

Winter

In the winter the farmer stores and preserves the excess from his harvest, so it will feed him and his family over the cold, unproductive winter. It is a time for maintaining equipment, rest, recuperation, and inward activity.

In nature, winter is associated with shutting down. Trees lose their leaves and suspend growth in a state of dormancy, conserving their energy. Hibernating animals retreat to their dens so they may also conserve their energy while temperatures are cold and fresh food is scarce. Humans, too, slow down a bit. We tend to be less active than in the joyful times of summer and the bustling times of the fall harvest. The harvested crop has been preserved and stored for the coming cold temperatures and long, dark nights.

In the Four Seasons metaphor, winter is also associated with a shutting down of sorts; after taking in the harvest in the fall (reaping what you've sown), what you so carefully nurtured throughout the spring and summer must be retained. The knowledge you may have gained from this process is retained, or stored up, so you can better plant and nurture the following spring.

Everything in your life has a winter phase. The end of the day, like winter, is a time to rest and recover from a full day of work and retain what you learned. You must rest to take care of your body and recover your strength so you're ready to do it all over again the following day. Evaluating the outcome of your day - the harvest your seeds yielded - allows you to make adjustments in your activities and behaviors so your results improve next time. Winter is also about remembering and processing the lessons you've learned, so you can pull from this knowledge in the spring.

Balance in Winter

Winter is the end of a cycle; some things will die, and some things will survive into the next spring. Within every ending are the seeds of a new beginning. To have a good beginning (spring), you must have prior knowledge and wisdom upon which to draw. You must have the resources (energy) to start anew, and without conservation in the tough times, without taking enough time to rest and recover, you will not have the strength to plant and nurture new seeds.

As we get older, our life progresses farther and farther into the winter metaphor of our life. As we age we need to be smarter and wiser, surrendering to our limits and age. Everything will come to an end, and one day our life will end. A person balanced winter is not reckless with his life, nor is he afraid of dying. Rather the balanced winter has faith, believing he cannot die a minute too early or a minute too late.

When Mike, the patient who I'd helped with various issues over the years, referred to in the previous chapter, came to see me again for a visit, he had recently experienced some very tough times. Mike's wife Margo had beat cancer twice when the cancer returned a third time. This last time it had

spread throughout her whole body and she did not have long to live. Mike and Margo had sought all forms of healing. When they both accepted that the end was inevitable, they sought spiritual counseling and help for Margo to die in peace. Mike, Margo, and her parents were all receiving help to let go. Mike had accepted that Margo was going to die. They prayed, and talked, and spent the last hours together as Margo passed away in her sleep. Mike believed Margo was in a better place, without suffering and in complete peace. He believed that she taught him and everyone else everything she was supposed to teach. He believed she had learned everything she was supposed to learn. He realized that everything Margo taught him and gave to him was still there and could never be lost. She had graduated, and he was still here because he was not done yet. Mike's neck and arm pain mentioned in the previous chapter had improved an amazing 95 percent. He was regaining strength and muscle development in his right arm and surgery to his neck was no longer a consideration. This time Mike came to see me with a new pain along the spine in his mid-back and in his right calf, as well as right foot pain and numbness. All the tension was located along the bladder meridian and in line with the metaphor of winter.

Mike had come to the realization that his life as he knew it had come to an end (winter) and a new beginning (spring) was yet to come. This was a time to be still, to remember Margo with fondness, and to remember everything he had learned. But Mike seemed to be rushing things. Mike admitted that he did not like to come home to an empty house. He had some fear about living life alone, having recently lost his wife, and it was harder when he came home and she wasn't there. He did not like having no control, not knowing what was next, or not knowing when his new life would start. Impatiently, he had started several business activities and spread himself too thin. Mike felt anxious and an urgency to get on with his new life. He admitted that he'd struggled with this same pattern in the past: when cycles came to an end, he avoided being still and quiet. He used to immediately dive into new ventures, get overly busy and try to forget by drinking. This time he once again forced the start of a new spring before he was done with winter.

I told Mike that a winter imbalance could be related to reckless behavior or fear, and it could cause restlessness, impatience, and an inability to rest. Mike needed to be still, to recover, to remember everything he had learned, to appreciate Margo, and to reflect on the beauty of her life. He wanted to write a book about Margo's life, her fight with cancer, and her graceful death. But he told me he felt impatient and afraid he was running out of time.

