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HAPPY 2006

365 NEW OPPORTUNITIES

— Parmjit Singh, PhD

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE MASTERS...

The greater danger
 for most of us
 is not that our aim is
 too high
 and we miss it,
 but it is too low and we reach it.
 — **Michelangelo**



Having patience I should develop
 enthusiasm;

For awakening will dwell only in
 those
 who exert themselves.
 — **Shantideva**



Thought grows out of environment.
 — **Arthur Waley**



Follow your bliss.
 — **Joseph Campbell**



A Man travels the world over in
 search of what he needs and returns
 home to find it.
 — **George Moore**



True happiness flows from the pos-
 session of wisdom and virtue and
 not from the possession of external
 goods.
 — **Aristotle**



A new dawn is upon us, inspiring new optimism, hope and will- ingness to charter new territories. It is a time for revaluation, re-assessment, ac- tion and renewal. Nonetheless, in this brouhaha of starting anew, we are of- ten haunted by 'where to start' or 'what is the right way to start afresh'. This is a legitimate dilemma because we do not want to make any mistake again; this time we want to make sure that we have made a right start by weighing all the pros and cons of our actions.

However, there is no one 'right' way to start. We should start from wherever we are, without falling for ego-flattering tall promises or reso- lutions. One step at a time is a good strategy because when we take one step the other step follows; and before we know it, we start walking in the di- rection of our goal.

I am reminded of Leo Tolstoy's story cited in *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, by Thich Nhat Hanh. It is about the quest of an emperor who tried to find answers to three most important ques- tions. The emperor thought that if he could know the exact answers to these questions, he can solve any matter. Those three questions were: (1) What is the best time to do each thing? (2) Who are the most important people to work with? (3) What is the most important thing to do at all times?

In order to find the answers, the emperor issued a decree in his kingdom and received numerous an- swers. To cut the long story short, none of the answers were satisfactory. Then somebody told him to visit an old wise man on a hill to get the answers to his three questions.

Eventually, the wise man showed the emperor the perfect an- swers to his questions. He told the em- peror that the best time to do anything is now; the most important people to

work with at any given time is the per- son you are with at the time; and the most important thing to do at all times is the thing you are doing at that time.

Though this advice seems simplistic, yet it is nothing short of any sacred commandment. The essence of this advice also applies to our New Year resolutions. What we need to under- stand is that we do not need to make a perfect start: every start has its own perfection. A tree bearing thousand fruits is enclosed in a small seed.

All you need to do is to take one step at a time with total attention and care. Most of the times, we get bogged down in logistics and our effort to make a perfect start never takes off the ground. It is better to take a wrong step than to stagnate at one place.

Therefore, when you get stuck on the horns of dilemma this year, follow the advice of the wise man, remember his answers and apply it in whatever situation you are. Try to live in the present moment, one day at a time, or even one moment at a time. When you look at 2006 like this, you will find 365 new opportunities. Make the best of those. They will not come again.

In this issue, Joanne Malar challenges conventional definition of new year resolutions, Gurudarshan Jyot exhorts us to stand up for our life by taking responsibility and I have dwelled briefly on the Myth of Self-es- teem and how meditation, yoga and sport psychology can help athletes and the science of healthy breathing. I have also baby-reviewed two insightful books, both related to health and heal- ing. In addition, you are invited to join our 5 Week Program 'The Healing Voy- age' starting on Jan 24. Details are on page 4.

Enjoy reading this issue and until next time, have a lot of good be- ginnings, stay warm and well.

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Mission Statement

'The Health Q' envisions to present factual information for the promotion of wholesome mental, physical and emotional/spiritual living. Synthesizing diverse sources spanning from scientifically valid physical/mental/emotional therapeutic techniques with latest research in mind-body medicine/sciences, cognitive & positive psychology, sport psychology, yoga, meditation, health sciences and other evidence-based integrative/alternative therapies, we intend to make 'The Health Q' an authentic vehicle for dissemination of reliable information for practical and healthy living.

'The Health Q' is not a replacement of a medical advice or treatment.

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CHALLENGING THE NEW YEAR —by Joanne Malar, Three Time Olympian

As a society, we like to think of the New Year as starting anew, beginning a new chapter in our lives and some would even claim to turning over a new leaf. Notice that all of these phrases contain the word 'new' which suggests that we like the thought of a fresh start where we can be completely detached from our past.

