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**Life Balance**

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**Part 1 - Introduction**

**1. Preface.** It is widely accepted that experiential learning is the best way

to learn. Experiential or direct learning can make a deep and lasting

impression on us, since what we have learned, remembered, and

assimilated is then carried forward for future challenges, which often

repeat or mirror past challenges. These lessons can be either pleasurable

or painful, ensuring that the lesson will be learned and not forgotten.

But how effective is indirect learning, that is, learning that is based on the

experience of others—often called formal education? Of course, the

effectiveness of indirect education depends on time, place, and person. But

research suggests that the odds against success in formal education are

quite high (Gardener). It is known, for example, that high school seniors

score higher in general education tests than college seniors, and it is often

remarked that the college experience is a blur of confusion and forgetfulness.

Communication studies also reveal that 70% of most messages are lost,

missed, distorted, or misunderstood (RCTaylor). That means that most

people have about a 30% chance of learning successfully from others—the

basis of formal education.

Now, what are the odds that those reading this pamphlet will be able to

understand, remember, and assimilate its teachings and message? Let us

hope that the odds for success are somewhat higher than average,

since those reading this pamphlet will be part of a select group of people

who are interested in and dedicated to the important subject of yoga and

Life Balance.

I advise scanning the information of this booklet slowly and carefully to

give you a sense of the scope and depth of our study together, which will

unfold gradually, week by week, semester by semester. Approach this

material with an easy, open, and relaxed mind, and avoid whatever strands

of perfectionism that you have acquired so far in life. It is said that the

perfect is the enemy of the good. Our emphasis here is developing goodness

in all its forms and avoiding “the lie of being perfect.”

Hippocrates, the Father of Greek Medicine, taught his students that

“the art is long, life is short, opportunity fleeting, experiment dangerous, and

judgment difficult.” The “art” Hippocrates speaks of is medicine, which is a

form of education. Hippocrates’ statement is not upbeat. It is an

admonition. Why? I think his somber tone comes from the brevity of

life and the difficulty of getting one’s bearings in life. It also comes

from the realization that there are two enemies of Life Balance, two foxes in

the hen house—external inducements, coming from a corrupt culture that

thrives on hooking everyone into excessive behaviors, and internal

inducements, which are deeply rooted in human nature and are difficult to

control. If unchecked, these internal inducements can bring down the

house, causing great misfortune both to ourselves and to others.

Hippocrates’ saying—in all aspects—applies to Life Balance as well. Learn

the art as soon as you can, since few people know, practice, or teach it as it

is set forth here. Most have only a small piece of it. Avoid costly and

reckless experiments, use your common sense at all times, and when in

doubt, ask two or three respected elders for their advice. Shrii Shrii

Anandamurti advised his disciples, “If you are not sure about doing

something, then wait. But if you are sure that an action will lead to a good

outcome, then do it immediately!”

Also note that individual Life Balance is controlled to a large extent by both

the wider spheres of Natural and Social Balance. If both Natural and

Social Balance have been compromised, as is the case now, then it will be

much more difficult to establish and maintain individual Life Balance. To

illustrate this, recall that about 70% of European Jews were unable to escape

the Nazi dragnet, no matter how hard they tried. Only a small remnant can

survive natural and social upheavals. Individuals are puny when it comes to

defending themselves against the tremendous surrounding forces of both

the Natural and Social spheres. The smallest circle below represents the

individual; the middle circle, society; the largest circle, nature, which includes

planetary, solar, stellar forces.



**Question 1**. Give an example of direct learning from your life that you carry

with you and use to this day.

**Question 2.** Give an example of indirect learning from your life that you

carry with you and use to this day.

**Question 3.** Discuss the role of perfectionism in your life. How do you

control this bad habit, if you have picked it up?

**Question 4.** *Confusion* means that one has no idea about the underlying

issues of a topic. *Undecided* means that one has clarity about the issues,

but there is no certainty about how to evaluate or come to terms with those

issues, thus making impossible a formulation for a wise course of action. Do

you agree that before you make a decision, you should know what the issues

are? Look at some of the lifestyle choices that you have made in the past

year and discuss them in terms of your degree of confusion or indecision.

**2. Life Balance – Definition.** **Life Balance is the attempt to live a well-knit life**, where our physical, mental, and spiritual potentials are developed in an integrated fashion. This idea is represented by the following diagram:



Life Balance will vary from person to person. It cannot be imposed. Instead, it must be freely chosen according to individual needs and preferences as well as cultural determinants. Life Balance will evolve (or deteriorate) over time, depending on the perception and judgment of each person, and depending on her or his stage of development. Each human being, if blessed with innate wisdom and endurance, will pass through and master eight stages of development, beginning with the crisis of identity in the early twenties and ending with the crisis of integration in the early eighties (Erikson). Along with stage variability, each person will fall roughly into one of 16 personality types, based on a particular combination and emphasis of perception, judgment, introversion-extroversion, and spontaneity-closure (Hirsh and Kummerow). Understanding the challenges of your particular stage of development and your particular personality type will promote self-knowledge, the first step in arriving at Life Balance and ultimately at soul or Self-knowledge. More information about these stages of development and personality types will be provided later in this article.

But before we go further, it would be good to ask to what extent we have achieved Life Balance. In most cases, as individuals, we all begin our lives with a fairly high degree of Life Balance. But it can fall apart and collapse! When it does so, there are 3 levels into which it can descend. This is true for individuals as well as for society and the natural world. The first level of deterioration is called **deranged.** This level can be repaired with quick and expert intervention, following the advice of the proverb, “A stitch in time saves nine.” But if the situation deteriorates further, its balance will become **disrupted**. At this level, with all semblance of order and harmony lost, the condition becomes both painful and dire. There are no quick fixes for this level. Only timely therapeutic expertise, focus, and energy can restore this lost balance. If the situation deteriorates even further, then the original balance becomes **degenerate.** At this last stage, only sustained, radical, and focused therapy can rebuild what has been lost. Harmony and order must be restored methodically, step by step. This will take time and effort, and, in many cases, only collective effort can make improvements, as with a team of multiple experts. According to the spiritual teacher, Shrii Shrii Anandamurti, the original balance of the natural world and human society, as well as individuals, has deteriorated to the degenerate level, marked by “economic bankruptcy, social unrest, cultural degeneration, and religious superstition” (*Pram*a).

There is much work to do to reclaim this lost balance. It can only begin with individuals who know what Life Balance is and who are working to achieve it in their lives. Society and nature will then respond to their efforts to restore this lost balance that is captured in the image of Eden or Paradise.



**3. Life Balance – What it is not. Life Balance is not arranging your life with “a little bit of this and a little bit of that,”** which avoids coming to terms with life’s puzzling and deep physical, mental, and spiritual potentials. All three levels must be engaged for Life Balance to occur. It is more than adding a few more activities to your physical existence, for example, by starting to jog as a complement your exercise program. Rather, it is adding new activities to the missing or underdeveloped dimensions of your life, such as meditation, asanas, or a music class, along with your workout program, to round-out your schedule.

A Google search shows how Life Balance is usually narrowly defined in our culture: *6 Tips for Better Work-Life Balance* (Forbes); *Work-Life Balance* (Skills You Need); *Work-Life Balance: Tips to Reclaim Control* (Mayo Clinic); and *Cities with the Best Work-Life Balance (*Kisi).

The problem with these narrow definitions of “Work-Life Balance” is that they reduce the status of our lives to being workers, as if work is the only activity of our lives. Work is important, yes, but there are many other activities and dimensions of life that can be and should be developed as well, once we are given the scope and the proper guidance to do so, so we can discover and express our full humanity, each in our own unique way. Few people throughout history have had this chance—or had the proper scope and guidance to do so. Most people have been drudges of one sort or another, without freedom, without choices, without support, and without recognition—in the home, on the battlefield, in the ghetto, on the street, in the brothel, on the farm, in the field, and on the plantation. There are many forms of slavery, which means being chained to a thankless existence of unending, grueling exploitation from all sides.

So, contrary to what our culture advertises, Life Balance is not showing up for work 50 weeks each year and then going for a brief two-week vacation somewhere in the mountains or on a cruise to a Caribbean Island. Rather, Life Balance involves opening up to all dimensions of life in the here and now—and then *creating* the time to explore them, until they become real for you, regardless of your cultural, ethnic, religious, or gender identity.

**Question 5.** To what extent is Life Balance present in your life now?

**4. Life Balance – A Short History of the Idea**. There is a deep, wide, and varied history of Life Balance in human culture. This section provides a brief chronological sketch of the idea. Each example can be instructive and might provide you with tips how to achieve a better sense of Life Balance than you presently know or practice. We advocate what is called a “synthetic approach” to learning, which carefully examines all traditions and then integrates them into a coherent whole without automatically rejecting what is unfamiliar or unknown. Remember that this process takes a lot of time and occurs in stages. Talking about these ideas in a safe environment is essential for moving forward.