I pointed out that if everything happened for a reason - a truth Mike had already learned about life - then how could he possibly run out of time? I said if he was supposed to write a book about Margo, nothing could stop him. The time of stillness, remembering, and reflecting on Margo and his life with her would cure his memories and help him write the book in due time. Mike's mid-back pain, right calf pain, and foot numbness disappeared as I released tension in spastic muscles. He realized that he needed to remain calm, still, and patient and avoid rushing into new projects before he was at peace.

People balanced in winter draw from their inner strength and are reserved and tactful. They are quiet, still listeners with good memories for details, such as names, numbers, dates, and places. They keep in contact with old friends and family. They are cautious in preserving their resources and seldom take on more than they can handle, and they do not make promises they cannot keep. They know their

limits. Balanced winters are concerned, but not overly so, with security and high-quality performance. They are grateful for their accomplishments and show their appreciation and loyalty towards their spouses, mates, co-workers, or teammates. They are patient, quiet, and sincere when listening, so that they can truly hear the needs of others. They are precise, organized, and detail-oriented. As great keepers, they take excellent care of their finances, personal belongings, car, and home.

They are grateful for their health and take good care of their own body with exercises, rest, and diet. People balanced in winter stay in shape and age gracefully and therefore look youthful. To protect themselves from the elements, winters dress practically in clothes that are both comfortable and suitable to the purpose and weather. The balanced winters can relax and rest and they value taking time off to recuperate and re-charge.

People balanced in winter exhibit common sense and an ability to appreciate and profit from their experiences. They remember lessons learned in the past, so they do not have to re-live and re-learn them. Wisdom is knowledge put to use. Therefore, in keeping with the wisdom of winter, they preserve (remember and appreciate) the knowledge they've acquired. They've learned tough times, like the hardships of winter, do not last, but tough people do. Remembering that things have worked out in the past, helps winters trust in their ability to stay calm and still in the midst of difficulties and hardship. The balanced winters have an abundance of wisdom and patience. The word "patience" means to endure, to be still, to wait in quiet, not to hurry and rush.

When they face a tough life situation, balanced winter people assess the situation and ask themselves if they have any control over the situation. If they do, then they have the courage to take action. If not, then they remain still and cautious until there is something they can do about it. The balanced winters have amazing will power and an ability to endure tough times by having faith. Experience has taught them to endure, because everything always worked out in the past. They stay calm, still, and patient, preserving their resources and carefully waiting until there is a new dawn or new spring.

The "Serenity Prayer" is a perfect description of a balanced fall and winter:

"God grant me the serenity

to accept (Fall) the things I cannot change;

the courage (Winter) to change the things I can;

and the wisdom (Winter) to know the difference." –Reinhold Niebuhr

Trying to control things we cannot control drains our energy.

In contrast, the imbalanced winters are restless and impatient and lack satisfaction. They are often type-A personalities who are never satisfied. For this reason they are unable to be still or rest.

They are often too serious in what they do, forgetting to rest and relax.

Imbalanced winters do not believe they can rest until they are done. The problem is that we are never done. Think about it. Your in-box will never be empty. Just when you think you've got everything done, something else will drop in. If you clean your house or do your laundry, just as you finish, you will find another dirty sock or someone left a dirty dish in the sink. I was told they'd never finish painting the Golden Gate Bridge because as soon as they get done, they have to start over again. If you believe you cannot rest until you are all done, then you will not rest until you die. If you live like this, then your life will be like the cartoon of the donkey with a carrot dangling from a stick in front of him. The donkey keeps walking to the carrot, but the carrot moves with him, always just out of reach. A life like this will never be satisfying, and this relentless pursuit without rest will cause injury, disease, and probably a premature death.

There once was a man praying out loud, "God, please, give me patience and give it to me now." That was not very wise. Trust me. If patience is a lesson, understand that it will not be learned fast. If you learned it right away, then what did you learn? An imbalanced winter will attempt to control things they have no control over, trying to force things to happen before it is time. In doing this they will exhaust too much of their resources, hence jeopardizing their own health and well-being.

