

# Seeking Balance in an Unbalanced World



A TEACHER'S JOURNEY



SEEKING  
**BALANCE** IN AN  
**UNBALANCED**  
WORLD

A TEACHER'S JOURNEY

• • •

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*This book is dedicated to everyone  
who ever encouraged me to shine . . .  
you know who you are!*



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I say,

*“Thank you for being with me on this journey!  
I love you!”*

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# Introduction

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*

—Margaret Mead, 1901–78, American anthropologist, author

**I never thought I would experience** having students throw chairs, curse, bite, and pitch conniptions so intense that I was not quite sure whether an alien might burst from their tantruming bodies. And I certainly never thought I would eventually think of such experiences as blessings. Today, I recognize that all those great efforts and struggles guided me down the right path. The challenging students, the demanding parents—and fortunately, the messages from those I worked with who said, “Angela, you are a great educator”—all added up over my years of teaching. With difficult children usually follow difficult parents, and I began to notice that each difficult student and parent who came my way were gifts. They were gifts because each one gave me a new strategy to put into my teaching toolbox. This book is a compilation of my tools. It includes the rituals I use to remain balanced during hectic and frenzied times. It is a repertoire of all my

balance-filled ideas. It is for anyone who wants to be a well-adjusted teacher and human being.

*Seeking Balance in an Unbalanced World: A Teacher's Journey* is for teachers, parents, and students studying to be educators. It is for anyone who works in a school organization and wants to live a less chaotic life. This book is for those who desire to be fine role models in this now-unbalanced world of ours, especially those who work closely with our next generation.

Somewhere along the timeline of my life, I went from being a high-powered college student to a frazzled first-year teacher to a teacher handling hectic changes through a few different grade levels to a balanced human being. This is how I label myself now, and it is where I continue to develop and grow. When anyone asks me these days, "What do you do?" I always say, "I am a teacher." I know people automatically envision a public school teacher or someone who teaches others, but I remind myself that first I am a teacher of how to be a balanced person.

At some point through the years, I did not panic when each challenging child came through my classroom door. I did not panic. I actually began trusting that I had the right tools in the toolbox. I learned to trust the process. I learned to trust myself (which is also a gift). I became conscious of my own personal talents. I also became aware that everyone has personalized talents, and I was ready, willing, and able to use mine. I am now eager to work on anything that is put in my path.

The students have entered my classroom one by one with their challenges. In my early days of teaching, the students were considered simply delayed in an area or as having a young developmental age. In the early 1990s, I noticed that many students coming to school needed some speech improvements. In this day and age, many students are entering school who seemingly have never shared in a conversation with an adult. The challenging students are now entering school not quite knowing how to simply talk with someone. Today more and

more students are arriving carrying serious issues. They come from foster homes because both parents are in jail for selling drugs, or they live with their stepgrandmother because their father died of a drug overdose and their mom is immersed in her own addictions. The issues are so deep and extreme that I believe teachers are not compensated enough to cope with the stresses that come along with these children, let alone trained to deal with any of these concerns. We as teachers have not only become health care workers, we are now to act as the children's parents and counselors as well. Today's teachers are overworked by the latest and newest curriculum they need to learn, worn out by the serious emotional issues that children carry to school each day, and underpaid considering the length and cost of our college education. Ask any teacher to share honestly about these issues, and you would realize we could form our own twelve-step anonymous group about the powerlessness we sometimes feel in this profession.

Children who are barely school age have full individualized education programs (IEPs) already in place. It bothers me as a teacher and a therapist that too many youngsters are carrying such heavy classifications today. Students are not simply considered developmentally delayed anymore. They are burdened with such labels as emotionally disturbed (ED); Asperger's, which falls under the autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) umbrella; or the classification that is lately being bombarded on our children, bipolar disorder. Of course, the old identifications continue as well. We teach children who have been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), all of whom are overactive and need excessive amounts of attention in our classrooms as well.

So, there you have it. The regular education teacher does not receive much training to work with these children. There is not a lot of money available to send us to be trained. There is a great deal of work to do and less help in the classroom. This is not a bad dream. This is reality. This is the reality in all public schools across the United States.

This was my reality only a few years ago. Instead of running the other way and choosing another path for myself, I chose to stay and make it better. Many days I thought the job was too much. It was borderline unbearable. I cried to my husband at night, and I was irritable to my family because I had depleted myself at school. I gave everything I had to the children in my classroom and their families. I basically had nothing left to give my family, let alone myself. This was my turning point. I realized I could not change others; however, I learned I could change myself. I turned inward. At this point, I was doing work in psychodrama therapy, which in simple terms is a role-playing and action-based therapeutic technique, and I decided to become a therapist as well. I also created and developed what I coined an individualized therapeutic plan (ITP) for myself. Quite similar to students' IEPs, an ITP looks at things from a holistic perspective. An ITP looks at all the dimensions of the self and includes specific ideas for those aspects that need to become more balanced in one's life. I truly believe it would be most beneficial, in terms of balance, if we teachers today created our own ITPs to help in preventing burnout.

