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RESOURCES TO SUPPORT ENHANCING YOUR MIND-BODY-HEART WELLBEING

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Here is a gift for each of you at Rediscovering U.

It is an excerpt from my book ***Living From the Center Within: Co-Creating Who You Are Becoming*** published by Paragon House. It is filled with ideas and practices for enhancing wellbeing, expanding your awareness, live a powerful life. Enjoy!

For more information on ***Living From the Center Within: Co-Creating Who You Are Becoming*** [Click HERE](#)



TRANSFORMING PRACTICES

Chapter 7

Transforming practices assist us individually and collectively in moving from dysfunctional to functional, from functional to optimal, and from optimal to enlightened.

Human beings are miraculously engineered. With our attention and intention, we are able to activate the relaxation response, a state of deep rest that changes the physical and emotional fight or flight responses to stress. When we relax, we counteract the hypervigilant responses of stress; decreasing blood pressure, respiratory rate, and pulse rate. In addition, we slow down the aging process, reduce anxiety, improve sleep, increase emotional calm and reverse distorted thinking and fear.

Relaxing influences important change at the cellular level in our bodies. In every human cell we find mitochondria. They convert chemical energy from food into a form that cells can use. They also maintain control of cell health and growth. Activating the relaxation response improves mitochondrial energy production and utilization and promotes mitochondrial resiliency. Relaxing also improves our insulin secretion and reduces the expression of genes in our cells linked to inflammatory response and stress related pathways.

Epigenetics is the study of changes in gene expression (active or expressing versus inactive or not expressing genes) without the underlying DNA sequence changing. Epigenetic change is a regular and natural occurrence, but can also be influenced by factors including stress, age, the environment, lifestyle, and disease state. Biological inheritance is not only coded in the genes, or in epigenetic modifications of the genes; much of it depends on morphic resonance from previous members of the species.

Telomeres protect the end of the chromosome from deterioration in a manner similar to the way the tips of shoelaces keep them from unraveling. When we produce relaxation hormones and chemicals, the telomeres are better maintained, improving long-term cell health. Our cells also become more efficient in their oxygen consumption and carbon dioxide elimination.

Activating the relaxation response increases the growth of high functioning brain cells and connections. When people do relaxation exercises, growth has been measured in the cortex region which is located in the front and outer parts of the brain. Growth in both the number of brain cells and the number of connections between brain cells has been observed. This part of the brain is associated with memory, attention, perception, awareness, thought, and language. Monitoring advanced meditators' brains while they are meditating shows increased cortex brain activity over a control group of people who do not meditate. Activating the relaxation response literally transforms us at a cellular level to become higher-functioning!

So what are these relaxation-eliciting practices? Transforming practices are activities designed to center, quiet, and open the mind-body-heart. They help us focus attention and awareness in the present moment. These mindfulness practices encourage open receptivity, accepting and observing without evaluation or judgment.

Transforming practices accelerate the natural unfolding process of human development. Our awareness expands, revealing our true nature in higher consciousness. Depending on our present condition, transforming practices can have many purposes.

According to fabulous research on transformation presented by Marilyn Schlitz et al. (2007):

Transforming practices quiet the mind-body, heal old wounds, shed false beliefs, cultivate intention and attention, promote insight, and expand capacities. The heart of these practices is their ability to bring you into direct contact with the numinous, open your eyes and heart to the sanctity of life. They assist you in realizing the abundant, ever-present, and surprisingly accessible deep meaning that is present in every moment of every day.

What are examples of these transforming practices? *They include but are not limited to:*

- Breath work: patterns of breathing
- Meditation: mindfulness, concentrative, moving, open
- Music: listening to chant, singing, toning
- Silence: bide in quiet
- Smell: aromatherapy
- Mindful eating: intentionally prepare and eat a meal
- Vision: screen savers, wall colors, art, photographs, decorating your spaces, creating vision boards
- Feng Shui: creating harmonious environments
- Body Movement: exercise, yoga, qi gong, tai chi, stretch, walk a labyrinth, dance
- Guided Imagery: autogenics, visualizations
- Journal: writing and reflecting, creating a gratitude journal
- Art: writing, drawing, sculpting, creating mandalas, making collages
- Biofeedback: using instruments that provide feedback on physiological changes
- Progressive relaxation: contracting and relaxing muscles sequentially from head to toes
- Being in nature: walking, sitting, observing
- Contemplation and study: sacred text, poetry, koans, myths, symbols, metaphor, archetypes
- Ritual: sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects that support an intention
- Dialogue: speaking and listening authentically and deeply
- Dreams: recording, contemplating, exploring meaning and insights in dreams
- Storytelling: examining current story, creating new story