**a. The Medicine Wheel.** Native American people entered the North American continent about 25,000 years ago, and they brought with them a teaching that they called the Teaching of the Ancestors (Campbell). This teaching is both simple and profound and expresses the idea of Life Balance in a clear and profound way.

According to this teaching, each person looks at the universe from a particular point on the Circle of the Universe (Storm). This point was determined by the season and day of birth according to highly treasured tribal lore.

For example, a person born in late April would be assigned to the totem of the Beaver. This person’s ruling direction would be the East, and the ruling element would be Earth. The power stone associated with this person would be Jasper. The Spirit of the Beaver, which became the life theme of the person, would be “to be a master of strategy, and to be unstoppable when working towards a goal. Though possessive, Beaver people treasure love and mate for life. On this turn of the Medicine Wheel, the Beaver’s lesson is to become more open-minded” (Native American Zodiac).

So, this point, called the Beginning Place, determines our fundamental orientation and unique but limited perspective on life. Our task as human beings is to travel away from this point, so we can grow to increase our understanding of all other positions on the Great Circle.

This increase in understanding occurs through the Teaching of the Powers. North represents Wisdom and Objectivity. Its symbol is the Buffalo. Its strength is certainty in knowing; its weakness is a sense of coldness and aloofness. East represents Illumination and Insight. Its symbol is the Eagle. Its strength is seeing into the future; its weakness is not grasping important details. South represents Innocence and Trust. Its symbol is the Mouse. Its strength is warmth and closeness; its weakness is being oblivious to the big picture. The West represents Looks Within and Introspection. Its symbol is the Bear. Its strength is the ability to understand emotion; its weakness is narcissism.

If someone is born in the North, a Buffalo, possessing innate Wisdom, then Life Balance is achieved when this person “travels” or experiences the other three Powers successively, going to and exploring and then beginning to understand the East, Illumination; then South, Innocence; and then finally West, Introspection. After this journey, which will take decades, the Buffalo will have become familiar with the East (Eagle), the South (Mouse), and the West (Bear)—all his opposites. During the journey, each of the personality strengths of the other Powers will be added to his original strength. At the end of the journey, the person will have integrated the virtues of all four Powers and will have become Whole in the process, becoming wise, visionary, trustworthy, and deep.

Becoming Whole allows each of us to touch Life and to be touched by it—the purpose of human existence. Touching usually occurs when some form of limitation is imposed upon us. For example, loving a beautiful child might be easy, but if the child becomes crippled or deformed by accident or sickness, then Touching and Loving will be more challenging. One’s initial love will be forced to become deeper through this limitation.

Life Balance in this tradition is achieved through what is called “the Sun Dance,” which means, on its deepest level, traveling around the Circle, whose Center is the Light of the Universe, to visit and integrate each of the Four Powers, thereby becoming a whole person who knows how to touch life, and be touched by it, thus living in Harmony with Universe.

This is a photograph of 3 generations of Native American women, whose faces show the resilience and wisdom of the Medicine Wheel tradition.



"Our hands are the antennas of our soul. When you move them by sewing, cooking, painting, or touching the earth, they send signals of caring to the deepest part of you, and your soul calms down. When you look at the hands of older people, they tell more about their lives than any other part of the body. Everything that is made by hand, it is said, is made with the heart, because hands and heart are connected." ~ Elena Barnabé

**b.** About 7,000 years ago, a great spiritual Master named Shiva systematized the teachings of **Tantra** into a coherent philosophy and set of practices. The Sanskrit word *tantra* is defined as “the science of liberation (*tan* in Sanskrit means “crude, ignorant,” and *tra* means “to liberate, to free from bondage.” These teachings, called *tantras*, originated as dialogues between Parvati, Shiva’s wife, and Shiva himself (Anandamurti). A considerable collection of these tantras, handed down in oral tradition, and quite diverse in nature, still exist today.

The foundational teaching of Tantra is *dharma Atmamoksartham jagathitaya ca*—"Dharma is to be practiced for Self-Realization and the welfare of the universe” (Anandamurti). The goal of Yoga is to promote the self-discovery of Dharma, the Truth leading to Self-Realization and Self-Actualization.  This is the basic rhythm of Life Balance. How are Self-Realization and Self-Actualization to be achieved?  They are achieved by seeking the guidance of the inner spirit first, through reflection and meditation, and then by using that insight to meet the demands of the external, objective world. The inner voice comes first; then the outer, in that order—not the other way around.

This is much more challenging than it sounds, for insight into the truth is hard to come by.  Actually, the opposite often occurs, when individuals first accept misleading information from the external world and then listen to their inner Self later (if at all)—often causing great distress and even calamity, because the Self has been compromised by following the wrong voice or voices. These wrong voices can be a supposed friend, an “in group,” or a mistaken authority figure—not the voice of truth, conscience, and integrity. These compromising voices can become especially dangerous if they are delusional, which have continually surfaced throughout the long course of history. These delusional voices have been present in all forms of tyranny, which deliberately promotes false ideas of racial, cultural, ethnic, or religious superiority to achieve total domination. In the words of the psychoanalyst who studied Hitler’s rise to power, “The frightening truth of politics is that **if** *the big lie* is told and repeated frequently enough, **then** it is believed” (Langer). Adolph Hitler, who coined the phrase *the big lie*, elaborated upon this idea in his preface to *Mein Kampf,* where he wrote that “the lie must be so colossal that no one would believe the impudence behind it.” This impudence “distorts the truth so infamously” that it gives it its demonic power. The bigger the lie, the more people are caught in its web. As the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer wrote, “Clio, the Muse of History, is as thoroughly infected with lies as is a street whore with syphilis.”

Shiva, the first Yoga Master who taught over seven thousand years ago, saw deeply into this war between truth and falsehood and gave the teaching of Life Balance. He represented this teaching as a six-pointed star.  The six-pointed star is composed of two interlocking triangles.  The downward pointing triangle symbolizes **introversion**--internal development through deep reflection and meditation, which accelerates emotional, psychological, and spiritual expansion.  The upward pointing triangle symbolizes **extraversion**--focused, selfless action in the external world that is filled with conflict, confusion, and strife.



The interlocked triangles mean Self-Realization and Self-Actualization, which in turn lead to further Self-Realization and Self-Actualization--a recursive process.  Inner guidance will lead to actions that are well-planned, strategic, effective, and just.  Here is the important outcome of Life Balance. It is not a fuzzy warm feeling. It is measured in intelligent, decisive action.

Referring to these two triangles, Shiva explained that there are two types of insanity. The first type of insanity is symbolized by the downward pointing triangle exclusively, absent its counterpart, the upward-pointing triangle. This first type of insanity is a life based single-mindedly on introversion or “navel gazing,” which leads to a life of narcissism and delusion. The second type of insanity is symbolized by the upward-pointing triangle exclusively, absent its counterpart, the downward-pointing triangle. This second type of insanity is a life based single-mindedly on extraversion, the “rat race,” which leads to a life of lost freedom and exploitation by others. Life Balance is the middle ground of sanity that avoids these two common forms of insanity.

**c. Five Element Acupuncture** began over 4,000 years ago when the culture hero, Yellow Emperor, Huangdi, established its principles. He maintained that Life Balance is achieved when a human being lives in accordance with the Tao—the Way things are and should be. The Tao creates “the 10,000 things.” On the earthly plane, the 10,000 things can be grouped according to Five Elements or Phases—Fire, Earth, Metal, Water, and Wood. Life Balance occurs when these Five Elements or Phases are able to flow harmoniously among each other in a circular fashion (Worsley).

Each of these elements is associated with specific organ pairs and meridian systems. There is a form of consciousness that is in charge of each one of these organ and meridian systems. Collectively these organ and meridian systems are known as the Twelve Officials.

Each organ is associated with a physical function, an emotional correlate, and a ruling spirit. For example, the kidney filters out waste products from the blood. When it is healthy, its emotional tone is one of gentleness and alertness. Its ruling spirit is conservation of energy and endurance.

According to this theory, we are all born with at least one element that struggles to keep up. It exists in a weakened state, causing a blockage or disruption of the energy flow among the other elements. This weakened element is called the Causative Factor—the weak one on the team that needs extra support. Disease follows if the blockage or disruption in the Causative Factor is not addressed and corrected. According to J.R. Worsley, the consequences of this blockage and disruption are far-reaching:

 If the body is sick, the mind worries and the spirit grieves.

 If the mind is sick, the body and the spirit will suffer from its confusion.

 If the spirit is sick, there will be no care for the body or mind.

