

How to develop and
maintain inner calm
during uncertain times

living PEACE

By Lyn Dalebout

after years of longing to live in wild, quiet country, I moved to Jackson Hole, Wyoming. I was seeking peace of mind in this paradise, a beautiful, reasonably remote mountain town. I wanted the less frantic lifestyle that comes with the clarity of high-altitude hikes, clean water and air, and time with wild creatures.

One day a few years ago, as I was returning from my daily walk, I encountered a convoy of Army trucks the size of small dinosaurs heading into Grand Teton National Park. My heart raced, surprising words flew out of my mouth, and my primal fear flared as I watched in horror. My place of peace was about to become an Army outpost, and permanent radars were to be installed to protect the valley's newest citizen, Vice President Dick Cheney.

Although I felt as if my neighbors and I were now under siege, that the war had come home, I realized that if

we are choosing to make peace an everyday commitment, such events cannot break us. I continue to bring a sense of peace and positivity into my life, to engage in activities that encourage peace—but it hasn't been easy, and it's taken effort and practice. Such is the nature of choosing peace each day.

Peace requires a stilling of the mind, a cessation of overactivity, and a desire to be quiet and to listen. Below are five starting points for practicing peace every day of your life. Do these alone and with your family. Teach your children and take them to your workplace. You will notice a difference.

1 Make space in your daily planner

Since Sept. 11, 2001, Pamela Waritan Smith, MD, of the Michigan-based Center for Healthy Living and Longevity and author of *HRT: The Answers* (Healthy Living, 2003), describes a shift in the biology of humans that, in effect, means we're under more stress. In an ongoing study involving thousands of patients from five clinics, Smith has found that prior to Sept. 11, 17 percent of >

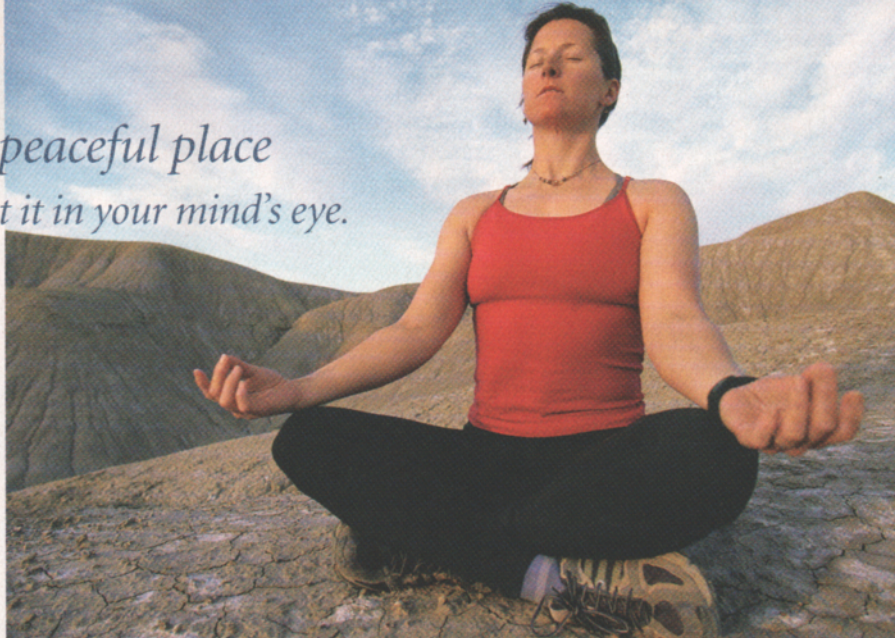
Compose yourself Do you choose peace each day? Tell us your inspiring and useful tips on how to bring a sense of quiet and calm to what may be a hectic life. E-mail your ideas to deliciousliving@newhope.com.

*As you breathe, imagine a peaceful place
in nature and visit it in your mind's eye.*

participants had elevated levels of cortisol, the stress hormone. "After 9/11, we're seeing shocking percentages," says Smith. "Seventy-one percent to 77 percent of our patients have continuously high levels of cortisol. Over time, this pattern can lead to adrenal burnout, which has all kinds of negative effects on the body, including high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and low thyroid function." How can we lower our cortisol levels and establish a physiology of peace, so to speak? Schedule time for relaxing every day. "Don't overbook," says Smith. "You need time to let your body settle down so these hormones have a chance to rest as well."

2 Strike a yoga pose

According to Bo Forbes, PsyD, a psychologist and yoga teacher in Boston, stress taxes our nervous system and can



result in irritability and decreased immune-system functioning. "The sympathetic nervous system calls us into action, and the parasympathetic nervous system brings our body systems back to calmness and rest," says Forbes. "When the sympathetic system is overstimulated, it leads to unhealthy continuous activation, resulting in all kinds of symptoms, such as

increased heart rate, sweating, and increases in cortisol."