Transforming practices can be utilized in our day-to-day activities. For instance, during a morning shower, practice a focusing your attention using all five senses to feel the warm water on the skin, smell the soap, hear the soothing water, see the colors and light, and maybe taste a bit of the fresh water. Notice how paying attention with all five senses brings our attention into the present moment.

We have examined incorporating reflecting on your present condition throughout the day using our witness perspective. We can bring our observer viewpoint to every moment and notice what is occurring in our body, mind and heart. If we notice a stress symptom, we can do a quick practice such as stretching or walking in nature. This will bring our attention into the present moment and activate the relaxation response.

I had a client who utilized his witness perspective to observe his stress response and triggers each day. Upon reflection, he realized he became stressed several times a day at work. This diminished his productivity and creativity. To reverse his stress response, he took deep long breaths for sixty seconds. He changed his screen saver to a picture from his favorite vacation spot and added an inspiring quote. When possible, he mindfully packs his lunch and eats outside alone. Transforming practice can reverse the stress response and quickly returns our mind-body to balance.

Ritual is a powerful transforming practice. We incorporate ritual into our celebrations, holidays, worship and rites of passage. They can be included in our daily routine also. We can create a small space in our home or office that holds a photograph or object that remind us of an intention we set. I remember a vacation with dear friends and family in Seattle where we spent a day on Vashon Island. We walked Point Robinson Park, and I had a conversation with one of my friends. She suddenly had an epiphany, a deep intuitive insight into the topic we were discussing.

Strolling down the beach alone contemplating this new understanding, she spontaneously added a ritual by picking up a small rock as a keepsake. It reminds her of the revelation and her intention to integrate this new awareness into her daily living.

The next day we went to the farmers market, and she was telling me about the rock she was carrying in her pocket. She stated an intention to have it made into a necklace to honor the moment and further remind her of the gem of wisdom she had discovered. We had stopped in front of a booth where a woman was wrapping stones and making pendants. Ten minutes later she was wearing her rock, now a piece of jewelry, around her neck. Adding a ritual, gesture, word, or object that supports our intention can enhance our experience. Ritual can assist us in remaining open to a new, larger worldview and greater access to the field of consciousness.

Bedtime is another wonderful time to add a transforming practice to your daily routine. We can take a few moments to reflect on our day and recall three times we were grateful.

Scientific studies on people who intentionally cultivate thankfulness experience more positive emotions, feel more alive, sleep better, express more compassion and kindness, and have stronger immune systems. Deep sleep is essential to restore our minds and bodies to balance every night. Practices such as progressive relaxation, listening to calming music can improve our sleep. Guided imagery, proactively focusing and directing your imagination in positive ways, can also be a powerful bedtime practice. You can image yourself at your favorite vacation spot or imagine your muscles softening and relaxing. There are many recorded guided imageries with words and music available. You will find resources such as guided imagery on my website.

Keep the practices embedded in your routine simple. Invite them to enhance your day, not be a stressor or a burden. Practice in various ways and follow what calls to you. Change them up and be playful and curious. Make them part of your everyday life. Our breath is free and always available to elicit the relaxation response. You can take a few deep breaths or practice various rhythmic breathing patterns for calming and creating openings to higher levels of consciousness.

It is also valuable to set aside practice time from our daily routine to relax and reflect. We can take a walk in nature or partake in a yoga, exercise, qi gong, tai chi, or dance class.

We can record our dreams and spend time reading and reflecting on them to see if they reveal an insight or revelation. Reading sacred texts has been important in every wisdom tradition. Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Islam are just some of the religions that have beautiful teachings on higher levels of consciousness worthy of contemplation. Poetry can also inspire us to deeper levels. Transforming practices support us at every stage of development; healing holes when we live at I am Individual, becoming whole at I am Interconnected and being Holy at I am Infinite.

