



Balance Point

*A Gift from
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Spring 2000

On Faith and Forsythias

As I write this, I can hear the wind blowing and blowing around the eaves of the house. Spring is blowing into Kansas.

The forsythia bushes are blooming - another sign that spring is really here. I love watching the way each forsythia bush changes from a nondescript tangle of bare branches into an outrageously yellow beacon of spring. It seems magical to me; a few weeks ago my forsythia looked like a lifeless pile of dead branches, a lost cause. And now every branch is covered with tiny yellow stars winking at me.

Forsythia seem to bloom just when I fear that the Midwest winter will never end. After days and days of cloudy, dreary weather, one day I look up and the sun is shining and the forsythia bushes seem to be shouting with joy, saying "Look! It's spring!." Forsythia bushes are God's way of reminding me to have faith and not give up hope. New growth is always possible no matter how cold and gloomy the world appears to be.

I have never seen a forsythia bush get fooled by false spring weather in February and bloom early. How do they do that? How do they know when to wait and when to bloom? Some inner clock, I suppose. My own life certainly goes much smoother if I know when to wait and when to act. That inner knowing comes naturally when I live mindfully. The essay in "Natural Ramblings" is about mindful living and my struggles with it.

When the forsythia bloom, I get the itch to garden. Spring means it is time to get down and dig my fingers into the earth, to feel and smell the change of seasons. Mother earth smells vibrant and alive beneath my fingernails in the spring.

Gardening is all about faith. I plant seeds, water them and then wait. After a week or two of waiting and watching, I finally spy the first sprouts of life poking out of the earth. Soon an entire plant is growing where there was once bare earth. Mother nature is quite the magician.

In this newsletter, I hope that I have packaged a little bit of spring magic for you. I have included articles about organic food and how emotions link to the physical body as well as the essay on mindful living. There are also poems and internet wisdom scattered about. Within these pages you may find one or two seeds that when watered with a little quiet attention, sprout into ideas you can use to improve your health and enjoy life a little more.

Blessings to you and all your loved ones. Have a magical spring.

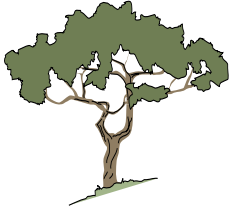
SLOW DANCE

Have you ever watched kids
On a merry-go-round
Or listened to the rain lapping on
the ground?
Ever followed a butterfly's erratic
flight
Or gazed at the sun into the
fading night?
You better slow down
Don't dance so fast
Time is short
The music won't last...

Excerpt. Author Unknown

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Balance Point is committed to
healing the planet; body, mind
and spirit.



*“If we are peaceful, if we are happy,
we can blossom like a flower,
and everyone in our family,
our entire society
will benefit from our peace.”*

- Thich Nhat Hanh

Natural Ramblings - I Will Be Happy When...

Note: this is an essay I wrote on a cold, gloomy winter day. But the sentiment is appropriate even today.

Winter is not my favorite time of year. In fact, it is my least favorite. Winter in Kansas seems to be filled with cold and gray days. February may be the shortest month, but it seems terminally long to me. I cannot wait until spring arrives with the smell of growth in the air.

Oops. I have fallen into my "I will be happy when..." trap again. I find myself focused on everything wrong with my day and fantasizing about being content when I have no more problems in the future. I will be happy when spring comes – I hate these cold, gray winter days. I will be happy when everyone is home tonight for dinner and my family can be together. I will be happy when I finish my newsletter. I will be happy when I have a good hair day. I will be happy when I have more clients. I will be happy when the sun shines. I will be happy when I solve that problem. I will be happy when...

Thinking this way means that my happiness never quite arrives. It is always just out there, a little ways in front of me. I can see it, smell it, almost taste it – but no, I CANNOT feel it until some point off in the future when all of the pieces of my life fall into perfect alignment and everything becomes heavenly. I put happiness out there, outside of me. If only other people and weather and circumstances would behave and do exactly what I want, THEN I could be content.

