



PRINCIPLES OF HIGH QUALITY NOURISHMENT

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For all twelve areas of essential self-care, there are shared principles for what constitutes *high quality* nourishment. By reviewing our own practices in light of these principles, we can determine whether we are nourishing ourselves effectively, meeting our deepest needs and encouraging personal and interpersonal evolution. There are many ways to approach self-assessment. One simple and direct method is measuring our level satisfaction in each nourishment area. This requires honesty, insight and compassionate self-awareness. It is also often helpful to consult with others who know us intimately, and who can – with their own honesty, insight and compassion – observe the levels of wellness and skillfulness in each facet of our being and from day to day.

NOURISHMENT OVERVIEW

Take a moment to inventory your self-care practices by rating each of the categories below, then invite others to evaluate you separately and independently. Reflect on the combination of factors contributing to holistic nourishment. “1” is extremely dissatisfied or doing poorly, and “10” is extremely satisfied or doing well.

	<i>Self</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>Total</i>
Physical health and well-being – consider diet, regular exercise, physical strength, energy, quality of sleep, chronic or recurrent illness, weight management, overall sense of well-being			
Positive emotions, creativity and self-expression – consider self-expression, authenticity in communication, regular creativity and imagination, overall happiness and contentment, sense of playfulness			
Relationships and social acceptance – consider quality of friendships, feeling loved and appreciated, regular expressions of love to and from other people, overall sense of connectedness and intimacy, sense of belonging			
Learning and intellectual stimulation – consider regular exposure to new ideas and opinions, excitement about learning, diversity of interests, mental alertness, overall sense of intellectual curiosity and openness			
Accomplishment and fulfillment – consider satisfaction over career, hobbies and life’s work, sense of overall purpose, excitement about plans and goals, confidence about successes and abilities			
Spirituality – consider the strength and consistency of connection and relationship with Inner Light, Universal Consciousness, Divine Presence, Spirit Guide(s), Soul, Spiritual Realm, Ground of All Being, Essence, etc.			
Healing of the past – consider level of peace, tranquility, forgiveness and healing around any traumatic events of the past, as well as the quality of relationships with all family members in the present			
Legacy, pleasure and reproduction – consider quality of what will be left behind, frequency of pleasurable experiences, and the sense of safety and stability in the home environment			
Ease of shifting between different modes of processing – evaluate how easy it is to move from a logical, intellectual way of thinking to a felt or intuitive mode of being; or from being grounded in the body’s felt sensations and messages to another mode where one isn’t even aware of			

the body; or from any of these to a deeply spiritual space within			
Self-empowerment – consider self-confidence and possession of a clear and accurate awareness about strengths and weaknesses; consider compassionate acceptance of own foibles and faults while at the same time remaining humble			
Sexuality – consider level of satisfaction with sex life, the level of intimacy with a partner, the quality of physical openness, sharing and enjoyment			
Integrity – evaluate the ability to harmonize thoughts with words, words with action, and action with taking responsibility for the consequences of actions			
GRAND TOTALS			

After you complete this exercise, take some time to compare notes. Did the observations of others align with your assessments? Are there areas you would like to improve? If you scored 20 for every total, I encourage you to plan on teaching others your secrets to success. If there are areas you want to address, take a moment to review the following principles of high quality nourishment and begin synthesizing some customized, integral practices for your life that improve your self-care in the areas you feel could be improved.

A FEW HELPFUL PRINCIPLES

The following can be applied to all aspects of self-care. In particular they are useful in designing and evaluating practices that nurture several areas at once. All of these principles promote the qualities of *attention, intention and follow-through*, which are the baseline characteristics of any successful integral practice.