Often when starting anew, we are told to 'let go' of the past pain, past failed attempts and move forward with a clean slate. This suggestion of wiping clean our past puts us on a new even start line. This gives us the mental perception that we may have a greater chance to succeed without our past failures and memories weighing us down.

Why do we think like this? Why be ashamed of our past? Why is 'new' so better? We need to challenge this thinking process.

It is always important to question the norm. I love starting something new, but the timing of it should not have to coincide with the New Year. Conventionally, we get so busy in our daily lives that we overlook our own personal goals. All of a sudden months and even a year has passed and we are no where 'on track'. We don't often take the time to evaluate where we are and where we want to go. Somewhere, we get lost in the mindless flow of time. And it is only during a certain time of the New Year that we are shaken out of our slumber. It becomes a proverbial divider in the seamless flow of time.

Don't get me wrong here. I am all for starting anew, taking a new direction, setting a new goal, but it needs to be an ongoing process, not simply once a year. My athletic background taught me the importance of setting goals, defining time-lines of evaluation in both training and competition, and having a support team to help me stay on track. Feedback and

timely support from my peers and friends kept me on track. I have automatically incorporated this process into my post-athletic professional lifestyle and I enjoy the challenges I pose myself.

Therefore, this 'starting anew' should be a continuous process rather than a linear yearly process, just as the natural cyclical processes such as seasonal changes. We should learn from them. Let our life be like a tree. Embrace the change as a tree does, go with the natural flow. Tune into your natural rhythm.

And as you might see, the tree follows the natural cycle quite seamlessly; there seems no obvious beginning or end. It all flows into each other. Therefore, why do we feel that we are not going through physical and emotional micro-lifecycles throughout the year? We need to know that our cyclical patterns all feed each other and are invaluable to our growth and character. In understanding this, it would not be an asset to start 'anew' without incorporating our past or the suffering, if at all, into our being.

New Year is exciting and so much awaits us, but often after a couple of weeks on our new missions/health kicks, we fall off the bandwagon. When our commitment and enthusiasm subsides, we feel guilty and unsuccessful. Instead of making ground-breaking resolutions, engage yourself in a natural flow of enthusiasm, progression, relaxation, reflection and evaluation throughout the year.

If you make the famous 'new year's resolution', make an ongoing one every 3-4 months as well. Create a like-minded buddy group. Remind, evaluate yourself, and re-evaluate your goals. Don't be critical of yourself; instead strive to become stronger and happier.

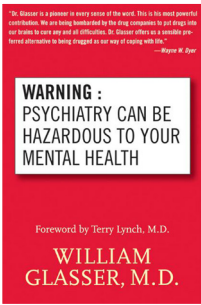
Let everyday be a New Year eve!!!

ENHANCING SELF-CONFIDENCE IN ATHLETES —Parmjit Singh, PhD

There is a direct relationship between self-confidence and sport performance. Self-confident athletes execute and perceive things differently than the athletes who lack confidence. Psychologically speaking, confidence is borne out of an interplay between thoughts, feelings and behavior and it would be fair to say that perception of self acts as a lens through which our potential expresses itself in any sporting event. If our perception of self is distorted, the end product will be bad performance, anxiety, and pessimism. There are various ways to boost self-confidence but most of the psychological methods end up being a band-aid approach for they do not encourage an athlete to get to know their inner self at its core. *Striving to have confidence in self without knowing it will not be as successful.*

However, if we fuse principles of meditation and yoga with sport psychology, it provides effective methods to boost confidence not only in sports but also in general life. This approach helps to *optimize* the person rather than simply the performance in a collection of events.

BOOKS



Dr. William Glasser's book is provocative, insightful and inspiring. In the age of modern medicine, it is refreshingly rare to read a physician who believes that most of our mental problems/diseases can be solved through compassion, relationship-building and choice-making.

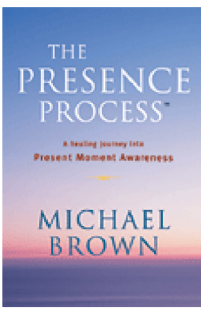
Written in an engaging style, interspersed with scientific research, Dr. Glasser suggests alternatives to medical treatment of mental disorders. Drawing from his professional expertise, spanning many decades, Dr. Glasser highlights the limits and often harmful effects of conventional psychiatric treatment of mental diseases.

