

June 1997

Keys for Living

This month the key is: *Commitment*

Last month I wrote about passion. Often, when we have a passion about something, we can ride the wake of its energy-filled wave in accomplishing our goals. Other times, commitment is needed to get us to our goal.

An author I read years ago described commitment as "**maintaining one's integrity in the moment of choice.**" I've always loved that description! When the feelings aren't there in the moment, we often need to call on our *belief in* something valuable. We can be aware of our feelings and also be aware of our consciously chosen priorities. Then we make a choice.

Making commitments means having an awareness of our priorities. Try listing all the roles, relationships, values, and demands you see in your life. Start with number one, and compare it to each one on the list, putting a tally mark by the bigger priority of each pair choice. (Yes, you have to choose one or the other each time!) Now do the same with number two, comparing 2 & 1, 2 & 3, 2 & 4, etc. Now do the same with number 3, then four, and on through the list. When you are done going through your list comparing every item to the rest of the list, rearrange them from most marks to least. Do the resulting priorities match your day-to-day life? Reality can sometimes surprise us!

I have **a great respect for the many clients I work with who show enormous amounts of commitment at various points along their path.** Calling for an initial appointment can feel very scary, and doing so takes a genuine commitment of caring about yourself or your child. In fact, research has indicated it is *often the healthiest member of a family who initiates counseling.* Years ago, I read excerpts from a book entitled *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway.* Often commitment is a part of that "anyway."

When our conscious commitments are difficult to translate into behaviors, we may discover a wealth of clues about underlying wounds or feelings that are making themselves known "indirectly," by showing their power to influence our behavior in those "moments of choice." Sometimes not wanting to come to a scheduled therapy session is a clue that a door has been opened on issues or feelings that have been quite comfortable in the dark. Or patterns or fears from the past are spilling into the present. **When our stated commitments do not match our behaviors, our soul is often asking us to stop and really listen to our whole being.**

It can be easy to fall into the trap of focusing on the drudgery of doing those things to which we have commitment, but for which passion is nowhere to be found. In those times, I often remind myself of how varied and diverse the world can be. I begin to search for SOMETHING — ANYTHING — I can notice and enjoy in the moment: sometimes it is the smell of my candle burning, sometimes it is the sound of the leaves on the tree outside my window enjoying the wind. Maybe it is just remembering what I will be doing or how I will feel when my committed task is accomplished. **When passion is far away and commitment is a necessary ally, finding some joy in the moment and asking commitment to share its space, can make all the difference.**

February 1998

Keys for Living
This month the Key is: Compassion

I was recently reading an interview with Roger Lewin, a psychiatrist who has written a book for psychotherapists about compassion. He calls compassion "*the core value that animates psychotherapy.*" I was struck by his words, as I often describe *my own practice approach as **competent and compassionate, with a holistic view.*** Those three things sum up what **I** see as the three key elements of good psychotherapy.

Compassion means: seeing the whole person, responding with respect, being mindful of our relatedness as fellow humans, seeing each other's vulnerabilities. It also means sometimes setting limits, saying "no," speaking the difficult truth -- but always with *respect and mindfulness.*

How and where can we find compassion in our selves? Dr. Lewin notes that, first, "*we must be deeply acquainted with our own experiences and feelings.* . . We must know what it is to hurt and be hurt. We must be intimate with **our** own angers, dangers and despairs. . . with our own capacity for joy and pleasure." According to Dr. Lewin, "compassion looks at the world from the point of view of human vulnerability."

Frequently, "**self-acceptance**" and "**compassion towards others,**" are mirrors. Leandis, a wise healer, states, "You can't condemn someone else, because if you do, you're condemning yourself. . . **We are all connected.** . . The weaknesses we see in others are our own. That's a reflection." *Often, when we find ourselves being critical of others, it is a clue that somewhere in our own hearts, we are lacking self-compassion.*

But there is more to compassion. As Dr. Lewin writes, "**Compassion can be very confrontational. Compassion can be insistent. Part of being compassionate is often daring to provide people with ripe, juicy, nutritive "No's."** As a caring adult or parent, it is from compassion that we don't allow our four year-old to play in the street, despite their tantrums.

Compassion does not mean we let ourselves be walked on or always find other's behavior acceptable. It means we know ourselves, our values, and vulnerabilities. And we live by our values, sometimes saying "no," but always trusting that the other person is on their own journey and doing what they need to learn their lessons — sometimes from us and our compassionate behaviors.

Lewin shares "*There is nothing else in human experience that has the personal, intimate and enduring force of . . . being known with compassion for what one is, a small and vulnerable and precious fellow being.*" That is what animates therapy and life!

November 1998

Keys for Living

This month the key is: Quiet Time

As the holiday season and cold weather comes upon us, I am struck by how busy our daily lives can keep us. Not only do we have the usual life maintenance tasks, such as showering, brushing our teeth, eating, doing dishes and laundry, paying bills -- the list could go on -- but we also have parties for Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanza, Solstice, gift buying, family gatherings...

Amidst all the activity, it can be easy to lose ourselves. **When we lose ourselves we lose track of our core, our feelings, our deeper needs.** Daily tasks and reactions take over.

Thich Nhat Hanh (Zen master, chairman of the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation during the Vietnam War, nominated by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for the Nobel Peace Prize) writes of mindfulness and notes, "*without it we will lose ourselves very quickly in a life full of worry and action, and our responses will become increasingly useless.*"

So amidst this busy season, taking some quiet time can be especially necessary and nurturing. **Quiet time can mean praying, meditating, journaling, or simply breathing slowly.** It can mean taking time to ground ourselves and slow down, noticing the colors and textures of the objects around us, noticing how our body feels in contact with our chair, noticing where we are holding tension in our body and relaxing those areas.