When people are balanced in the winter season they are feeling calm, present, safe, cautious, careful, still, patient, courageous, and secure. Any time a person is not balanced in winter, he or she will experience negative emotions or feelings of a hypo-active nature, such as depression, carelessness, recklessness, or fearlessness. Or they will experience emotions or feeling of a hyper-active nature, such as anxiety, fear, or terror. The negative emotion of extreme fear has an obvious survival value, it is sudden and temporary. It alerts us to sudden danger. A balanced winter will find will-power to live and muster the energy to take necessary actions to survive. They become calm and courageous to take action and escape from danger (flight) or they will stay put to combat it (fight). If a person remains excessively fearful he or she would be paralyzed and immobile; unable to overcome the danger. Most individuals with a winter imbalance experience a fearful anxiety that is less extreme but chronic. This fear is often imagined or unrealistic.

Your emotions and feelings can be your most important feedback to where an imbalance exists in your life. A person with an imbalance in the winter will tend to have too little winter or too much winter. Remember in ancient Chinese philosophy: too little and too much are both harmful.

Too little winter is often characterized by the following patterns:

- Being careless, reckless, or negligent with their own health, relationships, finances, and personal belongings.
- Taking too many risks.
- Experiencing sleep deprivation, too busy to get enough sleep.

- Taking one's own health for granted, eating a poor diet, and not getting enough rest.
- Not spending enough quality time with spouse, friends, or children and often taking them for granted.
- Not taking time to sincerely listen and hear the needs of their loved ones, friends, or associates.
- Are never satisfied, so they take on too much spreading themselves too thin, and the quality of their work ultimately suffers.
- Always having too much to do and claiming there's never enough time in the day.
- Making promises that can't be kept.
- Spending more than they can afford.
- Tending to overdo it when exercising (over train) and not taking time to recover.
- Experiencing pain or injury and continuing to exercising anyway.
- Being restless and unable to be still, pacing back and forth, tapping their fingers or feet.
- Having minds that are never still, always racing.
- Always checking voicemail, text messages, or e-mail 24/7.
- Having difficulty sleeping through the night, tossing and turning, their racing minds keeping them awake.

Wes was a thirty-seven-year-old high-power venture capitalist who came to see me for a multitude of problems. Wes was a type-A personality, driven and hard working. He was doing business with Asia and Europe and needed to make and take phone calls at all times from all time zones. He started working 5:00 in the morning and still checked e-mail, voice mail, and text messages until he passed out in bed at 11:00 p.m. With his cell phone on his night table, he slept restlessly, sweating, tossing, and turning all night. It's no wonder he was exhausted when the alarm went off.

He complained of exhaustion, cramps in his feet and calves, low back spasms with sharp pain, neck pain at base of head, and sinus headaches and pressure. Wes did not know how to relax. In fact he had a hard time even sitting still. His foot tapped the whole time he was telling me about his problems. He was in a constant fight-or-flight mode. He was sweating and restless in my office, often came late or missed his appointment, and always kept looking at his wristwatch during the treatment to see if it was time to leave. Most visits he jumped up, saying he had to leave even though there was five minutes left of his visit. As I worked on Wes's tight muscles I could literally feel how they tightened up and twitched every time his cell phone beeped. His body had adapted a fight-or-flight reflex to the sound of his cell phone. In any half hour visit the phone beeped up to ten times. I was able to give Wes relief but explained that he needed to make changes in his lifestyle or his health and life were in jeopardy. If he did not learn how to relax, recognize his limits, and find balance between work and rest, his symptoms would persist. Wes still has not changed his ways, and he is still coming to see me for relief of his symptoms.

Too much winter is often characterized by the following patterns:

- Being excessively fearful over their own and loved ones' health and life.
- Having excessive worry and fear about finances, life, and losing control.
- Often having phobias about heights, water, germs, new people, new things, sexual performance dysfunction, closed spaces, the dark, and death.
- Hovering over and being overprotective of their children.
- Lacking the necessary courage, being paralyzed and unable to take any action or move on.
- Seeming to have too much time on their hands.
- Being afraid to start new things.
- Appearing sluggish and feeling the need for frequent naps.
- Often having scary nightmares.
- Being afraid to spend money, always saving up for a rainy day that never comes.
- Feeling too tired to exercise and always having an excuse.
- Obsessing over details, and often trying to control things.