Classical Five Element Acupuncture uses a variety of techniques to balance the entire human organism—physical, emotional, and spiritual—by strengthening and integrating each separate system into an integrated whole. It is both preventative and curative. Counseling is an integral and important part of this kind of Life Balance. Counselling is addressed specifically to a far-ranging constellation of symptoms that attend the Causative Factor. So physical, emotional, and spiritual issues are addressed and gently healed. It is for this reason that acupuncture sessions are scheduled on a monthly basis for about 1 hour to both detect new disorders and to treat old ones on all levels. One this accomplished, the ship rights itself according to its own innate wisdom.



**d. Biblical scholars believe that the** **Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes,** books from the Wisdom Tradition, are based on a collection of sayings that date back to about 4,000 years ago, to earlier Babylonian and Egyptian sources. Hebrew scholars later collated and edited these sayings. Life Balance appears in many forms in these sources:

“Happy the person who finds Wisdom,

 and the person who gets understanding.

For the gain from Wisdom is better than the gain from silver,

 and its profit is better than gold.

Wisdom is more precious than jewels,

 and nothing that is desired can compare to it.

Long life is in its right hand,

 In its left hand are riches and honor.

Wisdom’s ways are the ways of pleasantness,

 And all its paths are peace.

It is the Tree Life of Life of all who lay hold of It.

 Those who hold fast to It are called happy” (Proverbs 3.13-18)

“Honest scales and balances are from the LORD; all the weights in the bag are of his making” (Proverbs 16.11).

“A false balance is an abomination to the LORD; but a just weight is his delight” (Proverbs 11.2).

“Dominion and dread belong to the LORD, who establishes harmony in the heavens” (Job 25.2).

“Better one handful of tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind (Ecclesiastes 4.6).

**e. In the Buddhist tradition,** Siddhartha Gautama provided a simple and profound version of Life Balance (Edelglass and Garfield). His **Four Noble Truths** state that 1) the essence of life is suffering, 2) suffering is caused by excessive desire, 3) suffering is not necessary--release is possible, and 4) the secret of release lies in the **Eightfold Path**, which briefly stated, says that individuals must develop the following:

1.  a proper philosophy--identifying the right goal and path of human life;
2.  a proper attitude--maintaining firm determination to overcome all obstacles on the path;
3.  proper control--regulating the five sensory and five motor organs;
4.  a proper livelihood--earning one's living without harming other creatures, such as the occupations of butchery or the selling of wine.
5.  proper exercise--developing and integrating body, mind, and spirit;
6.  proper completion--ending all projects in clean and conclusive manner;
7.  proper memory--keeping the mind in a sweet, positive flow at all times;
8.  proper mentalsuspension--merging the mind in its spiritual ground.

The fifth path explicitly states that individuals should be balanced in the systematic development (exercise) of the three realms of human life—physical, mental, and spiritual. Here is Life Balance pure and simple! It flows naturally from having “a proper philosophy” to start with.

**f. In the Greek tradition,** the **temple of Apollo at Delphi** advised all who visited it: “Nothing in excess.” This, too, is Life Balance at its simplest. But it must be remembered at the same time that this saying has its limitations, for a little bit of poison can be as lethal as a larger amount. **Some things should be avoided completely. Wisdom alone can clarify this point.**

Aristotle later elaborated upon this saying of avoiding excess in his *Nichomachean Ethics*, in which he stated that virtue is the mean between two extremes. For example, courage is the virtue that lies between cowardice and foolhardiness. Modesty is the virtue that lies between brazenness and mousiness.

The two great Homeric epics, the ***Iliad*** and the ***Odyssey***, embellish upon the theme of Life Balance as moderation. In the *Iliad*, Achilles flies into a rage of blood lust when the Trojan hero, Hector, slays his comrade, Patroclus. It is only after Hector’s father, King Priam, pleads with Achilles to return the desecrated body of Hector, his slain son, that Achilles relents and quells his “berserk anger.” The messenger of the gods, Hermes, assists Achilles during this interchange, demonstrating the need for spiritual agency in all difficult negotiations. During the interchange between Achilles and Priam, Achilles announces another dimension of Life Balance: “Two jars sit at the doorstep of Zeus; each jar is filled with the gifts that he gives. One is filled with good things, and the other is filled with bad things. If Zeus gives a man a mixture from both jars, sometimes life is good for him, sometimes not” (Iliad 24 566-69). The idea here is that each person is given a different allotment by Zeus. Making good on the gifts and accepting and working with the bad gifts is a matter of mastery and endurance—Life Balance. Accepting the bad gifts is important. There is no such thing as a “Perfect Life.” As Archidamus, the wise Spartan general, said to the citizens of Sparta, who were hesitant to go to war with Athens, “We should not think that there is much difference between one man and another, except that the winner will be the one whose education was the most severe” (Thucydides, *Wars*, 1.77).

In the *Odyssey*, the hero Odysseus tries to avoid his summons to a senseless war by feigning madness. He is unsuccessful in his ploy and is forced to fight a war that begins and ends in treachery and greed. After fighting this war for 10 years, he begins the journey home. He is forced to experience several subhuman and superhuman societies on his journey back, until he finally reaches the shores of Ithaka, his ancestral home. There he finds his wife and son beset by a group of rapacious and parasitic suitors who have broken the norms of all decency. Life Balance in the social sphere is achieved when Odysseus slays these evil suitors, cleanses his home of their and his servants’ corruption, and reestablishes himself as a loving husband to this wife, a faithful father to his son, and a wise king and ruler to his subjects.

**g.** **In the Islamic tradition**, the idea of *mizam* or balance played an important part in its medieval philosophy (Shaker). The saying from the Greek philosopher, Protagoras, that “man is the measure of all things” was changed slightly by Muslim philosophers to mean that “man is not only the measure of all things but is the measurer of all things.” According to this tradition, human beings do not live on the round Earth. They instead exist on an “isthmus.” An isthmus is a “narrow strip of land with sea on either side of it, forming a link between two larger areas of land.” So, “living on the isthmus” means becoming aware of the two seas that surround us on both sides—the Sea of the Right Path and Harmony (Paradise) and the sea of the Wrong Path and Disharmony (Hell). Life Balance is required to measure and take stock of our position (*mizam*) at all times.

The isthmus can also be thought of as a bridge connecting two worlds—the Seen (horizontal) and the Unseen (Vertical). The larger areas of land adjoining the isthmus on each side can refer to the Past and the Future. In the end, for a devout Muslim, Life Balance is achieved when the limitations of the seen are measured against the Unseen. This occurs in the daily Islamic practice of *zikr* or remembrance, which reminds the ego that it is not God.

**Question 6.** Of the seven versions of Life Balance described in this section, which ones appeal to you the most?

**Part 2 – The Core of Life Balance**

**5. Good Company.** The goal of yoga is to unite the mind—which is unruly by nature—with Cosmic Spirit.  Rendering service to all creatures while seeking liberation is considered the correct way to fulfill this goal.   **Good company (satsaunga) is essential for Life Balance**.  Yoga Masters teach that keeping good company is more important than meditation itself, for the sheer power of our surroundings can overcome the best of our intentions and the most subtle types of meditation techniques. We are all dyed by the color and vibration of our surroundings. If these surrounding are not clean, ethical, and principled, **no one be able to withstand their depraving effect**. This is why **keeping good company is takes first place** in the core practices of Life Balance. Individuals cannot withstand the onslaught of social forces.



A recent Tantric Master, Shrii Shrii Anandamurti, in his discourse "*Satsaunga*", described the dynamics of depraving company in this way:

"If Ann has 8 merits and 4 demerits, she has a resultant virtue of **+4**.  Bear in mind that the word *virtue* literally means *force*.  Virtue is never passive. Now, if Ann associates with Sue, who has 6 merits and 12 demerits—a resultant of **-6**—then Sue (-6) will corrupt Ann (+4), who cannot withstand Sue's negative impact (**+4 -6 = -2**). But if Sue meets Holly, whose merits are 16 and whose demerits are 2— **a resultant of +14**—then Sue (-6) will be elevated by Holly’s virtue (+14) **(-6 + 14 = +8).**"

What should you do if you know you are invited to a gathering where corrupting behavior will be present and perhaps even predominate?  It is best to avoid such situations altogether.  But if you have to associate with such people who have very low standards and values—say -30—then only enter that gathering with other virtuous people, so your collective merits—in this case (+40)—outweigh the group’s demerits, to avoid degeneration. Many people have “friends” who actually corrupt them—and take perverse delight in doing so.   Consider this Aesop’s Fable:

**The Ass and his Purchaser**

A man who wanted to buy an Ass went to market, and, coming across a likely-looking beast, arranged with the owner that he should be allowed to take him home on trial to see what he was like. When he reached home, he put the new Ass into his stable along with the other asses.  The new Ass took a look round and immediately went over to a place next to the laziest and greediest ass in the stable. When the master saw this, he put a halter on him at once and led him off to the market and handed him over to his former owner again. The owner was a good deal surprised to see the man back so soon, and he said, "Why, do you mean to say you have tested the Ass already?" "I don't want to put him through any more tests," replied the man. "I could see what sort of beast he was from the companion he quickly chose for himself."