And quiet time can be as short as one minute or as long as an hour. If we need prompting, we can schedule it in our day (12 to 12:50 p.m.), make it a part of our routine (take 60 seconds to sit in the bottom of the shower each morning and feel the water wash over us), or remind ourselves at random (set your watch alarm to go off once or twice a day).

Sometimes keeping busy can be a wonderful way to avoid ourselves. If we have conflicts with our family or uncomfortable feelings in our primary relationships, it can be tempting to stick with daily surface issues, especially around the holidays when we are spending time with family and friends. *It is OK to put issues "on the shelf" sometimes.* If anything, *quiet time can help you do that consciously*, so irritations and fears don't express themselves in unhealthy ways.

In many ways, therapy can be that quiet time -- a chance to sit calmly and focus only on oneself, without the tempting distractions of phones, bills, shopping, et cetera. It can be easy to think we don't have time. **Sometimes time, quiet time, is what we need most, to experience the intended gifts of the holiday season -- peace, love, joy.**

January 1999

Keys for Living
This month the key is: *Gratefulness*

There have been a lot of changes in my life over the past year -- some of them fabulous -- and some of them difficult, challenging, and (yes, at times) disheartening. I suspect any one of us can say the same. Yet, I have discovered gratefulness to be a crucial key to surviving, and even enjoying, a lot of life's transitions.

We cannot always control events and people around us. We can control how we approach life's happenings. I call this living from the inside out. Our thoughts and attitudes are powerful sources of creation. I have found, time and again, that if I can trust in a larger vision of goodness and love, a force larger than my narrow experience, then I can genuinely say "thank you" for a greater good, even if it is unseen by me. *When I am grateful, then I can trust and ask that something wonderful, beyond my vision, is being created from whatever life brings my way.*

Sometimes, in the thick of things, gratefulness can be more than elusive. In less intense experiences, **humor can help.** "Stuck" recently behind a slow, slow driver as I tried to make my way to my office and be on time for an appointment, I had to do a lot of deep breathing and finally, laugh. "OK," I said to myself, "here I am. I can enjoy the ride or I can be frustrated and unhappy." So I laughed, finding gratefulness for this nuisance, believing that maybe I or another driver had been diverted from a serious car accident. *Unseen good is still good.*

Another time I was checking out at Home Depot. Twenty-plus minutes I stood in line, for two small but necessary items to finish a project. Each time I changed lines, another glitch came up in the order of the person checking out. I remember thinking, **"There better be a plan here, because this could be really frustrating!"**

When I finally got to my vehicle, I put my two tiny items in the large SUV I had driven, and watched a young couple beside me unsuccessfully struggle to fit their large purchase into their tiny Ford Escort. We joked with each other about our purchase sizes in contrast to our vehicle sizes. **Then I knew** why my time in line had been so extended! The woman of the couple and I had a delightful conversation as we followed her husband (in their Escort) to their Brookside home, their purchase riding easily in the back of my vehicle.

In meditating about gratefulness recently, I asked, **"Why be grateful?" The answer was moving:** Because whenever we are thankful, the goodness in the situation, however large or small, increases exponentially. *What a powerful thing!?*

So let me say two things. First of all, thank you for your past and future support of me and my practice. My heart is full of the joy that comes from doing something I love so fully, and you have helped create that for me! And second, I wish for you many joys, increased exponentially by genuine gratefulness for all that you (and WE) are given!

May 1999

Keys for Living
This month the key is: Community

When I think of community, I think of ducks. "Find the ducks." That's what I heard in meditation, as I asked for guidance about finding my current office. (Looking back, maybe they meant *ducts*, because the office was gutted when I first saw it, heating and cooling ducts exposed!!) Later, I learned ducks are nature's symbol for community, for finding emotional comfort and protection (and joy!) by joining with those of like mind and spirit. Healing Options has been just that!!

Community helps each of us find our path, discover our best selves, and feel just how precious each of us are. It is important to have close personal supports so we realize our uniqueness and value. Sometimes our connections are less close, but just as valuable. Sometimes it means concrete help, like the neighbor who loaned me his leaf bag holder last fall. And sometimes, it is discovering new books (*Have you read this one? it is fascinating!*); other times, new ideas (*I heard on National Public Radio today that...*); and even new ways of finding meaning and approaching things (*I was meditating yesterday and realized. . .*). The important thing in community is that it moves us on our way towards creating our vision of ourselves and the world. **I include clients of Healing Options in my community, as they are an important part of creating my vision — healing for all, on all levels!**

We can expect our community to change, as we change or as our life circumstances change. When I first moved here from Michigan over six years ago, I realized I had underestimated how important the strong and supportive community I had built around myself was to my daily life. When we *are missing the connection of community, the void in our life can feel enormous*. During those times, it is important to know we are in a time of transition, honor the importance of community, and begin to create new connections.

I recently heard Corretta Scott King, widow of Martin Luther King, Jr., speak of her life, and vision. It was then that I realized **community can include people we have never met, who may not even know we exist**. They speak publicly, write books, or their stories find their way into the media. These people support us by offering inspiration, teaching us new things, or making us feel less "odd" when we feel out-of-step with the immediate world around us.

A key part of my vision for Healing Options is to use my office space for building and supporting a sense of community in various ways. This includes Reiki Healing Circles, a recent Reiki and Prayer Vigil for Peace in the world and especially in Kosovo, a clinical consultation group for a small group of therapists, and a support group of professionals who also provide energy work. Teaching Reiki classes has especially provided me with a wonderful sense of community, where I am struck by the diversity of gifts we all have to offer each other!