But my life is ticking away while I postpone happiness again and again. And all that wanting and needing and wishing for something to be different has NOTHING to do with true happiness. I have discovered that all it takes to feel more joy and contentment in my life is a shift in my attention. If I can let go of past mistakes and future problems long enough to just be present right here and now, then joy and contentment come naturally to me. This little shift is called mindfulness.

In the introduction to Present Moment Wonderful Moment (Parallax Press; 1990), Thich Nhat Hanh describes mindfulness this way, "When we settle into the present moment, we can see beauties and wonders right before our eyes – a newborn baby, the sun rising in the sky. We can be very happy just by being aware of what is in front of us." Thich Nhat Hanh is a Zen monk from Viet Nam who has spent the last 30 years teaching mindful living. His teachings appear very simplistic on the surface. Sometimes the simplest acts are the most difficult - and the most powerful.

Mindfulness is a simple act – just focus on whatever I am doing right now. For example, when I wash the dishes, just focus on washing the dishes. When I drive, just focus on driving. When I listen to someone, just listen. And when my mind wanders, gently bring it back to the single task in front of me. Just BE present in this moment.

This mindful way of living is a revelation to me. I have put conditions on my happiness all my life. But now I find that just by focusing on my breath and what is around me in this moment, I can shake my negative "if only this would happen..." loop. This one simple act helps me to feel unbelievably calm and content in the midst of a chaotic day.

So, I am working on – no, not working, that sounds too difficult. I am PRACTICING being mindful and noticing everything that is wonderful about the here and now. It is very hard at times. Like most Moms, I am trained to multi-task, to juggle three things at once. I am learning a new habit: one moment at a time.

Whenever I catch myself grouching about my lot in life and thinking "if only this would change, I would be happy", I stop, take a deep breath and look closely at whatever is here in this present moment. I focus on just this moment in time and my mind clears. I find peace. It is like coming to ground after a long, deep meditation.

Right now in this moment, I take a deep breath and look around me. I pause and notice the warm glow I have in my belly as I write this. I am content in this moment and I want to acknowledge my contentment. I want to notice what is peaceful and right about this moment. What I focus on increases and I want more of this warm, peaceful, content feeling in every day.

Yes, it is cold and gray outside and yes, my house is a complete mess and yes, my bank account is close to zero. BUT look how the bare tree branches appear to be etched into that gray sky – how incredibly gorgeous! And the cold weather brings the deer right up next to the house where I can watch them. And best of all, I sit here doing one of the things that I love most in the world – writing.

Life is not so bad, after all. In this moment I am happy.

Why Buy Organic?

Americans love fad diets. From herbal pills that "kill" your appetite to diets that eliminate "bad" sugar, Americans seem to latch on to one quick fix diet after another. Normally, I tell my clients to ignore the latest food fad and focus on balanced nutrition. But there is one "fad" that I think you should pay attention to - organic foods. More and more conventional supermarkets now carry organic products because sales are booming. And even though organic food tends to cost a little more, eating organic could change your health for the better.

What does "organic" mean?

The USDA unveiled proposed standards for exactly what is and is not organic food production on March 7, 2000. The Organic Trade Association which represents the organic agriculture industry in the U.S. is currently reviewing the guidelines. Until national standards are agreed to, the standards used in California and Oregon are considered to be the most comprehensive.

California's organic standards require that to be called organic, a product must be grown without the use synthetic insecticides, herbicides or fertilizers. Farmers or food processors wishing to use the organic designation on their product's label must go through a certification process. They must keep detailed records of methods and materials used in growing or producing the product. All methods and materials are inspected annually by a third-party certifier. And the land on which organic food is grown must be free of all prohibited chemicals for three years prior to certification.

Why pay more for organic foods?