"People are known by the company they keep."

All spiritual traditions stand on **3 Pillars**—1) the Light radiated by the Teacher, 2) the Light radiated by the Teaching, and 3) the Light radiated by the Community. The Community, when it is functioning properly, makes visible, embodies, supports, and nurtures the Light within both the Teacher and Teaching, which are otherwise difficult to grasp and understand by themselves, without the assistance of good company. Good company is not relegated to one religious or spiritual community.

Heaven’s Tao has no favorites

But endures in all good people.

Tao Te Ching 79

**Question 7.** Psychologists studying teen and young adult sexual behavior have found over the last few years that there has been a marked increase in viewing of pornographic websites—website sites where sexual acts are explicitly linked with violence. What surprised many psychologists was not teen viewing of pornographic websites but rather the **consequences** of that viewing: “21% of young women and 11% of young men who were surveyed revealed that they had been choked during sexual acts—and that they considered these violent sexual experiences **so mainline** (normal)that they thought that there was no need to talk about it” (Herbenick). As Tiffany Cross has said, “Sex is now not something you do *with* another person; it is something that that you do *to* another person.” This example reveals how the company of others (online viewing) affects ethical standards and behavior. Evaluate the information of this example in light of your own ethical standards and cultural expectations.

**6. Subjective Approach with Objective Adjustment**. This is another way of expressing Shiva’s foundational thought that we should follow dharma for “Self-Realization and for the welfare of the universe.” Self-Realization and Self-Actualization are very **challenging for four reasons.**

First, every time we attempt to go inward or outward, we must face, sooner or later, a **Reality Check**.  When we attempt to go inward, we often find that what we thought to be true turns out to be uncertain or false.  We have been trapped by our own illusion.  Likewise, when we attempt to actualize an idea or plan in the outer world, we often meet with resistance and denial.  What we had expected or wanted does not pan out, perhaps because of our own or someone else's illusions.  Outward reality can be just as tricky as inner reality.  Events rarely come off without a hitch.  Reality usually takes us by surprise.  Truth be told, reality is a continual surprise.  So Self Realization and Self-Actualization **are fraught with challenge and disappointment.**

Second, we all can experience different moods, to the point where our perceptions and our actions can swing wildly, unless we have established a stable ego and Center.  Only when we have a clear, stable mind and a clear sense of our soul can we understand and master both inner and outer reality. This takes decades to achieve.

Third, to compound the problem of mood swings, multiple personalities can develop and surface, making the task of Self-Realization and Self-Actualization even more difficult.  The ultimate solution to this problem is therapy and a commitment to a balanced life style that will reveal in time that the soul is the Real Self.

There is a fourth reason why Self Realization and Self-Actualization are very challenging.  There are many hidden aspects of ourselves that we do not know.  The Johari Window represents these hidden layers:



According to this psychological theory, much of value within us is hidden from both ourselves and from others. From the point of view of Yoga, the deepest part of ourselves is the Unknown Self, which includes both the unconscious mind and the soul.  Diligent meditation, combined with ethical action, can help to reveal this part of ourselves, but it takes years to access this knowledge.  As martial arts masters say, “There are no short-cuts!”

**Question 8.** Give some examples of Reality Checks that you had to experience, given your misperceptions, your mood, your mood swings, and the hidden nature of your Soul.

**7. Ethics.** According to many traditions, ethics are actually based on the spirit of all-pervasive cleanliness. Consider the following guidelines as forms of meditation as well as the basis for your behavior. These precepts must be understood clearly and must be applied to each situation with clarity and a sense of will power.

**1) Ahimsa**.  This means not to harm any being, beyond what is necessary, for the preservation of life, family, property, and wealth.  If force must be applied, then the least amount--and the subtlest form--is to be used, thus minimizing the extent and degree of injury.  Do not injure or kill any being unless it is absolutely necessary.

Ahimsa is **manifest** in a **diet that based on about 90% plants. This diet has 4 benefits**:

1. it avoids the unnecessary slaughter of billions of innocent land and ocean creatures each year;
2. it promotes health and reduces environmental depletion;
3. when more widely adopted, it would eliminate world hunger, for it takes ten times more land, water, energy, fertilizer, and labor to create a pound of beef than it does a pound of soy;
4. animal flesh contains toxic residues of hormones, pesticides, herbicides, heavy metals, and many organic compounds that are linked to high rates of cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, auto-immune disorders, Alzheimer's disease, dementia, and other degenerative diseases prevalent in meat-eating societies (*Harvard Health*).

Ahimsa is also manifest in **avoiding the Six Poisons:**

**ALCOHOL**. When you remember that nurses kill microorganisms by rubbing alcohol on your skin before administering a vaccine, then it **should be evident that alcohol is a poison**. It

* causes death to the cells of the liver and brain;
* interferes with the firing of synapses in cerebral neurons
* causes free radical damage in cell membranes;
* interferes with intracellular fluid transport in the brain, causing several kinds of cognitive and behavioral problems--loss of memory, loss of inhibition, impaired morality, accentuated aggressiveness, and a heightened desire for affection (**Wikipedia**, 2006);
* is the most common drug used in sexual seduction;
* is associated with 50% of cancers of the mouth, pharynx, and larynx;
* it is also linked to liver cancer, cirrhosis of the liver, pancreatitis, heart disease, polyneuropathy, depression, insomnia, anxiety, suicide, and sexual dysfunction (**Wikipedia**).

**COFFEE**.  According to Dr. Susan Brown, coffee is **America's favorite drug**.  Called "black poison" by some herbalists, coffee stimulates the heart, brain, and nervous system. It depletes the body of vitamin A, vitamin B, iron, and potassium.  It also destroys pepsin in the stomach, creates ulcers, weakens digestion, and leads to spleen and pancreas disorders, thus interfering with the proper digestion and absorption of food.  It is a potent stimulant of the central nervous system, and it causes headaches, tremors, nervousness, mood swings, depression, and irritability.  Constant caffeine consumption weakens the adrenals, thyroid, and other endocrine glands, and it also leads to male health problems, especially prostate problems--from benign enlargement and urinary difficulties to impotence and cancer, conditions that affect over 80% of men in the United States (Balch).

**MARIJUANA.**  Medical uses notwithstanding, marijuana interferes with cognitive function in a number of ways.  First, it affects the short-term memory, which situated in the area if the brain called hippocampus.  **It destroys "recognition memory,"** which is the ability to recapture the correct word when thinking, speaking, or writing (National Institute on Drug Abuse).  As such, it is the enemy of those who would think, speak, and write.  Marijuana also profoundly weakens depth and accuracy of the thought process, concentration, time and depth perception, and coordinated movement (Wikipedia).  Since it induces trances of uncontrollable laughter as well as paranoia, it is inappropriate both for accurate perception and balanced judgment.  It should only be used as a palliative when prescribed by a medical doctor for terminal sickness or other incapacitating conditions.

**NICOTINE.**  Closely related to heroine, nicotine is an addictive drug whose grip is almost impossible to break.  It damages the brain, cripples the will, causes emphysema and lung cancer, puts money in the pockets of big business, and is associated with almost every degenerative disease known to human beings--cancer, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, and diabetes.  One cigarette consumes almost 2 grams of Vitamin C, along with many other valuable nutrients as well.  Tobacco was once sparingly used by the Native Americans for sacred purposes.  Spiked by American tobacco companies, it has now become the**White Man's Curse**--a fitting retribution for the destruction of the Native American people, their values, and their land.

**WHITE FLOUR**.  Called **"white glue"** by herbalists, white flour has no fiber and thus clogs the intestinal tract.  White flour depletes the body's tissues of valuable minerals and vitamins which are processed away during refining.  Epidemiological studies show the correlation between the introduction of white flour in America in the 1890s and the rise of colon cancer in the early 1900s.  Found in pasta, bread, cookies, crackers, pastries, donuts, biscuits, pizza, and a host of other "fast foods," white flour contributes to low vitality, constipation, headaches, and migraine (Balch).  Refined grains such as minute rice also lack fiber, minerals, and vitamins and should be eliminated from the diet.  The average American adult has accumulated over 40 pounds of intestinal sludge as a result of a "refined" diet (Gant).