As a yoga teacher, Forbes sees the effect of stress on her students. "If people come into class in a state of tension and anxiety, negativity can follow if they don't shift awareness," she says. She suggests a regular yoga practice to calm emotions and allow peace to flow in. "Yoga can ▶

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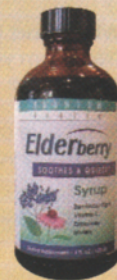
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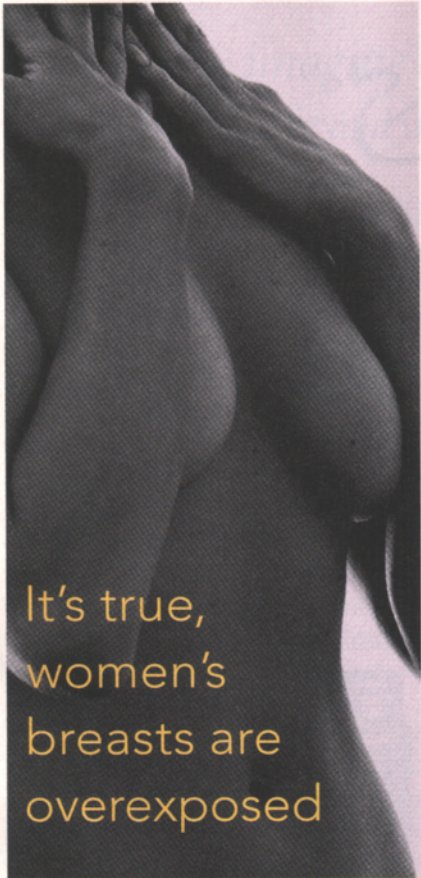
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spirit

help activate the parasympathetic nervous system and thus bring calm in the form of relaxed breathing and decreased heart rate. To practice peace is to create peace internally, and the best foundation for that is to calm the nervous system.”

If you don't have time for a yoga class, try practicing yogic breathing to release anxiety and bring balance to the nervous system and clarity and peace to the mind, suggests Forbes. Inhale for a count of two to three breaths, and then exhale for four to six breaths. Repeat this cycle for several minutes with your eyes open or closed until you feel less tense. As you breathe, imagine a peaceful place in nature and visit it in your mind's eye.

Another option is to do the simple yoga asana (position) called child's pose. Kneel on the ground and gently bend forward, resting your torso on your thighs with your arms gently extended in front of

you. Your buttocks should be on your heels, with your knees hip-width apart. Put your forehead on the ground or on a blanket, and breathe quietly. Hold for several minutes.

Or, if this bend is too difficult, lie on your back flat on the floor, arms relaxed at your sides, with your head turned to one side. Pay attention to your belly expanding with each breath, and imagine tension draining out of you and into the earth. “When you turn inward, peace will be waiting for you,” says Forbes.

3 Find your inner harmony and balance

Many wonderful practices exist in all spiritual traditions and cultures, designed to help people find hope and goodness within themselves and create peace. The ancient Japanese art of Jin Shin Jyutsu (JSJ), or the Art of Happiness, is generally

Ways to create peace each day

“When it gets really harried—as it did the last shift I worked—a few seconds of centering and controlled-breath techniques help to calm the mind and focus the thought process. These techniques are specifically Buddhist and have become an on-the-go part of my work.”

—David Peterson, MD, Seattle emergency room physician

“When I am first hit with grief, I try to ride it like a wave, allowing the emotions to flow over me.”

—Michael Seligmann, Ripton, Vermont-based avocational potter and writer and former psychotherapist who lost his son, Doug, in a climbing accident 11 years ago

“The wave used to feel more like acid than water, but we've learned over the years that the wave will eventually recede. And choosing to enter into grief feels better than resisting it. We feel closer to Doug, his memory, and a deeper part of ourselves.”

—Cindy Seligmann, Ripton, Vermont-based quilter and former psychotherapist, and mother of Doug

“When I rise each day, I read several short passages from spiritual teachers I admire. I speak aloud positive vows I have taken, such as ‘I dedicate my life to the benefit of all beings, spreading joy and inspiration.’”

—Chris Noble, Salt Lake City—based adventure and fine art photographer who spends three to five months on the road each year

“I think one has to turn off the TV, radio, and learn to listen to the beautiful stillness of their days. While I lived in New York City, the yearning to step out my door onto green grass was always there, and finally I listened to that yearning. I am so thankful I did.”

—Emilie Betts, 80-something-year-old artist, writer, and wise elder from Norwalk, Connecticut

“I practice a traditional Zen meditation, zazen, daily.”

—Dana Turner, former temple keeper at Palolo Zen Center in Honolulu

a self-help practice, according to David Burmeister, director of operations for JSJ Inc., though it may be applied in a client-practitioner arrangement. It has one basic premise: All that you need for harmony and balance is within yourself.

