. But with a lot of cleaning, you can get the water to start playing again. Then grass and flowers will grow around it, and birds will come there to have their bath. Just so, love can flow from us as from a living fountain, and those who live and work with will come to us to be refreshed.”-Eknath Easwaran

Questions to reflect on:

1. What is the message of Philokelia? How do we turn towards the Lord?
2. What is meant by “to remake ourselves?”
3. How do we remake ourselves?
4. What kinds of impediments have we built over many years of conditioning? And how can we dislodge the old patterns of conditioning?
5. How does life become a fountain of living waters? What is meant by dead waters?
6. What is your interpretation of the words like “grass and flowers will grow from a living fountain, and those who live and work with will come to be refreshed?”
7. What is meant by “to keep our souls turned towards the Lord?”

Philokelia is a Greek word which means Love of the Good, the Beautiful. The Philokelia is associated with “inner asceticism” with a perpetual remembrance of God as omnipresent and omnipotent.

Calming, Relaxing and Connecting Power of Listening to Music

Extracts from 6 Ways Music Can Lift Your Mood by Professor Shahram Heshmat Ph.D.

Research shows that listening to music can help us in many ways. Music can redirect our thoughts and feelings when we are anxious. Music can instill calmness and relaxation as indicated by reduced cortisol levels and lowered heart rate. (de Witte et al,2020). A large-scale review of 400 studies showed that playing and listening to music also improves the body's immune system, reduces stress, and promotes social bonding (Levine, 2013). Listening to music can facilitate a switch from the “fight-flight” to recovery responses by lowering blood pressure and heart rate. (Madey and Vandrás). Music allows people to explore their feelings and emotions where words sometimes fall short. Music can take us back to times and places that we remember fondly.

The following are ways that music can help us manage our mood:

1. Musical pleasure. The key reason people listen to music lies in the reward center of the brain. Listening to pleasurable music activates areas of the reward system in the brain.
2. Music as catharsis. Music helps channel one's frustration or purge negative emotions such as anger, grief, or frustration in a harmless way.
3. “Feeling” the music.. Being in sync with music is a source of pleasure. Dancing with music makes us happy because it is easy to attune to its rhythmic pattern. Music with a slow and steady rhythm such as meditative music, is shown to reduce stress by altering inherent body rhythms, such as heart rate, resulting in greater relaxation. Listening to soft music is psychologically soothing.
4. Moving in rhythm with others creates social bonds. Music is a tool that provides a sense of comfort and social connection among people.
5. Music as a best friend. Listening to comforting music, when we feel distressed or lonely, can provide mood transformation and a sense of connection. (Schafer et al, 2020). Lyrics that resonate with the listener's personal experience can give voice to feelings or experiences that one might not be able to express oneself.
6. Music evokes memories. Music is one of the strongest feelings of nostalgia. Songs played a lot during significant life events Such as Christmas or Diwali songs or wedding songs can trigger a deeply nostalgic emotional experience. We enjoy the sweetness of these memories via vivid imaginations. (Garrido & Davidson.2019)

To sum up, music is a powerful mood regulator and mood enhancer that can be used for relaxation and mood management. Listening to music alters mood via a helpful distraction and shifting thought patterns. We in many ways could benefit from the presence of music.

Mindfulness - Educational and Experiential

The present moment is the place where life may be fully lived, being here and now and helping us become more aware of ourselves. What Saint Augustine said 1600 hundred years ago is worth reflecting on. "Men go forth to marvel at the heights of mountains and the huge waves of the sea, the broad flow of rivers, the vast nests of the ocean, the orbits of the stars, and yet they neglect to marvel at themselves." The Western culture is so caught up in materialism that we forget about love, compassion, and generosity. The antidote is mindfulness: a simple and direct practice of moment to moment observation of the body-mind process through calm and focused awareness without judgement. As you come to see life as a process of constant change, you can begin to acknowledge all aspects of experience- pleasure and pain, fear and joy-with less stress and more balance.

This being human is a guest house.

Every morning, a new arrival. a joy, a depression, a meanness.

Some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome them all, even if they are a crowd of sorrows who violently sweep your house, empty your furniture.

Still treat each guest honorably, He may be tearing you up for some new delight, the dark thought, the shame, the malice.

Meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.

Be grateful to whoever comes because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.

The Guest House by -Jala ad-Din Rumi, a 13th century Sufi poet of love and a spiritual teacher.

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,

There is a field I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass

The world is too full to talk about.

Ideas, language, even the phrase "each other"
doesn't make any sense.

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.

Don't go back to sleep.

You must ask for what you really want.

Don't go back to sleep.

People are going back and forth across the downhill

where the two worlds touch.
The door is round and open.
Don't go back to sleep.
A Great Wagon by jala ad-Din Rumi

"We can never truly realize this oneness as Rumi says without letting go of our judgments first. Seeing every living being as a part of us is a step towards gaining a higher realization that doesn't know opposition. We must first let go of judgments before we can enter the spiritual realm and realize "oneness"

Whenever I find myself quick to judge or label, I take a moment, create space in my thoughts and remember to head to that field. That is where I become one with everything and everyone. Because when I see the world as separate, I only limit my potential."-Elyane Youssef

We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience -Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

We don't just live in the spiritual realm, but we are the spiritual realm.

Read what the Buddha said in Dhammapada-Sayings of the Buddha. "All that we are is the result of what we thought. It is founded on our thoughts. It is made up of our thoughts. If a man picks the axe with an evil thought, pain follows him as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage. If the man picks up the axe with a pure thought, happiness follows him like a shadow that never leaves you."

