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# Meditation and Stress Management

In my articles, I relate various topics to the practice of meditation. Usually we explore how meditation can support a particular activity, skill, trait, quality, etc. Often the meditation connection is not one that people would ordinarily consider; for example, meditation and family life or meditation and selling. However, in this article the connection is clear and obvious since meditation itself is a stress management technique. For this reason, I took a little time to develop a unique perspective on the relationship between the inner practice of meditation and our everyday life (or outer practice).

So first let's define a meditative state, as it relates to stress management. A meditative state is a state of calm focus, accompanied by a feeling of being in the moment or in the flow of life. And we will define stress as a state of tension or distraction accompanied by a feeling of resisting what is occurring at the moment.

In meditation you begin by sitting for 20 minutes or a time frame that results in a calm, focused feeling. I mentioned three qualities of a meditative state as being calmness, focus and being in the flow of life (nonresistance). In your first moments of sitting, you will probably not feel calm and focused. However, as soon as you take your seat, you can begin practicing the third quality, nonresistance, to move toward that calm, focused state. So you start by not resisting anything that is occurring. For example, even though meditation involves sitting in a posture with a straight spine, you might feel like slouching or slumping. Don't resist. Let your body do what it wants. The only thing you need to do to practice the true spirit of meditation is to calmly focus your attention on the movements of your body without resisting. By doing this, you are already establishing your meditative state (calm, focused, nonresistant). Even though your body is in a somewhat tense and unstable state,

this non-resisting practice and perspective will serve you well when you are in stressful situations of your day. For example, when a tense situation occurs in your everyday life, instead of adding to the problem with more stress and resistance, you let yourself feel the moment and observe exactly what is occurring for you.



Now let's return to your sitting posture to build on our basic premise. So your body is slouching and you simply observe the movements of your body and the tensions involved in your slouching position. By staying calm and focused, your body begins to adjust itself to match your calm and focused perspective. And in the light of your calm focus, your unconscious tensions become conscious. Then you notice that there is a certain tension in your body that is most dominant. As you place and maintain your attention on this area, you observe that the tension subsides and your body becomes more relaxed and stable. Then

you move your attention to your next dominant tension, and so on, until you reach a completely resolved physical state.

Now let's go back to that stressful situation in your day. In the same way that you maintained your attention on the tensions of your body in inner practice, you keep your calm, focused attention on the item in your outer practice that is making the situation tense. By calmly keeping your attention on what is occurring, the situation loses its power over you. You are no longer in a distressed and distracted state. You are no longer resisting and compounding the stress. With calm clarity, you see the situation for exactly what it is. Perhaps you smile inwardly, realizing how such situations would have previously resulted in a stressful state, and how much easier it is to simply practice your calm, focused, nonresistant perspective to resolve any situation in life.

So instead of imploding and creating tension in your chest, stomach, throat, shoulders, etc., you go with the flow of the situation and the response that comes most naturally for you. In this way, you are resolving stress as it occurs, rather than internalizing it. When we do internalize stress, it often compounds and creates a self-wakening pattern in our life. The pattern then develops further when we encounter a similar situation; and the memory of the original event creates a similar stress reaction. And then we begin to avoid situations that in any way resemble the original. Or we approach similar situations with an offensive or defensive mindset. When such patterns gain control over our lives, we begin living a negative life program, and lose our sense of true personal satisfaction, empowerment and enjoyment of life. As we now know, the solution is not to let the stress take hold in the first place by practice your non-resisting meditative perspective. ▲

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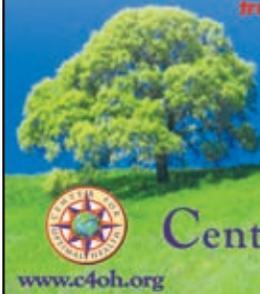
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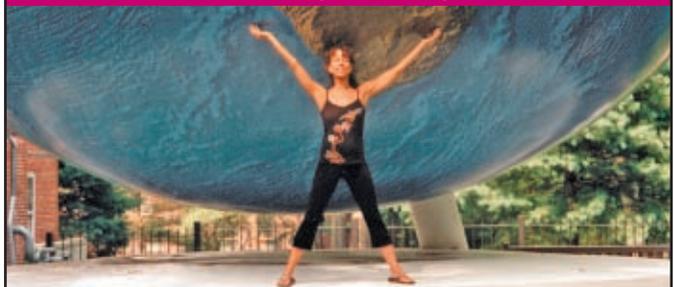
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# Stress Relief for All: A Summit on Yoga and Service

**A**S A SOCIAL WORKER AND A YOGA INSTRUCTOR, I WAS BOTH INTERESTED AND EXCITED TO HEAR ABOUT A SUMMIT THAT RECENTLY TOOK PLACE AT THE OMEGA INSTITUTE IN NEW YORK.