Bite for bite, organic produce is more nutritious. Fruits and vegetables grown on conventional farms have been found to contain 87% less minerals and trace elements than those grown organically according to research conducted at Rutgers University. The reason for this is organic farming methods focus on nurturing the soil and keeping it in top shape rather than applying synthetic fertilizers to promote plant growth. Organic farming practices also prohibit gassing or artificially forcing produce to ripen after it has been picked. This means that organic produce is left on the vine until it is fully ripe when the plant adds the majority of nutrients to the fruit or vegetable.

Organic food decreases your exposure to cancer-causing chemicals. A 1994-95 EPA report on US pesticide use found that conventional farms use an estimated 911 million pounds of synthetic pesticides on their crops annually. According to the EPA, 60% of all herbicides, 90% of all fungicides and 30% of all insecticides are known or suspected to cause cancer in humans. Besides being carcinogenic, many of these compounds mimic the functions of estrogen, testosterone and other hormones within the body. These "hormone mimics" are now linked to numerous reproductive abnormalities in mammals (including humans) such as malformation of the penis, undeveloped testicles and decreased sperm counts as well as intellectual impairment and depressed immune system function. The use of these compounds is prohibited on organic farms.

Organic dairy products decrease your exposure to bovine growth hormone. This growth hormone was approved for use in 1993 to boost milk production in cows. Bovine growth hormone, also known as insulin-like growth factor 1, is very controversial. Canada and all of the countries in the European Union ban its use. The hormone is a naturally occurring compound that regulates a variety of growth processes within the body. Hormone-treated cows have a higher level of the hormone in their milk than untreated cows. Research into the effect of bovine growth hormone on humans has shown conflicting and inconclusive results. In the meantime, I recommend using organic dairy products as much as possible – particularly if you are feeding small children.

Organic beef, pork, poultry and dairy decrease your exposure to antibiotics. Conventional dairy, poultry, pork and beef farmers commonly use grain that contains a low dose of antibiotics. Critics of this practice contend that prolonged exposure to low doses of antibiotics in humans or livestock breeds "superbugs" – strains of bacteria that are resistant

*"Tell me what you eat
and I will tell you what
you are.*

- Anthelme Brillat-Savarin

to treatment with antibiotics. Organic farming standards prohibit the use of antibiotics in well livestock. In addition, organic dairies remove sick cows that are on antibiotics from milk production and guarantee that their milk products are free of antibiotic residues.

Organic farming promotes a clean water supply. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the ground water in 38 states is now contaminated with residues from 98 different pesticides. Organic farming standards prohibit the use of these chemicals and eliminate the chemical run-off.

Which foods should you purchase from organic sources?

Dairy, poultry, pork and beef products are by far the most important products to buy organic. Livestock raised on most conventional farms eat grains containing pesticides, antibiotics and hormones. These compounds are concentrated in the fatty tissues of the animal, which means that meat, dairy and poultry products contain much higher levels of these dangerous chemicals than most fruit or vegetable sources. So, if you can't afford to buy a lot of organic products, switch to organic milk, eggs, cheese, poultry and meat first.

Buy organic baby food if you are feeding an infant. According to the Environmental Working Group, commercial baby food is the main source of pesticide ingestion for children 6-12 months in age. Infants and young children are more vulnerable than adults to the effects of pesticide residues because they are growing rapidly and many of their systems, including the immune system, are not fully developed. Just buying organic baby food and organic dairy products for yours kids will drastically decrease their exposure. Thoroughly washing or peeling all fresh fruits and vegetables will decrease their exposure even more.

What if organic products are not available or cost too much?

Here are a few things you can do when organic products are not available or are too expensive:

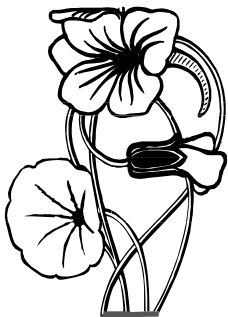
- ◊ Ask your favorite supermarket to start stocking organic products or try shopping at the local health food store. Most health food stores carry a wide variety of organic products.
- ◊ Wash fresh produce with soap and water or a citrus wash (now available in most supermarkets). If you can't wash it, peel it. This does not remove pesticides that have been absorbed internally, but it will remove chemical residues from the surface.
- ◊ Limit your intake of imported fruits – many foreign countries use pesticides that are banned in the U.S. due to their toxicity.
- ◊ Buy lean cuts of meat and trim any remaining fat – the chemicals tend to be concentrated in the fat.
- ◊ Buy low-fat milk and dairy products.

