



Newsletter

July 2002

Summer is finally here in full force. The season of the sun officially started on June 21st with the Summer Solstice. but for me summer actually starts at the beginning of June when my kids are sprung from school. And yes, I do mean “sprung” as in release from jail because even kids that love school (as I did) feel jailed and in need of release by May. Even teachers know that summer vacation comes just in time. But summer is finally here and my kids are loving their days of freedom.

I sat at the swimming pool yesterday watching my kids run wild in play and I couldn't help grinning as I remembered my own childhood summers. Do you remember what summer felt like when you were 10 years old? I remember swimming underwater through clear cool water playing mermaids and pirates. I remember the sweet smell of CoppertoneTM on my skin. I remember wading in cold streams building water dams out of twigs and mud and stone. And I remember reading my book in the breeze at the top of my favorite tree. Does life get any better than that?

I believe that God made summer for the kid in each of us. But now that I am a “responsible adult” I sometimes get caught up in my chores and obligations and forget to let my kid out to play. This summer, however, I am trying to turn over a new leaf and “forget” every once in a while that I am an adult. And you know what? Swimming underwater stills feels wonderfully sensuous. And suntan lotion still smells delicious. And books read outside under a tree are almost as good as books read in a tree. And building sand castles on the beach with my 3 year old is even more fun than making mud and twig dams. No, life does NOT get any better than this.

I hope that you find the time to let your own kid out to play before the season of the sun is over. Maybe we can play together - I will look for you at the pool. I will be the one playing mermaids and pirates <grin>.

Balance Point, Inc. is dedicated to healing the World, one little ripple at a time.

Nancy offers CranioSacral Therapy & Reiki treatments in Naperville, IL
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Gardening Without Gloves

I lost my smile for awhile this morning. I was feeling sad and lonely, so I went outside and dug in the dirt. I planted shrub roses and searched for a little peace. By the time I was finished I felt better but my hands were shredded. I should have worn gloves but I hate wearing gloves when I dig in the dirt.

There is something very primal about sinking my hands down into the ground and immersing myself in Mother Earth. Gardening demands naked, vulnerable hands. What that means is my hands get cut and scraped up. But I also have the amazing experience of sinking wrist deep into cool moist earth. I get to play in powdery topsoil and slick clay like a child in a sandbox. I enjoy the feel of wriggling earthworms and hairy root balls between my fingers.

Gardening is a tactile and sensual pleasure without gloves. And it is also dangerous. Digging around in the dirt with naked hands is very vulnerable and probably a little crazy. After a morning of "naked" gardening my hands look like I went to war and lost. A sensible person would wear gloves. I used to be a sensible person. I used to get paid a lot of money to be a very logical and sensible computer systems manager. Then one day I realized that there was also a totally illogical and emotional side to life that I would never get to experience if I were sensible and logical all the time. Now I touch people for a living. And I garden without gloves.

Life is a lot like gardening. I can put on a glove and cover up my soft vulnerable flesh. I can present an impervious sensible exterior to the world and act like I am tough and invulnerable. Or I can leave myself exposed and show my heart and my soft emotional core to the world. The second option is rife with danger. Someone could take advantage of me, of my softness. They could use me or hurt me badly. That is a very scary possibility. But I cannot stomach the alternative. The thought of living hidden behind a tough shell is not appealing to me.

I treat a lot of babies and small children in my work. Young kids meet the world with soft eyes and open hearts. They do not hold back and wait to see if it is completely safe to smile or to reach out and love someone. They remind me what it looks like to be utterly alive and open to everything life offers. I wonder what the world could be like if adults were able to be that open.

Humans are meant to be soft and caring and vulnerable. Those are some of our best qualities. We are meant to be open and soft enough to enjoy intimacy with our family, with our friends and neighbors, with the natural world. And the best moments of my life are when I risk it all and share my true self.

Opening up to life and all of its joys can be very scary. Opening to joy means I must also walk through the heart of sorrow and grief. This morning when I went outside to garden I felt like I carried the sorrows of the world in my heart. Experiencing deep intimacy in my work and home life comes at a price. Sometimes the sorrow is very, very deep. But I have come to believe that sorrow is the flip side of joy; I cannot have one without the other.

When I am filled with sorrow over life's many tragedies, I do silly insensible things like gardening without gloves and reaching out to strangers with a helping hand. I breathe deeply into my sorrow again and again until I can soften my heart and smile again. I may have to breathe into the midst of my pain over and over and over. But eventually, my sorrow passes. And I find my smile.

Breath After Breath

Breathing in, it all begins. The act of breath marked your first moment out in the world. And each moment of life since has ebbed and flowed with the breath. Life becomes delineated and defined by the breath.

Natural breath is an elegant dance of air and form. The belly rounds, the low back gently arches and the chin rises with every in-breath. And the dance reverses on the out-breath; the chin falls, the belly empties and the curve of the back flattens out. Breath ripples in and out of a healthy human body like waves dancing up and down a beach. But today most people have stifled their dance almost out of existence. The stresses of modern life dampen and block the dancing wave of breath. It is time to reclaim the dance.

Breath and Body

The dance of life and breath begins in the chest. Every cell of your body demands the substance of breath - that invisible elemental pair known as O₂ or oxygen. And the chest is where oxygen is drawn into the body.

Your diaphragm performs the work of breathing. Sitting at the base of the ribs, the diaphragm contracts and expands the chest volume, creating a negative pressure that pulls oxygen into your lungs. Inside the lungs, thousands of tiny paper-thin sacs dangle from the branches of your bronchial tree. This is where air meets blood. With each and every breath a quick exchange occurs; oxygen crosses over into the blood and carbon dioxide waste is expelled. A simple act - just a breath - and yet so essential to life.