Mark Lilly (Street Yoga) and Traci Childless (Omega Institute) organized the service-oriented summit to bring together like-minded yogis interested in supporting and empowering individuals and organizations to best serve their communities through yoga and mindfulness.

My friend had educated me about the wide variety of social service and community organizations using yoga as their foundation to heal, inspire, and create peace within the lives of individuals and communities that may experience chronic disempowerment, disease, and/or emotional struggles. As I reflected on this information, I was overwhelmed at the variety of creative service work inspired by yogis; further, it also became obvious to me that yogic philosophy has an important message to those who desire to reach out into their communities and assist others.

As someone who has been working with disempowered individuals and communities in the social service arena for 7 years, I am aware that those in charge of operating agencies that reach out to the most poor, overwhelmed, and stressed community members are themselves often overwhelmed, overburdened, and stressed. Many agencies are still struggling to implement policies and procedures that support and take care of their employees, who often run the risk of emotional "burnout" in response to high caseloads and exposure to the violence and extreme trauma of the individuals and communities that they treat/serve. Further, the social service industry is wrought with the same problems that many of the nation's for profit corporations experience - greed, poor intentions, attachment to economic gain at the expense of quality service, to name a few. In times when the economy is challenged, integrity is often lost.

If we practice yoga, we probably understand the positive effects of a yoga practice on our emotional and physical health and can envision how the physical practice of yoga may be valuable for employees and employers in work environments. The value of yogic philosophy in such environments may be subtler, yet just as integral, and has a lot to say about integrity. Karma yoga asks us to explore our egos and to ask questions about our intentions as we serve others - are these intentions to truly serve or are they rooted in a desire to bolster our image within the community?

Can we allow ourselves to change our mission statement and our goals if we should find that they no longer serve in the best manner possible, or do we cling to our ideas out of a sense of fear? Are we so attached to outcomes and measures that prove our success that we forget about the beauty of connecting with the individual faces and stories that comprise the community? These are all questions that Karma yoga may ask us as we serve others.

For those interested in exploring volunteer or service work, the following list of yoga inspired individuals and organizations may be a good place to start. This list is by no means exhaustive, just a sampling of organizations to give you an idea of what is out there. If you feel compelled, you can do more research, and perhaps find a cause that you would like to support someday!

- *Sprout Yoga*: serves people overcoming eating disorders and surviving posttraumatic stress disorder; based in and around Media, PA.
- *Street Yoga*: teaches yoga to homeless youth; based in Seattle and Canada.
- *The Niroga Institute*: teaches yoga to abused, neglected and incarcerated youth.
- *Little Flower Yoga*: provides sliding scale fee school based yoga classes; based in New York.
- *Art of Yoga*: yoga, meditation, and creative arts for teen girls in detention centers; based in San Francisco and San Matteo.
- *International Association of Yoga Therapists*: serving yoga teachers who use yoga in mind body therapies.
- *The Linneage Project*: serves youth in detention centers in NYC.
- *Varada Yoga*: serves at risk youth in Ottawa, Canada.
- *Yoga Bear*: matches cancer survivors with yoga studios throughout the U.S.
- *Bent on Learning*: provides yoga to inner city schools in NYC.
- *Off the Mat, Into the World*: serves yoga teachers who want to use yoga as a means of bringing activism and awareness to their students.
- *YogaHOPE*: serves women in transition and recovery in residential treatment facilities; does teacher trainings throughout North America. ▲



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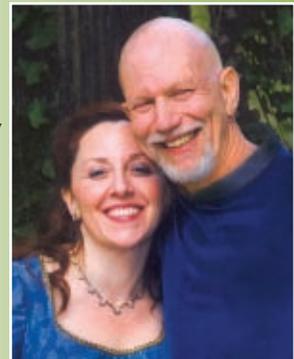
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# Nature: The Natural Stress Reliever

**W**ithin the word natural is nature. It is our re-source of energy, vitality and relaxation. Nature is not something outside of ourselves, it is us, and as humans, it is our birthright. We define Nature as all form, that which we live in and on, and that which houses our Self, namely our bodies. It is critical that we return to this awareness and embrace life sustained by the loving and healing energy of Mother Nature.