I have included in this newsletter dates for an upcoming Reiki class, a Spiritual Meditation (Native American Journeying) class, and a Flower of Life workshop I am sponsoring. **Maybe some of these will speak to you** as a way to enlarge your personal community.

So let me thank each of you for being a part of my community! May we all have many ducks around us, to feel the emotional comfort and protection of community in our lives.

August 1999

Keys for Living

This month the key is: "Enjoying Holland"

As some of you may know, I used to do pediatric hospice work. The piece that follows was handed out at the funeral of one of the children with whom I had worked. (I do not know where the original piece came from.) The child had been born with physical challenges that made it clear the child would not live more than a decade, if that. The mother of this child gave me permission to share this piece and its context.

I believe this piece is a wonderful metaphor for not only what it is like to have a child with a disability, but also many other situations in life. **Often we are given situations** that are not a part of our original life plan: being without children, experiencing a divorce, losing a job, - the list could go on. Some things are life-changing, others just not what we had planned! **The point is that we have options** - options about how we handle the situations we are given, how we grieve our losses, how we let go and move on, or create new situations. So **I offer this piece as a metaphor for life - whether we end up in Italy or Holland.**

Welcome to Holland, by Emily Pen Kingsley

I am often asked to describe the experience of raising a child with a disability - to try to help people who have not shared that unique experience, to understand it, to imagine how it would feel. It's like this...

When you're going to have a baby, it's like planning a fabulous vacation trip—to Italy. You buy a bunch of guidebooks and make your wonderful plans. The Coliseum. The Michelangelo David. The gondolas in Venice. You may learn some handy phrases in Italian. It's all very exciting.

After a few months of eager anticipation, the day finally arrives. You pack your bags and off you go. Several hours later, the plane lands. The stewardess comes in and says, "Welcome to Holland."

HOLLAND?!? you say. What do you mean Holland, I signed up for Italy! I'm supposed to be in Italy. All my life I've dreamed of going to Italy.

But there's been a change in the flight plan. They've landed in Holland and there you must stay.

The important thing is that they haven't taken you to a horrible, disgusting, filthy place, full of pestilence, famine and disease. It's just a different place.

So you must go out and buy new guidebooks. And you must learn a whole new language. And you will meet a whole new group of people you would never have met.

It's just a different place. It's slower paced than Italy, less flashy than Italy. But after you've been there for a while and you catch your breath, you look around, and you begin to notice that Holland has windmills, Holland has tulips, Holland even has Rembrandts.

But everyone you know is busy coming and going from Italy, and they're all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life, you will say, "Yes, that's where I was supposed to go. That is what I had planned."

And the pain of that will never, ever, ever go away, because the loss of that dream is a very significant loss.

But if you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn't get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things about Holland.

November 1999

Keys for Living

This month the key is: "Belief in Something Greater"

Laughter. That was going to be the topic of this newsletter. However, when I meditated, the Universe was very clear that now is a time to remind people of the nature of the Divine, specifically Love, Wisdom and Vision. So here it is...

This is the time of holidays and celebrations. Whether we celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Winter Solstice, or some other holiday, the common key is a connection to and belief in "Something Greater." We can call this "Something" God, The Universe, All My Relations, Jehovah, Yahweh, All That Is, The Source, the Tao, A Higher Power, The Great Spirit, Wakan -- the list could go on!! The name does not shape the Divine; it only gives us a way to speak of it.

There are three attributes crucial to this "Something Greater": LOVE, WISDOM, and VISION.

LOVE. The Universe has a caring that is far beyond what we can imagine, but from which we can learn about love: unconditional acceptance and choice. First, this means loving ourselves. Often, this is one of the most difficult challenges we face! **In the work I do through Healing Options, I have discovered that loving our self is the foundation for everything else.** Love also offers choice. It does not tell someone what to do, or believe it knows best for others. **Love accepts each person's path as their own.** Maybe that is why there are so many religions and paths to use in connecting to the Divine.

But how do we accept someone else's path if we believe it causes hurt or pain? We are all connected to each other; we do not live our lives in isolation. **The most loving thing we can do is focus on and take responsibility for our own path.** What do we speak up about, how do we speak up, how do we live our lives, what are our values? **Our lives are living examples of what and whom we love.**

WISDOM. It can be hard to believe in the wisdom of the Universe, especially when pain or hurt is involved. Often the wisdom is revealed much, much later, if ever in this life. Sometimes we see our only choice as faith that the wisdom is there. The dictionary defines being wise as "possessing discernment, judgment, or discretion; characterized by or showing such power." **Knowledge, discernment, love and a rightful use of power are all a part of wisdom.** "Something Greater" is able to make decisions from a place full of knowledge and love, and devoid of revenge, hurt, anger, or confusion. it has great power and can be trusted to use it in appropriate ways. **I believe the Universe wants us to each find our power, and use it in appropriate ways, with wisdom!**

VISION. The workings of the world are so vast and interconnected, as are our relationships with each other, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to have the whole picture. Our own perceptions are often limited by our individual perspective, time, anger, hurt, or confusion. **The Universe grasps the whole picture!**

Once while meditating I asked to understand exactly how some things in the world were related and interrelated. **I was told** that it was not worth the effort to try and grasp an understanding of everything. **We can trust the Universe to have vision, and we can trust that we only need to understand part of the picture.** If we need to see a particular aspect of the larger vision, the Divine will help us grasp what we need to see. **Our job is to have a personal vision and to be open to what the Universe has to share.**

Our lives can be a collaborative process between the Divine and us. As a psychotherapist, I bring skill and experience to the sessions. But I also trust "Something Greater" to guide the process for us.