**WHITE SUGAR.**  Called **"white poison"** by herbalists, white sugar depletes the body of B vitamins, chromium, zinc, and copper (Tenney). High sugar intake leads to the excretion of calcium and magnesium, both of which are required for proper muscle, nervous, and brain functioning.  White sugar attacks the body in many ways.  It lacks fiber, thus giving rise to constipation.  Its overuse encourages the development of hypoglycemia and diabetes, and it contributes to drowsiness, lethargy, depression, and attention deficit disorders.  Overuse of white sugar is linked to candida infections as well as the onset of cancer.  It also causes water retention, causing women to suffer from bloating, cramping, and premenstrual and menopausal problems.  High sugar intake is linked to arthritis, tooth decay, heart disease, and osteoporosis (Tenny).  Of all the anti-nutrients, white sugar is the most important to eliminate, because its effects are so far-reaching and insidious.  Brown sugar and all other artificial sweeteners should also be avoided. It is interesting to note that the average American eats between 120-150 pounds of white sugar each year.

A plant-based diet rich in **fiber, prebiotics, probiotics, and phytochemicals** (found in colored fruits and vegetables such as blueberries, raspberries, cherries, broccoli, carrots, spinach, and soy) promotes the health of our intestinal biome, which contains about 40 trillion cells—many times more cells than our body’s cells. The key to health lies in the health of this inner biome.

Ahimsa is also manifest in effective application of the **Five Conflict Strategies**--1) avoidance, 2) surrender 3) compromise, 4) collaboration, and 5) opposition, fighting at all costs to win--**depending on the situation.** Shrii Shrii Anandamurti has taught that **the only weapons one needs to win all battles are ethics.** The application of these principles requires 1) a subtle reading of all the cues of a situation to understand its dynamics, 2) knowing all of the ethical principles well, 3) having the will and courage to apply them, 4) applying them with enough force to make a difference, and 5) trusting in a potential moral outcome, which is never guaranteed.

Ahimsa is also manifest in the care that yogis take to **prevent self-injury**, which occurs in all forms of excess, in debasing and manipulative relationships, in addictive substances, and in addictive behaviors (eating disorders, gambling, serial sex and romance, shopping, video games, binge TV, procrastination, etc.).

**Question 9.** This section, coming first, reveals its importance. Assess your ability to apply an appropriate strategy to one conflict that you are experiencing now.

On the **environmental and social levels,** a non-violent society would

* restore ocean integrity by capturing the 8 million tons of plastic that collect in the Pacific Vortex annually and help transform it into fuel;
* restore ocean alkalinity, on which diatoms, which produce most of the planet’s oxygen, depend;
* re-establish dead or dying coral reefs;
* reduce human harvesting of ocean life and set aside safe zones to restore it;
* build safe water supplies through conservation and waste management;
* purify the air by eliminating industrial pollutants, large-scale burning, and petroleum products;
* begin large-scale reforestation projects, which support land, air, and water regeneration;
* prohibit underground nuclear testing, which undermines the integrity of the earth's crust;
* convert our ever-expanding toxic landfills to reclaimed land set aside for other uses by recycling everything fabricated by industry;
* make all industries buy back and repair everything that they sell, thus eliminating the “throw away” mentality that they have created and foisted on society as normal;
* phase out the slaughter of over 56 billion food animals per year and provide incentives for a plant-based diet;
* provide minimum necessities—food, shelter, clothing, education, health care—to all;
* set up a system of incentives, based on ability and merit, that encourage education and work;
* promote a sense of activism and team-work for progressive change on all levels of society;
* discourage laziness, passivity, and escapism, which damage the human spirit and society;
* convert competitive, punitive, and racist educational systems into equitable, disciplined, focused centers of health, collaboration, rehabilitation, instruction, and balance.

On the **international level**, a non-violent society would eliminate **"the scourge of war"** (Shrii Shrii Anandamurti), from which no human generation has ever been free.  A scourge is a "whip or lash that inflicts excruciating pain and is the source of persistent trouble" W*iktionary*).  Here are the main facts of war:

* in primitive warfare, about 15% of fatalities are civilian (*Quora*);
* in modern warfare, about 90% of fatalities are civilian (*Wikipedia*);
* “the third army"--infectious disease, which comes in the wake of war, kills about 10 times more people than warfare itself.

**2)** **Satya**.  This means thinking and speaking with benevolence by keeping one's mind attached to Truth and Love.  A contemporary name for Satya is mindfulness--overcoming the sense of duality (me-you, us-them, good-bad) and instead anchoring one's mind in the state of Being Itself.  This is not as easy as it might sound.

According to Spiritual Masters, the Universe is embedded in Satya.  This means that at the highest level of reality there are no secrets and that falsehood vanishes in the light of truth. It also means that hatred is transformed into complete understanding and love.

Satya is **manifes**t by internal kindness in one's thought processes, giving the benefit of the doubt, thinking deeply, and avoiding constant criticism, chatter, gossip, slander, and small talk.  It is said that "small people talk about others; ordinary people talk about themselves; big people talk about ideas."

**Question 10.** Describe a “big person” in your life using specific examples.

**3)** **Asteya**.  This means respecting the property of others, and not stealing from others or yourself, physically or mentally.  Asteya is **manifest** in allowing others the space to "simply be, " without interfering or robbing them of their resources, wealth, time, or freedom. There are **three levels of wealth**--material, psychic, and spiritual.

**a. Material wealth** exists when one's assets are greater than one's debts. For example, one who has assets of $5,000.00 and debts of $2,000.00 is materially wealthy, whereas one who has assets of $50,000 and debts of $80,000 is materially impoverished (Phillips). The *Tao Te Ching* puts it simply:  "Knowing what is enough is wealth."

**b. Psychic wealth** includes a number of virtues--imagination, creativity, initiative, and resourcefulness (Fogel).

**c. Spiritual wealth**, the rarest form of wealth, includes insight into what is real and lasting, impartiality, renunciation, integrity, and devotion or spiritual love (Shrii Shrii Ananadamurti).

Though everyone wants to enjoy all round wealth, history reveals that few actually do.  As a matter of fact, "in most societies and throughout most generations, a small proportion of the population receives most of the income" (*Britannica,* 2000).

Yet it is generally conceded that psychic and spiritual wealth are more important than material wealth, not only because they are able to generate material wealth, but also because they are able to compensate for it when it is not present.  Many of the world's greatest teachers were neither wealthy nor impoverished. They simply lived--and lived simply--so that they might transmit their psychic and spiritual wealth to those who were ready or destined to receive it.



**4)** **Brahmacarya**.  This means attachment (*carya*) to Spirit (*Brahma*).  It also means, in a secondary sense, celibacy in youth and fidelity in marriage.  Brahmacarya requires a special form of vision--the ability to see Spirit in all creatures and in all situations.  Brahma is the depth, not the surface, of all experience.  Brahmacarya is the effort to connect to this depth, to immerse oneself in it, to see what it reveals, and then to be illuminated by it. This is much more difficult than it sounds.  Attachment in all its forms (material, emotional, sexual, financial, social) is the enemy of Brahmacarya.

See with desire, perceive the surface.

See without desire, perceive the depth.

Tao Te Ching

Seeing with desire—attaching to the surface—is natural and instinctive. We think that what is seen is real, solid, and reliable.  Experience teaches us that what is real--the realm of Spirit—is hidden, deep, and elusive.

This is why, in his wiser years of middle age, the philosopher Spinoza created his letterhead with a red rose, the symbol sexual love—with the following word:



**Caution**

Brahamacarya is **manifes**t by attaching and maintaining one's focus to the inner depth of a person, circumstance, or experience, not its physical or emotional surface, attractions, or flaws, which can either distort or repel one's vision and feeling.  It is also manifest in ferreting out the hidden radiance in all experience--one of the gifts of meditation.

**Question 11.** It is said that women give sex for love and that men give love for sex. Evaluate this statement in heterosexual and homosexual frameworks. Discuss this saying in light of Brahamacarya.

**5)** **Aparigraha**.  This means detaching from luxuries and donating any extra wealth to charity.  This is **manifest** in a simple, frugal, generous lifestyle.

**An advanced culture** would encourage simplicity, modesty, anonymity, and charitable giving as the preferred lifestyle, as opposed to today’s lifestyle of complication, extravagance, showmanship, and greed.

**6)** **Shoaca**.   This means striving to become clean physically and mentally and to avoid self-obsession.  It is **manifest** in recognizing the Spiritual Source (Brahmacarya) within all beings and to recognize the Spiritual Path of Returning to the Center (Brahmacakra) as the Path of Nourishment, Purification, and Completion.  It is also manifest in the ability to curb one's instincts and lower appetites, to avoid drugs and intoxicants, which destroy the intellect and intuition, and to avoid bad company, which leads to one's and other's downfall. The teenage brain, which matures only after 28 years, becomes addicted "faster, harder, longer, and with more devastating consequences" than the brain of an older person (Jensen).