My ITP looked at those dimensions of my life—my spiritual, emotional, physical, social, intellectual, and occupational aspects—and noticed that the largest slice of the pie was my occupational self. I had allowed my teaching career to swallow up the other important areas of my life. In my ITP, for my physical dimension I included that I needed to exercise four times a week for thirty minutes each time. For my spiritual aspect, I determined that I needed to do yoga for myself three times a week. My social dimension needed to visit with friends daily, even if it was only for five minutes. I made these and other changes until I felt balanced once again. I looked inside at what needed to change. I decided to live and teach by example, share by example, and basically do most things by simply being a balanced human being who cares. The entire world knows we need teachers who care. I want to be one of them. I was determined not to run away from the problems.

Rather, I chose to stay on my teaching path and offer my wisdom to others. This is how my book came about. My message is that you should trust your inner guidance system. Have faith and believe. Trust the life process. My path led me to share my talents. In fact, everyone's path is supposed to lead them to sharing their gifts with others. This book is my gift to the *deeper* world of teaching. Enjoy!



# 1

## Become a Mindful Teacher

*It is never too late to be what you might have been.*

—George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans), 1819–80, English novelist

**When I tell people that I am a teacher,** I know many of them automatically envision a public school teacher or something similar, but the word *teacher* embraces a deeper meaning in my spirit. In my heart, I know I am here for a greater purpose. We are all here for a greater purpose. Knowing who you are and what your talents are will help you define your true purpose more clearly. My talent is about balance, and I know my purpose is to teach others about how to live a more balanced and fulfilling life. Balance to me means the opposite of compulsion. It is about being well rounded, open, and familiar with the whole self. It is about responding to life with your wisdom. A balanced person knows deeply what her spirit, mind, and body need to shine in this world, and then she applies it. This defines a well-adjusted being.

Shaping your values and becoming more of who you genuinely are as you continue on your journey are essential elements to being a

well-rounded, balanced individual. Knowing who you are, becoming mindful of your authentic self, is a skill. It sounds simple, but in today's busy world we are playing so many roles and juggling too many priorities, so knowing who we are on this earth can be difficult, yet it is critical. It is critical because the world is starving for wise men and women. We already have enough chaos. The universe is hungry for your uniqueness. It needs your deep wisdom to shine on it.

Think about why you are reading this book. Perhaps you believe, as I do, that a great deal of your surrounding world is chaotic. I know I would like to see more balanced, peaceful individuals in this world. You, too, would like to be one of those well-rounded, wise individuals everyone wants to be around. Or perhaps you would like a little of the peace of mind you hear people talk about time and time again. Regardless of why you believe it is important to be balanced and teach balance, the world is hungry for these types of people.

So, how do you, as a responsible, functional person, become more balanced? How do you ensure quality time with your family with all the grocery shopping, laundry, cooking, cleaning, bills, appointments, schedules, and meals together? How do you nourish yourself to become a well-adjusted, balanced person despite all the demands from work, some difficult people in your life, the craziness of the media, and a world around you that is not rational or balanced itself?

First, you must understand the dimensions of the self. There are six dimensions to each individual. All of these dimensions need to be developed and balanced. In this chapter we will discuss exactly what makes up the self. We will learn about all the aspects that make up the whole self. We will define more clearly who we are and outline the steps we can take to become more balanced individuals. By simply being a balanced person, you are already teaching the fundamentals of balance to others. You are doing it by example, and people sense balance. It is important to note that we are multifaceted people and that each facet needs to be carefully examined. As we work on each

part of ourselves, that area becomes clear. It glistens and eventually becomes so finely polished that it reflects your shine. Then you move on to the next facet. You will look at it and do the same enhancement, continuing on to each facet, polishing and developing it, enhancing and balancing each aspect as you continue on your life journey.

Stop for a moment to think of three pleasant individuals you know. I would bet the enjoyable individuals you name are working for the most part from a balanced state of being. They know, consciously or not, that they need to be secure in all areas. They are the people we enjoy being around. They are people we aspire to be more like. They share many characteristics. They tend to be friendly, outgoing, spiritually uplifting, and confident. They are smart, everyone at work seems to like them, and overall they are happy with themselves. Notice that I did not say they are perfect. They have days when they are off balance as well. For the most part, though, they've got it going. These types of people hold the secret to being balanced. Their whole self is balanced. Knowing all about your whole self is vital to being a well-balanced individual.



## The Whole Self

I did not always know who I truly was. It has taken me many years to uncover what I do know of myself. Furthermore, I am still learning about the real me.

When I attended college in the early 1990s as a nontraditional student, I noticed that many other nontraditional students, such as those who served in the military and older students, succeeded at becoming exempt from a class called “Design for Active Living.” I believe the college’s philosophy was that the students who were older had life experience, which would be close enough to equivalent, so they were

excused from the course. I am thankful I was not released from taking the course. Back then, my energy went toward taking care of my eight-month-old son and holding two part-time jobs, one as a waitress, the other as a bartender, while I attended college. Diving into any course about a design for living seemed quite appropriate for me at the time.