So as we enter the holidays and turn the Y2K corner, maybe, instead of mayhem and chaos, **we can usher in** a call for a connection to "Something Greater," with **a flowing abundance of Love, Wisdom, and Vision!** (And laughter, too!)

January 2000

Keys for Living

This month the key is: "Generosity"

As many of you know, I planned "laughter" as the topic of my November 1999 newsletter. In meditation the Universe suggested otherwise. This month is no different! When I asked if I'd ever do "laughter" as the *Keys for Living* topic, I heard only laughter — and the word, "Eventually!" So, this month, "generosity" is the key!

The "holidays" are over. As we move through the new year, it is worth keeping the traditional generosity of the season alive and well! **Generosity can take on many forms: money, possessions, spirit, time, energy.**

True generosity comes from an open heart. There are no attachments or expectations, no hidden agendas to feel important or connected to someone through manipulation. **If we are giving to increase our own sense of esteem, then our heart is not open.**

In Native American culture, generosity often takes the form of a "Give-Away." In this ritual, a person gives away useful or loved possessions without attachment or regret. (In our culture, this might include money!) **The focus is to release things with a joyful heart, a humble attitude, and no expected obligations.** A Give-Away is never used as a means of controlling another person.

One goal of a Give-Away is to honor the sacredness of the item itself. Jamie Sams, a Native American healer, gives the example of a clay pot that sits on a shelf. If the pot is not used, the mission of the pot has not been honored as sacred; therefore, it should be given away to someone who will use it, to allow the pot to complete its mission of service. *The concept of "Indian—Giving" reportedly came about from not understanding the Native American tradition of honoring each object's sacred mission: if the recipient of a gift was not using the gift, it was considered unneeded, and open to being reclaimed and given to someone to would use the gift, and thereby honor the object's sacred purpose.*

I think of the many items I have in my life — vases, clothes, jewelry, books . . . It can be easy for many of the things we "have" to end up unused, sitting around gathering dust or being lost in the back of a closet. **Part of a Give-Away is honoring the role each thing has played in our life. Then we can consider whether or not it is continuing to be honored regularly, or if it may better serve the world by our allowing it to move on.** *What in your life could you honor as a Give-Away to a person or organization?*

Fear and a belief in scarce or limited resources can often be a barrier to open-hearted generosity. However, **if we find a place of belief that we all are One and that the Universe is unlimited and abundant,** then we know we will have enough of all we need. From that perspective, **generosity flows easily.**

As you know, a lot of the work I do in my practice focuses on energy. **To me, generosity is a way to energize our lives,** versus hoard and stagnate money, time, energy, or spirit. Allowing something to stagnate (be it water, food, or energy in general) means it often becomes devoid of life, joy, vibrancy, and health. *Noticing the ways in which we are generous (or not) can offer us insights about ourselves.*

If we realize a tendency to hoard or withhold, it can be a wonderful opportunity to explore fears held inside. *Getting acquainted with our fears, confronting them, and releasing them, can be a*

powerful avenue towards generosity— towards our selves and towards others. (Generosity towards self is important also!)

For myself, I sometimes add discernment to the formula for generosity. Does an organization do good work and use money wisely? Does an individual have money management skills or do they use the gifts and opportunities given to them? *Generosity without discernment can sometimes become a mindless lack of respect for our own resources and gifts.*

So I encourage you to open your heart, make friends with your fears, honor and develop your skills of discernment, and cycle around the abundant and unlimited resources of the Universe -- all year!

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Wednesday January 12th, 7-9pm.

I will be presenting an informational reflection at the **House of Menuha on Spiritual Meditation / Native American Journeying.**

Call House of Menuha (816-444-2434), a place dedicated to rest, reflection, personal and spiritual growth,

to be added to their mailing list, so you know what is being offered.

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Be not anxious about what you have, but about what you are. --- Pope Gregory I

— When we come to the last moment of this lifetime, and we look back across it, the only thing that's going to matter is "What was the quality of our love?" — *Richard Bach*

Valentine's Day is around, the corner... Would a Healing Options gift certificate be the right gift?

Healing Options Classes and Trainings

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February 12 & 13 (8:30am-4pm)

Shamanic Journeying Training

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This form of active meditation uses a drum to facilitate an individual's safe journeying through non-ordinary reality. Through this method, a person can facilitate great personal understanding, growth and healing in the context of Love and The Greatest Good. Class will emphasize Shamanic Journeying of a Native American style. Must attend both days. \$222 (1/2 due one week before class).

February 19, 20, & 26 (8:30am to 3pm)

Reiki I & II Class

This spiritually-based form of energy healing addresses all levels of being: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual. Reiki can be used for yourself, other people, animals, plants, or the larger world. It is believed Reiki attunements alone stimulate cleansing and raise the vibrational energy level of the recipient. Class includes training, practice, and attunements. \$240 (half due one week before class).

Must attend all 3 days.

August 2000

Keys for Living
This month the key is: "Peace"

Peace. Not the usual topic this time of year. But don't be fooled, it's not the winter holidays yet! As you may know, I always meditate to seek suggestions about the intended topic of my newsletter. This month, I was asked to offer information about three specific types of peace important to our lives.

Each type moves peace further outward, and each one supports the other.

Internal peace is the first key. No matter what is going on around us, as long as we have an internal knowing that what we are doing is the right thing, then external chaos or not, we have a quiet *core* from which to draw. For this, we must take the time to listen to our inner voice.