- ★ **Compassionate Intention.** What motivates us to self-nourish or apply any of these principles? To whatever degree we are driven by deeply rooted and abiding love, caring and appreciation for ourselves, everyone around us and every aspect of our existence, we will be that much more effective in our practice. The ultimate expression of this intention is a desire for the good of All, in which we are inextricably included. In contrast, when we allow fear, insecurity, guilt, feelings of inadequacy or codependent impulses to guide our efforts, we will ultimately undermine our own progress and fall short of our goals. One way of describing this is that we climb up the mountain because we want to be whole and encourage wholeness in others, not just to see the view.
- ★ **Humility and Authenticity.** Wherever we are in our journey, we recognize, appreciate and represent that place to ourselves and others. In all likelihood, we are both much farther than we think we are, and have much further to go than we think we do. The mountain path has many false peaks and unexpected turns, and it is difficult to fully understand what we are accomplishing until we have reached the summit. So we can only describe where we are and thrive where we are.
- ★ **Courage, Faith and Hope.** When we entrust ourselves to an experiential process, nothing is guaranteed. Like life itself, there is a constant unfolding that justifies all our efforts, but we cannot truly know anything until we engage the world around us. We rely on courage, faith and hope to realize unproven possibilities. We take risks and remain open. How we invest these attributes is

less important than cultivating the attributes themselves. It doesn't matter what we believe awaits us at the mountaintop, as long as we believe in an interesting possibility that draws us onward.

- ★ **Disciplined Effort.** One the one hand, this means placing a priority on routine effort and delaying gratification of competing desires. On the other hand it means pacing ourselves and not taking on too much too quickly. Reinforcing the ego by forcing ourselves to jump through hoops of accomplishment is more likely to produce burnout or mistaken pride than high quality results. Instead, we plan carefully and proceed with steady, measured endurance. Disciplined effort also means *paying attention* and keeping all the other high quality principles in mind. In terms of the hike up the mountain, it means we keep going, and we do so in ways that conserve our strength.
- ★ **Periods of Stillness.** As with many of these principles, cultivating inner quietude is a practice in itself. But if we can incorporate stillness into every other practice, we will amplify the results. Stillness comes in many forms: resting from physical effort to be revitalized; taking a break from solving a mental puzzle to gain fresh perspective; allowing laughter to distract our heart from its desires; relaxing into the present moment and our own interior spaciousness. As we hike through forests and meadows and rocky ridges, we pause to regain our strength, open ourselves to *what is, right now*, and appreciate everything around us. In stillness we find calm, strength, and a clear vision for our next steps.
- ★ **Gratitude, Passion and Joy.** These are the main evidences of any kind of fulfilling nourishment. If we're not enjoying the hike, something is amiss. When we feel connected to and grateful for our experience, celebratory happiness naturally springs forth, and passion for the climb is renewed.
- ★ **Variation.** No matter how enthusiastic our initial efforts, empty habit, inattention and boredom can crop up. Variation in practice deflects these inevitabilities. We are not machines but organic, dynamic beings that enjoy inspiration. Sometimes a period of stillness is enough to divert us from numbing monotony, and sometimes a complete change in direction is required. Sometimes we must adjust the *balance, duration or intensity* of our practice repeatedly. But although a path up the steep ravine may appear to be a shorter and more exciting route, the plodding switchback is likely more reliable. Variation does not always increase efficiency, but it does help us keep alert. On the other hand, overly frequent variation can inhibit forward progress altogether.
- ★ **Intermediate Rewards.** Along the same lines as introducing variation and periods of stillness, planned rewards are important too. Although self-nourishment will ultimately provide its own long-term rewards, sometimes we need to motivate ourselves within shortened cycles of gratification. I may want to reach the mountain lake by sunset so I can take pictures of the beautiful scenery. If I get up early tomorrow, I'll be much more likely to reach the lake by sunset. So as an intermediate reward, I plan on having my favorite foods for breakfast if I can get up early.
- ★ **Discomfort.** There is no growth without some discomfort or tension. Whether strengthening our muscles or facing our innermost fears, progress will entail both a little pain and tolerance of risk. One very natural response is to avoid all pain or change, and seek comfort or pleasure in the familiar or whatever distracts us from applying ourselves. When we do this, however, we begin substituting necessary areas nourishment and deplete our reserves. Eventually this leads to atrophy, injury and even incapacitation of whatever is being neglected. So one measurement of effective self-nourishment is noting how uncomfortable we are with our practice. If we are being

challenged regularly but still sense we are moving in a positive direction, our disciplines are likely helpful ones. If we are never uncomfortable or hesitant, we are probably missing something important.