It is quite challenging to remain an impartial and non-judgemental observer when you sit in a hall of mirrors to observe your image face to face. We see fear, shame, guilt and we see other unwelcome but familiar internal visitors. Remember Sufi's poem - The Guest

Words and Questions to Reflect On

"We have to realize that for the last twenty, thirty years we have cultivated many habits which prompted distractions, and when we meditate we go against all these habits. It is going to take some time before we dissolve the power of these tendencies." - Martin Batchlor, The Ten Oxherding Pictures

Questions for reflection:

- Which habits prompt distractions in you?
- Which obstacles did you encounter?
- Which habits are difficult to dissolve?
- Which habits have you been able to dissolve?
- Which obstacles have you overcome? How did you dissolve them? How long did it take to dissolve them?

"The soul that is attached to anything, however much good there may be in it will not arrive at the liberty of divine union. For whether it be a strong wire rope or a slender and delicate thread that holds the bird, it matters not, if it really holds it fast. For until the cord be broken, the bird cannot fly." - Saint John of the Cross

"We are tied down by numerous selfish attachments, large and small. We can get attached to anything, from our heirloom china to our comic books. Things are not meant to be loved but to be used wisely. People are to be loved, but there too, we must be careful not to come to see people as possessions-which is quite different from loving them. Through the practice of meditation, we can learn to recall all our selfish desires and slip free of the fetters that bind us to a limited way of life. For it is then, when we are not selfishly attached to anything, when we are living for the welfare of everybody around us, that we are likely to be given a long life, health and plenty of energy to go on contributing to the peace of the world in whatever way we can." Eknath Easwaran

Questions for reflections

- What is meant by the liberty of divine union?
- What can we do to attain the liberty of divine union?
- What specific cords need to be broken to attain it?
- How do we see people as our possessions?
- What happens in relationships when we view people as possessions?
- How does the practice of meditation help us for the liberty of divine union?
- What does attachment mean to you? Why do we need to get detached?
- Why do we need to dissolve attachment even for good stuff?

"I will practice arriving back to the present moment, not letting regrets and sorrow drag me back into the past or letting anxiety, fear or cravings pull me out." - Thich Nhat Hanh

- When you practice Mindfulness Meditation, what kinds of thoughts arise in your mind that take your mind away from the present moment?
- What kinds of emotions arise in your heart that take you out of the flow of here and now presence?
- What kinds of bodily sensations and cravings do you feel that distract your attention from the present moment?
- How do you liberate yourself from the grip of such distracting stuff?

"Either you learn to ride the donkey or the donkey rides you." -Anonymous

- How do you relate to the idea of the donkey?
- What does riding mean to you?
- u? How does the donkey ride you?
- Can you share your personal experience when the donkey rode you? How did you feel about that experience?
- Can you share your experience when you rode the donkey instead of the donkey riding you? How did you accomplish that autonomy?
- What did you learn from your experience?

"May humanity be your race. May love be your religion."-Tao by Laotzy

Reflect on these words of wisdom.

- How do you relate to these ideas?
- Can you share your personal experience when you let humanity be your race and love as your religion? What helps you stay in this state?

Notes on Spiritual Solutions

Answers to Life's Greatest Challenges by Dr. Deepak Chopra

There are times we go through dark zones in our lives where we feel lost. Confusion and inner conflicts overwhelm us. We feel hurt, rejected, betrayed, misunderstood, anxious, depressed and at times desperate. Dark clouds loom over our minds, and we feel lonely. When a crisis descends, we need to face it with awareness. We need to awake from our dense deep sleep, from our dark zone to see the light. My father used to sing the song of “awakening in Hindi. Here is the English translation of this song:

Wake up Oh traveler! The morning has dawned. How long will you keep on sleeping?

One who sleeps loses everything. One who wakes up attains everything.

How long will you keep on sleeping? Oh traveler? Wake up.

There are three levels of Awareness:

Level 1: Constricted Awareness

Level 2: Expanded Awareness

Level 3: Pure Awareness

When we keep on sleeping and do not face the challenge, we draw back, feel contracted inside, and feel the strong grip of anxiety, despair, helplessness, and hopelessness. This state of **Constricted Awareness** is the enemy of finding a solution.

The following elements are present in the **Constricted Awareness**:

- Thwarted desires. Something you want is meeting with opposition.
- You feel every step forward is an uphill task or a battle.
- You keep on doing more of what never worked in the first place. You feel like you keep hitting the wall.
- There is an underlying anxiety and fear of failure.
- You are flooded with uncertainty and doubt.
- Your mind is not clear. There is confusion and inner conflict.
- As frustration mounts, your energy is depleted. You feel more and more exhausted.
- You feel you're alone and nobody really cares about you. You feel left out.

When we recognize and be aware of this contracted state of awareness, when we wake up, we enter into **Expanded Awareness**. Real solution to a crisis comes from this awakened and expanded awareness that helps us to be our true self. The inner feeling is no longer flight, fear or helplessness and hopelessness. The obstacles that seemed immutable melt away.

The following elements are present in the **Expanded Awareness**:

- The need to struggle begins to diminish.
- You start to let go.
- More people connect with you. Feeling of loneliness is diminished.
- You approach decisions with confidence and hope.
- You meet fear realistically and it starts to lessen.
- With clear vision, you no longer feel confused and conflicted.

Pure Awareness

Life ceases to be a struggle. We are moving to Pure Awareness, from the glimmer of light to the fullness of light. Life unfolds naturally and effortlessly from its source of pure awareness. This is a spiritual journey from darkness to light, from constricted and fragmented self to the whole self.

We hear our original voice. We see our original face. We feel the fragrance coming from within. Our search for finding it outside of our self ceases. We hear our calling, the purpose of being here in this world and we respond to the inner call. We follow our bliss. This state of being is called the Transcendental state of consciousness or Enlightened state of consciousness. We feel at home no matter where we are. We feel one with the universe. We feel liberated from the self-created bondage.