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4. Groth, Edward III, PhD, "Science, Precaution and Food Safety: How Can We Do Better?", Consumers Union of U.S., February 2000.
5. National Research Council, "Pesticides in the Diets of Infants and Children, National Academy Press, 1993.
6. Online resources: www.epa.gov/pesticides/op/ , www.ewg.org , www.ota.com , www.OrganicInfo.com

“As for butter versus margarine, I trust cows more than chemists.”

- Joan Gussow, Asst. Prof. of Nutrition & Education at Columbia University



Body Language

Has this ever happened to you?

Whenever you slow dance with your spouse, your chest gets very warm and you feel all “snugly”.

Or

Your 3-year-old daughter is constantly butting heads with you today. As you put her in time out for the third time this afternoon, she screams that she hates you. You manage to bite your tongue and not scream back at her. Later after you put her down for her nap, you sit quietly for what seems like the first time all day. You immediately notice a sharp pulling in your back between your shoulder blades.

Or

The morning after you get a massage, you wake up coughing. Later you find yourself sobbing over the tiniest little upset in your schedule.

Or

You have a horrible week at work. Your boss seems to be dumping work on you. You madly scramble to catch up, but just seem to get further and further behind. Friday morning when you wake up, you notice your jaw is very tight and sore. When you mention the pain to your husband, he tells you that it sounded like you were grinding your teeth while you slept the other night.

What's going on? Where do these strange aches and pains and sensations in your body suddenly come from? What is your body trying to tell you?

Most of us in the Western world have been taught to spend our life in our heads, focused on our thoughts. We ignore our bodies below the neck much of the time and use them as transport vehicles for the all-important brain. And we consider emotions messy and troublesome. Sometimes we even wish we could “grow up” and never feel depressed or angry again. When strong emotions come up, we stifle and try to deny them. Or we wake up with a pain that won't go away. Our body feels like an enemy who has betrayed us. But our body can be an insightful, helpful friend, if we learn how to speak its language.

The Emotion-Body Link

Emotions are linked to the physical body in mysterious and wonderful ways. What you think and how you feel directly affects physical health and well being. Ancient Chinese medicine speaks of this emotion-body link. The Chinese believe that specific organs and parts of the body are connected to specific emotions – e.g. the liver and jaw to frustration, the lungs to sadness, the stomach to worry.¹ Chinese medicine also links excess or deficient emotions experienced over a long period of time to many chronic illnesses.²

Hindu and Buddhist traditions speak of chakras or energy centers positioned along the spine. Each chakra is believed to house different emotional issues. A physical block in the energy flow in and around a particular chakra corresponds to an emotional issue that the person is grappling with.³

Our language is filled with references to this emotion-body link; we speak of our gut being gripped in fear, teeth clenched in anger, or a widow's body bent over in sorrow. We intuitively know that our emotions affect and interact with our physical body.

What our intuition senses is true is now being confirmed by science. The research of Dr. Candace Pert has shown that chemicals called neuropeptides are released whenever you feel an emotion. Different neuropeptides are released in response to different emotions. Each neuropeptide attaches to different receptors in the body, triggering changes in the function of that organ or body part.⁴ And it is a 2-way street with the body sending information back to the brain via this biochemical highway. Your brain and body are constantly communicating and interacting, sharing information about your every thought and emotion. Your emotional state is mirrored in the tissues of your body.



