

The Seven Laws
of
Stress Management

Law Number 5

**Balance Can be Achieved Only When There is an
Equal Commitment to One's Mind, Body and Spirit**

There is an inherent sense of harmony that exists between mind, body and spirit. Much of your daily activity and existence as a human being is intended to be dedicated to sustaining this natural sense of harmony. Mirroring nature itself, you internally embody natural processes. By engaging these natural processes and higher states of existence, you can generate increasing levels of energy and momentum that perpetuate themselves.

In order to tap into this hidden source of energy and wisdom, you must first shift your thinking from a one-dimensional perspective to a holistic perspective. Another significant step is identifying and reexamining your dominant beliefs about wholeness, balance and well-being. But, what are beliefs? Beliefs are “what one has come to think of as truth and what one perceives as reality (*Healing through Writing*, page 37).”

In other words, to begin to view yourself and your life more holistically, you must adopt the belief that as humans we are spiritual as well as physical and intellectual; that there is a greater and deeper meaning and purpose to our existence that extends beyond simply accumulating material possessions and defining ourselves by social status.

It also requires us to understand and accept that a holistic perspective of balance and well-being is representative of our internal as well as external condition. Therefore, a person who tends to his physical needs but disregards his mental and spiritual needs has not truly attained a sense of balance and well-being. The same is true of individuals who focuses exclusively on achieving balance in their professional lives but neglect their personal lives. In adopting new beliefs about the holistic connection between mind, body, and spirit, you will be compelled to more actively and more deeply explore all aspects of your multi-dimensionality.

The Concept of Balance and Well-Being

The benefits of writing and self-reflection I have experienced in my personal life, for sixteen years, have significantly contributed to the idea of structuring *The Seven Laws of Stress Management* in a workbook format. This is combined with more than a decade of professional experience as a mental health therapist and workshop facilitator, helping others identify and utilize healthy methods for coping with stress and maintaining balance in their personal and professional lives. The emotional and spiritual benefits of writing and self-reflection on a daily or consistent basis are described in detail in my book, *Healing through Writing: A Journaling Guide to Emotional and Spiritual Growth* (2005). *Healing through Writing* also presents examples of various methods of journal writing, techniques for developing greater self-awareness, and a self-inventory tool for monitoring emotional and spiritual growth through what I call, “Seven Determinants of Emotional and Spiritual Growth”.

The *Seven Laws of Stress Management* is an extension of the philosophy and techniques of *Healing through Writing* in that it provides a step-by-step approach to expanding self-awareness and maintaining balance and well-being. Empowering individuals to maintain balance in their personal and professional lives, *The Seven Laws of Stress Management* offers a framework for viewing balance as a multi-dimensional element of our human make-up (mind, body and spirit) and personal growth as a continuous cycle fueled by an individual’s level of commitment.

My personal and professional experiences have affirmed that the ability to maintain balance and well-being in an individual’s personal and professional life is a skill acquired over time. One, therefore, does not simply read a book to learn how to maintain balance and well-being. Rather, one must make a conscious commitment to developing the discipline to incorporate a routine of consistent self-reflection and other rituals into his or her daily life and adopting holistic beliefs that encompass an awareness of mind, body and spirit.

The *Seven Laws of Stress Management* workbook is designed to challenge you to commit to writing and self-exploration on a daily basis as a means to effectively managing stress and facilitating personal growth. Ultimately, *The Seven Laws of Stress Management* provides a roadmap for developing and maintaining a proactive lifestyle that promotes balance and well-being.

Part I begins with an outline and description of seven laws or guidelines for maintaining a balanced lifestyle. You are encouraged to examine strengths and weaknesses in your lifestyle – habits of daily living - as it relates to each of these seven laws. More specifically, you are encouraged to write your thoughts, emotions and life experiences that relate to each of the seven laws as a means of gaining greater clarity in your beliefs and in your ability to identify internal and external obstacles to achieving balance and well-being in daily life. For you to maximize the benefits of this book, you must concurrently record your thoughts, emotions and reflections in a journal or spiral notebook.

Part II provides a seven-step process for developing, implementing and maintaining an effective stress management plan. This section begins by challenging you to commit to decluttering your thoughts and emotions through the implementation of brief daily or consistent journaling to prevent the build up of negative energy and emotional clutter in your personal and professional life. Later in this section, the importance of decluttering your physical environment is emphasized in an effort to create space, organization and positive energy in your physical surroundings. Part II continues with the identification of warning signs and stressors as part of the process of formulating written “Prioritized Stress Management Goals.” The book concludes with the final step of the seven-step process, “Putting It All Together,” where the reader is reminded that a sustained level of commitment is the most essential ingredient to ensuring one’s success in minimizing stress and encouraged to refer, as often as needed, to any part of *The 7 Laws of Stress Management* in the future.

The Seven Laws of Stress Management is rooted in the philosophy that balance and well-being can only be achieved and maintained when the needs of one’s mind, body and spirit are adequately addressed. Your physical, mental and spiritual states of existence, from day to day, are interconnected. Thus, your physical condition should not be given greater emphasis than your mental or spiritual condition as an indicator of health, balance and well-being. Equally, a high level of self-awareness is required to identify and eliminate barriers to achieving and maintaining a state of mental, physical and spiritual harmony.