The following elements are present in **Pure Awareness**:

- There is no struggle.
- Desires reach fulfillment spontaneously.
- You bring blessings to you and to others.
- The outer world reflects what is happening in your inner world.

- People are naturally drawn towards you. They are happy to be with you.
- You provide inspiration to others. You aspire to others.
- You are at home in the universe.
- You view yourself and others with compassion and understanding.

* * * * *

Five Love Languages

In 1992, Dr. Gary Chapman published a book Five Love Languages. The book #1 New York Time's best selling book. I have extracted the following Five Languages of Love from Dr. Chapman's book.

1. **Words of Affirmation:** Express affection and appreciation through spoken words, verbal praise, kind, uplifting and encouraging words. Complement what they do well.
2. **Quality Time:** Look for quality time over quantity time. How well do you spend time together rather than how long you spend time together. Love and affection are expressed through love language when someone else gives their undivided attention. When they are together they feel loved if you are present and are focused on them. Make sure you make eye contact, affirm what the other person is saying, and refrain offering advice. Have your own alone quality time and your communal quality time. Both are important.
3. **Physical Touch:** A person with this love language feels loved through physical affection. Touch is the primary language that expresses love without words. It can be expressed by holding their hands, touching their arm, cuddling or giving a massage. This quality time can range from chatting over dinner to going for a walk.
4. **Acts of Service:** When people do nice and helpful things for them, even little things for them unconditionally, they feel loved and valued.
5. **Receiving and Giving Gifts:** Gift giving is a symbol of love and affection. They treasure not only the gift given but also the time and effort the gift giver put into it. What's more, they do not necessarily expect large or expensive gifts. You communicate to them that you really know them. Remember St Francis of Assissi's prayer: It's by giving we receive.

I will conclude with a 5,000 years old Upanishad Mantra of Togetherness. It is in Sanskrit.

OM sahana vavatu,

Sahanau bhunaktu.

Sahaviriyam karava vahai.

Tejaswina vadhitam astu.

Ma vidvisa vahai.

OM Shantihi, shantihi, Shantihi

Translation:

Let us protect together.

Let us enjoy eating together.

Let us invest our energy together in a noble cause.

Let us shine together to dispel darkness.

Let us always maintain friendship.

OM Peace Peace Peace

We All Are God's Children

I have selected a few sentences from Radical Welcome by Stephanie Spellers. I urge all of us to reflect on these selected sentences. Become aware of where we stand and reflect on how we can expand our consciousness.

When we deny that the person in front of me is a child of God no matter what their color, sexual orientation, language, creed, wealth (or lack thereof), mental health, status, education level, or addiction. When we cannot see them as a precious soul who is part of all that is Sacred, and shares that in common with us.

When we cannot see that we are all bound together by the Sacred DNA that is in all of us and in which we all participate. Then we start to objectify and dehumanize. At that moment we choose to deny them their inheritance.

As they wander into our lives, Asian massage parlor workers, Brown skinned immigrants feeling abuse and death. See them as a beloved child wanted and welcome. And when we become the “elder child” muttering under our breath, sulking in the field refusing to welcome them to the family table (Luke 15) in that moment we take away their faces and we rob them of their voice, and they become objects and creatures less than human.

O God Lord, let the faces of those we would reject haunt us, anger us, condemn us. For that face is the face of our brother, our sister, your child. Let us not forget that the one we see is a member of your family, a sacred child, a person with a face like your face.

Balancing Two Dimensions Of Life

If we look at Cross or Swastika, we find two dimensions: Vertical and Horizontal.

The Vertical Dimension is the Dimension of Being. The Horizontal Dimension is the Dimension of Doing. The vertical dimension is the dimension of oneness, and the horizontal dimension is the dimension of separateness. The vertical dimension opens up when we are present, here and now. Here is the cessation of the stream of thinking and reacting. Here is the source of awareness, of inner spaciousness in which we realize the depth of who we are. There is no conceptual realization but only a silent knowing, a silent realization of the being, of being present.

The horizontal dimension is the dimension of thinking which is mental doing. For doing something we need time. Whatever we have achieved on the horizontal dimension has limitations. Usually thinking is about the past or the future and it takes us away from the present. We get mentally lost. We cannot deny thinking or suppress thinking or doing which belongs to the horizontal dimension. We need to honor it, accept it and not fight it. The world of doing has its relative importance. And we need to deal with it. We also need to know that there is something more fundamental and that is the world of being, awareness, consciousness, the vertical dimension.

We live in a phenomenal and transient world. There is an element of instability in the horizontal dimension. If we give our absolute attention to this horizontal dimension we are caught up and get stuck. Staying on the vertical horizon helps us remain balanced, stable and centered. We let go of the veil of thinking and look at the world and human beings with non-judgemental awareness. This is deep knowing. Then comes the recognition and realization of the other as one because we emanate from the same source. We are separate on the horizontal dimension but one on the vertical dimension. This is the miracle of awakening and living as an awakened being in the world. When we live this way, the world loses its heaviness.

We are going to have tribulations in our personal world and collective world but be of good cheer. We can overcome the world. It is our destiny to overcome the world not by worldly power. We have transcended it. We have reached the transcendental vertical horizon, the world of being. We are still able to operate in this world, in fact operate better more harmoniously, more efficiently, that includes our relationships. We need to learn the art of living by wisely balancing the two dimensions-the horizontal and the vertical.

Abridged extract from Balancing Two Dimensions Talk by Eckhart Tolle

A Buddhist Wisdom Parable

A young monk asked the sage:

Can you help me quiet my mind from this endless stream of thoughts?

The sage replied: "Bring me this mind of yours."