The times we live in now present us with much change, chaos, and crisis. Crisis in Chinese means both danger and opportunity. Many of our clients say they are “stressed out”, that their lives are unraveling, that the challenges of these times are overwhelming. Research demonstrates that stress directly affects the body. Hans Selye, a pioneer in stress research, defines stress as “the rate of wear and tear within the body”. Many are experiencing this “wear and tear” as illness, a feeling of deterioration and dismantlement, within their own bodies and around them on the Earth. Our bodies are made of the Earth, of natural materials, and most people are able to recognize the connection between humans and the world we live in. People are waking up to the fact that the Earth is mirroring us, that Nature is also experiencing the impact of natural stressors. We are in this together. The good news is Nature and our own bodies have an amazing resiliency. Moreover, when we consciously choose to work together as equal partners, the power for healing and transformation is enormous.

As conscious beings we can choose to stay in fear or scarcity and remain prisoners, or we can choose freedom. Our culture supports imprisonment and a disconnection from our authentic nature. The media with its messages of doom and violence, the fast food industry, our addiction to caffeine and sugar (like triple espressos and Red Bulls that even our young people are consuming), the dieting industry, the compulsive use of cell phones, all keep us running in fear as fast as we can. We remain unhappy with our body size, the size of our home, the size of our bank accounts, and we search relentlessly for a product/answer that will finally make us happy. There are a plethora of artificial options available today to keep humans numb, asleep to their own potential, and on edge (stressed out). Like in a nightmare, these self-imposed prisoners remain unconscious, as they chase after something elusive and outside of themselves to find peace.

Freedom and a stress free existence remain an option. Waking up to who and what we are, slowing down enough to be in the present moment, thawing out from our deep and numbing freeze is possible. Re-partnering with Nature is essential. Though sent to the underworld by humans, Nature remains available to us if we but remember and recall her back into our lives. We have a wonderful opportunity in these changing times to shift our consciousness. It begins with recognizing our Essence, and how Nature is us. We need to stop cutting ourselves off from our bodies, from the ground we walk upon, from the food we eat, from the air we breathe, from the relationships that we have with this most abundant life-giving and sustaining Earth.

The Greek Philosopher Heraclitus talked about the four elements being fire, air, earth and water. For Carl Jung these symbols



were essential parts of us. He said that air represented the intellect, water our feelings, earth our sensations, and fire our intuition. He said to be complete human beings we were to develop (and we would say-live) all of these elements. Many people embrace Nature only through their minds, by naming or labeling what they see or by reading about it. Others try to control Nature, interacting with it in a tame and organized framework (air conditioned homes, manicured lawns for instance). But

Nature needs and wants to be deeply felt and experienced. The wildness of Nature and our natural self is what is in order. This does not mean that we all have to go on survival training in remote corners of the world. It does mean that we spend time experiencing the trees, the plants, and animals (and even our bodies), that are in our lives already. We must deeply interact with, respect and ingest the gifts of Nature that abound right here and now.

When we were planning our honeymoon, we chose to go to Peru for shamanic training instead of Italy. We camped in the jungle and also climbed 16,000 feet into the mountains to learn from the Quechuan shaman of this beautiful land. At times staying in sparse accommodations (as opposed to the comfort of five star hotels) was a challenge. On one freezing mountain night, as we left our tent to sojourn to the toilet (and that is a generous word for the bucket we had!) we longed for the great food and comfort of Florence. However, the honeymoon gift of this trip was transformational on a cellular level. We got to experience firsthand how the native healers and shaman experience Nature in a natural way. They never disconnected from Pachamana (their word for Mother Earth), so the mountains, lagoons, rivers and jungles, and all that is contained within them, are alive like ancient friends. We felt a richness in these relationships linking their bodies/minds/spirits to All That Is. The sun, moon, stars, and all other parts of Nature are seen as beloved beings, as vibrant and real as their family, and this was reflected in their daily lives as well as in their rituals and ceremonies.

People might say that there is not enough time to take a walk, or to check in with their own body to see what it needs, or to eat something natural, or to smell a flower and breathe in its beauty. There are too many tasks to be done. Yet, that walk outside or laying on the Earth or whatever real and dynamic connection we make between ourselves and Nature, allows us to be held and healed. Lao-Tzu, the phenomenal Chinese sage, said it very well: “Nature does not hurry yet everything is accomplished”. Commit to at least one act per day of consciously interacting with Nature, see and know deeply that you are Nature. You will feel your life improve and you will be revitalized and more alive. ▲

# Do Less – Achieve More

*“They escape the infirmities of age and remain healthy because essence and spirit are guarded within. At their zenith, their sinews harmonize with their vessels, marrow hardens their bones, and ch’i improves their circulation.”*

– Po Chi, the Supreme Teacher.

Have you ever seen that funny dog on the Celebrex commercial, standing on its hind legs and waving its front paws in the air? That’s T’ai Chi. What most people do not know is this ancient art has its origins dating back to the Yellow Emperor of China. Cloaked in mystery, it is said that the Yellow Emperor imitated various animal movements in exercises for maintaining health.