I recently went to a conference in Toronto. When we left, we were expecting to stay in a rustic private cabin on a 94-acre retreat center. When we got there, we found "rustic private cabin" meant a horse stall with a bed in it. Needless to say, we headed off for a hotel, incurring unexpected hotel and taxi costs. Then, two days into the week-long workshop, 13 out of 19 of us were struck by food poisoning. As I lay on a mat at the back of the conference room the next day, **I drew great resolve, comfort, and stability from an internal peace that, despite the troubles, challenges and expenses, I was in the right place and all was as it should be.**

There is **another kind of peace** that I call "**practical peace.**" This peace *extends outside of us to other people*, and is probably the most well-known type of peace. It has many forms and can range from preventing war, to the amazing works of Mother Theresa, to "playing and working well with others."

To create this type of peace, we *use a loving and compassionate heart* to listen to others without judgment, *use discernment* to clearly see others' strengths, vulnerabilities, and fears, and then we strive to *find creative solutions* to respectfully address the needs of everyone involved. The book Getting to Yes (by Fisher) has a crucial idea in it, which I use often. They suggest listening *not* to positions (I want to go out for dinner, and you don't); instead, **listen to issues** (for both of us, it might be we had a stressful day at work, and we are tired). *Positions are often black and white* (eating in or out); *issues have numerous helpful responses* (take-out, delivery, napping before dinner, 30 minutes of quiet before exploring options).

A third form of peace is "Peace towards All." **Traditional Native American culture is a wonderful example** of this kind of peace. If we believe that everything is touched with the love and energy of The Great Spirit (The Source or Creator), then we use a loving and compassionate heart to *relate to all people and things*. When I cut my grass, I thank it for its growth, I say hello to the trees in my yard, and I send well-wishes to the birds, bunnies, squirrels and deer that live in the wild area at the back of the yard. And I thank the moles for sparing us their presence!

Striving for "Peace towards All" can cause us to reflect anew on situations previously considered simple. We might take the spider in our home outside instead of killing it without a thought. We might begin using natural mixtures on our lawn instead of poisons that hurt the Earth and ground waters. We might begin to honor trees and speak to them before we trim their branches.

No matter what level of peace we are striving for, slowing down and listening is the key. For internal peace we must listen to our hearts. For practical peace we must listen to our hearts *and* the hearts of others. And ultimate peace comes from listening to the energy and messages of "All That Is".

So, as you move through your day, consider listening! In doing so you may find, and create, great peace!

March 2001

Keys for Living

This month the key is: "New Beginnings"

It is Spring, a time of new beginnings. We can all agree **nature moves in cycles and seasons**. In the fall the trees release their leaves, bulbs move their energy underground, plants often appear dormant.

Sometimes it is easy to get caught up in the routine of life or the chaos of life and forget that **all life is made up of cycles, including our own lives**. However, if we do not take the time to really look at our lives periodically, we may miss the inspiring freshness of new beginnings.

Releasing old feelings that no longer serve us is one way to create a new beginning. These feelings can include guilt over deeds long over and addressed, past mistakes we think we have made, or "what ifs." Sometimes we feel unnecessarily responsible for a friend, family member, or project. Or perhaps we are squandering energy by harboring mistaken beliefs that convince us we have failed or we must behave or look a certain way to be lovable.

Even seemingly little things can take up energy. I recently discovered that I still wondered about a friend with whom I had lost contact years ago. She had cancer, and I wondered if she was still alive. In the process of releasing, I realized that she had ways to contact me if she desired, and my efforts had been exhausted. It was time for me to let go and trust that, alive or not, the Universe had her in It's care. It was time for me to stop investing *my* energy in *her* path.

I have found that **if we state an intention to release unnecessary feelings, the Universe will gladly offer us** what author Jamie Sams calls, "pop-quizzes." This means the Universe will give us situations that highlight our old, out-dated feelings. The **pop-quizzes** can be as mundane as a TV show, or as intense as a relationship clash. However, if we are open and alert to letting go of what no longer contributes to our greatest good, a very real cleansing can be created—a new beginning.

Letting go is not always comfortable. However, if our minds, emotions, the cells in our body, our homes are full of unnecessary things, there is little room left for new and exciting people, things, and energies to enter our lives. **Commitment is necessary.** It is important to honestly assess if we are ready to commit to releasing those things which no longer contribute to our greatest good.

Sometimes when things or relationships are difficult to release, psychotherapy, Reiki, or other options can provide us with extra energy for healing or help us understand what we need to learn before we move on. *I have also found it productive to ask directly for the help and intervention of the Universe.* With genuine intention, you can say to yourself before sleep each night, **"I ask the Universe to help me release that which no longer serves me, and to accept that which will move me closer to the greatest good in my life."** Sometimes healing can be so simple!

Acceptance is another aspect of new beginnings. Accepting our past means it no longer holds power over us, allowing us to move on. Maybe we need to attend to unfinished business or make amends as needed; however, **there comes a time to accept what has been, move on, and create something new.** Then, we can use acceptance again to help us be open to new people and new energies in our lives.