So I took the class, which was taught by a petite older woman known for her liberal values and lifestyle. She had an extremely kind heart and was always available to touch base. In this class I attained the knowledge that would later on help me in life. There I learned about the six dimensions that make up the whole self. Those ideas were originally developed by Dr. Bill Hettler and the National Wellness Institute in the Six Dimensional Model of Wellness that was created in the 1970s. Dr. Hettler is also the cofounder and president of the board of directors of the institute, based in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, whose mission is to serve those individuals and organizations that promote the best possible health and wellness for everyone. Essentially a person applies this holistic model of wellness to begin to see how the six dimensions of self—spiritual, emotional, physical, social, intellectual, and occupational—are interconnected and contribute to healthy living. The course I took did not offer detailed information about it but rather only summarized the basic ideas in one or two particular classes. Nevertheless, I ran with what was given to me. The ideas touched me so profoundly that the core of my spirit was put on an entirely different path. I am tremendously thankful for Dr. Hettler's study on wellness. His mission to help others become aware of the different areas of life helped me look at the quality of my own.

Now at this point, did I immediately stop napping in my car between my college classes? Did I stop pulling all-nighters staying up with my teething toddler while studying for exams? Did I quit one of my two jobs? No, I did not! Nevertheless, I became aware of my behaviors and choices. Awareness, I realized, is the key ingredient to chang-

ing anything in one's life. I did connect immediately with Dr. Hettler's mission and began to apply small gestures toward balance to my diaper-book bag of a college life. For instance, instead of downing my usual two-liter bottle of soda in front of open books in the middle of the night, I decided to have two cups of warm green tea. And so my balanced self slowly began to emerge, one small gesture at a time.

Needless to say, I used those original beliefs as my jumping-off point. Those six dimensions of self—spiritual, emotional, physical, social, intellectual, and occupational—guided me on the path to living as I do now and to writing this particular book. Although I may use many of Dr. Hettler's dimensions in a different light with a distinctive twist, they certainly inspired me to think in a more holistic manner. Holistic balance became my passion. I started looking at each of the dimensions thoroughly. I explored each one as though I were taking a full-time course. While obtaining credit hours for my therapy credentials, I began to hold workshops, educating teachers, healing groups, and the incarcerated therapy group I worked with about the dimensions of the self. I became even more awake to my passion once I realized I had started adding my own significant ideas to each of the six aspects. For instance, the occupational dimension became much more than a person's values with his involvement in a career or job. Rather, I began educating others about the importance of how one occupies one's time in this world. I put an emphasis on becoming attentive to your time, on what you put in your mind, what you choose to read and listen to, and how you choose to use your daily hours.

In the following pages, I'll define and discuss each dimension for you in more depth. With each aspect—spiritual, emotional, physical, social, intellectual, and occupational—you will be given an exercise to learn more about yourself. These key dimensions to the whole self will give you a greater understanding of each facet of the deeper you. Balancing each one is a skill, and, when you add your own personal style to it, voilà, you have your whole self, the complete you.

**• EXERCISE •***The Whole Self: Who Am I?*

Here is an exercise I developed for you to learn more about the real you, the whole self. Please do not hesitate to take a great deal of time on this exercise. It is better to be spontaneous and write down your first thoughts. Take a piece of paper and label it “The Whole Self: Who Am I?” Then number the paper 1 through 6 with these headings:

1. The spiritual dimension
2. The emotional aspect
3. The physical self
4. The social dimension
5. The intellectual aspect
6. The occupational self

Now write one of your roles or an aspect of your life next to each numbered facet. As I mentioned, it is better to write down your first thoughts that come to mind. For example, next to “The spiritual dimension,” you might write, “I am a yoga instructor” or “I am a devout Catholic.” For “The social dimension,” you might state, “I am introverted” or “I am a social butterfly.” Regardless, be sure to include something true about yourself as you relate it to each dimension. Continue on through number 6, spontaneously writing down “I am . . .” next to each numbered dimension.

Now that your list is finished, tape it to your chest and walk around for a little while as you reflect on what you put next to each number. Are you happy with your list? Ask yourself, “Who am I really?” Does this list reflect the real you? Would you like to make some changes in it? If so, jot yourself a note next to the area in which you would like to make changes. Draw a star next to what you love about yourself! Keep this list in a folder labeled “The Whole Me.” I am certain you will want to return to it as you develop each of your dimensions. It is also healthy for your emotional aspect to look back on your growth and view it as the worthwhile experience it is. There will be many exercises throughout this book to help you uncover your authentic self as you begin

to teach others about being their authentic selves. Keep in mind that balance is the key as you continue onward and look at each facet of the whole self.



## The Spiritual Self

The first dimension is defined as the spiritual self. There are many aspects to the spiritual self. Your creativity is based here. It is where all your spontaneity stems from. The connection you feel to your higher power lives in this facet. How you form a relationship with your higher power and how you define your purpose in this universe are relative and extremely personal to each individual.