Once in the blood, oxygen is carried to each cell of the body via hemoglobin. And at the boundary of each cell, the same exchange occurs; oxygen is pulled into the cell and carbon dioxide is expelled. The dance continues at the cellular level.

A part of each cell known as the mitochondria transforms simple oxygen into energy to do the work of the cell. Called the powerhouse of the cell, the mitochondria bear an amazing resemblance to an ancient single-celled creature that scientists believe once inhabited the primordial slime back when life itself was new to this planet.

The ability to pull oxygen in and create usable energy was key to the development of human life. Without mitochondria, without oxygen, without the simple act of breath, the cell and ultimately the human body cannot function and will soon die.

There are many participants in the physical dance of breath; the lungs, the diaphragm, the blood, the mitochondria. Many dancers, many places where something can go wrong. And yet for billions of human beings, this amazing dance is done flawlessly more than 20,000 times each day.

Breath and Mind

Practitioners of meditation discover that focus on the physical dance of breath ultimately leads to the space where physical form and thought intermingle, the human mind. But where exactly is your mind? Where do thoughts live and take form? Many people believe that the mind resides in the brain. The knowledge you hold of the world as well as your memories and your

Breath and Emotion

Life is filled with emotion from beginning to end. And emotion can be transmuted and transformed by breath. The only difference between fear and excitement is the act of breath. But when emotions arise that are unpleasant such as anger, grief or jealousy, our first instinct is to close down and stop the flow of breath. We freeze in an effort to avoid the visceral pain that accompanies difficult emotions. Yet, closing down only prolongs the pain.

Difficult emotions become lodged in the tissues of the body, eventually turning emotional pain into physical illness.

But there is another way to handle emotions: to stay open and actually use the breath to move through difficult emotions. The simple act of breathing deeply and slowly over and over can transform agitation into calm.

Breathing deeply is a simple act that can be terrifying in the face of deep emotion. Yet, the breath can open the body to anger or sorrow and allow the pain to pass through like a rainstorm over the mountains. One breath at a time, peace can be found again.

emotions appear to be tied to the nerve cells within the brain.

And yet, the human mind is a complex beast. So complex that grasping it has eluded both spiritual seekers and gifted scientists after lifetimes of devoted study. And more and more empirical evidence points to the intelligence of mind spread throughout the tissues of the body. Talk of "muscle memory" and emotions stored within connective tissue have become commonplace. The search for the elusive human mind broadens and continues.

Wherever your mind is ultimately found, one thing is known: the mind is intertwined with the dance of breath. The simple act of breathing lies at the heart of your life experience. Learning and storing facts about the world depends on a constant flow of oxygen to your cells. Your imagination, your emotional responses to life and your memories - virtually all of what you know of as your mind is connected to the simple act of breath. Just a brief time without breath and pieces of your experience, your creativity and your self will be lost.

Breath and Spirit

Your next breath places you deep within the circle of all life. Green plants are the foundation of your every breath. Within the cells of plants, God quietly moves and a mysterious alchemy known as photosynthesis occurs. Through photosynthesis, plants somehow transform sunlight and simple chemicals into complex, living plant tissue. And the by-product of this green magic is the oxygen your body requires. Without seaweed and algae, without trees and grasses blanketing Mother Earth, you could not survive. And plants in turn require the carbon dioxide that you exhale with every out-breath. You rely on plants and they on you. The circle is complete.

Beyond the physical realm, the dance grows even more mystical. More than just a physical act, breath is where the ethereal and intangible essence of life is believed to touch tangible form. Prana, Pneuma, Chi, Qi - by many names, the dance of breath has been the focus of spiritual worship and study for thousands of years. Ancient cultures understood the wonder of breath. Philosophers and spiritual mystics have written volumes about the power and the magic of breath. Each breath is the flow of pure spirit into and through the physical body. It is no mistake that the word for spirit and the word for breath are one and the same in many languages.

With every breath in, God fills and blesses you with another moment of life. A simple breath is your direct link to the divine, to the eternal. Is it any wonder that the dance of breath is the foundation of meditation, of yoga, of many ancient forms of prayer?

Breathing in, breathing out. It is such a simple dance. Yet, so deep, so core. This elegant dance of air and human form is at the root of all human life. Your breath is the cyclical tide that defines your time here. And slowly, persistently with each breath, your body, mind and spirit become interwoven into a tapestry in the form of a complete life. May you experience many more magical breaths in this lifetime.

Belly Breathing

Belly breathing is the foundation of meditation as well as yoga. It is the way newborn babies naturally breathe. But somewhere on the path to adulthood, most of us "forget" how to breathe properly.

What is the secret to belly breath? Relax the abdomen! Forget what you learned in charm school. With every in-breath, let your relaxed abdomen swell as though filling with air. Then allow the abdomen to empty on the out-breath. The chest stays still as you breathe from your belly. This will probably feel upside down and weird at first. But keep trying. Note: if you have asthma or emphysema, go slow and practice for brief periods. Stop at the first sign of wheezing. Relax and try again later.

That's all there is to it. Breathe into your abdomen. Do not force your breath, just relax and let your abdomen slowly fill and empty, fill and empty. Practice belly breathing lying down first then try it sitting up straight. And notice what your breath feels like entering and leaving your body. Is it symmetrical? Forced or easy? Deep or shallow? Do you have places in your chest where the breath can not go? Is your throat open or tight? Are your ribs relaxed? Just notice. Do not judge yourself, just notice.