Asha, a forty-six-year-old woman, came to see me for an Achilles tendonitis; she had pain and numbness in her left heel and foot. I found her blockage to be in the kidney and bladder meridians and told her these problems were often related to fear and control. I continued to tell her the feet were often associated with fear of moving forward or recklessly moving ahead before it is time. Asha told me that she had been separated from her husband for four years and had been living in a separate household with their son. As far as she was concerned, the marriage was dead, but her husband was still in control of their finances and paying their bills. She was anxious and fearful every time he called because he was always critical about how she lived her life and spent money. She knew she lacked courage to start anew by getting a divorce and controlling her own life.

As Asha was telling me about her life, her fear, and her lack of control, I was releasing trigger points in her foot, ankle, and calf. After I finished the treatment she stood up and was able to walk and jump without pain or numbness in her heels, ankle, or foot. I told her that if the underlying cause of her pain was, as I suspected, due to her fear of moving forward with her life, the pain could come back. The true remedy would be to overcome her fear and regain control of her own life by making the decision to start a new spring.

Any symptom of pain, dysfunction, or disease of the urinary bladder or kidney meridians is related to an accumulation of tension (stress) and a blockage of circulation (Chi). Here are some common symptoms that result when the winter metaphor is out of balance and there is a blockage of circulation in the urinary bladder or kidney meridians.

- Dehydration.
- Disturbances in the regulation of blood, lymph, cerebrospinal fluid, joint lubrication, urine, sweat, and saliva.
- Swelling and edema.
- Sleeping disorders and fatigue.
- Lower back pain and sciatica.
- Bone pain or painful, dysfunctional joints.
- Arthritis
- Osteoporosis or osteopenia.
- Decaying or weak teeth.
- Problems with memory: poor memory, poor retention of new information, interruptions in the flow of thoughts.
- Alzheimer's and dementia.
- Ear infections or hearing problems.
- Pain in feet, ankles, and calf muscles.
- Cold feet.
- Achilles tendinitis or rupture.
- Hair loss or balding.
- Headaches or tension at the base of the skull or inner corners of the eyes.
- Sinus pressure and headaches.

How to Achieve Balance in Winter

Balance in winter is important because storing and preserving what you've worked so hard to harvest allows you to continue to grow and evolve as a person. If you worked to change your lifestyle and lose weight, you want to keep it off. And if you worked to save your money and buy a new car, you want to keep the car in good condition and take care of it so it will last. You worked so hard to gain your harvest, what good is it if you lose it right away? To master the winter qualities of storing and preserving what you have in your life, you must learn to: appreciate what you have, remember what you've learned, know your limits, and be still.

If you appreciate what you have, you will get what you do not have. If you are unhappy with what you don't have, you will lose what you do have. Dissatisfaction, jealousy, restlessness, impatience, and always looking to move ahead will lead to chronic anxiety and lack of peace. A person who is never satisfied cannot be still in body or mind because they're constantly moving and racing, fearful of running out of time or getting behind. This behavior is reckless to our health because we will not get enough rest, causing constant exhaustion with decreased performance of body and mind. The stress from not

getting enough rest will lead to muscle tension, causing oxygen deprivation with decreased circulation and inhibited immune system. It is important for us to listen to our own body, to know our limits. When our body is achy or tired it means we need to rest. There are times when it is necessary to push through, but an imbalanced winter always keep going. Not listening to your body is like continuing to drive your car while ignoring the warning light on your dash board that indicates you are low on gas.

Everyone has much to be grateful for and appreciate. Think about it, we have all, at one time or another, taken our health for granted. Then when we get a bad cold or flu and feel miserable, we realize how great we felt before becoming sick. Maybe you have an old car that you no longer care to wash. You park it like a bumper car, and you curse it anytime you get a chance. Then when it suddenly breaks down and you have no car, you realize that your old car served you well. No matter how bad you might think your current situation is there is always someone who is worse off, and your situation could always be worse as well.