When you work in a public school system, *creative self* is the politically correct term for the spiritual dimension of a person. You will use the phrase creative self when working with the children. For now, though, I will refer to it as the spiritual self, defined in the broadest sense. Please take note that I am not referring to simply a “religious” self when discussing the spiritual dimension. If you are a religious person, however, that certainly could be included as part of who you are under this aspect. Moreover, I am relating to the spiritual self as the distinctive way you define your true essence, the manner in which you are open and expansive in this world.

I also feel it is essential to illustrate how I remain balanced in this dimension. I am certain that if anyone is stumped in this area, you will be able to find the necessary connections and reminders of what your personal spiritual connection embraces. For me to remain spiritually balanced, I begin with a simple prayer when I open my eyes each day. I say, “Thank you for this morning. Give me strength as I get out of my comfortable bed and all the comforts of my home and go to work out in today’s world. Help me to shine in every dimension of my whole self and help others to see their unique beauty and

creativity.” It usually flows something like this, but you know as well as I do that life is not always the same each morning. On your most tired days you could simply say, “Thank you for this life” or “Thank you for this day.” Regardless of my circumstances, I always thank my higher power for each day. Whether you are sad, angry, depressed, exhilarated, or whatever, train your spirit self to never forget that each day truly is precious. It is a gift that you can take a breath today. We never know what the next hour may hold in store for each of us; therefore, this very moment is precious. Still others may feel more comfortable with a simple positive thought, such as, “I’m glad to be alive” or “What gesture can I offer to someone today who needs help?” Regardless of your faith, your practice, or anything in between, begin each day with a simple connection, a spiritual or creative ritual to help you become more aware of this dimension within yourself.

While attending workshops for my therapy credentials, I learned that it takes the mind and the body a minimum of twenty-one to thirty days to form a habit, whether it is a good habit or a bad one. I knew I could apply this research to my spirit as well, and that is what I did. A simple ten-second prayer before you touch your feet to the floor will make an amazing difference in your daily attitude. It truly sets the tone for the day ahead.

There are other ways I remain spiritually balanced. Not only do I talk with my higher power through prayer, but I listen as well. Each day I take several minutes to meditate. I sit in a quiet place, focus on my breath, and take a few moments to become aware of my spirit in my body. I often hear people say they are not quite sure whether they are meditating right. The more you practice meditation and listening to your higher power, the easier it will become for you. There are many great books on all types of meditation (see Additional Resources on page 139). You may find a class at a meditation center or through a community education program. Videos and

DVDs on meditation are also available. Explore meditative tips that you feel connected to. Some people find quiet breathing meditation soothing, while you may feel more connected to walking meditation or a type of nature contemplation. Certainly the Internet is also an amazing resource for finding definitions, types of meditation, local classes, and other connections. Find what works for you. The all-encompassing purpose of any type of meditation discipline is to find quiet time within the moment at hand, to find space with your higher power. I highly recommend any discipline for your spirit's growth.

Yoga is also a path for me to enhance my spiritual development. I practice yoga four to six days a week. I make sure I practice in an open, clean space so that when I am finished, I leave feeling more in touch with who I am spiritually and more open to the world around me. I have taught yoga as well. Teaching yoga has been a way for me to give back what I know about being spiritually balanced. And because it helps others, in return it helps my spirit. By giving we receive. That is the way life works.

## • EXERCISE •

### *The Spiritual Self: Evolving the Healthy Spirit*

For your next exercise, begin with a new sheet of paper and title it "The Spiritual Self: Evolving the Healthy Spirit." Below the title, write all the ways you remain spiritually healthy. Under those items, list one or two ways you could improve on your spiritual growth. Keep each idea simple and be specific. Do not simply write, "I will walk outdoors more." Rather, state what is realistic for you. "I will walk outside for fifteen minutes five days a week after dinner." By being specific in your growth plans, you will clearly know your expectations and be able to live up to your own realistic goals. This will help you feel successful as you enhance your spiritual self and grow into the real you.

Remember, all these gestures will add up as you uncover your authentic self. Include this piece in your “Whole Me” folder and occasionally reflect back on it to see the number of small gestures growing.



## The Emotional Self

The emotional self is incredibly involved. It sends messages to all the other dimensions. It lets you know how you are doing spiritually, physically, socially, intellectually, occupationally, and, of course, emotionally. The role of the emotional self is complex, because you may be doing well in your physical and social dimensions but hurting in your intellectual, occupational, and spiritual aspects. Simply put, when you are balanced in all other dimensions, your emotional self is proud, happy, and at peace. Let us first discuss this multifaceted dimension, the emotional self.

It is normal to have all sorts of emotions. It is normal to feel sad, depressed, irritated, overwhelmed, excited, and at peace at various times during the same day. Furthermore, once you understand the nature of emotions, you'll find it is far easier to grasp the complexity of the emotional component of the self. A person I know who is highly involved in Alcoholics Anonymous and other twelve-step programs once told me we can experience more than two hundred feelings. That in itself is amazing. Our feelings convey meaning to all other aspects of our being. Our emotions let us know how we are doing physically. If we are tired, our fatigued and lethargic body will tell us. If we are depressed, our emotional self will look to the spiritual dimension for a way out of the hole. If we are feeling lonely, we will look to our social aspect and ask it for help. If we are lacking in the areas of intellectual and occupational growth, our emotions will tell our bodies about the emptiness we feel deep inside ourselves.