Retreats encourage mindful activities set aside from our daily routine. I facilitate workshops that give participants an opportunity to immerse in transforming practices for a day or two. At a recent workshop, we spent an afternoon creating collages from magazine images and words on index cards. We used a number of transforming practices woven into our day. At the beginning of our collage process, we did a body scan to notice tight areas in our bodies and then imagined them soften and relax. We energized our bodies, minds, hearts and space with gratitude. During the afternoon we alternated between silence and healing music. We utilized essential oils in a diffuser to aid our relaxation.

We spent some time reflecting on our collages when they were complete. One of the women noticed a pattern. Words and images about fun and riches were often hidden by restricting images like boulders, bars or fences. Through storytelling, she uncovered a belief that she does not feel worthy of abundance. With that powerful untrue story revealed, she was able to re-enter her life paying attention to opportunities for joy, wealth and ease while eliminating self-sabotaging behaviors that kept her in lack or scarcity. As I stayed in touch with her through individual coaching sessions, I was delighted to see her make small changes her lifestyle which improved her health and well-being. She began to say yes to opportunities and relationships that expanded her work. Her business thrived and prospered.

There are some transforming practices thought to be more body-centered, mind-centered or heart-centered. All practices impact all of these aspects of our human being, but some put more emphasis one aspect. When we begin to practice more regularly, we may notice we have easier access to higher levels of consciousness choosing a practice that focuses on the body, mind or heart.

If you are a body way person, someone who enjoys getting into the flow or the zone through exercise or dance, for instance, you may find mindful movement, progressive relaxation or being in nature the easiest way to practice. Scanning your entire body slowly from the tips of your toes to the top of your head, feeling every somatic sensation can bring you fully into the present moment. Resting your attention on each area, imagining them soften and relax and breathing deeply may effortlessly quiet your thoughts, feelings and physical body.

If you are a heart way person, feeling the flow when you are in service to others may open you to new levels of awareness. If you are feeling moved by the suffering of others you may find chant, loving kindness practice, or story telling beneficial. Cultivating gratitude in your life can enhance your wellbeing. Practicing compassion can be inviting and natural to a heart way person.

If you are a mind way person, someone who enjoys learning new ways or intellectual discussions, you may find contemplating and studying sacred text, poetry, koans, myths, symbols, metaphor, or archetypes expand your awareness and activate the relaxation response. You may find paying attention to your dreams enlightening. The witness observer can be useful as you notice your reactivity or desire to avoid or attach, which take your mind out of the present moment.

Invitation to Practice

- Choose one practice you will use throughout your day if you notice your stress response turning on.
- Choose one practice you will use for 60 seconds a day when you are free from reactivity to deepen your relaxation response.
- Once a week, set aside 30 minutes to engage in a transforming practice.

Strengthen your skills of transforming practices by regularly utilizing the ones that feel the most inviting. In addition, try new techniques. Add them to your daily routine and set aside time to immerse yourself in relaxation.

Over time, as your baseline state of consciousness expands, your practices will shift and change also. Allow the best practice for you arise from your wisdom by routinely assessing of your present condition.

Reflection

Describe an experience you had using a relaxation practice, in the moment, when you were stressed or reactive. Did it bring you back to balance?

What are your favorite transforming practices to relax and to open you to new insights and expand your perspective?

When did you experience a transforming practice open you up to a new insight or expanded your perspective?

Have you heard about a new practice you would like to learn more about and to try?

Have you been on a retreat or workshop that was impactful in your life? Do you have any scheduled in the near future?

How can you learn about organizations or people in your area who will support you in learning new practices?



*Who is Michele Rae?

Michele Rae is a Transformational Coach, Spiritual Teacher and Nationally Board Certified Health and Wellness Coach.

She is the founder of her coaching practice The Center Within and has an office in Bloomington. She is the author of ***Living From the Center Within: Co-Creating Who You Are Becoming***, and graduate faculty at the Humphrey Institute and Center for Spirituality & Healing at the University of Minnesota.

Her passion is supporting individuals and service groups making empowering choices that have the most positive outcomes for themselves and the greater collective. She delights as clients step more fully into their power and release what no longer serves while creating a life they love personally and professionally.

Want to learn more? Be in touch!

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