He emphasizes that most of the mental problems, even serious ones, are an expression of underlying unhappiness and advocates that by making choices and regaining internal psychological control, we can treat them without undue pharmaceutical intervention.

This is where it sounds hope-inducing: it tells us that we are not solely at the mercy of medical treatments/methods; that we can treat mental health problems through compassion, choice and relationships without excessive use of medication. Informative, insightful and timely.

Warning: Psychiatry Can be Hazardous to Your Mental Health.

By William Glasser | Harper Collins



This book is born out of Michael Brown's attempt to deal with his own suffering from an acute neurological condition for which conventional medicine has no cure or treatment. Faced with the tyranny of pain, Brown developed a personal method of self-healing—'The Presence Process', A healing journey into present moment

awareness.

The contents of this book are inspiring and full of wisdom. What makes this book even more authentic is that it is born out of Brown's journey to make sense of his condition and come to terms with debilitating bouts of pain. 'The

Presence Process' is laid out in ten sessions with simple-to-follow instructions through which one can transcend daily suffering, pain and addictions.

There are various other resources on 'awareness', but this book definitely stands out as it comes from the womb of personal pain and eventual liberation. Michael Brown has done a great job laying out his personal journey for others to follow. Through this book he shows that despite our circumstances, we still hold reasonable sway on the 'present moment' of life. Simple, inspiring, healing and transcending.

The Presence Process

By Michael Brown | Namaste Publishing

Short reviews by Parmjit Singh, PhD

DO YOU ALSO SUFFER FROM SELF-ESTEEM?

Have you ever thought that if I had better self-esteem, my life would be different? If so, think again. Self-esteem may not be such a powerful determinant in fashioning our destinies as it has been portrayed in the Western society. In fact, recent research says that it does not matter much.

Self-esteem, to me, is a sort of misnomer and its current definition is profoundly narrow and materialistic. We are so smitten with reductionistic science that if there is anything wrong in our life, we compulsively start thinking that we must be *lacking* something, just as another material thing. Therefore, self-esteem also has become another thing on our 'to-get list'.

However, this is not so. We suffer from low-esteem because we have started identifying our self-worth (esteem) on the basis of *what we own, what we do, money, etc.* By doing so, we

commit the error of 'sizing' our self-worth in reference to external parameters.

We need to think about self-esteem from a different perspective. We suffer from low self-esteem not because *we do not have it, but because our perception of real self is clouded under materialistic delusions.* Years of comparative thinking and conditioning has obscured our authentic inner self.

In order to have healthy self-esteem, we do not need to gain it from somewhere else. All we need to do is peel off the layers of conditioning and false identifications we have accumulated through life experiences. Once you do that, you will find that you always had it. It was just lying buried under your false perceptions and wrong-headed identifications.

—Parmjit Singh

EXERCISE MAY BEAT ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Keeping physically fit can help you stave off potential threat of Alzheimer's disease because exercise can flush out harmful toxins from brain and help protect the nerve cells. Scientists have found that exercise doubled the amount of protein that helped flush molecules thought to be underlying this disease.

YOGA IS BETTER FOR BACKACHE

A study published in the December 20th issue of *Annals of Internal Medicine* suggests that yoga is more effective in relieving lower back pain than a self-care book and these benefits persist for several months.

Jan. 24, 2006
5 Week 'The Healing Voyage'
@ YWCA Downtown Hamilton
Free Info session: Jan 17, 7 PM

March 7, 2006
10 Week 'The Healing Voyage'
@ YWCA, Downtown Hamilton
Free Info session: Feb 28, 7 PM

"Feel Good About Yourself"
Feb 25, 2006 Saturday, 9am-1pm @ YWCA Downtown Hamilton

What you get:

Take control of your personal health/wellness and life balance by learning the role of mind, body, and spirit. Learn advanced techniques of psychology, mind-body medicine/science, yoga, meditation, visualization, awareness training, creative art therapy and self-auditing.