The monk responded: "When I seek it I cannot find it. It seems it cannot be grasped."

The sage stated: "Graspless and neither here nor there. How can you quiet what is not there?"

Suddenly Realizing the 'nothingness' of knowing 'no mind'

The monk "Awoke" experiencing the Nameless Essence within the Blissfulness of Silence

The Unknown Wanderer simply walked the way without another word.

Adopted from Buddhism Daily Practice by Ed Crowley

Footprints

*One night I dreamed a dream.
I was walking along the beach with my Lord.
Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.
For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,
One belonging to me and one to my Lord.
When the last scene of my life shot before me
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.
There was only one set of footprints.
I realized that this was at the lowest and saddest times of my life.
This always bothered me and questioned the Lord about my dilemma.
“Lord, you told me when I decided to follow you, you would walk and talk
with me all the way.
But I’m aware that during the most troublesome times of my life
There is only one set of footprints.
I just don’t understand why, when I needed you the most you leave me”
He whispered,” My precious child, I love you and will never leave you,
never, ever during your trials and testings.
When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.
-Margaret Fishback Powers (July 4, 1874- June 15, 1958)*

Questions to Reflect On:

- How do you relate to the notion of footprints?
- Have you experienced someone carrying you in his or her loving and caring hands when you were going through trials and testings in your life?
- Have you carried someone in your loving and caring hands when someone was going through such difficult times?
- What helps you walk on this path of serving others selflessly? Which spiritual practices help you to walk on this path?

Calming, Relaxing and Connecting Power of Listening to Music

Research shows that listening to music can help us in many ways. Music can redirect our thoughts and feelings when we are anxious. Music can instill calmness and relaxation as indicated by reduced cortisol levels and lowered heart rate. (de Witte et al,2020). A large-scale review of 400 studies showed that playing and listening to music also improves the body's immune system, reduces stress, and promotes social bonding (Levine, 2013). Listening to music can facilitate a switch from the “fight-flight” to recovery responses by lowering blood pressure and heart rate. (Madey and Vandrás).

Music allows people to explore their feelings and emotions where words sometimes fall short. Music can take us back to times and places that we remember fondly.

The following are ways that music can help us manage our mood:

1. **Musical pleasure.** The key reason people listen to music lies in the reward center of the brain. Listening to pleasurable music activates areas of the reward system in the brain.
2. **Music as catharsis.** Music helps channel one's frustration or purge negative emotions such as anger, grief, or frustration in a harmless way.
3. **“Feeling” the music.** Being in sync with music is a source of pleasure. Dancing with music makes us happy because it is easy to attune to its rhythmic pattern. Music with a slow and steady rhythm such as meditative music, is shown to reduce stress by altering inherent body rhythms, such as heart rate, resulting in greater relaxation. Listening to soft music is psychologically soothing.
4. **Moving in rhythm with others creates social bonds.** Music is a tool that provides a sense of comfort and social connection among people.
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To sum up, music is a powerful mood regulator and mood enhancer that can be used for relaxation and mood management. Listening to music alters mood via a helpful distraction and shifting thought patterns. We in many ways could benefit from the presence of music.

Extracts from 6 Ways Music Can Lift Your Mood by Professor Shahram Heshmat Ph.D.

Remaking Ourselves Is an Inner Work

“If we had to seek for virtues outside of ourselves, that would assuredly be difficult; but as it is within us, it suffices to avoid bad thoughts and to keep our souls turned towards the Lord.”- Philokelia

To remake ourselves, we don't have to bring goodness, love, fearlessness, and the like from without and force them into our hearts somehow. They are already present in us, deep in our consciousness. If we work to remove the impediments that have built up over many years of conditioning, to dislodge the old resentments and fears and selfish desires, our life will become a fountain of living waters, it was meant to be.

An old fountain may be clogged so that not much water can get through. But with a lot of cleaning, you can get the water to start playing again. Then grass and flowers will grow around it, and birds will come there to have their bath. Just so, love can flow from us as from a living fountain, and those who live and work with will come to us to be refreshed.”- Eknath Easwaran

Questions to reflect on:

1. What is the message of Philokalia? How do we turn towards the Lord?
2. What is meant by “to remake ourselves?”
3. How do we remake ourselves?
4. What kinds of impediments have we built over many years of conditioning? And how can we dislodge the old patterns of conditioning?
5. How does life become a fountain of living waters? What is meant by dead waters?
6. What is your interpretation of the words like “grass and flowers will grow from a living fountain, and those who live and work with will come to be refreshed?”
7. What is meant by “to keep our souls turned towards the Lord?”
8. Please give a few illustrations of remaking your life. And how do you feel about remaking your life?

Philokelia is a Greek word which means Love of the Good, the Beautiful. The Philokelia is associated with “inner asceticism” with a perpetual remembrance of God as omnipresent and omnipotent.

Onening

There is an African- Zulu concept of “ubuntu” which means “I am who I am because we are who we are.” The Ubuntu vision of relatedness can provoke healing in the midst of current crises and divisions. We are living in “hot-mess times.” In our current context race and ethnicity, caste and color, gender and sexuality, socioeconomic status and education, religion and political party, have all become reasons to divide and conquer by fear and rancor...Put simply, we are in a perilous time, and the answer to “Who are we to be?” will have implications for generations to come. We have a choice to make. We can answer it in the spirit of the Zumbu phrase Ubuntu- I will be deeply related to who you are. In other words, we are each impacted by the circumstances that impact those around us.

