

Are You Dancing as Fast as You Can?

By Carolyn Reynolds

Are you being pulled in too many directions? There are so many responsibilities: work, fitness routines, school, sporting events, shopping for supplies, church events, charity work, etc. There is a pull away from the home. Then there is a return home. Your home is your family's center. And hopefully, it is a safe haven where all family members can leave in the morning, nourished in body and heart. Then after a day's interaction in the world producing, learning, working, and socializing, the home is also a safe haven where all family members can process/share the day's triumphs and frustrations.

How can you make your home a safe haven, a nurturing place? It really is pretty simple: attention. Practice maintaining focused attention on each family member every day. Put down what you are doing and make eye contact. Ask questions for clarification. Ask questions for the other to ponder. Then share a concern for which you may need support. Everyone loves to be of assistance, to be needed. Remember that energy follows attention. You are nourishing the soul when you are giving someone loving, supportive attention.

There is a story about a man who traveled from Chicago to India in order to meet a great sage to ask the secret of a realized life. When the Chicagoan climbed the Himalayas to reach the sage's cave, he was overjoyed. "I have been reading and studying philosophy and religion for 10 years but I am no further along my spiritual path than I was when I began my quest. Please tell me the secret of attaining realized life." The sage responded, "Attention." The Chicagoan was confused. He restated his plea thinking that the sage didn't understand. The sage responded, "Attention, attention." The traveler was most upset, having traveled half way around the world only to hear this one word. In anger the traveler demanded to know the secret! "Attention, attention, attention," was the response.

Cultivating the power of focused attention is also part of yoga practice. When attempting to maintain balance on one leg or on the hands, a dristi provides the power. A dristi is sustained focused attention on an object or even a spot on the wall. Without the ability to focus attention, balance postures start waving about. And without focused attention on the course of your life, it will also waver among others' demands and interests. There are lyrics to a country song that illustrate this innate wisdom: "If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything."

Children who have attention problems find life boring. Nothing interests them. It isn't that life is boring but instead they can't stay with something long enough to really know it. Sensation seeking is a common result of this inability to focus. Living on the edge of danger forces attention. It's a survival instinct. Maintaining focused attention is a pleasurable experience. Time seems to disappear when we are fully engaged. And these dangerous activities are the only time some folks can know that pleasure.

Focused attention is a necessary prerequisite to meditation. If you find sitting in meditation frustrating, practice maintaining a dristi and a balance posture for a while. Play with holding a balance posture like Natarajasana, the dancer. Stand in mountain alignment with feet under hips, shoulders directly above the hips and head lifted. Align the navel center over the right foot so that you are in mountain over only the right foot. This frees up the left leg. Form your dristi. Raise the left foot behind you and clasp the inside of the ankle with the left hand. Position the open hand so that the thumb is pointing toward the ceiling and the palm is opened away from the body. This position helps keep the left leg in a parallel plane to the right leg. In other words, make sure the left knee is not pointing out to the side. Press the foot back and into the hand as you raise your left arm and leg as high as comfortable. The right arm moves forward to help you balance. Remember your breath. Maintain a steady, even, full, velvet breath. When you are there, balanced and focused, it feels great. Now take that focus into your life and into your meditation practice, and teach it to your children. Enjoy the dance of life with your family.