T’ai Chi is a wonderful mind-body exercise of renewal for spirit and energy. If you enjoy Yoga or Pilates, T’ai Chi will enhance and improve your practice promoting mental well-being and physical strength. Vitality, relaxation, tranquility, enhanced personal creativity and sense of purpose are just the beginning of the gifts this ancient art has to offer.

T’ai Chi, pronounced “tie-chee”, is a fabulous activity for people of all ages and any level of fitness. Many couples enjoy taking classes together. With this exercise we learn to take laziness to an art form. No kidding! We embrace the Taoist philosophy of “Do Less – Achieve More.” And who wouldn’t want to do that?

Legend says that the Immortal Taoist Chang San-feng had a dream. In his dream, Chang was wandering the mountains and observed a battle between a crane and a snake. The great bird came down from the heavens and the snake rose out of the earth. Impressed by the beauty and grace of the animal’s interactions, their defensive moves and counter-attacks, he created T’ai Chi.

Several of the T’ai Chi postures mimic animal movements found in nature. Many of their names reflect this, such as, White Crane Spreads Wings, The Snake Creeps Down, Embrace Tiger Return to Mountain and Golden Cock Stands on One Leg.

T’ai Chi is a system of slow moving postures that flow together creating a Form or choreography that promotes health and wellness. The focus of its study is using the body as an integrated structure, creating fluid movement that honors our physiology. By relaxing and aligning our skeletal structure, we remove stress from the body, especially

the joints, allowing outside forces and gravity to freely pass through. We desire to be calm and peaceful in our everyday movements. The point of studying T’ai Chi is not to learn the choreography or dance steps, although that will happen. If you have ever watched Fred Astaire or Gregory Hines dance, their movements marry T’ai Chi principles. Anyone can learn dance steps. The point is to learn how to dance with the grace and elegance of Astaire and Hines.

The most common form is Master Cheng Man-ch’ing’s Short Yang Form, which can be practiced in less than ten minutes a day, perfect for our busy modern lifestyles. Designed to be impossible to master, the Form offers a lifelong journey. It is like peeling back the layers of an onion, and with each layer the experience becomes richer and more enjoyable.

We practice T’ai Chi between heaven and earth. Cheng Man-ch’ing has distilled his decades of teaching into twelve simple words: Swallow the heavens ch’i; tap the earth’s strengths; prolong life through softness. In one of my classes a student is 100 years old. God bless him.

T’ai Chi is a soft and yielding art. Though counterintuitive to western thought, many of its Taoist philosophies marry nature. For example, “the soft overcomes the hard”, as is evident in water and rock. Just take a look at the Grand Canyon. Several others are: The strong will end up losing to the weak. The high gives to the low. The full gives to the empty. Water will always seek the lowest level. The Tao, which literally means “The Way”, worship water. It is not a belief system or a religion. It is a way of experiencing a harmonious life. If you want to be filled, first you must empty. Lao Tzu in the famous “Tao Te Ching” says, “If you want to take, you must first give.” Other sayings include: If you want love, be sure to give your love. These are universal principles that honor all of us.

If you are open to something new that dates back some 4,000 plus years, and you are ready for a potentially life changing experience, then I strongly urge you to check out a T’ai Chi class near you. Plus, it is fun! You’ll know in one or two classes that this is an activity that lifts your Spirit. ▲

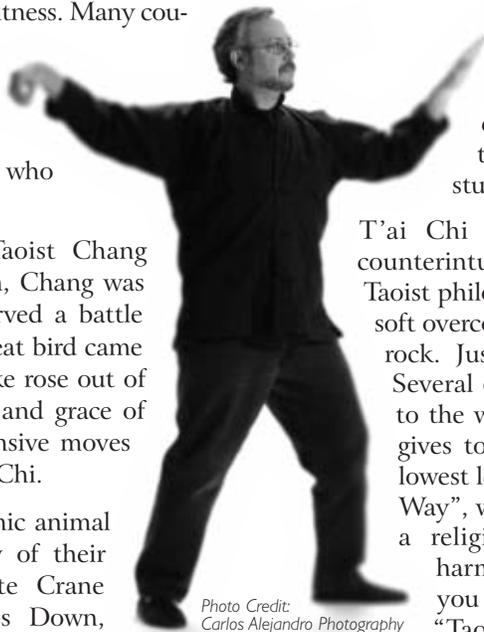


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Carol Bowman, MS, past life regression therapist for fifteen years, is the internationally-known lecturer and author of *Children's Past Lives* and *Return From Heaven*.