Finally, new beginnings are fostered when we are fully in our *own* lives, not investing energy in judgments about what others should be doing. We can never know another person's story or path. We can only know our own. **It is our responsibility to accept other people's paths as right for them.** In the spirit of Spring, **I invite you** to join with the energy of Mother Earth and the life around us. Consider embracing release and acceptance as you **create a cycle of new beginnings for yourself and your life.**

August 2001

Keys for Living

This month the key is: "Comfort"

On a recent trip "home" to Michigan, I had opportunity to visit Lake Michigan, Lake Huron, and Lake Superior. I have always felt a strong connection to the Great Lakes. I love the shades of blue, the sounds of the waves rolling in, the smell of the fresh water and wind, the soft, white sand of Lake Michigan, and the brisk, refreshing temperature of the water. As I sat on the shore looking at the power and beauty of the lakes, I was filled with gratefulness for the comfort and love I have always felt from the waters of our Earth. I knew in that moment that the topic of my next newsletter would be the necessary joy of comfort.

When I think of comfort, I think of feeling safe, soothed, and consoled. **Comfort** means knowing and feeling we are not alone, and we will be okay, no matter what the present circumstance. **It is a glorious feeling based in connection.**

Comfort can come from many sources, and it is important that it does. If we rely on only one relationship, job, animal, or activity to provide us with all the comfort we deserve, we are creating an imbalance that is ripe for upheaval. It is important that we gain skills in utilizing various sources of connection: people, things, activities, and our selves.

A primary relationship can be a significant source of comfort by providing a constant presence that allows us to feel loved, safe, and touched. Sometimes it can be comforting to just know someone else is near. However, if being in a primary relationship means we avoid developing skills in self-comfort and self-reliance, then we are cheating ourselves out of an important part of our own strength. We end up limiting who we are and stifling the potential given to us by the Universe. **To fully connect in a relationship, we must know we can also be okay on our own.**

Friends are a crucial part of comfort's foundation. It is a wonderful gift to have people in our lives that can offer us support, guidance, truth, continuity, and perspective. **Different people can provide comfort about different things and in different ways.** Some may offer support about work, others about spiritual concerns, others about parenting or relationships, and others offer physical help that can be comforting. Remember, comfort flows from connection. **Do you have people in your life with whom you can connect in comforting ways?**

For many people, things are a source of comfort. Maybe something provides us with a connection to the caring feelings of someone in our lives. However, **it is important to consider what it is we are connecting with in a place or thing.** If we are finding comfort in possessions, to what are we really connecting? Ask yourself if you are finding comfort in ways that honor and strengthen your core, or if you are connecting to things that seem comforting but do not really move you forward towards your best self.

Activities can also be sources of comfort. I find great comfort in the energy of Reiki, which often feels soothing, like the peace of being totally loved and in the womb. I also find great comfort in Journeying, which allows me to connect with the love of the Divine. In connecting with the Universe in these ways, I feel great love, and I refuel my trust that all will be okay and everything works for the greatest good. It is this kind of comforting connection to the greater Love that flows to us from Mother Earth, the stars and planets of Father Sky, and the beautiful power of the oceans and lakes. **What activities bring you comfort? In what ways do they allow you to feel a comforting connection?**

Two of *the* most common difficulties with comfort that I see in my healing work with others is a reliance on only a few resources and a need to develop skills in self-soothing. Reading and journaling

are very comforting for me. Sometimes I find great comfort in silence, which allows me to focus and reconnect with my self. **It is important to discover how you can comfort yourself. It is when we are not sure of our own ability to comfort ourselves, that we enter into unhelpful relationships or make impulsive decisions that do not serve our greatest good.** Consider how you can connect with your inner self and/or the great love of the Divine. This will likely be the path to comforting yourself. Consider writing down the people, things, and activities that bring you comfort. How do they comfort you? With what are you connecting? And how can you comfort yourself? **Everyone deserves to feel safe, loved and hopeful. Find the connections that offer this to you.**

January 2002

Keys for Living

This month the key is: "*Trust*"

Trust is basic to life. As children we need to trust that we are safe and will be fed, clothed, cared for, touched and loved. As we grow, we need to trust that we can explore the world, who we are, test out limits, and return to the safety of those who love us when we need their comfort. As adults, we need to trust in our own skills, wisdom and strength. When we do not have these foundational pieces of trust in our lives, developing the skills and knowledge needed for healthy trust can be a challenge.

Often people think of trust as an all-or-nothing concept: either you trust someone or you don't. **However, trust is a process that involves discernment.** To blindly trust someone without observing the other person's actions, their strengths and vulnerabilities, or stopping to listen to your own inner voice and intuition can be dangerous, if not risky. I often tell clients that if they trust me to, be a good therapist and a clear conduit for healing and information from the Universe, I think it is a fine choice. However, to trust me to give their car a tune-up could be troublesome –and costly. (Last time I tried to give my own car a tune-up it cost me \$80 to fix it!) **Trust means knowing for what you are trusting.**

I heard a powerful concert about-trust at a recent continuing education seminar on couples counseling. In choosing to share vulnerable or personal thoughts and feelings with another, one element can be, "Do I trust this person to be sensitive and careful with what I share?"

Though this is an important part of decision-making, **the most important issue of trust lies within: "Do I trust myself** to be fine, *however* the other person responds? Can I feel good about myself, my choice to share and how I have shared information, regardless of how the other person responds?" And do I trust I can somehow find my strength, whatever the situation in which I find myself?

This internal focus on trust is similar to what I heard in meditation recently about the issue of trust: "Trust is at the core." **Though there are many skills involved in choosing to trust appropriately, they all reside within us:** our clarity of observation, evaluation and discernment about ourselves and others, our ability to access our intuition and calm voice within, our abilities set boundaries, and our ability to trust that the Universe will provide us with all we need to succeed in being ourselves.

