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Welcome...

Here is your *Beyond Mastery Newsletter* for June 2013. This newsletter may be duplicated and distributed to those who share an interest in Energy Medicine, neurolinguistics—especially Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP)—and spirituality.

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This month the featured articles are “The Ticking Clock?” by Joel; and “Walk Your Talk,” by Debra.

The Ticking Clock

Centuries ago this article would have been called “The Sands of Time.” An “hour glass” used to show the passage of time, wasn’t really an “hour” glass, of course. Until the development of clocks, we had no way to measure the passage of time specifically. Sundials gave us a clue about measuring the time from sunrise to sunset, but it took a clock to provide a consistent reference to time—both day and night.

Clocks changed everything. The general divisions of time—morning, noon, afternoon, evening, and night—were replaced by more precise measures. People could be paid “by the hour,” and trains could run “on time.” Professional basketball players have a 24-second shot clock to help keep the game moving and interesting. Big computers can be programmed to buy and sell stocks, second by second as they change values.

While there are still some places on planet Earth where people live according to the natural rhythms of the day, modern societies move at a much faster pace. Times have changed since the poet Horace (65 BCE to 8 BCE) told us to “carpe diem,” or “seize the day,” but the concept is still valid. We need to make good use of today because we don’t and can’t know what tomorrow will bring.

The question each person needs to answer is, “What—exactly—is good use of today?” Denis Waitley, a popular motivational speaker in the 1970s and ‘80s, used to say that we needed to think of every day as “the Super Bowl, and there are no time outs.” The metaphor is basically that life is a continuing competition, in which “if you snooze, you lose,” a race without pit stops.

One of the metaphors that influenced my thinking on this subject is usually attributed

to William Sloane Coffin, who said, “*The trouble with the rat race is that even if you win, you're still a rat.*” It seems to me that it's worth wondering about the purpose of such a race and the desirability of competing in it.

Members of some religious sects opt out of the race and beg for their sustenance. They subsist on what those who are good at racing with the rats can afford to give them. I'm not sure how much time they spend in prayer, meditation, and other spiritual pursuits, given the time they need to spend begging. Others join a commune, build shelters, and practice subsistence farming. That's probably a healthier way of life than commuting into a major metropolitan area, spending the day in a cubical working at a computer, and then commuting home again.

My sense is that we are to “bloom where we are planted” (the original is usually attributed to Mary Engelbreit). I think that means that we are to live each day with **awareness**, being consciously aware of the *meaning* that underlies the *form* of what we are doing. In that sense, even a “rat race” can provide us with opportunities to extract meaning from our activities. *What* we do is not so important as *how* we are doing it.

Although we don't like to think about it, humans are mortal. You may recall the syllogism about Socrates: All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore.... At this point, we all know that Socrates was indeed mortal. By all accounts, Socrates was also aware of how he was living his life and the choices he was making. Seizing the day (*carpe diem*) can and does mean different things to different people. Denis Waitley was focused on business success. Socrates obviously had other objectives in mind.

Each of us has to choose the kind of meaning we want to extract from life while our clocks are ticking. It seems to me that the main thing is to be aware. The clock continues to tick regardless of your level of awareness. This is what I think the Buddha meant when he said, “When you walk, just walk; when you eat, just eat.” Focus on what you are doing so that you can be fully aware.

My sense is that the Buddha would not preclude sharing a meal with someone and switching back and forth between “just eating” and “just conversing.” (That may be why we're told to avoid talking with our mouths full, which is especially true if you're eating soup.) Being aware—focusing totally on what you are doing—is a form of what has been called **mindfulness** (see <http://bit.ly/BCz4d>).

The clock may be ticking, but your focus of attention really should be on what you are doing rather than on the ticking of the clock.

Walk Your Talk

For some time, it has been in the back of my mind how important it is to be in integrity with what you say and what you do. The old saying goes, “Actions speak louder than words.” In my day job as an integrative therapist or *executive wellness coach*, I was present, peaceful, and I saw perfection in the world. But when I would wrestle with having to do our income taxes, or struggling with the internet provider, or answering the phone and having one of what seemed like hundreds of telemarketers on the other end of the line, my poise was all too absent.

Much of my everyday experience seemed like life or death. While doing something as mundane as peeling potatoes, or washing the window-cleaning rags used by Johnny on the Spot Window Cleaning, my shoulders would be tensed and it felt as though I was racing against an invisible clock. Each task done left another to do. Every moment had to be filled with doing....