Debbie Ellman, a JSJ practitioner in Scottsdale, Arizona, offers a simple and fun technique that can bring peace to you and your children. In JSJ, each finger is associated with balancing the energy meridians throughout the body. "By holding your fingers one at a time, for a few moments at a time, one can unload attitudes associated with the meridians," says Ellman. Wrap the fingers of one hand around each finger of the other hand, and release worry (thumb), fear (index), anger or frustration (middle), sadness (ring), and trying or pretense (pinkie). "The deepest root of these attitudes is fear, which is 'false evidence appearing real,'" says Ellman. An easy way to remember what each finger represents is "Take away worry FAST"—fear, anger, sadness, trying.

4 Tap into your creativity

Tracy Penfield, creator of SafeArt in Chelsea, Vermont, has another take on developing inner peace: creativity. SafeArt helps people to make safe relationship choices by resolving conflict through creative outlets. "Peace has many parts, one of which is self-esteem, which really is making peace with yourself," says Penfield. "Peace in relationships comes after you find peace within yourself." Penfield encourages students to dance, paint, and write about their conflicts, working their way to their own happy endings. "The creative act allows one to step back and give voice to one's struggles, which if left unprocessed can lead to negative emotions, even violence," Penfield says. "Students learn that negative emotions can be turned into positive, creative acts."

She suggests reading books or taking a class in your community that will encourage your own creativity, whatever the art form might be. "Find a way to share your creation with at least one other person," Penfield also advises. "This act can literally help you release your suffering and bring new positivity into your life. You will then make space for more positive relationships to enter your life." ➤

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5 Make conscious choices

Each year on Sept. 21, a bell rings at noon in the Japanese gardens at the United Nations to commemorate the International Day of Peace. People around the world celebrate this day with a moment of silence. Because the celebration happens at noon in different time zones, it translates into what has become known as a "peace wave."

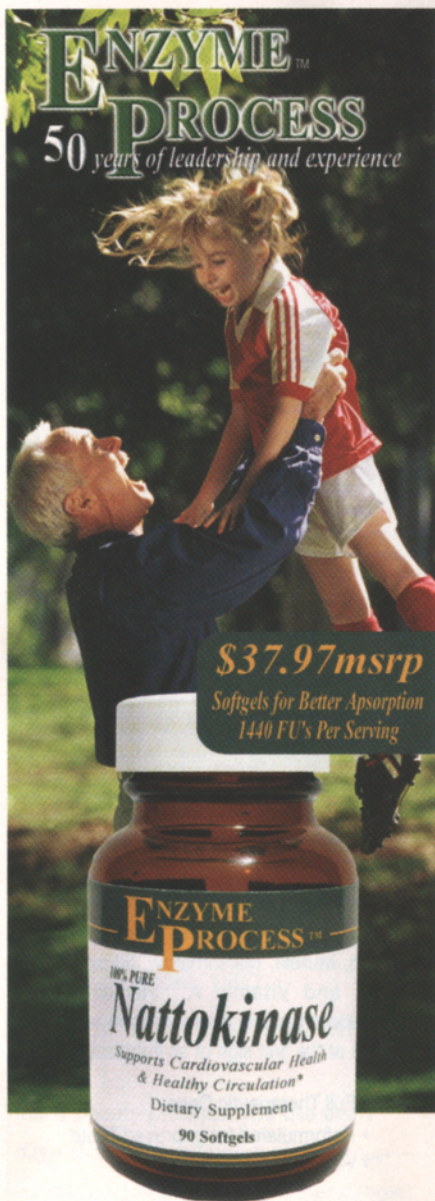
Avon Mattison, the visionary founder of Pathways to Peace in San Francisco and a former U.S. Foreign Service diplomat, helped give birth to the idea in 1982. "Personal and planetary peace are inseparable," Mattison says. "Peace begins with oneself, living in harmony with one another and with the Earth. Peace is a daily transformative practice." In other words, peace is a daily choice. We make energy and investment choices. We may choose recycled products. We may eat organic food from local growers (if possible) and from environmentally sustainable agriculture. These choices turn you into a "peace-builder," Mattison suggests. "As a peace-

builder, you can create cultures of peace within your family, your community, your place of work, and between nations." So make good choices and join the peace wave in September. This simple gesture is also a great way to bring the commitment to peace into your own home.

Simply peace

All these practices seem so simple that one wonders if they are effective. But remember that bringing peace into your life doesn't have to be complex. Give one or more of these suggestions a try the next time you seek a solution for a negative attitude, feel immobilized by global fear, or have a racing heart. Be a peace-builder, and begin to discover and trust the power that comes from listening to your being, stilling the mind, and quieting the body. May peace be with you. ■

Lyn Dalebout is a poet, writer, educator, performance artist, and sidereal astrologer who has lived in Grand Teton National Park for 23 years. Her book of poems is *Out of the Flames* (Blue Bison, 1996).



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