Trust is also "at the core" of a loving and open relationship with the Divine. With our limited human view, **it can be easy to see experiences as negative or unnecessary;** we can get caught up in trying control events or people. When this happens, we often experience anxiety, fear or confusion. Whenever I feel any of these restrictive emotions, I take a deep, slow breath and repeat the simple phrase: "I trust the Universe to provide me with all I need." *I take as many slow breaths and repeat this phrase as many times as I need.* Once I re-connect to my calm center, where trust resides, I am able to move forward freely. The Universe has a greater vision and knowledge of the lessons and love I need. **All I need to do is connect to my core, find trust, and be open to the signs and opportunities put in my path.**

So go ahead—develop your practical skills in healthy trust. And remember that trust is at the core—of our selves and the core of love, joy and gratefulness. If we choose to trust the Universe to provide us with all we need, then we are freer to love and dance and smile and laugh. And that is what real living is about!

In the wake of all that has happened recently in our world, I suggest we each state an intention every morning, that we trust the Universe to provide us with all we need and we trust the Universe to take whatever exists and turn it into something wonderful that serves the higher good for all of us. We all deserve to freely love, dance, smile and laugh!

August 2002

Keys for Living: "Mission and Purpose"

I believe each of us has a divine and unique reason for being here. Yet for many of us, the nature of that purpose feels elusive. Or we may feel certain we have finally nailed it down, only to find our idea of our life mission changes again. Sometimes it feels like a continual search. If you have experienced any of these situations, you are not alone.

The only **two general rules** that cross all occasions to knowing your purpose is: **1) When you find it, you will know; it will feel right in your entire being 2) It will be a source of joy and peace and fun.**

First, it is important to let the Universe know, with regularity, that you are interested in knowing your life purpose and you are interested in fulfilling your unique and beautiful mission. State your intention in conversation with the Universe each day. **Intention and consistency are key.** If nothing else, having focus and consistency will help you remain grounded, which is essential to the greatest fulfillment of every person's mission. When you are grounded you are calm and slow enough in thought, word, deed and emotion to notice the entirety of a situation, another person, and your own body and self. As a therapist and spiritual guide/coach, I believe being grounded is a necessity for attaining any long-term change or growth.

Trust is also a practical key to discovering and expressing your greatest life purpose. If you stay grounded and focused in your intention, asking the Universe for Its help, then you can trust you are on the correct path. This, however, is where things may become confusing. At times we might feel certain we have found "our purpose." Then after years of such clarity, a new path arises that feels even more right.

Do not be tricked into thinking you have been on the "wrong" path if your focus changes or grows. This is how the Universe guides us in collecting the skills and experiences we need. Often we need to learn new skills, have new insights or experiences, or meet new people in order to be prepared for fulfilling our life purpose in its grandest form. **Preparing is a part of fulfilling one's life purpose.** Your responsibility is only to be fully engaged with your interests; seek to really know and understand the paths you choose to pursue.

I know I often felt frustrated waiting to know my true path and mission. I learned psychotherapy, then Native American Journeying, Reiki, and the MerKaBa meditation. Each of these were only a part of gathering the experiences, knowledge and skills important to accessing all of who I am intended to be. **Now, I realize each experience and each person I have met has helped prepare me to be ready.** The Universe heard my intention and guided me along as quickly as possible to grasp all the skills and experience needed to fulfill my intended purpose.

Whatever you feel drawn to pursue, it is important to have a daily spiritual practice. A spiritual practice is anything that brings you peace, joy, clarity, a sense of oneness with all, and an opportunity to connect with your inner self. Gardening mindfully can be a spiritual practice. **If**

you feel stuck or confused about your life path, the first question to ask is: Are you following through with your chosen spiritual practice on a daily basis?

There are also ways to influence your general being which can help with accomplishing your divine mission. Each person has a unique "vibration" which is the entirety of who they are; think of it as a unique mixture of notes and chords. Many of us "hear" these notes and chords (vibrations) unconsciously. We often use what we "hear" to know whether we can safely trust someone else, whether they are familiar to us, or if they are genuine.

Any spiritual activity which can raise your own vibration level will draw you closer to your fullest self. These activities might include things such as Reiki (where the attunements in training raise your vibration level) or the MerKaBa meditation, which activates the crystalline energy field around your body. I believe even psychotherapy can raise one's vibration level, by releasing old hurts and regrets, learning healthy boundaries and detachment, loving oneself more, and releasing mistaken beliefs.

Finally it is important to stop and take stock periodically. Set aside formal time at least every three months to recommit to your desire to live your greatest life purpose. Develop your own personal ritual. Schedule quiet time at home. Or schedule time at the House of Menuha, a church, or a temple, to reflect in an atmosphere of peaceful spirituality. The key is to schedule 1-2 hours of sacred time to assess what you have learned and experienced in the past few months, find gratitude, and re-commit to your highest purpose.

You are beautiful and unique with a purpose all your own. Trust you are here for a reason. Let the Universe know of your choice. Pursue practical and spiritual methods to speed your road. Then enjoy the peace which comes from being at-one with your truest self.

November 2003

Keys for Living: Balance

As some of you may know, I am in the process of designing and planning the building of a new home. It is quite a process, and one that is a constant opportunity for me to practice balance. The creation of a new home is a lot like an intensified version of **the on-going process of healthful living: It is a mixture of creativity, trust, exploration, self-education, finding helpful people, rational and intuitive decision-making.**

The trick in all times of stress or change, is being mindful and bringing all your resources into the mix: a rational mind; a trusting and open heart, a cared-for body; intuition; others of integrity and skill. I recently **went to a workshop** by Sonia Choquette, Ph.D., about creating personal balance. Her book, *True Balance*, is a practical guide for evaluating and enhancing how well you access all of who you are and can be. As Sonia's book goes through some of the major chakras,¹ she reminds us how valuable it is to attend to our universal and unique needs: Our needs for nurturance; our needs for pleasure and joy; our needs for right and clear thought; compassion towards ourselves and others; genuine personal expression; intuitive knowing and action; and Divine inspiration and peace.