**7)** **Santosa**.  This means being content with one's lot, even in adversity, while working to improve it with diligence, patience, and grace.  It is **manifest** in an optimistic and realistic attitude in times of misfortune and in equanimity and modesty in times of fortune.

**8)** **Tapah**.  This means undergoing hardship for the sake of the goal of attaining Self-Realization and Self-Actualization by serving all creatures without expectation of reward.  It is **manifest** in meditation, which is service to one's soul.  It is also manifest in study, for students, and in fasting, which purifies one's body and mind.

The Old English word *feastan* means "to hold fast to Spirit"-- *not* to avoid food or water for a specified period of time.  In Yoga, fasting is observed 11 days after the New Moon and 11 days after the Full Moon, for a period of 36 hours, beginning after the evening meal, skipping all meals during the next day, and then breaking the fast the following morning.  Those learning to fast should begin to do so with shorter time frames.  Drinking water with a little lemon or lime juice and a pinch of salt will help keep the digestive system alkaline and restore the body's lost salts.  A fast should be broken with a small amount of nutritious food, and the body should be systematically re-hydrated.  Only those who are healthy should attempt to fast.  Consult with your physician before doing so, for it is not easy. During the first 12 hours of the fast, the hardship associated with the practice becomes evident.  Bringing a fast to a good conclusion is an accomplishment in itself--nothing to be proud of, but a reminder of how soft ordinary life is.  One also realizes during a successful fast how obsessed one is with triviality and how comfortable and simple it is to live with Spirit.

**9)** **Svadhyaya**.  This means systematic study of scripture to grasp its real—and often hidden—meaning. It is **manifest** in daily reading of any work of art that inspires noble action and devotion.  The purpose of Scripture is to provide instruction about what to do and what not to do.  Its purpose is also to provide inspiration, discipline, and correction--what is meant by "tough love."  When correctly read and understood, Scripture provides the feeling of coming in contact with one's conscience and spiritual depth. One can enjoy a World Humanities course by reading the *Tao Te Ching*, poems from China; *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, parables from Japan; the *Bhagavad Gita*, a text from India; the *Book of Job*, *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes*, *Genesis,* the *Prophets*, and the **Sefirot** from Israel; the Koran and the poetry of Hafez and Rumi from Arabia, Persia, and Turkey; the Gospels from the Middle East; and the **Teaching of the Medicine Wheel** from North America.

**10)** **Iishvara pranidhana.** This means surrender to God, literally, accepting the shelter (*pranidhana*) of the Cosmic Controller (*Iishvara*).

*Who is luckiest in this whole orchestra? The reed...*
*Its mouth touches your lips to learn music.*

*All reeds, sugarcane especially,*
*think only of this chance.*

*They sway in the canebrake,*
*free in the many ways they dance.*

*Without you the instruments would die.*
*One sits close beside you.*
*Another takes a long kiss.*

*The tambourine begs,*
*Touch my skin, so I can be myself.*

*Let me feel you enter each limb bone by bone,*
*that what died last night can be whole today.*

*Why live some soberer way*
*and feel you ebbing out?*
*I won't do it.*

*Either give me enough wine or leave me alone,*
*now that I know how it is*
*to be with you in a constant conversation.*

**~ Rumi**

Surrender is developed through faith, acceptance, and meditation, by which one attempts to surrender one's ego to Cosmic Mind and Source. Meditation is a form of exalted listening.  This is the primary practice of yoga.  Success in meditation is based upon 1) firm determination, 2) follow-through, 3) respect for the Light that dispels all psycho-spiritual darkness; 4) psychic equipoise; 5) control of all sensory and motor organs; 6) a sentient vegetarian diet; and 7) Grace.  Meditation is best practiced in a quiet, clean place in a room dedicated for this purpose.  Advanced meditation arouses the latent sleeping divinity, called the Coiled Serpentine Force (*kula kundalini*), from the tip of the spine, the location of the root chakra, to the top of the head, the location of the crown chakra.

The best times to meditate are the **samdhyas**, 30 minutes before and after the dawn and sunset, when the earth's vibration is the most peaceful and calm.

**8. Mantra Meditation.** Yoga Masters say that it all boils down to 3 things—the base, the means, and the goal. The base is ethical living, the means is meditation and its allied practices, and the goal is attaining liberation and enlightenment through merger with Cosmic Spirit.

There are many approaches to the means—meditation. These include sitting quietly, reflecting deeply, observing intently, and dis-identifying from our physical and mental experience. For some people, a helpful tool to promote effective meditation is mantra. The literal meaning of mantra is “the repetition of a word that leads the mind (*man*) to liberation (*tra*).”

**STEP 1.** There are many types of mantras, most of which are not uttered and most of which are kept secret.  But a universal mantra is different.  It can be spoken or sung openly and can be used in collective gatherings as well.  A universal mantra can be as effective as any of the other specialized mantras, which are reserved for the higher lessons of yoga and for other occasions.

**STEP 2.** The Universal Mantra **BABA NAM KEVALAM** may be used for meditation and for healing illness and trauma. This mantra has 8 syllables and is therefore classified as an octosyllabic mantra.  It was designed by the spiritual master Shrii Shrii Anandamurti to vibrate the eight chakras or psychic centers of the body. The eight sounds of **BABA NAM KEVALAM** may be sounded internally or externally as follows—

1. Ba  2. ba  3. nam  4. mmm  5. kay  6. wah  7. lam  8. mmm.

          BABA means Cosmic Love.

          NAM means expression or word.

          KEVALAM means ONLY or EVERYWHERE.

**STEP 3**. Here are two links to listen to this mantra set to music:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InBJ\_yXzhUk

https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=lFjen-0jp74

**Step 4.** The meaning of the mantra is that THERE IS ONLY COSMIC LOVE.  That means that LOVE IS ALL THERE IS, that Love is residing behind all of our mental activity, behind its anxiety and distortion.

When listening to this mantra, simply let it pass through your mind.  Turn the music off when you like, as it is concentrated therapy!  But keep coming back to it.  Some people do not like listening to this mantra, as it can bring up hidden negativity in the mind. Others find it pleasing. It is actually the easiest part of meditation, as it takes no effort to listen to it or to concentrate on it! Understood spiritually, listening to a mantra is receiving the gift of Divine Love crafted into exquisite sound by a spiritual master. Our task is simply to receive. The sound and associated meaning of the mantra relaxes our whole being and takes it into deeper levels of awareness, healing, and love.

Several years ago, a young woman who looked very sad kept coming to our Yoga Club meetings. She was depressed because she had just gone through a painful breakup with her boyfriend. I suggested that she listen to mantra music as a method to help her deal with her loss. Several weeks later, I noticed that she looked happier. She said that she had simply listened to mantra music throughout the day. That’s all—no formal meditation practice. She just listened. Clearly it had helped her, demonstrating the simple power of listening to mantra music. Later, after more instruction, she was ready to go forward with more formal lessons, culminating in her receiving a special mantra that she used for her meditation. Sometime later, she told me that she was celebrating her first-year anniversary of being off anti-depressants—for good. It all started from listening to mantra.

This story is important because it illustrates that it is impossible to proceed with meditation unless and until one is ready. The mental ground work of cleansing and preparing the body and mind must be completed through absorption of the mantra on a deep level, on an unconscious level. If you are trying to force yourself to meditate, it might be a losing battle! The best thing to do at this stage is simply to listen to the mantra and let it do its work. When this stage is complete, you will know it is time to go on to the next step. There is no hurry. Accept where you are.

**STEP 5.** If you want to use this mantra as a meditation tool, then **link your breath with the mantra**—breathing in for BABA NAM and breathing out for KEVALAM. Spend about 10 minutes in this state, focusing your mind on the mantra and its idea and feeling.

**You are meditating when the rhythm, vibration, and meaning of the mantra merge into a unified feeling of deep peace**, which lies beyond all agitated sensation, thought, and feeling.  This is called mantra caetanya (synchronization of mind and mantra with Cosmic Cognition).

You may meditate lying down in shavasana (corpse pose), or sitting up in a chair, or sitting up in half or full lotus position.  Your body position does not matter that much. What is important is coordinating your focus and achieving mantra caetanya. You will have to work to achieve mantra caetanya, for you will have to rope your unruly awareness into the process. Remember that spiritual masters say that the normal state of the mind is “monkey mind.” That means agitation and a refusal to focus for a sustained amount of time are the mind’s normal state.

Once mantra caetanya is attained through regular practice, it can then be sustained in daily life without too much effort.  If you are thirsty enough for it, you will attain it. Regular practice makes a big difference. This is why spiritual masters emphasize meditating at least twice a day—to create and sustain the rhythm of physical relaxation, mental expansion, and spiritual liberation. Twice a day for about 20 minutes during each meditation session is crucial. It is the “make or break” point.