The emotional senses we have work as a funnel, guiding us to a more balanced state of being. It is important to respect and honor the emotional self. Listen to your emotions and, more important, identify them. Listen to the messages your body is sending you.

## • EXERCISE •

### *The Emotional Self: My Feelings Today*

Take a moment now to make a list of all the feelings you have had today. Be specific. Rather than writing, “I felt sad,” write, “I felt sad when my boss was too busy to tell me what a great job I was doing in my classroom today.” By being specific, you can take your power back instead of wallowing in your negative feelings. How do you take your power back? By identifying why you felt a certain way, you can also identify what you can do within your power to change your negativity into a more positive attitude.

In the example I gave, I could have been disheartened all day, sinking in my own sadness. Instead, by pinpointing what was happening, I was able to gather some strength back. By seeing that someone was too busy to notice my contribution, I realized the boss’s action did not negate my contribution. Ideally, taking note of the circumstances results in the opposite of being self-pitying. It focuses on the positive. Furthermore, it states that my contribution to the world of teaching was splendid. Nevertheless, I wished someone could have noticed. This acknowledgment alone helps keep depression away. It holds negative feelings at bay and positive feelings at the forefront.

It is important to identify all your feelings and never sweep any of them under the carpet. If you’re sad, then by all means be sad. If you’re angry, then be angry. I have heard it said that people who get angry are not angry people. This saying expresses so much about the emotional self. By experiencing our feelings, by expressing our emotions, we honor our emotional self. This goes for all feelings, whether you have identified them as negative or positive emotions. Do not hide your negative feelings.

On the other hand, do not hang out in a negative space for long periods of time either. It is more important to identify your feelings and state what needs to be done to move into a more positive frame of mind. In this example, it is better for me to note that I was sad because no one acknowledged my great efforts in the world of teaching today. Then I am able to identify what needs to be done for me to feel better. Sometimes if I feel sad, I need to set a timer and just cry for thirty minutes. Other times I need to find a friend and share what my sad day was about. Taking action will single-handedly relieve most of my sadness, and in effect it will also help balance out the social dimension by honoring friendships as well.

Add this list to your “Whole Me” file. Take special note of any patterns or repeated feelings you had throughout your day. By being aware of your feelings, you have an added advantage to understanding more of your emotional self. This is all done by simply being attentive. Include on this list, next to your identified feelings, any action steps you may wish to take. By merely writing these things down, you are claiming your feelings and identifying the appropriate actions that need to occur for you to get back to balance.

## • EXERCISE •

### *The Emotional Self: Retaining Emotional Health*

Make a list of all the ways you remain emotionally healthy. It is important to list all the ways you can freely express yourself. For example, you may include that you are part of a writers’ group, keep a personal journal, or have a best friend you consult with about your most private issues. Possibly you dance around your living room and sing loudly when you feel joyous. Or for fun, on your daily drive home, you turn up the volume on your radio so incredibly loud, and sing like there is no tomorrow. Regardless, be sure to truthfully include all the ways you are able to freely express yourself. I am certain that even after you feel your list is complete, you will still identify other ways that you do this. It has simply become a part of you. Afterward, record one or two ways

you can improve upon your emotional balance. For example, you may write that the next time you have a gut reaction about a situation, you are not going to discard that feeling. Rather, you will look at the feeling and identify what your body is attempting to reveal to you. Put this list with the others in your “Whole Me” file.



## The Physical Self

Who are we physically? That may sound like a simple question, yet there is more to the physical dimension than meets the eye. You are more than, for example, the 135-pound female with brown hair and brown eyes or the 180-pound male with light hair and blue eyes that you see in the mirror each day. In addition to this outer body, there are many aspects to the second dimension, the physical self. Let us first examine the obvious part of our physical self, our tangible external body.

Once again, I will reiterate that you must find what works for you to remain “physically” balanced. I will share the ways that work for me, and in doing so I am confident your physical development will become more evident to you.

Overall, I feel balanced physically. I try to get plenty of sleep each night. I exercise four to six days a week to keep my body feeling healthy. I eat a balanced diet full of fruits and vegetables, grains, nuts, and cheese, and all the good stuff you already know about. Certainly, I balance it out with my favorite occasional treats of key lime pie, chocolate peanut butter bars, and buttered popcorn too. For the most part, though, I come from a balanced state of physical health. Yes, the periodic indulgences will happen; however, they will be more on a conscious level and done in a balanced manner. Awareness is a key factor to balance within all of the dimensions.