Last May 8, I attended a one-day silent meditation retreat hosted by our local Sangha. While having lunch, I still recall the way my taste buds exploded like Pop Rocks (the number-one popping candy) when I put a pita chip with hummus into my mouth. I had a sense of all the hands, the sun and rain, and the soil that had been involved making it possible for me to enjoy a baked sweet potato. I may be forgetting some previous precious moment, but I think of this as my first truly conscious experience of mindful eating.

This first taste was very welcome, and I was blessed to attend the first three days of the weeklong silent mediation retreat in June, and another weekend in October. Although I had been a contemplative for several decades, something deeper was opening up within my awareness with the silence and mindfulness within a group.

I am very thankful for the experience of healing and mindfulness that had begun for me even before the surgery last fall. I had become quite dissatisfied with the pace of my life. Thankfully, on some level you are aware enough at times like that to know an internal change is being called for. No amount of rearranging provides the intrinsic satisfaction we are all craving.

In *The Heart of the Soul: Emotional Awareness*, Gary Zukav and Linda Francis write about perfectionism being the assumption that the world (as it is) is not perfect. Contrasting a gorgeous landscape and a landfill, they challenge us to see that one is a perfect example of nature in its pristine state and one is a perfect example of what comes from ignorance or exploitation. Imagine that you can see every circumstance as perfect—the **perfect consequence given the choices made**. “The choice each individual makes, moment by moment, is not between a perfect world and an imperfect world, but between different perfect worlds.” (p.163)

I am no less busy this spring than last, but something within me has changed. When I crawl into bed after hours of scheduling window-cleaning jobs, at the end of a long day, it is grace that helps me know *it is only windows*. In fact, I sometimes say that out loud. When I catch myself racing around as though someone or something is in danger, I am thankful for the awareness.

In Buddhism the idea of “right effort” is about finding the meaning in everything we do. According to Lama Surya Das, in *Eight Steps to Enlightenment: Awakening the Buddha Within*, the Buddha taught of Four Great Efforts. The first is “the **effort to avoid** any new unwholesome, negative thoughts or actions.” The second is, “the **effort to overcome** any existing unwholesome thoughts or actions.” The third is “the **effort to develop** only good and wholesome thoughts and lead an enlightened life.” And the fourth is “the **effort to maintain** the goodness that already exists.” (p. 270-273) This section of the book leads to a heading about making the effort to meditate daily: “JUST DO IT!”

Somehow this took me back to the idea of preferences and perfectionism and to the way Janet Mentgen would tell Healing Touch™ students and practitioners to *do the work*. One could think of Healing Touch™ work as more sacred than scheduling window cleanings, for certainly healing work provides the opportunity for being present with another in meaningful ways. It is important for me to see how everything does that.

I have read previously, and also again in the Lama Surya Das book, the story of Buddha’s servant, Ananda. Even though he had been with the Buddha day and night for several decades, Ananda had not been enlightened. After the Buddha’s death, Ananda wanted desperately to have a say in the teaching that would go forward, but only those

who were enlightened would be allowed to participate in the process. As the time of the gathering approached, Ananda gave up trying. “Ananda gave up trying to be something he wasn’t; and then, before his head hit the pillow, in an instant he was a liberated *arhant*—totally awake.” (p. 275)

Of course, he had put a lot of right effort into his process. He had been a student and a seeker for his whole life. With his whole being he wanted to be enlightened. The combining of the dedication and commitment and the willingness to surrender had resulted in the goal’s being met.

Last year at the June retreat, the meditation teacher asked me if I wanted to be free. That seemed such a shocking question, but I think I have a better understanding of what she meant when I think of Ananda. Did I want to be free enough to give up trying so hard? Was I willing to let go? Could I avoid the unwholesome, and cultivate the wholesome? Would I just do the work? I will go to the June silent meditation retreat again this year. I do not know where I am in the process, but I know I am grateful to be alive and still in it. I will sit. I will walk. I will eat. God help me walk when I am walking. With grace perhaps I will walk my talk.

Language Tips and More

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You can also stay in touch with us by Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, or Skype. You can also text or send a quick email message: debra@scs-matters.com or joel@scs-matters.com, and within the continental U.S., you can call Debra at (269) 921-2217.

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