During successful meditation, pain, suffering, and ego obsession wane, and we become more aware of our sentient, higher nature. We also become aware that, no matter how many or deep our troubles, our life is a gift, not a burden. This is the point of meditation!

Most of our meditation practice deals with what we cannot see.  Probe this space with both your heart and mind.  This will take you into Cosmic Awareness, which lies beyond the reach of words and concepts. Eventually, the mind will come back from its expanded state and return to its normal state of thinking and feeling. Apply the insight and love gained in your meditation to your daily life.

**STEP 6.** There are many interconnections between mantra and neuroscience. A San Francisco critic wrote that **mantra music is "the new soul music**."  According to Ramesh Bjonnes, "This is not surprising, since neuroscience is finding that repetitive sounds are good not only for the soul but for the brain.  Our **Reticular Activating System** (RAS) is responsible for detecting new stimuli when we experience change and thus causes the brain to be alert.  When stimuli are repetitive, as in chanting, the RAS is disengaged, which has a quieting effect on the brain.  Brain wave activity is also affected, since alpha and theta activity are increased, which enhances awareness and relaxation.  Heart rates are lowered, and stress is reduced.  The world's leading neuroscientist, N. Lyubimov, has found that chanting creates coherent activity in the brain, indicating left-right activation and coordination.  Chanting thus produces restful alertness and improved mental performance and greater creativity.  If we add all of the spiritual benefits--feelings of unity, devotion, and love--then the age-old art of chanting mantras is surely one of humanity's most soulful and uplifting musical expressions."



**9. Half Bath.**  Meditation is facilitated by a cool body, which calms both the mind and spirit.   Consider the following yogic technique, called Half bath, various forms of which are used in many contemplative traditions. Step in a bathtub or shower stall and systematically cool the heat centers of the body in this order, since it is aligned with the neural pathways and areas of the brain:

1. Splash or pour cool water over the genital area;
2. Splash or pour cool water on the lower legs and feet;
3.  Splash or pour cool water over the arms, from elbows to finger tips;
4.  Splash or pour cool water into the mouth;
5. Then splash water into the eyes 12 times;
6. Spit out the water from your mouth;
7. Gather water in your cupped hand and bring it to your nasal passages;
8.  Tip your head back and let the water trickle down your nasal passage;
9.  Better yet, use a *netti pot* using a mild saline solution for this purpose;
11.  Bring cool water in your hand to the back of your neck (3 times).
12. Bring cool water on your fingertips to your ear interstices (3 times);

If a tub or shower is not available for half bath, do as many steps of this procedure as possible, given the circumstances you find yourself in.  Washing and cooling the feet is an important part of this procedure, since the brain and feet have many neural connections.

Studies indicate that there is a direct correlation between body heat and increased heart rate, physiological stress, anger, violence, suicide, anxiety, and impaired cognition (*Psychiatric Times*). Cooling the body with water decreases these symptoms and can prevent them from arising during times of stress and can prevent them from arising if the body is cooled regularly four times a day—ideally before morning meditation, before lunch, before evening meditation, and before sleep.

Research indicates that cooling the body in the above manner is equivalent to about 20 minutes of meditation. How is this possible? Half bath triggers the “Diving Reflex,” which deep sea divers experience when they go on extended dives (*Deeper Blue*). Half bath, like a deep-sea dive, 1) lowers the heart rate, 2) reduces blood pressure, 3) deepens respiration, 4) retards arterial blood flow to the extremities, 5) redirects arterial blood to the brain and inner organs, and 6) initiates high efficiency metabolism, exhibited by many aquatic animals and migratory birds, by which more physiological work is done with less energy than is usually required.

Three minutes of half-bath delivers the same outcome as if you were to meditate for about 20 minutes with a hot and agitated body-mind. Therefore, a meditation beginning with half-bath will go deeper in a 20-minute period than a meditation without a half-bath.

**Part 3 – Supports to Life Balance**

**10. Teaching Styles and their Outcomes**. It is important to adopt an experimental attitude to test everything.  Yogis are scientists who run experiments in the laboratory of their bodies, minds, and spirits.  They run these experiments in a supportive, authoritative context:

The following chart illuminates four teaching styles:



Just as plants need proper support to establish deep roots in the soil, to grow upright towards the sun, and to bear fruit at the end of the season, so children and young adults need proper guidance, feedback, and coaching in order to grow into responsible, competent adults.

These four teaching and parenting styles have far-reaching consequences. **Assertive or authoritative** teachers and parents are both warm and strict (responsive and demanding).  They set limits and enforce them in a humane manner, encouraging cooperation and acceptance, creating children who are responsible, self-motivated, on-task, competent, and well adjusted (Darling, 1999).  **Permissive or indulgent** teachers and parents are both warm and lax (responsive and not demanding).  They prefer not to set limits, thus creating children who are moody, erratic, willful, irresponsible, and incompetent.  **Bossy or authoritarian** teachers and parents are strict and cold (demanding and not responsive).  They set limits and enforce them with coercion, shame, and guilt, creating children who are obedient, submissive, repressed, angry, and perfectionist. **Indifferent or neglectful** teachers and parents are lax and cold (not demanding and not responsive).  They do not set limits, nor do they indicate that they care about or love their children, who end up being emotionally starved, conflicted, off task, and enraged.  These kinds of children usually indulge in outrageous, anti-social behavior to get the attention they do not receive--except by counselors, case workers, and police officers.

These four parenting styles create four broad classifications of children--in their starkest terms, **happy leaders, careless lawbreakers, depressed victims, and enraged criminals**.

Lying behind these four parenting styles lie deeper attitudes about emotions.  Psychologist John Gottman has identified these attitudes as **meta-emotions—**“feelings about emotions" (Talaris).  Gottman believes that there are four meta-emotional styles.  Life Balance will center in the fourth style—emotion coaching.

The first meta-emotional style is **dismissing**.  It is often based on parental uncertainty about what to do with emotions.  The solution for this kind parent is to ignore emotion.  It is based on the belief that emotions, especially troubling emotions, do not matter that much and that they lead nowhere.  The motto of this style--*"Just get over it"*--signals that the child's emotions should be discounted in favor of reasonableness and cheerfulness.  The problem with this style is that emotions cannot be easily dismissed, no matter what our age.  When emotions are dismissed, they are forced to be hidden, creating repression and alienation.

The second meta-emotional style is **disapproving**.  It is based on the belief that emotions are messy and that they should be controlled.  The belief of this style is that emotions can turned on and off at will.  The motto of this style--*"You shouldn't feel that way"*--signals that emotions indicate bad character.  The problem with this emotional style is that it creates children who do not trust themselves, who grow up feeling that "something is wrong inside," who are lonely, who suffer from low self-esteem, and who often have learning difficulties (Talaris).

The third meta-emotional style is **laissez-faire.**  It is based on the belief that emotions may be expressed openly, without inhibition or reservation.  According to this style, we may express whatever we feel, whenever we feel it, without limit.  *"Anything goes"* is the signal of this emotional style, which is based on the belief that self-discipline and regard for others are not important.  The problem with this style is that it creates children who are self-centered, who cannot calm down, cannot concentrate, and cannot pick up on social cues (Talaris).  They often become bullies.

The fourth meta-emotional style is **emotion coaching**.  This style recognizes the central importance of emotions, which are accepted and recognized, even when they are difficult or troubling.  In this style, children are taught how to recognize emotions, how to label them--which is often a challenging task--and how to accept them.  Parents who coach their children's emotions listen to them with empathy, so they can learn how to be empathetic with themselves and with others.  Children are also taught how to accept limits, while at the same time that they learn how to solve difficult or challenging emotional problems.  The motto of this style is *"Let's work through it together, until you feel better."*

Clearly, the best teaching style is assertive—warm and strict, responsive and demanding, that is supported by emotion coaching, where high standards, reasonable limits, and cordiality create an enjoyable learning environment. This will mark our approach towards all topics.



**11. Personality Development and Identity.**

**a.** As mentioned earlier, life proceeds in stages. **Erik Erikson** formulated the theory of the Life Cycle, which progresses through eight identifiable stages.  Each stage has a central task that must be completed before the next one can be started.  Each stage is marked by a critical threshold that must be crossed, thus enabling the individual to begin the next stage.  According to Erikson, if an individual has not satisfactorily completed the task of a certain stage, then she or he will call a "moratorium"--a time out--and attempt to work through it, until it is patched up or resolved.  A moratorium could be announced in a variety of ways--weeping, moodiness, silence, angry outbursts, illness, dropping out, a break-up, or a suicide attempt. Erikson's eight stages are as follows (dates approximate):

    a. trust - distrust (first year)
    b. autonomy - dependence (second year)
    c. initiative – apathy (third year)
    d. achievement – failure (fourth to twelfth year)
    e. identity – ambiguity (teens to late 20s)
    f. intimacy – isolation (20s to 40s)
    g. generativity – stagnation (30s to 60s)
    h. integrity - despair (70s to 80s)

These stages are fluid and vary for each of us. For example, some people spend their whole lives trying to trust others or themselves but never really succeed. Or a forty-tear old person may be at career heights only to suffer an abrupt relationship break and subsequent divorce and be thrown back into an identity and trust crisis. Life in unpredictable, and we often have to go back to relearn lessons that were not really learned or experienced deeply.