The Wisdom of the Body

Your physical body acts like a sounding board, constantly sending your brain feedback about the way you feel about what is happening in your life. Body sensations such as muscle tension or relaxation, pain, warmth, cold, imbalances in posture and asymmetry can give you information about how you are truly feeling. And your body does not lie. While your mind may be rationalizing and trying to convince you that you are a grown-up and are not really angry at your daughter, your body is sending out a pure signal about just how angry you really are feeling.

The physical body has hundreds of sensations it uses to try and get your brain's attention. But if you ignore the more subtle cues, the body has one sensation that is guaranteed to get your attention: Pain. Pain gets you out of your head and down into your body. It immediately focuses your attention on your body in a dramatically effective way. Physical pain is the one sensation that most people cannot ignore no matter how many painkillers they take or how hard they try to distract themselves.

Learning to read and heed your body's signals can dramatically improve your physical and emotional health. It will also decrease those nagging pains that seem to go on and on. Yet, most of us have no idea what our body is trying to tell us. We have been out of touch with our physical body for so long that we have forgotten how to listen to its wisdom.

Getting in Touch with Your Body

Here are several ways to get back in touch with the silent language of the body:

1. Get physical.

Go for a walk. Take aerobics. Jog. Swim. Dance. Work out on the Nordic Track. While you are exercising, focus on the sensations that arise in your body; Do you sweat? Where? Is a leg muscle tight? Are your shoulders high and tense or relaxed? Do not read or watch TV or listen to the radio or otherwise distract your mind. Just focus on your body and how it feels when you move. Yoga and Tai Chi are wonderful forms of exercise that will train you to focus on your body and its sensations.

2. Take a Breather.

Whenever you are stressed out or in the midst of conflict, take a time-out for 10 seconds; stop whatever you are doing, breath slowly and deeply in and out several times. Then mentally scan your body and notice how each part feels. What emotion are you feeling? What sensations come up in your body? What happens to the sensation when you breathe deeply? After practicing this technique regularly for a few weeks, you will begin to see the pattern of your emotions as they are expressed in your body.⁵

3. Learn to meditate.

Meditation is a wonderful way to slow down and take note of exactly where you are at and how you feel right now in the present moment. Most forms of meditation have focus on the breath as their foundation. The simple act of focusing on your breathing quickly moves you out of your head and down into the body. Meditation can also give you insight into how those sensations in your body relate to the thoughts and emotions whirling around in your head. Sitting, walking, writing and dance meditations are all wonderful ways to get back in tune with your body. Meditation can be easily learned by taking a class or using a guided meditation tape.

4. Get a massage.

Massage (or energy work) gets your muscles and breath moving. It also directs your attention out of your head and down into your body. Massage is a wonderful way to increase your awareness of exactly what sensations your body is experiencing. Massage can also be beneficial in letting go of old stuck emotional patterns.

5. Write about your body and your emotions.

Take 10 minutes and sit in a quiet place. Write about the sensations you feel in your body; is some area tight? Or hot? Are you slouching? Is your foot asleep? Do any emotions and/or memories

“Your heart often knows things before your mind does.”

- Polly Adler

surface? Write about whatever you experience. Keep your pen moving for 10-15 minutes without stopping. Notice if your body sensations change as you write.

Journal writing can be good for your physical health as well as your emotional health. In his book, *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotion*, James Pennebaker, Ph.D. summarizes research that found that people who write about their traumatic experiences and difficult emotions have stronger immune function and fewer doctor visits.⁶

Be gentle with yourself

As you practice the techniques listed above, expect to get stuck at times. When that occurs, be gentle with yourself. It is very human to cycle and deal with the same emotion or issue over and over. This happens most often when the emotion coming up is one that you do not like or approve of. You are bound to experience some emotions that feel unpleasant to you. Try to allow yourself to feel them no matter how distressing they are for you.

It is part of the human condition to feel a wide range of emotions, including so-called "negative" emotions such as rage, grief, fear and jealousy. Emotions are not right or wrong, or good or bad, they just are. Remember to breathe and give yourself enough space to just feel whatever you feel without harsh judgment or condemnation. Use the ideas listed above to express, accept and let go of difficult emotions. If you find that you remain stuck in the same emotional rut after several weeks, consider seeking some form of professional counseling to help you move on.