What hurts you hurts me. What heals you heals me. What causes you joy causes me to rejoice, and what makes you also causes me to weep. By channeling the ancient wisdom of ubuntu, we can engineer a badly needed love revolution to rise out of the ashes of our current reality.... The empathy that grows from listening to others, from connection with our neighbors, and from loving our neighbors as we love ourselves can define the courses of action we take. The divisions, dichotomies, and dualism of the world can only be overcome by a unitive consciousness at every level: personal, relational, social, political, cultural, in inter-religious dialogue, and spirituality in particular. A transformed people unite all within themselves, so they do the same in the world. I can give someone what I have in me- loving kindness Metta as the compassionate Buddha taught. A Christian mystic, Julian Norwich, used the old English term “onening” to describe what happens between God and the soul. As Julian put it, “By myself I am nothing at all; but in general, I am, I hope, in the onening of love...for it is in this onening that the life of all people consists.” She concludes: “In the sight of God, all humans are oned, and one person is all people.”

Excerpts from Jacqui Lewis, Fierce Love: A Bold Path to Ferocious Courage and Rule-Breaking Kindness That Can Heal the World (New York: Harmony Books, 2021),11-12 and adapted from Richard Rohr, A Spring within us: A Book of Daily Meditations (Albuquerque, NM: CAC Publishing, 2016), 39 Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love.

Prayer of St Francis of Assisi

Make me an instrument of peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.
Where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, grant me that I may not seek much.
To be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love.
For it is in pardoning that we may are pardoned.
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Let me conclude with a five thousand years old verse From Taittiriya Upanishad.
This is an invocation chant of togetherness and creating peace within and
beyond oneself. It is in Sanskrit.
Om saha navavatu saha nau bhunaktu.
Sahaviriyam karava vahai.
Tejaswinavadhi tamastu.
Ma vidvisha vahai,
Om shantihi shantihi shantihi.

Let both of us be protected.
May both of us be nourished.
May both generate energy together.
May our attainment be bright and brilliant.
May we not have any conflict among ourselves.
May there be peace in me, in you and everyone.

Strength in Storm

Fortunately, none of us are stuck with the mind with which we are born. With practice of mindfulness meditation or reciting a mantra or learning to focus on one thing at a time our mind can be made one-pointed on the essential goodness in every human heart. Then every negative emotion can gradually be transformed into a force for good. Anger, the most destructive emotion-destructive of health, of peace of mind, of relationship, of life itself-can, when transformed, become a loving force that can change the world.

"The ancestor of every action is thought," says Emmeson.

How we think shapes how we act, and the net effect of how each of us thinks and feels shapes the behavior of the group we live in. The family is affected, co-workers affected; eventually there is an effect on society itself. The mental states we tune into actually gain strength from the attention we give, the stronger they become. And just as people become addicted to drugs, the mind can become addicted to certain kinds of thinking. Fear is a drug. It can alter consciousness. So can greed. Anger is one of the most powerful drugs, more addictive than cocaine.

Any decision or action under the influence of fear, anger, or greed has to be distressful. That's why most international policies are not successful: they are taken under the influence of fear, greed, and anger. Fortunately, negative states of mind fade away if they are not reinforced by repetition. However strong they appear; they come and go. What is positive in consciousness is permanent, unchanging.

That's why I say original goodness is a part of our nature. When we cease to feel negativity with our attention what remains is positive. We can strengthen what is positive by removing negativity from our minds.

That's what spiritual practices like mantra or meditation can do. Then our life is a message as Mahatma Gandhi said.

Extracted from Strength in Storm book written by Eknath Easwaran

Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness is the skill of being deliberately attentive to our experience as it unfolds- without the super impositions of our usual commentary and conceptualizing. Mindfulness provides a wholesome way to attend to our experiences and helps us overcome the unskillful habits of mind that cause us to suffer needlessly. We can develop the skill of mindfulness and apply it to every aspect of daily life.

Practice of meditation is the fundamental technique for cultivating mindfulness. Since mindfulness is the skill of opening ourselves to reality without judgment, it is important that we approach the practice of meditation in this spirit, relinquishing preconceptions and expectations about the discipline. Using the Five Precepts of Buddhism, we will consider the interconnections of ethical behavior with the development of mindfulness and shaping of personal character. Beginning the actual practice of meditation starts with focusing attention on the breath and observing when the mind strays. By noticing when attention has wandered away from its focal point and then gently returning it to the breath, we gradually strengthen our capacities for concentration and awareness.

Practicing mindfulness over time reveals and develops the qualities of wisdom and compassion, the two virtues of the discipline. Wisdom means seeing clearly into the fundamental nature of reality. Through meditative practice, we deeply recognize the eternal arising and passing away of all phenomena and see the unsatisfactoriness of ordinary human experience that derives from the illusion of the self as an entity separate from the rest of reality.

Practice is the key to meditation. Anyone can develop meditation skills and apply to the daily aspects of living: breathing, sensing, feeling, thinking, eating, walking, speaking, sleeping, and even driving. When we work on the fundamental aspects of mindfulness practice, we can work on more challenging things: coping with physical, and mental pain, grief, and anger, cultivating compassion and loving kindness, forgiveness, and patience for ourselves and others, a life of generosity, and accepting mortality- the universality of loss, of impermanence and transience. We learn to focus in the present moment, on the here-now consciousness.

Finally, the capacity of mindfulness practice to profoundly alter our perceptions of ourselves, the world, and our place in it.

Extracted from Practicing Mindfulness: An Introduction to Meditation by Professor Mark W. Muesse, PhD The Great Courses

Two Wings of the Self

There are several dimensions of our Self such as physical, mental, emotional, relational or social, and spiritual. We can enhance the qualities of these dimensions by practicing mindfulness. In this article, I have presented two dimensions of the self: mental and emotional, cognitive and affective. These are two wings of our Self. We need to create dynamic balance between these two wings.