Carol has been featured on national TV and radio including *Oprah*, *Good Morning America*, *The Art Bell Show*, *Unsolved Mysteries*, *ABC Primetime* and as reincarnation expert on A&E and The Discovery Channel.

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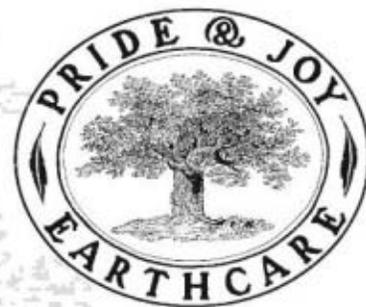
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# Dreams

# RELIEVE STRESS



**THOSE WHO HAVE STUDIED DREAMS TELL US THAT DREAMS PLAY A VERY IMPORTANT ROLE IN RELIEVING STRESS.**

Dream labs experimented by putting terminals on the heads of individuals who would sleep in the lab. The terminals connected to a dial with a needle. The move of the needle indicated that the person was dreaming. The observers would then awaken the sleeper and disconnect the dream. This practice repeatedly removed dreams from the sleepers' experiences. After a few days, the observers witnessed psychological abnormalities in those not permitted to dream.

We also know we relieve ourselves of anxieties and fears in the Dreamtime. Dreams will often present scenes that give us the experience of current anxieties. Clearing them in the Dreamtime helps free us of our anxieties during the waking state.

Before dreams became the subject of psychology, other cultures connected them to their true source, the world of Spirit. This column has asserted that dreams are I AM conversations; that is, they supply important information and guidance from the Higher Self, the part of us that we truly are. Historically, dreams brought healing as the asclepieions found in the ancient Greek temples of Asclepius. Ancient Greek

mythology honored Asclepius as the god of medicine and healing. Greeks also petitioned Him for guidance and divine inspiration. The rod of Asclepius, a snake-entwined staff, remains a symbol of medicine today, although sometimes a staff with two snakes, the caduceus, is mistakenly used.

In addition, some Native Americans used vision quests as a rite of passage, fasting and praying until they received the anticipated guiding dream. Upon their return, they then shared the dream with the rest of the tribe.

Though it would appear that stress comes from outside sources, one might consider the opposite concept - stress comes from within. It arises from a lost sense of balance and disconnect with one's Inner Self. As we have the courage to take responsibility for our own anxieties, we then avail ourselves of the power to balance them.

If we feel an imbalance, the Dreamtime will help us. It can give us a picture of the reason why we feel imbalanced as well as giving us a scene where we can experience what it feels like to re-balance. Consider the following dream. I rode my bicycle to my place of business. I recognized the entrance immediately. I found a comfortable place for my bike and left spaces for my co-workers. I taught new methods to my co-workers. I was very good and animated. Because riding a bicycle requires balance, the dreamer is feeling the Energy of balance. This is most important. It is one thing to know that we have an imbalance; it is more important to experience how balance feels. That feeling serves to rebalance the dreamer. Look at the numerous

benefits of the newfound balance. The dreamer finds his way immediately to his place of business. He finds a comfortable place to park and offers the same convenience to his co-workers. Finally, the dreamer can now present new methods to his co-workers. He is animated and successful because balance leaves him free of other cares that would inhibit his Energy. The dreamer awakens in the balanced state. He now understands the grace that he has received, intends to feel the balance, and anticipates a very successful and happy day.

Here, the Dreamtime offers another reason for stress. I drove on a highway. An old woman decided to back up, but she could not. Her grandchildren came and comforted her and gave her Love. Driving along a highway suggests our daily movement through our experiences of life. The old woman feels uncomfortable moving forward. She tries to go back, but she cannot undo the progress that she has just integrated. This is a very common source of anxiety, feeling uncomfortable with the personal growth that we have just experienced. We have not yet adjusted to the new person that we have come to be. However, we have the means within us to balance. The woman's grandchildren represent all the gifts that she has birthed on the Earth. Those gifts will see her through the anxiety that she feels from her forward movement into newfound heights. The dream shows why the dreamer feels anxious, and the dream also shows that the dreamer has all the gifts required to move forward in a balanced manner.

The remedy is obvious. When feeling stressed, take two dreams and call the Higher Self in the morning. ▲



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# Coach Thyself: Healthcare Over-Stress



**R**EDUCE STRESS, WE ARE TOLD. It's quite bad for you—the source of many ills. OK... But books, doctors, researchers, and various healthcare pundits are also telling us all sorts of other things. Drink at least 64 ounces of water every day. Non-caffeinated teas count. No, actually, they don't count. Eat fish for their omega 3's. Stay far far away from the mercury in today's fish. Get rid of your amalgams. No don't—there's no evidence for that. If your blood pressure or cholesterol numbers are higher than such-and-such, you must take this drug. No, don't take the drug because its side effects will soon require that you take other drugs and your natural balance will be out the window. And on and on.