Another way I remain physically healthy is by striving not to be extremely critical about my physical body. Instead, I do the best I can

at taking care of my physical appearance. I get plenty of rest, I drink lots of water, and I pamper myself with hot baths. Nourish your physical body. Even as I am getting ready for work in the morning, I do nurturing things for my physical self, like a bit of meditation and exercise. Try always to remember that your body is thankful for the smallest gesture you can offer it. After a calming hot bath, I apply makeup modestly and try to highlight my better features. Do not look in the mirror and notice all the flaws the physical body naturally comes with. Preferably put the focus on your strong points—and, by the way, each physical body does come with strong points.

For example, when you look in the mirror, try to be aware of your thoughts. If they are negative, which thoughts can be at times, and you begin to think “My nose is too big” or something of that nature, quickly change your message to “I like my cheekbones” or something more positive. Focusing on the positive is a key within all the dimensions of the self and of life. Focus on the positive. This will help you in your response to your physical dimension.

Besides an outer physical self, we also have an inner physical self, which holds a great deal of wisdom. Our inner wisdom is very involved and complex. My yoga experience has furthered my knowledge of this fact. I cannot tell you enough how important it is to listen to your body. If your body is tired, it will tell you. If it is hungry, it will tell you. If it is not hungry, it will say so as well. Your body radiates all kinds of feelings to you all the time. Your feelings and thoughts create body messages and energy in a variety of ways. It is important that you listen to those messages and honor them. Your mind has been trained for years and years by a chaotic society with irrational people in it. It is more important now that you listen to your body’s wisdom.

Let me give you an example of this principle. I grew up in a blue-collar home. My dad worked the eleven to seven shift as a dock loader, and my mom worked swing shifts taking care of elderly patients in a hospital and in private care. When I was young, I recall my dad saying he had not missed work in eleven years. I also remember my

mom going to work very ill. She would say, “I am sicker than a dog and I am going to work. There’s no reason anyone needs to get out of going to work.” In other words, she was in essence saying, do not listen to the messages of your body, but comply with the craziness of society’s demands and go to work. It deserves mention that my dad died at forty-two and my mom at fifty-two. Their messages still lie ingrained in my mind. When my body knows not to go to work it tells me, “Your throat is scratchy, your body is tense from all the stress, and furthermore, you are exhausted from the unbelievable demands that are put on teachers these days.” My body screams, “You need to take this time and return yourself to health!” Nevertheless, to this day I still have to argue with my mind to take a day off and nurture myself back to health. Why? Mostly because many people still come from that irrational state of mind, as my mom and dad once did, trying to keep moving whether they are sick or not.

## • EXERCISE •

### *The Physical Self: Awareness of the Physical Body*

How do I maintain my body physically when we live in a society where the minority is thin and the majority is overweight? How do I preserve myself when we are confronted with an abundance of temptation each day on television, in the advertisements we read, in the grocery stores, and everywhere around us? Try these two approaches I use to touch base with myself physically to stay aware.

Ask yourself if you “see” yourself. Use the acronym SEE—Sleep, Exercise, Eat—to check in with yourself regarding your overall physical balance. Ask yourself, “Am I getting a healthy amount of sleep? Am I getting the proper amount of exercise for my physical body? And am I eating a healthy array of foods in a balanced way?” Keep a daily SEE journal and include it in your “Whole Me” file. Record these basic items in your notebook: the quantity and quality of sleep you get each day; the amount and type of daily exercise you had; what you

had to eat and drink daily, including all snacks and meals. Keep it very simple for quick referencing. It should be the first document you look at when you feel out of sorts. If your physical body is undernourished, you will have it on record and actually note the action steps you need to take to get back to balance. Include the action steps in your SEE journal when necessary.

Another thing I try to do on a daily basis is to be aware of my eating and drinking habits. I do this in several ways. Try this technique for enhancing your conscious physical health. Make an effort each time you put anything into your body to ask, "Does this help my body to be balanced and have positive energy?" In your SEE journal, include a list of items that give you great positive energy. Separately list items that do not agree with you and overall negatively affect you. Take note of what to avoid and what to include more of in your life for balanced energy. In addition to raising your awareness, this will also help you to be more thankful for what you do have.

## • EXERCISE •

### *The Physical Self: Staying Healthy*

Make a list of all the ways you remain physically healthy. Below those items, write down three ways you can improve your physical health. Include all this in your "Whole Me" folder. Once again, be specific. Instead of writing, for example, "I will get more sleep, I will cut back on sweets, and I will also exercise more," it is better to write, "I will go to bed each night by nine thirty and I will only allow dessert three times a week. I will also exercise five times a week for thirty minutes." By being specific, you will be able to see the results happen. By feeling the success, you are already successful.

Certainly it is important not to expect the immediate results and instant gratification that the unbalanced world holds so very dear. Rather, it is more valuable for you to commit to healthy balance. Continue to make these daily gestures toward it. To recap, it takes the mind at least twenty-one to thirty days to form a habit. Remind your-

self often of this information as you train yourself to be the physically balanced human being you need to be.



## The Social Self

Who are you socially? Are you the cynic at work and home? Are you the quiet one? Are you a bubbly person others enjoy being around? Regardless of which one you think you are now, it is more important to identify the type of person you want to be and why you want to be that person socially. Being the authentic person you are meant to be is more important than any popularity contest you may be playing in your mind. To put it simply, there will be days when you may be off balance and a little on the cynical side or simply more reserved than usual; nevertheless, you will do the work necessary to get yourself back in a positive, balanced framework.