A great amount of work has been done to understand, measure, improve and enrich the cognitive dimension of the self. Psychologists have come up with the concept of IQ, Intelligence Quotient to measure intelligence. Recently a great amount of scientific research has been done to demonstrate the importance of emotional wellness in our life, the power of Emotional Awareness.

What is Emotional Intelligence?

IQ is a measure of intelligence which is determined by scores on various tests that evaluate short-term memory, reasoning ability and verbal recall. People can marginally improve test scores through practice or by lowering their test taking anxiety, but the measure is fairly static, and it diminishes with age. In contrast, Emotional Intelligence, EI referred to as EQ can be enhanced over time and perhaps throughout a person's life span. EI enables us to navigate the emotional, social, and political complexities of life with skill and grace. Ultimate success in life and certainly overall happiness- may have to do with developing higher levels of emotional intelligence.

Dr. Daniel Goleman's best seller Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ launched the subject of Emotional Intelligence. Since then, EI has become one of the most intensively studied and widely promoted qualities of leadership. As Goleman states, EI is the "Sine qua non of leadership." Goleman's modified version of EI has four quadrants:

- (1) Self-awareness,
- (2) Self-management,
- (3) Social awareness, and
- (4) Relationship management

Self-awareness

The self-awareness quadrant addresses the human psyche-the psychological or mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Enhancing our self-awareness means getting to know how we function internally. Increasing our capacity for self-awareness enhances moment-to-moment awareness of our emotional states and their relationship to our physiology and our underlying experiences of met and unmet or challenged needs-for example, love, connection, autonomy, respect, security. Ultimately it involves transforming our inner landscape from one dominated by fear-based conditioning, self-empathy, self-worth, and a greater capacity for self-agency.

Self-awareness also includes developing a relationship with the heart-mind and increasing our ability to rely on that vast and undefinable (yet realizable) dimension of our being.

Here are some important characteristics of emotional self-awareness:

1. We recognize our feelings in the moment.
2. We can see the link between thoughts and emotions.
3. We are out of our emotional triggers as well as habitual patterns of reactivity and the storylines we use to justify them.
4. We recognize that while emotions are a valid and important dimension of our human experience (and potentially source of profound insight), they are also transitory in nature and often stem from misperceptions, assumptions, or limited interpretations of what is actually occurring in the present moment.
5. We are able to feel our emotional experiences in the moment. We appreciate their richness and subtlety without hanging on to any particular feeling or indulging in reactive behaviors.
6. We are aware of our inherent biases and prejudices, We do our best to set them aside in order to act with respect, inclusivity, cultural humility and compassion.

Self-management

Increasing self-awareness naturally leads to greater capacity for self-management and we optimally respond rather than react. In this way we can make intelligent and beneficial decisions informed by emotional awareness.

There are so many methods for self-regulation, but one of the simplest ones is often attributed to Thomas Jefferson: “When angry, count to ten before you speak. If you are very angry, count to one hundred.” By doing so, we have probably released ourselves sufficiently from the grip of the fight-flight mechanism and regained enough access to the rational parts of our neocortex to respond more appropriately to whatever triggered us in the first

place. And if we take a deep belly breath with each count, the state-shifting method will be even more effective in rebalancing our autonomic nervous system. In short, it enables us to down regulate our physiological and emotional state just enough to avoid impulsive reactivity and make better decisions for ourselves and others.

A consistent daily mindfulness practice leads us to be more emotionally balanced by the end of a meditation session.

Social Awareness

Social Awareness is focused on developing a number of competencies related to others: empathy and caring, organizational awareness, and having a service orientation.

Empathy and caring: The Empathetic Heart-Mind

Social awareness and empathy both refer to our ability to feel what others are feeling, -to sense what may be going on for them. It means we can tune in to others, respect their concerns, and care about their feelings. This ability involves listening well, paying attention to body language and vocal tone, and doing so out of genuine caring.

As we get older and go through various hardships, most of us begin to realize that others have experienced similar challenges. The beginning to realize that a surprising number of our Joys and sorrows are Universal, and that knowledge empowers us to feel a stronger connection with a greater compassion for others. We become more interested in what they think and feel as well as how they perceive the world. Our curiosity and openness to what is going on around us increases especially when it comes to the people we live and work with every day. We may even begin to sense our interconnectedness with all human beings, and all forms of life, for that matter.

Empathy is our capacity to feel what others are feeling and compassion refers specifically to concern for others and motivation to help or relieve their pain. As it turns out, recent brain studies demonstrate that empathy and compassion involve different neural circuitry. Such studies also show that the experience of empathy can lead either to feelings of empathic concern and compassion or to empathic distress and aversive feelings. They may suffer from empathy fatigue or empathy burnout. There is the concept of empathic heart-mind. Empathic heart-mind is what allows us to have greater sensitivity regarding the feelings and needs for others in addition to the capacity to genuinely care about their well-being.

Organizational Awareness

We all live and work within various systems family social networks and workplace as well as spiritual communities that operate at different orders of complexity. That would be a great tool. Goldman and others describe organizational awareness as a key competency for leaders within the social awareness quadrant whether we think of ourselves as leaders or not, we all clearly benefit from being able to understand these systems from top to bottom, inside out and outside in.

Goleman uses organization awareness to a higher order empathic awareness that includes the entire landscape of organizations and systems. We need to understand what rules are, how decisions are made, how to influence such decisions and how to effect change. We need lots of insights into the culture, politics, and power dynamics of the landscape we are attempting to navigate. All of this requires a kind of holistic empathic awareness at the systems level.

Service Orientation

The final competency within the social awareness quadrant of Goleman's EI model is service orientation. Having a strong service orientation simply means that we are focused on providing service and valuable experiences to others. In the modern Western world, we are all trained from birth to be good mindless consumers. We can make every effort to consume consciously and wisely.