- ★ **Grounding in Natural Rhythms.** This is about remembering our own place in the natural world and its rhythms. Our native patterns of sleeping, eating and personal effort parallel the ebb and flow of day and night. Gregorian calendars are based on phases of the Earth's rotation around the sun. Solar months also partially emulate the phases of the moon. Menstruation closely parallels the lunar cycle. Seasons influence our moods and how we interact with each other and with Nature. And of course our very lives and energy replenishment come from Nature, through foods and sunlight, fresh air and clean water. Our internal rhythms govern us as well. To whatever extent we are mindful of these cycles and energies, to whatever extent we consciously sustain a conscious connection with them, we strengthen and expand self-nourishment.
- ★ **Acceptance and Letting Go.** As we self-nourish we will encounter difficult truths about ourselves and the world around us. How we respond to this unveiling is in part a reflection of our personal experience and development. But if we can embrace what we discover without fear, if we can completely forgive ourselves and others, if we can let go entirely all attachment to outcomes, then we allow all that nourishes us to flow freely. Without acceptance and letting go, we tend to build walls around each facet of Self that would otherwise welcome nurturing. And the more walls we construct, the more we will find ourselves struggling to move forward or be whole. Using the mountain analogy, perhaps I can't move as quickly as I would like because my feet are sore. I can accept this, letting go of all related expectations, or I can resist it. If I resist it, I may injure myself, experience excessive pain or even stumble off the path in distraction. If I accept and let go, I will slow down, learn the lessons I need to learn at the pace I need to learn them, and eventually reach my goal despite my limitations.
- ★ **Integration into Being.** Healing, growth and transformation will not fully engage until we stop doing and start being. Until our self-care practice becomes an unselfconscious extension of who we are, our nourishment will be incomplete; it will be measured in effort and attainment instead of evolution. We rarely methodically premeditate breathing, loving someone or laughing out loud, so why would we struggle and sweat over every aspect of authentic integral practice? Once we find our balance, we really will just be finding ourselves. The rigorous hike may still be strenuous, but our efforts will not feel anything like overextended striving. The splendor of each internal summit will still evoke *ahas*, but our responses will settle into continuous gratitude and celebration, rather than a sense of accomplishment or confidence in our latest achievements.

CLEAR BENEFITS

After applying these principles to self-care over time, a significant question persists: *is it working?* There are many ways to measure the benefits of practice, and a detailed exploration of options will be the subject of future writings. However, some reliable metrics are:

- ★ Our overall *health and vitality*;

- ★ Our pervasive sense of *joy and contentment*;
- ★ The ease with which we make *constructive choices*;
- ★ The ever-increasing *quality of our relationships*;
- ★ The *positive influence* we have on our immediate environment and the lives of others; and
- ★ The distinct experience of *a deepening connection and a sense of living fully*.

After months of balanced, holistic nourishment, we will notice concrete changes. Assessments such as the *Self Awareness and Self Esteem (SASE)* evaluation will show improvement. The nourishment appraisal at the beginning of this article will indicate increasing levels of satisfaction in multiple areas. What will become increasingly clear over time is that an internal harmony among all aspects of self has been established, and now requires mindful maintenance. This does not always mean our external circumstances improve instantly, and in fact there can be lengthy periods of tumultuous transition. But eventually, with persistent discipline, the external world will come to mirror the positive developments of our interior life. And when we operate in harmony with the Universe, we will have attained the highest quality nourishment possible. As that harmony resonates through every facet of our existence, we will thrive in powerful and surprising ways, until we propagate that harmony into wider and wider arenas of action.

And finally, it is helpful to remember that each of us is unique. There is no one-size-fits-all remedy to nourishment barriers, and there is no single integral practice that provides holistic nourishment for everyone. Our individual song generates unique interactions with everything around us, and those resonances look, feel and sound different than music in the lives of others. So we create and reinvent as we move forward. We march to the beat of our own drum. We find our own path up the mountain, a path that is inevitably solitary, but intersects with others for moments of joyful connection, mutual encouragement and deep sharing.