The Seven Laws of Stress Management is a philosophical and practical guide to achieving and maintaining balance in your daily life. To fully utilize the principles, concepts, and techniques presented in this book, you must commit to the daily discipline of silence and meditation that is required to become more in tune with your mind, body and spirit. Not only can you ascertain a greater understanding and awareness of the interconnectedness of your mind, body and spirit through this book, but you will also identify seven key principles for daily living to guide your thought processes, behavior and patterns of decision-making. In addition, you will gain a greater sense of enlightenment, and be empowered to develop and implement daily habits of living to foster growth, balance and well-being in your personal and professional life.

Definitions

Definitions for seven key words that are closely related to the concept of balance and well-being are listed below. As you read each definition, one at a time, take a few moments to reflect on each word. Also, in an effort to reinforce your understanding of each of the seven key words, space has been provided on the following pages to record any life experiences, thoughts or emotions that may be triggered or related to the definitions, and the concept of maintaining balance and well-being. This serves as an opportunity to make your initial entry in your journal.

STRESS – *The nonspecific response of the body to any demand, whether it is caused by, or results in, pleasant or unpleasant conditions (Hans Selye, *The Stress of Life*, page 74).*

BALANCE – *The ability to achieve and sustain empowerment to cope with the predictable and unpredictable demands of one's personal and professional life; the inner and outer work that an individual puts forth to achieve and sustain a consistent flow of positive energy in one's daily life (Anthony Parnell, *Healing Through Writing*, 2005).*

SELF-AWARENESS – *The ability of an individual to assess the potential impact of life stressors on one's well-being such that one simultaneously is able to identify internal and external resources available to minimize the damage to one's mind, body and spirit; the ability to independently explore and understand the source of one's thoughts, emotions, and behavior (Anthony Parnell, *Healing Through Writing*, 2005).*

EMPOWERMENT – *The ability of an individual to identify and to consistently utilize the internal and external resources that have been identified to improve one's life situation and to maintain balance and well-being in one's personal and professional life (Anthony Parnell, *Healing Through Writing*, 2005).*

SPIRITUALITY – *One's awareness of the Universal Life Force that creates and sustains all living things and one's ability to utilize this awareness to grow in love, expand consciousness, and to fulfill one's life purpose (Anthony Parnell, *Healing Through Writing*, 2005).*

HEALING – *The process of restoring balance to one's mind, body and spirit; addressing unmet physical, emotional and spiritual needs (Anthony Parnell, *Healing Through Writing*, 2005).*

WHOLENESS – *An individual's ability to effectively process one's thoughts and emotions and to respond effectively to life situations and to others without being limited by gender, race, age and so on . . . (Anthony Parnell, *Healing Through Writing*, 2005).*

The Concept of Stress

The complexity of the phenomenon of stress can be evidenced by the myriad of life challenges with which we must contend on a daily basis – financial challenges, family and work demands and so on. Even more, the culture of our modern society has evolved such that we are bombarded and frequently overwhelmed by the daily demands for time and energy that are placed on us.

According to a 2007 national survey conducted by the American Psychological Association (APA, www.apahelpcenter.mediaroom.com, 2007) “nearly half of all Americans report that stress has a negative impact on both their personal and professional lives.” More than 50 % report physical symptoms (fatigue; headache; upset stomach) and psychological symptoms (experiencing irritability or anger; feeling nervous; lack of energy) related to stress in the last month. And, for three quarters of Americans, money and work are the leading causes of stress.

Stress is common to everyone, personally and professionally, but we experience and respond to life situations in our own unique way. While the birth of a child, for some, induces tremendous financial and emotional strain, for others, it provides a sense of spiritual joy and fulfillment, despite the financial and emotional sacrifice. This is the irony of stress in that it has its negative as well as its positive qualities and its impact varies from person to person.

The broad scope of stress makes the concept of “balance” and “self-awareness” so significant. Stress, while having the potential to cause great damage to your mind, body and spirit also is an essential characteristic for strengthening an your mental, physical and spiritual self. Hence, stress is an intrinsic life force of nature. A body builder cannot develop a muscular physique without adding “stress” or tension to the muscles in the body through constant repetition and the systematic application of pressure and weight. This is combined with the understanding of knowing how much rest to give the body during and after workouts so that the body has time to properly heal. Yet, in the same instance, an individual who over exerts his or her self by lifting too much weight before the body has developed enough strength and flexibility will bring harm to the body rather than make it stronger. A sculptured physique is the end result of learning how to exercise discipline and how to be more in tune with the body.

There are numerous examples of the delicate balance that must be maintained within your daily life to promote growth and oppose deterioration. Sunlight, food and water are all vital to existence. At the same time, they also require a balance in their intake and consumption to ensure that equilibrium is maintained within the body and to allow the body to perform at optimal levels. Thus, the analogy of the body builder is also true within your mental and spiritual self. For everything, there is a threshold at which there is over-consumption or under-consumption. While there must be an exertion of force for growth to occur, constant self-awareness must also be maintained from moment to moment in order to adequately address the ever changing needs of your mind, body and spirit. Your ultimate challenge in minimizing stress is learning to manage the shifts of mental, physical and spiritual energy that you experience in your everyday life. In many ways, effective stress management can be viewed as a balancing act of learning how and when to consistently replace the negative energy in your life with positive energy.

There are volumes of literature and scientific research on the causes and effects of stress. Most notably, Hans Selye, M.D. through his scientific research of the causes of stress and the physical reactions of the body to stress, developed the concept of the *general adaptation syndrome* (G.A.S.) which outlines a process by which our bodies attempt to maintain homeostasis as they navigate and adjust to the constant changes that occur in and around us.