Self-Management

Self-management and social management are the third and fourth quadrants of Goleman's EI model. Self has five dimensions: physical, breathing, mental, emotional and spiritual. All these dimensions are inter- connected. Physical dimension refers to body, physical sensations, physical wellness, physical exercise, digestion, and physical rest and sleep. We need to take care of all aspects of physical well-being. Breath is a link between body and mind. Belly breathing creates a relaxation response and is conducive to sound sleep. How to manage our mind is very important.

Quiet, clear and meditative mind helps us make right choices in all aspects of life. A quiet and clear mind helps us make wise choices and decisions. As Bhagavad Gita says: Mind is the cause of bondage and liberation. We have a wide spectrum of emotions such as love, kindness, empathy, sympathy, compassion, as well as anger, fear, jealousy, cruelty. As wise human beings we need to cultivate positive emotions and regulate and manage negative emotions. Self has also a relational or social dimension-intra- personal and interpersonal..

How we relate to ourselves, and others causes happiness or misery. And last but not the least is the spiritual dimension of oneself. Unconditional love, kindness, compassion, selfless service, generosity and forgiveness help us not only to survive but also to thrive and flourish. We serve and save the mother earth from manmade pollution and destruction.

Taking care of oneself and others and the earth with mindfulness and loving kindness is the call for all of us. Our life and life of others is very precious, the life of nature is very precious. We all need to awaken and play our part in sustaining our life and wellbeing of others and the universe at large.

Relationship Management

Relationship Management is the fourth quadrant of Goleman's EI model. Fleet Maull prefers terms like Effective Relationship Skills or Skillful Communications. This is also the domain of Authentic Relationship. Consider how much drama and conflict arise from "unmanaged" relationships. Management in this sense means engaging in our relationships with kindness and skill.

With relationship management, we consciously bring our best intentions and most emotionally intelligent, skillful, and wise self to our daily interactions with others. Proficiently managing relationships for mutual benefit requires effective communication skills, and the ability to influence and Inspire others in positive ways, a team -oriented mindset, and the aptitude for navigating conflicts with ingenuity and grace.

Abridged extract from Radical Responsibility by Fleet Mauall, PhD

Pearls of Wisdom

Dr. Jagdish Dave's beautiful Pearls of Wisdom - A gift for us to cherish and follow.

001

Be still to listen to the music of experience

002

Let everyday be a good day, a God's Day

003

Let your smile ripple, generating multiple ripples.

004

While gazing at the moon, do not forget our Earth mother, our birth mother.

005

Remember: The evening is born in the womb of the morning. And the morning is born in the womb of the evening.

006

We need to feel in order to heal.

007

There are times when we need to walk alone. And there are times when we need to hold each other's hand.

008

When we live in harmony, we create the Rainbow of Life.

009

The universe is multiverse. There is oneness in manyness.

010

Birth and death are twins like sound and silence.

011

You cannot climb up on a smooth surface of a mountain.

012

Love = I + You = We = One. In a loving relationship, You are Me, I am You and We are One.

013

To say hello to the present, we need to say goodbye to the past and to the future.

014

Consider everyday an invitation to live mindfully and fully.

015

Father and Mother are the archetypes of firmness and tenderness, toughness and gentleness. We need both to be a whole person.

016

Non Judgmental, existential awareness makes us fully present to the present.

017

Inner peace is the key that unlocks the door of outer peace.

018

When the voice of the intellect stifles the voice of the heart, there is nothing but noise.

019

We all need to keep the mirror of our consciousness clear to see the world as it is.

020

Love without attachment brings joy and peace. With attachment it turns into disappointment and hurt.

021

Toxic thoughts give rise to toxic emotions, toxic cells in the body, and toxic actions and reactions.

022

Remember the Zen saying: Eat when you are hungry, drink when you are thirsty, and sleep when you are tired.

023

It is so simple to be happy, but it is so difficult to be simple.

024

Think upon these words: What is Mind? doesn't matter. What does matter? Never Mind.

025

Let us mind our mind. It is the cause of freedom or bondage; war or peace.

026

Happiness blossoms in the flower of love.

027

Form exists in the background of formlessness.

028

How do I know the other when I do not know myself?

029

Self-fullness is the out breath of the in breath of selflessness.

030

Let us join our hand with the hand of the ever giving nature.

031

How can we be separated as long as we are connected by our heart-thread?

032

We do not need to remember those whom we have not forgotten in our heart.

033

We look for a master key to open the outward treasure-money, recognition, status, approval, happiness and the like. We tend to forget to use the master key to open the inner treasure filled with boundless abundance.

034

Unless we learn how to celebrate our loneliness-positive emptiness, we will feel loneliness-negative emptiness, looking to be filled by outside sources.

035

When our eyes are clear, we see Sat-Existence and Satya-Truth as the two sides of the same coin. When we realize this, life becomes a celebration.

036

An act done with love and kindness is light like a feather. An act done for just the sake of doing is heavy like a mountain.

037

Words unspoken with love are louder than words spoken with sheer obligation.

038

Do not overlook the quiet beauty of the flower right in front of you to see the grandeur of the far away peak of the Himalayas.

039

My mother used to say everyday: Appreciate everyday what you have and be grateful for everyday blessings. Do not take for granted even the smallest gifts you have. Counting blessings everyday has made my life blissful.

040

I deeply cherish what Saint Kabir has sung in his poem, Kasturi Kundal Base— Fragrance lies within you.

041

When you do something right, right things happen to you almost effortlessly.

042

When you are on the right path, you run into the right people.

043

The universe echoes our voice. It is also called the Law of Karma.

044

In meditation, we listen to God, In prayer, we talk to God. Both are spiritual ways for receiving the Divine blessings.