Personally, I am more extroverted than my husband. He would just as soon stay home for the most part, unless it is to attend a hockey game. Because of our differences, we have had to balance our social calendars. I, as well as he, know the importance of fellowship and feeling connected to others. We set aside time each month to get together with friends for dinner and to simply socialize. We almost always comment on what a good time we had. Human beings are social beings, and it is important to honor that element of our existence.

The social self has many facades. Today, we play many roles and juggle too many priorities. We have almost forgotten why we are here and what our purpose is. I believe our true purpose is to combine our unique self with other authentic individuals to make a healthy world for everyone involved. Instead, we put on our work role in the morning, our parenting role in the evening, and our neighborly role over the weekend. By that time we are exhausted and, more important, have discounted the fact that there is a spirit in us that wants to be genuine.

**• EXERCISE •***The Social Self: My Effective Social Characteristics*

Make a list of all the roles you play on a daily basis, for example, parent, teacher, spouse, and sister. Next to each role identify all the characteristics that go along with that role. The characteristics next to parent may be strict, loving, helpful, angry, and self-righteous. The characteristics next to sister may be something like superior, patronizing, loving, and helpful. Now circle all the ineffective characteristics for which you would not like to be identified. You may have circled the angry and self-righteous characteristics under the parent role and also the superior and patronizing characteristics under the sister role. By simply being aware of which characteristics you would like to diminish, you heighten your social awareness. By and large, this is a major step to helping and healing your social dimension.

Now consider how you remain socially balanced. How often do you attend social functions? And, more important, how often do you attend social functions as the real you? Do you go out socially? If yes, how often? These are questions to ponder as you reflect on the individual characteristics for which you wish to be identified. Knowing who you are and what traits you would like to be known for is critical to developing your social persona. Include this paper with your social information in your “Whole Me” folder.

**The Intellectual Self**

An intellectual person is basically someone who spends time thinking and studying about the world around her. I am a very intellectual person. I did not realize that until I was in my later twenties, after I had completed my undergraduate work and found a job as a schoolteacher. It was then that I felt my intellectual success.

Beforehand and in my early teen years, I actually felt somewhat naive. My world during my school years was predominantly a social one. My whole self was way off balance. The social dimension was seemingly my only interest, and I did not give much attention to the other aspects of the self. My world was friends, dances (I never missed one), sporting events, boyfriends, and whatever social event was happening the coming weekend. I disconnected from the academic intellectual aspect, and I got by. Looking back I understand how school personnel found it easier to allow me to go down this narrow pathway than to reinvigorate me with encouraging academic knowledge and the outlook of a successful future.

It was not until my first year of college that I realized I had always had an innate intellectual desire. My first English professor read some of my work and told me of my gift of persuasive writing. He encouraged me to write and excitedly asked when he could read more of my work. A science professor suggested that I should be a scientist because of my natural curiosity. These types of messages turned my world around. I became an intellectual sponge, partly because of the newfound messages that surrounded me. I instilled these new statements in myself, thus growing in more ways than one. Needless to say, I ended up graduating cum laude with a high grade point average. If you were to ask any of my high school teachers five years prior whether that was possible, I am not sure any of them would have bet on it. Nonetheless, proactive remarks are more important than ever in today's world, and they are what we need to give our children.

It is no wonder today's teenagers have such severe issues. Discipline, positive guidance, and awareness have slipped into the background while instant gratification and immersing themselves in what they want, when they want it, seem to be the norm for today's young population. As a society, we have allowed our children to go down any path of their choosing, because it is just easier to let them to do so, even if it is to their detriment. Eating disorders, depression, and suicide attempts, basically all their cries for help, along with their drug

and alcohol addictions, are pervasive in schools today. The same old wounding, negative messages that lack direction and attention are overflowing in today's unbalanced world. In fact, they are now spilling over more rapidly because of the crazy, busy world in which we are living. Adults seem more hectic, reacting to this type of world. Nevertheless providing guidance and full attention to our young people is most critical now.

Today's youth are our greatest resource in turning this unbalanced world around. It is possible to recover from this damage and heal the world. We need to do this by reviving their innate intellectualism in their hearts. I once took a reading course that taught that if you want children to read, teach them to believe they can read. To connect this premise to the intellectual dimension, I believe we need to teach children about their inherent wisdom. We need to teach them to believe in their intellectual selves. We need to show them how their bodies hold wisdom, how their minds are sharp and can identify the good judgments they need to make. We need to show them their spirits can soar. This is the job of today's teacher. It is critical that we fulfill this obligation.

### • EXERCISE •

#### *The Intellectual Self: Wisely Balanced*

How do you remain intellectually balanced? On a separate piece of paper for the intellectual dimension, write down the things you do in your life to improve your intellectual self. How do you broaden yourself as an intellectual being? Include one or two action steps you can take to strengthen the intellectual dimension in your life. Add this to the other papers in your "Whole Me" file.