All this would be funny, except for one thing. It's ultimately a matter of life and death. And for all of us, in different ways at different times in our lives—it can become a source of moderate to severe stress. But wait a minute. If stress itself is so bad, then maybe it's one of the causes of the situation we're in. And now all the differing healthcare prescriptions are stressing us more? Isn't this just a nasty little feedback loop! And maybe also a fast lane to the infirmary.

Let's call this condition, mild or severe as it may be, "healthcare over-stress." Unfortunately, it's rare to hear it talked about. Someone who does talk about it, Marc David, writes in the area of food and diet. His two

books, *Nourishing Wisdom*, and *The Slow Down Diet*, are simply the wisest I have read on the subject. Eating fast, he points out, not really tasting or enjoying it, and in particular stressing about what you are eating and how healthy (or not) it is—these really cause more trouble than what or how much you eat. Stress clobbers your digestion, shortens your breath, and gums up your metabolism. It is bad.

So how do you avoid health-care over-stress? As a coach, I work with people to reframe the medical advice muddle completely. To coach yourself in the same direction, here are some basic tips.

General health prescriptions are based on statistical averages. No one fits all of them. Every health related step you take also has both good and not so good effects. Your mind-body system is seriously complex, and, while the good of one particular step might way outweigh the bad for you, that's not necessarily true for your neighbor. Apart from acute conditions, every piece of wellness advice should come with an anxiety warning. Something like: "This rule singles out one of many, many factors that affect you. Your particular health depends not on rigid adherence to it, but instead on finding the best compromises among many such rules. Remember this... experiment... and stay cool!"

Experts, whose studies focus in on one or two areas, cannot tell you what's overall best for you. They have tunnel vision. If they were car designers, they would be fixated, for example, on reducing air resistance. What they created would look like a bullet, but could only be driven by midgets. Take note of general healthcare advice, but hold on to this calming truth: how much it

applies to your particular situation remains to be seen.

What's needed, you see, is an expert in you. And guess what? Built in to your intestinal lining is so much nerve tissue that it is now acknowledged as "the second brain" (see Michael Gershon's book so titled). The job of all of this gut level gray matter is to orchestrate what you eat, how it gets digested, and how these power your metabolism and immune system. Compromising among hundreds of different rules is its "meat and potatoes," so to speak. Under its care, your body is amazingly self-healing. You CAN relax and tune more into what it wants. That's a major difference between people who follow all kinds of health rules and still die young, and those who break most of them and live happily on and on.

Again, apart from acute conditions, practitioners who see you only as a set of numbers, and simply try to force those numbers towards the "normal" values are of limited value. Medicine has a history of doing strange things that the human body still finds a way around. On the other hand, practitioners who engage "with heart," and care enough to tune in to your uniqueness, are worth their weight in gold. These folks can help you experiment with and listen to your particular "second brain." In many cases, I think they connect to it intuitively.

Bottom line here is—in the grand array of ever-shifting compromises that determines your health, stressing overly about how well you follow this or that rule or advisory may more than undo any good there is in following it. Feel what your relaxed body wants. Trusting your "gut instinct," it turns out, has a real scientific basis. ▲

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# THE BASKET (RUT) OF EMOTION: Anxiety, Anger, Depression and OCD

**B**ESIDES OUR OPPOSABLE THUMBS AND USE OF LANGUAGE, the relationship between our emotions (feelings), thoughts (cognition), imagination and actions contributes to our uniqueness as an animal on this planet, as well as our complexity as spiritual-material beings.

The "mind" can be thought of as a set of functions, like the functions of a computer. The user of the mind is consciousness (spirit), and the purpose of the mind, at the very minimum, is to enable us to interpret, utilize and survive the environment so that we can procreate.

However, like a computer getting stuck in a loop, the mind can also get stuck in a rut. And the solution is not to "blame" the computer but to learn to turn it off, re-boot it, and improve the software and hardware.

The study of thoughts, feelings, behavior and mental processes is called psychology. However, in addition to these functions there is spirit, which is different, remains controversial and is neglected by many schools of psychology. Recently, there have been advances in our understanding of these interactions, with new techniques such as journaling, meditation and coaching to move us out of our ruts. Before discussing getting out of our ruts, we need to explore in greater detail how they get created.