**b. Survival and Success—the MBTI.** If someone were to ask you, “What are the most important skills to survive and succeed in life?” what would you say? Avoiding danger? Having a stable job? Landing a satisfying career? Having a supportive family? Marrying well? Luck?

While all of these answers have some truth to them, two psychological processes underlie all of them. These are the true keys to survival and success. These two processes are our ability to **gather complete information** and to **make wise decisions** based on that information. To deepen our analysis a bit further, our success in life depends on two activities—gathering information in an accurate and complete manner, and making judgments that are not only logical but also thoughtful and considerate to others and the environment (Krebs and Kimmerow).

Success here means a life that is grounded in integrity, modesty, and hard work. It means a life that is anchored in family; that is purified by silence; that respects the land and all its creatures; that is directed towards Spirit; and that is tuned to the voices, songs, dances, and wisdom of the Old Ones, the Elders, or the Ancestors—all included in the term Life Balance.

**Priority of Function.** The Myers-Briggs (MBTI) Indicator, based on the ground-breaking work of Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung (1875 – 1961), reveals how the two processes of gathering information (sensing or intuition) and making decisions (thinking or feeling) are arranged in a significant hierarchy within most individuals.

These 2 processes contain 4 functions that can be arranged in 8 different ways. These are ST, SF, NT, NF, TS, TN, FS, and FN. In this example, the first letter of the sequence will be considered more important than the second. A ST personality signifies that Sensing (S)—one function of perception—is more important than Thinking (T)—one of the functions of making decisions. And TS signifies that Thinking (T)—one function of making decisions—is more important than Sensing (S)—one of the functions of perception.

The difference between the ST and TS personality could not be more profound. The TS type will use Thinking (T or logic) to arrive at a decision—often premature—before enough information—Sensing (S)—has been gathered to support it. This a recipe for disaster—making decisions before all of the information is in. This set-up is common to many types. It can be compensated for once awareness of the problem has been created. The analysis of your MBTI type will be the first step of this process. What do you do instinctively—gather information or make decisions before all the information is in?

It is clear from this one example that the survival level of a ST type is much higher than that of a TS type. The ST type is focused on gathering as much information as possible before making a decision, whereas the TS type will tend to make judgments prematurely, before all of the information is in. But generally, those who prefer judgment (T or F) over perception (S or N) will have to learn how to reverse this process, so they can learn how to gather a rich field of information before they begin to try to make decisions about it.

All types have built-in ways to compensate for their innate biases. Bear this in mind as we go further into your personality type.

There are more than 8 personality types. According to Myers-Briggs, there are actually 16, when our preference for introversion (I) and extraversion (E), as well as openness (P) and closure (J), are added to the mix.

GOLD at SUNY Geneseo can provide you with a sketch of your MBTI type. Contact them for more information.

**c. Gail Sheehy** built upon Erikson's work on the life cycle in her book *Passages:  Predictable Crises of Adult Life*.  Sheehy claims that adult life is punctuated with a series of challenges, upsets, and readjustments that we must all face, even though their onset and duration vary considerably from individual to individual.  These seven phases are the following:

1.  **The Dream of the Twenties**.  This is a time when we try to materialize a dream or vision that is usually rooted in an important experience of our pre-teen years.  Many times, this dream or vision is revisited and revised during our early twenties, since it is often severely challenged by internal and external pressures.  But the dream inspires us to move forward, no matter what obstacles lie in the way.  Not infrequently, the early dream that we follow in our twenties is not our real dream—our own dream.  Rather, it could be the unlived dream of our parents, grandparents, or other significant family members—brother, sister, cousin, aunt, uncle, etc.

2.  **The Break-up of the Thirties**.  This is a time when we reassess our early dream, which has significantly shaped our career and relationship decisions to this point of our life.  But now the dream changes, making what we have achieved in our twenties seem limiting, one-sided, or unfulfilling.  The reassessment of our early dream usually causes a significant, if not disastrous, shift of direction and allegiance in our career and relationships, unless we are guided by good sense, stable friends and family, and a sense of balance and moderation, which can help keep us on course in a sensible fashion during this turbulent period of life.

3.  **The Crack-up of the Forties**.  This is often a difficult time, when we consider a new set of options that call for our attention in an indirect and often troubling manner, where borders and limits are indistinct and sometimes foolishly transgressed.  As in all these stages, but especially during this one, which can seem interminable, our transitions can be quiet or stormy, smooth or disruptive, depending on our sense of responsibility and integration, our tenacity and our flexibility.  This is a time when we are challenged to stay true to our deepest values.  Often, we must overcome temptations and alluring fantasies that in truth lead nowhere.  Once we have mastered this conflict, we are able to encounter what is truly worthwhile--the Self within.

4.  **The Mellowing of the Fifties**.  This is a time of integration, of reaping the rewards of our past decisions, both wise and foolish.  At its best, it is a time of patient effort, which brings more modesty, a more realistic sense of self, and more openness to others and to life.  If the other transitions have not been negotiated successfully, this can be a time of resignation and shrinking.  As in all of the previous stages, many become stuck in this stage and either falter or die.

5.  **The Expansion of the Sixties**.  This a time when we are able to make our greatest contribution to the world, since we have achieved a better, more realistic sense of ourselves and the world.  This is a period when we can be more balanced and integrated than we have ever been before, a time when we can be at peace with ourselves, and a time when we can skillfully practice our craft--our calling, our vocation--that we have found, developed, and honed throughout several decades.

6.  **The Waning of the Seventies**.  This is a time when we begin to consider retirement, leisure, and new relationships with our spouses, our siblings, and our grandchildren, with our extended family, and with other people "on the same wavelength" that we have come across.  This is also a time when some people begin to become aware of the presence of their soul, which prompts them to review their life, to consolidate their experience, to begin to heal the wounds of the past, and to seek spiritual growth.

7.  **The Wisdom of the Eighties and Beyond**.  This is a time when our timeless nature begins to assert itself in a profound way, when our experience and wisdom can be utilized to guide others.  It is also a time when we begin to glimpse what Carl Jung called the Treasure--the inner beauty and worth of life.  It is also a time when we immerse ourselves in the first stages of the Life Review, when we begin to take stock of our experience, adding up its worth, its failures, its concomitant lessons, and its hidden blessings.  To round out one's life in this way, after successfully negotiating all its critical thresholds, is a very unusual and high achievement, which is actually an inestimable gift. The more one has achieved Life Balance at an early age, the easier these inescapable transitions will be.



**12. Walking the Labyrinth.**

Labyrinths have been created by many cultures to symbolize the journey to the Center, which can be accessed through one path. They surfaced about 6000 years ago in ancient Minoan culture and were then duplicated in ancient Egyptian, Indian, Greek, and Roman culture, from which they were transmitted to the modern world. It is different from a maze that has many dead-ends and in which one can become lost and trapped. The rhythm of a labyrinth is 1) preparation for depth, 2) entry into the energy field, 3) reaching the Center, 4) regeneration and return, and 5) re-emergence into the daily world (Lonegren).

A classical labyrinth has seven circuits to the center. It can be left-turning or right-turning, depending on the layout required by the landscape.



Labyrinths have been shown to create a sense of peace and calmness and to raise consciousness. They should be walked in a leisurely manner, since they can be used to assist in solving problems. Before entering the labyrinth, ask for guidance about a problem and then see what emerges in a day or two, without expectation or overthinking. As such, labyrinths can be valuable tools to restore lost Life Balance. Walking the labyrinth is a form of moving meditation. The pattern is 3,2,1,4,7,6,5,8, which approximates the phi constant in nature.

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**Footprints.** Since he was twelve years old, Lars has co-managed his family farm on a part-time basis and as a labor of love. The farm, called Baltar, meaning “The House of Fulfillment,” is a 184-acre tree preserve and wildlife refuge containing a butterfly sanctuary, forest trails, ponds, tillable land, and oak-beam historic barns. He was a pre-medical student at Hamilton College (A.B. 1963), a student of World Religion at Harvard Divinity School (S.T.B 1966), and a student of Humanities and English literature at the University of Minnesota (Ph.D., 1974).

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Throughout his academic career, Lars has taught a wide range of courses in English composition, Eastern and Western Humanities, Literature and Culture, and the spiritual traditions of India and China.

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