## The Occupational Self

In my deeper understanding, the occupational self is much more than a job and employment. It is about how we occupy our time in this world. I hadn't realized this until the first time I held a workshop on the dimensions of the self in which a retired person was in attendance. I could tell by her reaction that she was still mourning her lack of employment as she worked her way into retirement. When I presented an exercise about how people remained occupationally balanced in their lives, she told me her occupational self was "dead." When I changed the wording to how do you "occupy" your time in your life, I could tell she felt much better. This was also my turning point when looking at the occupational aspect of the self.

I look at the occupational self as a link to the spiritual component. I occupy my time in many ways, and those activities usually connect with the spiritual dimension. Of course, in my actual job, I occupy my time as a teacher, and, more important, I do this on a more meaningful level. First, I am a teacher of how to be a balanced human being. Next, I am an elementary school teacher. I occupy my time with writing. I spend time decorating for the holidays with my family. I also occupy my time with leisurely Sundays. I take yoga and teach it to others twice a week. I spend time scrapbooking and reflecting on memories with family and friends. I do jobs that keep my household flowing smoothly, such as laundry, cooking, paying bills, and grocery shopping. I occupy some of my time daydreaming in a hammock. I also work in the garden. These are some of the ways I use my time in the occupational dimension of myself.

I think it is important to explain what I aim *not* to do with my occupational component. I make an effort not to occupy my time with meaningless things, such as worrying and complaining. Furthermore, I strive to be in the moment and focus on the tasks at hand.

**• EXERCISE •***The Occupational Self:  
Making Wishful Behaviors Happen*

For your next exercise, fold a piece of paper in half lengthwise. On one side, make a list of all the ways you occupy your time. Of course, include your employment and all your avocations. Name all the behaviors that occupy your time as well. Now on the other side of the paper, list other ways you wish to occupy your time. Next to each wishful way, write one step you can take to make that occupation come alive in your life.

Remember to be specific. This will help you be successful within the occupational dimension. Include this new information in your “Whole Me” folder. You should now have exercises for the whole you and for each dimension of the whole self. It will be a fabulous resource to reflect back on as you continue to watch your growth happen.



By being a mindful person, you are adding awareness, which is greatly needed in today’s unbalanced world. The aware teacher thinks logically and creates with wisdom. Today’s children are yearning for these types of adults. Aware people coming from this healthy space are the first ingredient for a balanced tomorrow.

## 2

# Exude Positive Energy

*If the world seems cold to you, kindle fires to warm it!*

—Lucy Larcom, 1824–93, American suffragist, feminist

**The teacher is the one to establish the atmosphere** in the classroom. Enthusiasm and a positive attitude are contagious energies that inspire virtually everyone. I find it's important to point out that insensitivity and a negative attitude are infectious as well. The teacher sets the tone. How you choose to spend your days in the classroom is up to you. If you decide to have a positive attitude, you continually strengthen and balance all the dimensions of the whole self. Think about it. Spiritually, it is uplifting to look at the glass as half full. Emotionally, your feelings become optimistic and hopeful. Physically, your focus is on your positive attributes. Socially, you enjoy friends and family with a pleasant manner. Intellectually, the world you study becomes a place full of possibilities. And with a positive attitude, your occupational self is at peace with the activities you engage in. A positive person is a joy to be around.

How do you change your attitude to be more positive? How do you speak positively in a faculty room when seemingly the only forms of

talk are negative conversations? The talk is usually about the school, the administrators, the work, and, of course, all the difficult children. The demands, the gossip, and the complaints drain the teachers' energy, leaving them depleted and feeling negative about their livelihood. The teachers leave the faculty room after lunch and wonder how much longer they can go on like this. When in fact, if the talk had been more positive, upbeat, and inspirational, they would leave feeling revived and light. That spirit would then journey back to the classroom to continue encouraging others.

As an undergraduate, I often heard my professors give advice on not becoming involved in shoptalk in the school's faculty rooms. I have since heard from inspirational education speakers, colleagues, and others that often these places can be full of people who are part of the BMW club. The BMW club is not made up of teachers driving fancy cars. It actually stands for the Bitch, Moan, and Whine group. In my early years of teaching, I learned exactly what they were talking about. But what do we do about the tendency to complain?

First, understanding the nature of negative thoughts and behavior is important. This brings awareness, and awareness is the key to finding your positive outlook. People who are negative and complain for the most part are in a sense searching for happiness. They are generally pessimistic, and when they connect with other unhappy individuals, it creates an illusion of pleasure. The illusion is this: if I complain with you, then we are all in this together; therefore, my life is full of friends. In actuality, the true picture is closer to hell. In some weird sense, this commiserating behavior makes the social self feel somewhat satisfied, even though it leaves all the other dimensions depleted and hungry for balance. A true friend would help you get out of the hole and into a positive frame of mind. A true friend on occasion may have a bad day herself and need to vent, but for the most part shares in creating goodness. Overall, connectedness should be reviving and vitalizing to the self. Be attentive to the words you use. Positive