The main issue in our stuck-ness is losing the balance between the details and the big picture, similar to the "forest for the trees". For example, people who are anxious find things to worry about and dwell upon—they can always fill the Anxiety Basket. However, what is more important is the Anxiety itself—the question of why they have weaved the Anxiety Basket in the first place, and how they maintain it. Similarly, the Depression Basket always finds negative thoughts to fill itself. With Anger, it is easy to find something large or small to piss us off. With Obsession, there are always tasks or issues to ruminate about. These Baskets or ruts develop for several reasons--a combination of heredity and environment ("nature and nurture"). Nature gives us our genes and brain chemistry. Nurture involves how we've fed our brains, how our families operated, our positive and negative experiences, and what we've learned, intentionally and un-intentionally over the course of our lives. Some of these experiences are available to our consciousness; others are less available, what we call sub-conscious or un-conscious. These can either create a rut or prevent one.

## JOHARI'S WINDOW

One way of understanding the parts of our awareness is through a model called Johari's Window (see diagram). In this model, awareness is divided into four areas based on what is Known or Not Known. The region of awareness that is Known to ourselves and others is called the Public self. The region that is Known to us and Not Known to others is called the Private self.

The other two regions, the areas of which we are not aware, are the more interesting and subjects of psychology and yoga. The first is the region of awareness that is Not Known to us but is Known to others. That is called the Blind Self. A humorous example may be a "Kick Me" sign on our backs

that friends laugh about. A subtler example would be a person that scares others with their angry facial expressions and tone of voice, but truly does Not Know that they are angry. Many people look and act depressed but deny feeling it.

The last region, the Dark Self, is the part of ourselves that is Not Known to ourselves or others. Like the Dark Force, it often drives us in directions that we are, by definition, not aware, but still cannot resist. Examples include self-sabotage, when we consciously set a goal and yet another stronger part of ourselves stops us. Anxiety-producing and obsessive thoughts come from this

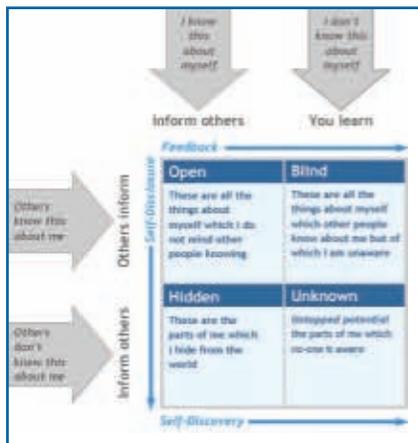
region as well. We are aware of the thought, experience the emotion, but can't really stop it at the source.

Self-delusion and self-deception often come from these Unknown areas of our being, as do the rationalizations and justifications that occur after we have feelings, thoughts, images or behaviors that we know are not right.

The goal of psychotherapy, yoga and philosophy is to increase the region that is Known To Self and decrease the region that is Not Known; to seek the truth about ourselves; decreasing the Blind and Dark selves. Whether one wants to also increase the region Known To Others is a personal decision—some people prefer more privacy, while others believe that to be fully authentic in our lives, we should always be who we are and not need to hide.

## UNDERSTANDING THE DARK SELF

Since this Dark Self is often a large source of our persistent dysfunctional feelings and thoughts, we must understand this region. Freud is the modern genius who identified this region of our minds called the Unconscious. He developed





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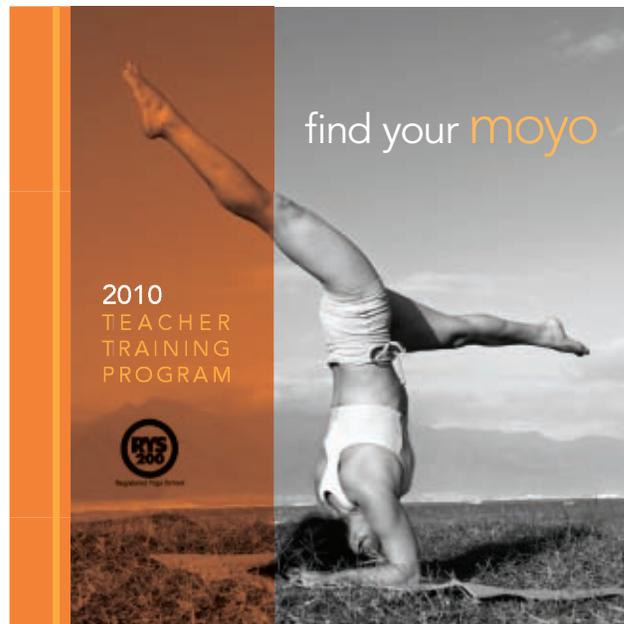
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# Going Green in Your Own Backyard

## LET'S FACE IT; BEING "GREEN" IS IN VOGUE THESE DAYS.

Whether it's via the news, advertising campaigns, or other forms of mass media, we've been hearing a lot about Green business lately. It's become a marketing slogan, a catch phrase and in the bigger sense, a concept that mainstream culture is starting to embrace as desirable way of life. But, Green business is more than a good idea. It's a practical and powerful way to help create a more just and environmentally sustainable economy. It's holistic approach to being a consumer, and while we all need certain products a goods, we can be conscious about our spending by supporting green businesses and helping build a more green economy. While a lot of big national companies are sending us this message, did you know that there are some great green businesses in your own backyard? We've compiled this short list of some great Philadelphia area businesses, many of which were green long before it became popular. Check them out and be empowered to support the green businesses in your own community!