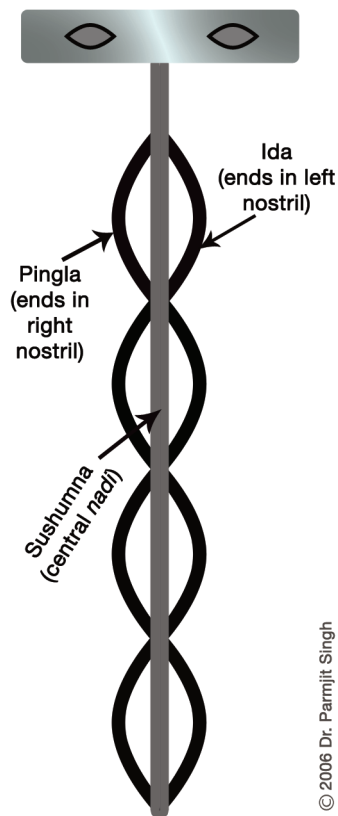
Learn to beat stress, feeling of depression, chronic pain/health problems or to speed up recovery from an illness. Transform your negative thinking, improve relationships, enhance health & well-being and learn to create balance, manage stress/work-related health problems, anxiety, low self-esteem, body image problems, chronic pain and enhance your general well-being.

From an extensive tool-kit, chart your personalized journey of discovery, healing and transformation.

YWCA Membership not required for our programs. Open for both men and women.

Call 905.524.3463 to get more information about these and other programs

SCIENCE OF HEALTHY BREATHING —By Parmjit Singh, PhD



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YOGIC PHYSIOLOGY

The conventional wisdom in physiology deems breathing as a vehicle for only transporting oxygen into our body. Experts do not attach much importance to breathing other than this. However, this is not the case in yogic science. In yoga, breathing has towering significance and is considered to be a gateway for understanding subtle human anatomy and physiology, which current science has not understood yet.

According to yogic experts, our physical body is composed of numerous nadis (channels) which are route maps for the flow of pranic energy. Some manuals peg the number of these nadis at 350,000. However, only fourteen of them are considered to be important than others and out of this number only three are the most important. These three are Ida, Pingla and Shushumna. Ida conveys female (calming) energy and terminates in the left nostril and Pingla carries male energy (aggressive) and ends up in the right nostril (see the illustration). The intersection of these nadis along with other nadis constitutes seven chakras.

We can feel the flow of energy by carefully monitoring the breath through these nostrils. They tend to vary throughout day and night: sometime one nostril is dominant and other times it is the other one. Mostly, either Ida or Pingla is active (dual state) and Shushumna (non-

dual state) is blocked at the base of the spinal column. It is only when the flow of breath in both the nostrils is equal that the state of Shushumna is created.

The role of Pranayama (the science of breathing) is to open up the third channel, Shushumna, so that we can meld into cosmic consciousness and experience internal joy and non-dependent happiness. Through the techniques of Pranayama, a yogic practitioner de-vitalizes both Ida and Pingla (dual state) and generates a Shushumna (non-dual awareness) leading to the unblocking of Kundalini (serpentine) energy lying dormant in the first chakra called Muladhara. Once this energy is unblocked, we experience a state of joy and liberation. Suddenly, everything becomes clear and we no longer remain trapped in the materialistic delusions created by over-active thinking mind.

Various techniques are available for facilitating this non-dual state. By systematically training our breathing habits, we can open up the gateway to joy, health and happiness. One simple technique to start this process is to learn nadi shodhadam (channel purification). You can learn this technique by attending an integrated health courses such as one starting at YWCA in January (see above).

STAND UP FOR YOUR LIFE — by Gurudarshan Jyot, PhD

To live your life to its fullest potential, you must participate in it. You have to take responsibility for yourself, your actions, goals, progress and above all your dreams. Only you can fulfill them and it is up to you

to decide what you really want and develop a plan for achieving them.

The hardest part in this process is to take the first step and approach the issue of turning a new leaf in your life with a positive attitude and outlook. Do not say 'no' to yourself. Let not the difficulties dilute your resolve. Instead remind yourself 'you cannot gain anything unless you try';

in fact, there is no harm in trying. Nothing comes out perfectly the first time, it gets better and easier with practice and time. With efforts and discipline, you will come closer to realizing your dreams.

So dare to dream and take responsibility for your actions. Let this year be one of those where you take the step you always wanted to take.