



A Life of Balance

An excerpt from Padme Nina Livingstone's *Let's Not Call It Meditation: Practical Guidance for People Who Think They Can't Sit Still and Quiet the Mind*

What comes to mind when you think about balance in your life? It's a good idea to check out your personal connection with the word, balance, because it may be different than what is meant here. Ironically, ideas about living a balanced life have become one of the biggest stressors. If we managed to live up to the advice of countless magazine articles and life style experts, we'd be exhausted - always eating healthy, getting five half-hour sessions of aerobic exercise every week, 8-10 hours of sleep per night, daily quality time for oneself, loved ones, our community, and planet- with weight training, meditation, yoga, fashionable clothes, meaningful hobbies, and excellent sex too. Trying for perfect balance, as defined by others, can keep us running around, filling up our life from someone else's perfect menu. We can get so caught up in living by prescription, we forget about simply being. We end up feeling stressed, and dissatisfied, wanting things we can't change to be different.

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Another type of balance is an inner state of balance. It's an experience we can find within us. Wanting more awareness in life, is the one arena where wanting something to be different pays off. When we want to change, we can change with awareness practice. Simply turning our focus inward, meditating, and practicing with awareness, we find the deep inner balance we have been looking for.

Can you imagine for a minute what it would be like to be alive in the moment, feeling the movement of life, living with inner balance, each moment alive with awareness? Picture an old weights and measure scale. You know, the kind that portrays the justice system. There's a tiny point of contact between the scale platform and the top of the triangular base, isn't there? Think of that point of contact as who we are in this moment. Right here! The scales hold everything life brings our way. They may swing wildly or sit quietly, but the point of contact remains intact. That's what is meant by balance: Each moment we can be the point of contact with a solid grounded base.

Sometimes, of course, balance feels like we're balancing on a razor edge between chaos and simplicity. Sometimes balance feels like the silence in the midst of a hurricane, perfectly still, while the winds of change blow the scales up and down and back and forth. Sometimes life is a see saw, with a rhythm and craziness all its own, and we remain alert with a conscious point of contact between moments! Sometimes, as we all know, we get thrown off balance in the rush of chaos, and forget the aspect of self that is always grounded, aware, and balanced. However, it is good to remember, even when we feel lost in chaos, we are still attached to a base of balance, by a fine point of contact with ever-changing, moving scales. We just have to remember Balance is there!

My husband, Bill, is a building contractor, which means he has great opportunity to explore chaos and balance every workday. Often he has three of four crews of people working on different jobs, with different needs, looking for his direction at the same time! Now, that's chaotic.

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Bill typically works on three or four different jobs every day. His crew handles the carpentry aspects of jobs. Each job may also need an electrician, a plumber, a masonry crew, roofers and a painter. Bill directs the whole job and makes sure that each subcontractor's job fits the next sub's piece, so the schedule comes together smoothly, the work stays on pace, and the renovation looks beautiful in the end. Most of the time, things do work out beautifully, but there are days that top the stressful chart, even for a person like Bill who has been meditating for many years. Bill says, "What makes the job most stressful, is when people don't do what they say they are going to do."

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Recently, Bill arranged to meet roofers at 8 AM at a job site. He made sure his crew arrived by eight, because they needed to work with the roofers at the same time. However, the roofers didn't show up, never called, and couldn't be reached. Bill sent his crew off to pick up material at the shop, and get some work done work on a job an hour away.

"The problems come up when I want things to be different than they can be."

Then, he left to check out an emergency call from a mason at another job. The masons had been digging for subterranean duct work and hit granite. They were anxious for Bill to arrive and figure out what to do next. Under Bill's direction, they tried to jackhammer the rock, but it didn't work. While they were discussing how to get the job done, (maybe if they bought a special saw to cut away a piece of the rock), the roofers called Bill. They wanted to know where he was. They had been delayed

but were now ready to work. Bill had to reschedule the roofers because his crew had moved on because the roofers had been late. Now he was deep in problem solving with the masons about how to break up the granite and save the duct work. In the end, they did cut away rock with the new saw, for the duct work to fit properly, and the roof work eventually got done.

Later, Bill said, "That day I was good at staying with what is. If I can be honest and clear with customers and subs alike, the situation stays more balanced, even when big mistakes happen." So, when does Bill lose balance? "The problems come up when I want things to be different than they can be." Bill said, "That's when I lose my balance. Then I may lose my temper with a subcontractor or a supplier, or hear myself complaining about my day at dinner. I know I can't control everything that is going to happen with all the subs and materials. If I adjust as I go, I stay in balance."

Whether we are at work, shopping, vacationing, or at home, with awareness work and a meditation practice, we return to center with a sense of balance, again and again. We may forget, then remember who we want to be. After all, life is a lively personal collage.

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It includes self, others, passion, quiet, love, food, money, work, adventure, boredom, physical activity, stillness, pain, humor, sorrow, creativity, sleep, chaos, fear, death, laughter, joy, family, and love, love, love - all of what life has to bring us!

I think of balance as a condition occurring when the integration and interdependence of different aspects of our life communicate well together. In other words, balance is how we feel when we feel loving, strong, and clear minded, no matter what is going on internally or externally. It is a condition that occurs with awareness.

What makes balance so interesting is that balance cannot exist without chaos. Balance is created by chaos. Chaos is the stuff we usually try to avoid; Painful life circumstances like losing a job, divorce, sickness, and letting go of our children when they leave home. Loved ones dying, a beloved going to war, or being in a war. When things become difficult, we feel our way through. Our strengths and weaknesses are in full view. Chaos shows us who we don't want to be, and how we don't want to live, so we move toward what we do want. We seek change, we seek balance. That's the gift!

“Sometimes balance feels like the silence in the midst of a hurricane, perfectly still.”

You might want to think about your relationship to chaos. What if you imagined chaos as your personal cyclone. We live in the center of our personal cyclone, whether we like it or not. And, how we live with the chaos of our life defines our everyday experience of life. Do you seek balance? Do you let chaos get to you? Do you have balanced energy some of the time? Do you know how to return to balance? The picture of the Flowering of Inner Growth shows us what it's like when we are a balanced, grounded, blossoming flower in the center of the cyclone: Blossoming, loving, and present, even as the winds of life try to uproot us and blow us away!

Find the updated version of this article and more in Padme's book

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The flower portrays our wholeness. The flower shows how every interconnected part is essential, and part of the nature of a balanced mind and life. This is why balance is the center point of flowering. It is our true home, a fine point, being still in the midst of the changing winds of our life. Balance is a centering, internal experience, which informs all the rest of our life! It is awareness fully expressed.



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About Padme Livingstone

Padme Nina Livingstone is the Director of A Quieter Place: Practical Meditation for Living Your Life. She has a B.S. in Human Services and extensive experience with awareness meditation, self-inquiry, parenting, relationship skills, energy work, caregiving, and bereavement. As a meditation teacher and author, Padme has spent much of her life untangling her own confusion, while finding balance around her physical, mental, emotional and spiritual life. After more than 36 years of meditation and self-inquiry, and over 18 years of energy healing work, Padme discusses meditation, relationships, and energy healing using accessible, practical language with people who want to feel less stress, and enjoy more peace, clarity, compassion, curiosity, honesty, and gratitude. For more information, visit her website at www.aquieterplace.com