Your body can truly become an insightful, helpful friend, if you stop and listen to its wisdom. Learning to hear the body's silent language takes time, patience and practice. But the payoff in improved physical and emotional health is immense.

1 Yanchi, Liu; *The Essential Book of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Volume I: Theory*, Columbia University Press, 1988.

2 Kaptchuk, Ted; *The Web That Has No Weaver*, Condon & Weed, 1983.

3 Lankston, Nancy; *Chakra Energy: Evolving Woman*; 1998.

4 Pert, Candace; *The Molecules of Emotion*, Simon & Shuster, 1997.

5 For more detail on this technique, read *The Ten-Second Miracle* by Gay Hendricks, HarperCollins Publishers, 1998.

6 Pennebaker, James; *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotion*, Guilford Press, 1997.

Reflections on Childhood

Magic

Sandra's seen a leprechaun,
Eddie touched a troll,
Laurie danced with witches once,
Charlie found some goblins' gold.
Donald heard a mermaid sing,
Susie spied an elf,
But all the magic I have known
I've had to make myself

by Shel Silverstein, *Where The Sidewalk Ends*

Internet Jokes:

A three year old put his shoes on by himself. His mother noticed the left shoe was on the right foot. She said, "Son, your shoes are on the wrong feet." He looked up at her with a raised brow and said, "Don't kid me, Mom, I know they're my feet,"

On the first day of school, the Kindergarten teacher said, "If anyone has to go to the bathroom, hold up two fingers." A little voice from the back of the room asked, "How will that help?"

Hug O' War

I will not play at tug o' war
I'd rather play at hug o' war
Where everyone hugs
Instead of tugs,
Where everyone giggles
And rolls on the rug,
Where everyone kisses,
And everyone grins,
And everyone cuddles,
And everyone wins.

by Shel Silverstein,
Where the Sidewalk Ends



A big thank you to my sister,
Kathy Minden, for this baby pic!



If you like this newsletter, pass it on to a friend. If you want to be added to my mailing list, call me or send me an e-mail:
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In addition to making house calls, I now offer CranioSacral Therapy, Reiki and Swedish Massage treatments at:

Mother Source, Inc.
7295 W 97 (Windmill Square)
Overland Park, KS

Nutritional counseling and meditation instruction are also available.

Call me at (913) 406-8857 for an appointment.

CranioSacral Therapy is a gentle non-invasive method that detects and corrects imbalance and restrictions within the bones and membranes that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord. The methods used encourage a state of profound relaxation and are particularly effective in treating back, neck and pelvic pain, anxiety, stress, headaches, TMJ and depression as well as suck, sleep and attachment problems in infants and some forms of palsy and hyperactivity. The client can remain clothed during treatment.

Reiki is an ancient Buddhist healing method. Reiki means Universal Life Energy or the Energy of the Divine. This form of energy work balances the energy of the tissues of the body as well as the chakras. The client can remain clothed during treatment.

Swedish Massage is a series of flowing strokes, kneading, stretching, rolling and tapping movements done to the muscles and connective tissues of the body. The movements are based on ancient massage techniques that predate the Christian era.

Books for the Mind and Spirit:

Being Peace by Thich Nhat Hanh, Parallax Press, 1987. A wonderful little book on mindfulness and finding peace.

Present Moment Wonderful Moment by Thich Nhat Hanh, Parallax Press, 1990. More from Thich Nhat Hanh on mindful living.

Learning to Fly by Sam Keen, Broadway Books, NY, 1999. A sixty-one year old man takes up the trapeze and learns about fear, trust and letting go. Filled with laughs and spiritual insights.

Where the Sidewalk Ends by Shel Silverstein, HarperCollins Publishers, NY, 1974. A book of poems that will help you remember what it is like to be a kid.

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