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### Sustainable Business Network of Greater Philadelphia

Sustainable Business Network of Greater Philadelphia is a nonprofit network of local businesses and social entrepreneurs. SBN members are committed to building a more socially, environmentally, and financially sustainable local economy. To become a member or to find information on others members and local events, visit [www.sbnphiladelphia.org](http://www.sbnphiladelphia.org)



### Monarch Natural Dry Cleaners (Wayne, PA)

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### Gypsy Style (Conshohocken, PA)

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# ALCHEMIZE YOUR STRESS:

## A COMPLETE LIFESTYLE APPROACH



**S**tress manifests in many forms and comes from a variety of sources. It is an individual experience. What is stressful for you may not have any effect on someone else. Why is it even important to learn how to deal with stress? Stress is one of the underlying causes of all illness and disease. It causes acidity in the body, which is a cohort of inflammation and dehydration. Understanding where your stress comes from and what triggers that fright, fight or flight reaction in your body and learning how to make better choices is the first step in discovering how to be an alchemist to create your joyful, peaceful life.

In my opinion and experience, there are many ways to empower yourself and begin creating your amazing life. Peruse the approaches below and start implementing at least one thing today! Do make sure you read all the way to the end. I saved the best for last!

1. *Play outside - barefoot whenever possible.* Swim in natural bodies of water such as a lake, a stream, or an ocean. The negative ions present in the earth are used by your body to reset your nervous system and clear out free radicals that damage your organs.
2. *Deepen or form heart to heart connections with family, friends, and people in your community.* Take a risk and be a little vulnerable with someone you can trust. Make it a priority to spend time with the important people in your life.
3. *Eat pure, whole foods.* Food contaminated with pesticides and chemical fertilizers are neurotoxins and destroy your immune system and nervous system. Your ability to handle life circumstances dramatically improves when you give your body the proper fuel.
4. *Hydrate.* Drink water, water, and more water. Not tea. Not coffee. Not diet soda. Not Vitamin water. Water. Pure water flushes out the leftover metabolites of stress chemicals in your cells and bloodstream. It is ok if you have to use the restroom every hour. You are human. It's what you do. Hint: drink as much water as possible in the morning when you first get out of bed. Start your day with a natural cleanse and a clear mind!

5. *Breathe.* Make this a conscious exercise. Breathe from your belly. Before you react to the circumstance that raises your blood pressure, remember to take in several deep slow breaths. This will engage your parasympathetic nervous system

which will help you remain calm and able to choose a balanced approach to the situation.

6. *Move your body.* Physical activity helps to clear out the build up of acid in your tissues. Engaging in movement helps to calm the mind and helps you feel centered.
7. *Nourish your spirit.* Deepen your connection to the Divine by whatever method works for you. Whether it is by attending church, sacred ceremony, communing with nature, or meditation, you need to make nourishing your soul a priority and tune in to your inner Divinity.
8. *Understand your reaction to stress.* What is it that you are really reacting to? Is it truly the circumstance or did this event just trigger an area in yourself that you need to heal? When you heal the underlying wound, the things that used to trigger you no longer have a stressful effect!
9. *Get support from someone experienced in transforming his or her stress into something beautiful.* Maybe you seek out the expertise of a life coach or alternative medicine practitioner. Whatever their title, choose someone that resonates with your needs and is happy in their own life.
10. *Change your perception.* This is really the most important concept of all I have mentioned so far. Do your best to remove yourself from the emotion of the stressful circumstance and be an objective observer. Once you understand your triggers, you are then empowered to choose your reaction. You can repeat your pattern or create a new one thereby changing what you perceive as stressful in your life.

What are you committed to in your life? Do you want to experience joy and peace consistently? While making changes is truly a journey, it does not have to be complex. We tend to make healing difficult, confusing, and complex. Our society has distracted us from what is truly important. Rather than researching the best supplement or medication, tune into your heart's own wisdom. Every thing you need is right in front of you and you can access it by opening to your intuition and heart's wisdom! ▲