When we criticize what we have - our spouse, partner, car, home, or job - we stand to lose it. We need an attitude of gratitude and on a daily basis we should show our appreciation for everything we've accomplished, received, achieved, and learned. We need to spend quality time with everyone who is important to us and those we want to keep in our life. We need to sincerely listen to them and appreciate them for who they are - that means stop reading the newspaper or watching TV when your spouse needs to be heard. When your children need you, get present and listen; do not let your mind be somewhere else or think about other things. No matter how old your car is, wash it and appreciate it. Take care of and preserve the neighborhood you live in by not littering. Do not waste the excess of your financial gain by spending it right away. A hundred years ago, nobody had any teeth left by the time they were fifty years old. Today dental hygiene, daily brushing, and flossing have helped us have strong, healthy, good-looking teeth that can serve us for life. As my dentist said jokingly, "Only brush the ones you want to keep." A good habit that can help you balance winter is to make an inventory of everything which you are grateful for on a daily basis. This could be done by writing in a journal or in your thoughts.

Remembering what you've learned is the second essential step to achieving balance in winter. Any life experience is a learning opportunity. To store what we learned from our experiences, we need a quiet, still time to reflect on and assess what we learned. When you pour concrete, you cannot remove the form until the concrete has hardened or cured. The word cure has many meanings. One is to preserve as by drying or salting - you've probably heard about curing beef or fish to prevent spoiling. The farmer cures his hay by drying it and salting it so that it can be preserved in his barn and last through the long and cold winter. Taking time to cure what you've learned is equally important so that you can retain it. If we do not retain what we learn, then we have to re-live that life experience to learn our lesson over and over again. When we learn something from a life experience that was unexpected or unwanted, this curing is even more important. The word cure also means to restore health or to affect a cure. In other words, taking the time to cure and retain what we learned is a cure for our well-being and spiritual growth.

Everyone has seen friends and acquaintances suffer from a heartbreaking relationship break up and then rush into drinking to forget or into a rebound relationship out of fear of being alone. Maybe

you've even done this yourself. This reckless behavior never works and because the person either did not learn from their previous relationship or did not cure what they learned to heal from the broken relationship. They will repeat the same relationship and suffer the same outcome again. As tempting as it seems, we cannot skip the season of winter. Running around trying to force our seeds into a frozen ground is wasteful and fruitless.

In addition to remembering what you've learned, you must know your limits. Your body is not immortal. While a reckless, self-destructive lifestyle is common in young people, some never learn. Eat healthy, avoid excessive partying, alcohol or drugs, and exercise without abusing yourself or overdoing it. The most important factor in a balanced winter is getting enough sleep. Quality sleep, being still and having quiet time is essential for recovery to preserve your body and mind. A person who does not live by this wisdom will age and die prematurely. Realize you will not be "done" until the day you die. Preserve yourself by knowing your limits and giving yourself enough quiet time and rest to recover for another day.

Lack of exercising (being a couch potato) can lead to obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and many other diseases that can cause us to prematurely age or die. The other extreme is training and exercising too much. When it comes to exercise, more is not better. Exercise does not build up our muscles and get us stronger! It actually breaks our muscles down. Proper quantity and quality of rest and nutrition will, however, allow the body to repair the muscles and re-build them, bigger and stronger than before. Progressive training is based on a balance between breaking down (stress) and building up (rest, recovery, and nutrition). Stress, if applied gradually with proper time to recuperate, will help us grow both physically as well as mentally. One of my patients once told me, "If I would have known I was going to live this long, I would have taken better care of myself." Realize you will not be done until the day you die. Do not wait until it is too late to take care of your body. A person who does not live by this wisdom will age and die prematurely.

The final important step in achieving balance in winter is being still. In life we often find ourselves in tough times. When we are exhausted, scared, stressed out, and can't see the light, it is important not to run around like a chicken without a head. At this time we need to be still, draw from our inner faith, and preserve our energy and resources. Surrender to being still and patient. Have faith and beliefs that serve you. Reflect on your past and remember that everything in the past always worked out. Believe that you always have what you need when you need it. If you don't have it right now, you must trust in the fact that you do not really need it right now.

Balance in Your Future Winters

Balance in winter means preserving and storing what you've gained through the spring, summer, and fall. Without appreciating and remembering everything that has brought you to where you are today, you cannot continue forward successfully. You can't evolve or build upon what you've gained - you can't better the seeds you'll plant in the coming spring. But when you take the time to appreciate

what you have, remember what you've learned, respect your limits, and be still, everything in your life will get better.

For full and complete information about the Winter metaphor as well as all self help improvement applications, buy and read the book;

"The Four Seasons Way of Life, Ancient Wisdom for Personal Growth".