



mindset

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balance

As I contemplate the many aspects of life we all try to balance, my thoughts begin to spin. Should I look at the aspect of balancing physical needs? Adequate food, rest, and exercise are surely the basic foundations of a mentally healthy life. Should I look at the aspect of balancing time? Again, sufficient time for work, rest, and play are essential components of a healthy lifestyle. How do I balance competing needs? Perhaps most problematic for many of us is the necessity of balancing our needs with the needs of our children, parents, employers, spiritual community, and our wider community.

The image that comes to my mind is that of a juggler balancing on a seesaw while attempting to juggle balls and keep plates spinning on a table! It is probably an impossible task. Balls will be dropped, plates will be broken. Finally, the juggler has but one choice: step off of the seesaw and stand on firm ground. He may then be able to retain the focus he needs so he can juggle everything without too many mishaps.

I want to talk about metaphorically getting off of the seesaw. Most of us, it seems, deal with our many balls and plates by running back and forth between them, while trying to keep our balance—all, of course, while balancing on a seesaw. So we too must learn to get off the seesaw and stand on firm ground. We need a centering belief that helps us put everything into sharper focus, so that we can find the right place and time for the various activities of life.

This grounding or centering belief can come from one of any number of perspectives. We might use a spiritual perspective, one based on our values, or a personal mission statement that we write for ourselves. This unifying principle can help us figure out how we can allocate our precious resources of time and energy.

Stephen Covey's book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, remains an important resource in this search for a way to organize our time in a way that reflects our values. He suggests we begin this process of awareness by writing our epitaph. How do we want people to remember us? Our epitaph is the overriding message that we want our lives to convey. Our fictional obituary should reflect our lifelong values and help us formulate our priorities in the here and now. The next step is the hardest because it involves taking an honest look at how we actually spend our time. We need to take a step back and examine whether or not we are living our lives in a way that reflects what we hold most dear. Finally, we take a look at all of

the competing needs and try to fit them into a schedule that is realistic and reflects how we want to be.

A number of years ago, when I had small children, was working part time and doing quite a bit of work in my faith community, I took the time to do this process. When I examined how I was actually living my life I was appalled to realize how much emphasis I placed on efficiency! Efficiency was not even on my list of values. Efficiency certainly took precedence over *my* needs and certainly interfered with my ability to be present and consider other needs. I am not dismissing how helpful it is to be efficient, but there are far more important values.

As I thought about how to order my priorities I imagined a triangle, like the food pyramid. At the base of the pyramid was my belief in divine love and my wish to be a reflection of that love in the world. With that desire at the base, everything else fell into place. First, if I do not take good care of my physical needs for food, exercise, and sleep, I am a poor reflection of love! I am cranky and irritable and have nothing to give. Next, if I don't balance work and play I radiate resentment, not love. Finally, if I don't balance my needs with those of others I wind up being burned out and of no use to anyone.

While that is the overall picture, it is one that must be worked on every day. A friend recently told me of his practice of writing down what he wants each day. The "wants" can range from the spiritual to the mundane. A desire "to be present in the moment and present to everyone I meet" can exist with a desire "to see *Big Fish* at the movie theater."

This practice is a quick form of journaling that I think captures an essential ingredient. When we start our days by reflecting, we put ourselves at the center of our day. We recognize that we are in charge of looking at all the competing elements and deciding what we can do. We recognize that we are probably planning too much. We can make our goals more realistic, remembering that how we do things is as important as what we do.

We must of course be willing to shift our plans and priorities if need be. The important thing is trying to evaluate the need to respond to the unexpected through the lens of our mission statement or our values. The goal is to consciously live our lives. When we are at death's door we don't want to look back with regret. I know I do not want "She was a really efficient person" as my epithet. lol