

Welcome to May,

So nice it is to have the sun out and some warm weather finally. As I sit and write this email to you, I see a hummingbird and some bees enjoying the nectar from the lilac bush right outside my window. So nice spring is!

This newsletter looks primarily at similarities between meditation, exercise, eating well, yoga and stretching. Before going into that, I would like to let you know of the Cycling Awareness class that will happen this month. There was a good response in the April newsletter and the class will begin on Wednesday, May 24th. There will be four classes, three of which will entail cycling and the fourth class will be all about fixing flat tires.

The classes dates and times are:

May 24 from 5 – 6:30

May 31 from 5 – 6:30

June 7 from 5 – 6:30

June 14 from 5 – 7pm

The first class' theme is "Gears; what do we do with them all?" This class will meet at a location on the bike trail and will bicycle from there. Other locations will be announced at the end of each class.

There is still time to join in. If you would like, email back and I will fill you in with more detail. Helmets are required in these classes.

Moving onto meditation and fitness:

I was reading an article about Natalie Goldberg who is a writer and meditator. She is the author of many books one of which is Long Quiet Highway. In the article I was reading about her, she listed some "rules" she has found to help her keep her practice going when there were plenty of reasons to stop. I share this with you because I feel this is helpful if you meditate, workout, run, walk, swim, go to work, eat well, stretch, do yoga and so on. These 'rules' can be brought into your life, if you choose, no matter what you do and what you are trying to achieve.

Natalie has meditated for over 25 years and one paragraph stated:

"Why did I do it? What kept me going? First, I liked that it was so simple, so different from the constant rush of human life. When I sat (walked, exercised, ate), I wasn't hurrying toward anything. The whole world, my entire inner life, was coming home to me. This felt right – and it was inexpensive. All I needed was my breath, a cushion or chair, and a little time. And I feel I've learned a few things about meditation during my sitting tenure. I wouldn't necessarily call them "rules," but they have helped to keep my practice going when there were plenty of reasons to stop." (Why do you workout, walk, eat well, stretch or yoga? Do you do it without worrying about the rush to get someplace else or achieve a particular goal? What would it be like to go in and just workout? Just do yoga? Just stretch? Just eat well? Just walk?)

The Dalai Lama (or maybe Thich Nhat Hanh) wrote a book that looks at the similarities between praying and meditating (Christianity and Buddhism). If you are more

comfortable with the word prayer instead of meditate, please make that change in the writing below.

Rule #1: “If you want meditation (fitness, health, happiness) in your life for a long time, do not make a rigid structure and then chastise yourself when you don’t comply with it. It’s much better to keep a limber mind and develop tenderness toward existence. Missed a day? You’ll begin again the next day. Where are you going anyway but right where you are? But that doesn’t mean structure isn’t important. It’s easier to return to something solid than to an amorphous intention to some plan to meditate (workout, walk, eat well, stretch, yoga). Begin with five minutes – a time structure – and clarify it even more. When should you sit (workout, walk, eat well, stretch, do yoga) for those five minutes?... If you choose a time, it makes the practice sturdier.” (In all the weight management books I have read, they all state that the more strict/rigid a diet is, the more difficult it is to stay with. I hope you are looking for a change for the rest of your life. How can you be tender toward your existence?)

Rule #2 “...be creative and flexible in your meditation (workout, walking, eating well, stretching, doing yoga). A structure that worked well for three years may suddenly collapse: You have a new job with different hours, or you’re traveling for two months, or your wife (or daughter) just gave birth... So learn to meditate (workout, walk, eat well, stretch, do yoga) in a chair, while you sit in the waiting room of your dentist’s office, or in the car as you wait for your (grand) son or daughter to finish soccer practice.”

“Meditation (workout time, walk time, eating well time, stretch time, yoga time) is about having a large life smack in the center of your everyday life. The challenge is how to stay open and continue.”

Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk, says “I do whatever works and change it when it no longer works.” (Are there any changes awaiting in your life?)

Rule #3: “Never give up. Even if you can’t meditate (workout, walk, eat well, stretch, do yoga), carry your meditation (intention) inside. ... There might be periods – weeks, months, or even years – when you can’t get to the cushion, (workout, walk, eat well, stretch, do yoga) but that doesn’t mean you have to give up being a meditator (fit, healthy, happy person). And when you finally do return to sitting (working out, walking, eating well, stretching, doing yoga), your practice might be even fresher than when you left it.”

Rule #4: “even if you carry meditation (fitness, health, joy) inside - still see and feel as a meditator (fit, healthy, happy person) - there are times when you need to physically practice differently.”

Rule #5: “No matter how far your meditation (workout, walk, eat well, stretch) diverts from the cushion or the chair (the gym, outside or other location), don’t forget to return again and again, as much as possible, to that immobile sitting position, where everything runs through you. ... Each practice has its one essential activity. For Zen, it is sitting.

This is good. Otherwise we might wander off, get lost forever, and never find the beginning.”

Stay present as you walk, workout, eat, stretch, do yoga each day of your life realizing the impact each of your foot prints leaves behind.

FYI – I will be out of town most of July. If you have programs you want to take care of before I leave, let me know soon so there is enough time.

Have a lovely day. Enjoy this life!

Carol Lee