045

We are the pilgrims of light.

046

When I hold a hand with love and compassion, I feel God holding my hand.

047

I have learned a very good lesson from living mindfully: Don't hit your head against the wall of the past. Our head just keeps on bleeding.

048

By using my senses, I explore the surface of the outer lake. By meditating, I see the depth and clarity of my inner lake.

049

By saying Namasté, I bow to the divine light within you.

050

By doing a simple act of kindness, I make my day a good day, a God's day.

051

When my head touches the sky, let me not forget the little dust particles of Mother Earth.

052

Meditation helps us to be aware of the space-time bound changing world and the world beyond the space and time, the presence of here and now consciousness.

053

Dharma or Dhamma is living according to the awakened state of being.

054

When we live according to Dharma or Dhamma, we live like a lotus in the water, connected but not bound. It is by remaining connected without getting attached, we blossom fully.

055

Science raises questions(?) Spirituality offers wonderment! Wows!

056

When our heart throbs with unselfish love, it becomes a prayer to the Divine.

057

How well we live is as important or perhaps more important than how long we live.

058

We need to keep our eyes open to see the face of God and the ears clear to hear the footsteps of God.

059

It is how we view the things that disturb us, not the things by themselves.

060

When we focus on what we do not have, we surely miss noticing what we have.

061

Love, compassion, connecting with others and contentment are the basic ingredients of happiness.

062

Life is a tale told by idiots, full of furies, signifying nothing as Shakespeare said. Or it could be a tale told by enlightened ones, full of bliss and signifying everything.

063

There are two ways of looking at the cup of life: half full or half empty. But what if there is no cup to look at?

064

Life offers to deny, or life offers to celebrate. What is your choice?

065

Devotional practice without break lays the firm foundation of growth and wellness.

066

Love is like fragrance. We smell it though we don't see it. Love is like the sound of silence. We hear its whispers in the ears of our heart.

067

To be happy, we need to align our work and activities with our heart's desires. We need to follow our bliss.

068

Our desire and ability to follow the path of our heart is stifled by negative messages we have scripted in our subconscious mind.

069

Not being is the mirror of being. Emptiness is the ground of fullness.

070

Unconditional love is the only way for receiving unconditional love. It is also a way of accepting what is rather than demanding and expecting how it should be.

071

When I was 16 years old, this is what I learned from my Sanskrit teacher. I am translating what he used to say in Sanskrit. There was a time when we as a couple used to think, feel and say: mine is yours and yours is mine. What has happened lately makes us think, feel and say: mine is mine and yours is yours.

072

An act done with loving kindness does not need to be broadcast. It felt like a fragrance permeating in the air.

073

When someone says "absolutely", I feel nervous and disconnected. For every wrong, there is a right and for every right, there is a wrong. For every this, there is every that. In Jainism, it is called syadvada. Existence is multidimensional. It all depends on which lens we use.

074

When we react to what someone is thinking, feeling or saying, we are on a bumpy ride. When we respond, we are on a smooth sailing ride.

075

I will never forget what my Farsi Professor Dawar (in my college-Gujarat College) used to say: Energy can be widely used but it should be wisely used. This wise advice can be used for any kind of energy-physical, mental, emotional, spiritual including nuclear.

076

Let us nourish the plant of our relationship with love and compassion. Love and compassion beget love and compassion.

077

When our eyes are filled with love and compassion, we see auspiciousness. When our ears are filled with love and compassion, we hear auspicious sounds. Love and compassion fill our lives with joy and bliss.

078

Nature offers us a feast to our senses, mind and heart if we let ourselves be open to nature.

079

Loving and kind words create harmonious structures-holograms in our being.

080

We need to be grounded and centered to create and sustain our growth promoting relationship.

081

What we resist may need our firm and focused attention to heal.

082

Silence opens up the doors of perception that were closed by too much noise of repetitive thoughts and actions.

083

Stand for a while silently and mindfully to experience the depth of richness of the moment.

084

We need to keep our eyes open to see the changing beauty of nature and our ears open to listen to the symphony of nature.

085

We reflect outside what is inside of us.

086

Transformation takes place not by believing in truth but by knowing and living it.

087

My dad often used to say: When you know something is good, do it right away. And when you know something is not good, count to ten and take deep breaths.

088

What is Mindfulness? It is very simple: Walk while you walk. Talk while you talk. Eat while you eat. Rest while you rest and sleep while you sleep. So simple!

089

What is enlightenment? Zen master's answer. I eat when I am hungry. I drink when I am thirsty. I sleep when I am tired. So simple!

090

We let go of the ego to discover our true self-the self that mirrors the face of selfless love.

091

Seeds of bitterness stored in the soil of our subconscious mind grow into bitterness and hurt none but ourselves.

092

Blaming others for our own shortcomings is a guaranteed way for stopping our own growth and development.

093

Words for deep contemplation. "When I love him, I am hearing through which he hears, his sight through which he sees, his hands through which he grasps, and his foot through which he walks." —A Sufi Poem

094

Roses bloom in the garden of love. It is the power of love that helps us go through thorns on the way.

095

Nature, like love, speaks to us in utter silence.

096

Words to contemplate: "Each day well-lived makes yesterday a dream of happiness and each tomorrow a vision of hope. Live therefore this day. For it alone is life." —Kalidas, an Indian poet

097

We need to invest our full attention in the process that is here and now rather than the outcome that is there and then.

098

Real forgiveness is for our own healing. We cannot be free from our pain as long as we hold onto the non-forgiving the other. It is like licking our old wounds. Forgiveness is for the forgiver.

099

When we focus on the core values of a religion, not its outer trappings, we see the common ground and the real possibility for harmony.

100

A new force or energy, a tertium quid, is generated from the dancing of opposites.