For me to be my best, I need a lot of quiet time. I do not do well with on-going high stimulation for too long. I love to visit New York City, but living there sanely would be a challenge! **It is important to know your unique make-up, then make choices that support you to be your best.** We are all different, and **though others may not understand your choices, you will do your best and feel the greatest peace when you know what you need and are true to your core being.**

In times of stress, most people over-emphasize or under-emphasize particular areas of need. I tend to enjoy getting things done. Often, my challenge in times of stress is to wait or include enough laughter, pleasure and joy in the mix.

I recall one time of stress in which I asked the Universe for clear guidance about what to do. As I meditated, the answer was clear and direct: "Wait."

"N0000," I wailed. "Anything *but* that!!" I learned in that experience that waiting and "doing nothing" can be a challenge for me. I learned how important it is to maintain a calm, balanced center, so I can make the best choices and feel the greatest peace. If I cannot access easily my calm center, then I know I am off-balance. **What tells you your own balance is off?** How do you behave, think, react? What can you do to notice whether you are at peace and balanced, or in need of personal nurturance? **For personal balance, it is crucial to know your vulnerabilities and recognize the individual clues that tell you special care is needed.**

As the busy and sometimes stressful season of the holidays approach, you may wish to take inventory of what behaviors, people, routines, places, colors, foods, meditations, or activities support your most balanced and peaceful, joyful self. Enlist the help of those around you if necessary. Use a journal or book as a support. Spend some time in quiet. Surround yourself with beauty. Exercise. Paint. Dance. Take a walk. Read a book. Visit a place that surrounds you with peace. As a unique and precious expression of creation, do what you need to do to be your best self.

May your holidays and new year be full of love, peace, joy, hope, and an ever-present realization of how precious you are.

¹ Chakras are believed to be energy vortexes; each human has various chakras that influence and reflect different areas of personal experience.

Keys for Living

This month the key is: “Flexibility”

As many of you know, the last year has been filled with the task of building a new house and selling my previous home. Being someone who likes organization and order, it has been a constant challenge for me to remain flexible, open and calm. I have often had plan in my head much different than how things occurred or different than how others thought things would proceed.

In the realm of flexibility, I learned three things over and over. **Flexibility is fostered by staying open and calm in all situations, for only then can we best be aware of options, new ways of seeing things, or new possibilities.** When we are open and calm, it is easier to be clear about our own visions and desires. Many of the people helping create my new home did not share or understand my vision. Being calm and as open as possible to the flow of Divine energy, and knowing my vision, helped me focus energy productively.

In trying to be flexible, I continuously re-learned the ever-consistent message of the angels: “Everything is perfection.” Often, when something did not go according to plan, it often became clear later that everything worked out better because of the delay or problem. **In the face of the unexpected, the options are to become frustrated or become flexible in trusting the Universe to be in charge.**

Finally, practicing flexibility has meant realizing that **not everything is important to the larger picture.** We always have a choice about what we choose as our focus. The “trick” is to discern what is important to us or a situation, and what is best allowed to be or unfold without intervention. When we know something to be right—or wrong—somewhere deep within us, that is the core of finding our truth, our focus and our direction. **Sometimes flexibility means practicing patience—seeking clarity and waiting for the knowing of where to focus our energy.**

Flexibility at its best requires an open mind, open heart, great patience, great trust, and knowing ourselves from within. With these tools, we can decide where and how to direct our energy. **As new people and situations present themselves to us, we have unlimited possibilities before us.** When we are flexible, great surprises have opportunity to bloom! **May you have a bouquet of joyful surprises and unexpected perfection!**

~ The ancient ones who knew how to live with the subtle essence of the Universe were gentle and flexible, profound and undistinguishable. . . . They adapted themselves to a circumstance like melting ice. – *Lao Tzu, as translated by Hua-Ching Ni*

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When you are on a journey, it is certainly helpful to know where you are going or at least the general direction in which you are moving, but don’t forget: the only thing that is ultimately real about your journey is the step that you are taking at this moment. –“*The Power of Now*” by Eckhart Tolle

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~ The Master observes the world but trusts his inner vision. He allows things to come and go. His heart is as open as the sky. – *Tao Te Ching, translated by Stephen Mitchell*

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Keys for Living

This month the key is: “*Courage*”

There are so many great “c” words: clarity, compassion, courage, creativity, candor. Courage is my focus today.

Courage can come in many forms. Personal courage allows us to be honest with ourselves and risk the sometimes unknown territory of change. Great personal courage is at the heart of all growth and change. **I believe it takes great courage just to ask the Universe to provide us with truth, and it takes great courage to be open to noticing the truth when it is presented to us.**

It is important to not allow fear of failure or a sense of defeat trick to us into not being open to the truth. Remember: **Just because we know a new truth, that does not mean we have to be ready to act on the new information.** Life is a series of steps, a building of moments. Being open to the truth is only step one. Doing something differently in the face of new information is another step in a process, another level of courage. We can ask for truth or clarity, know it, and then pray for the courage to act in accordance with the new knowledge.

Do not trick yourself into thinking you do not have enough courage to change in the ways you may wish. You only need enough courage for the next step—not the whole trip.

I have often told the story of when the angels told me I needed to care about a particular issue. After genuine self-reflection, I told the angels, in all honesty, “I don’t really care about that issue.” After great debate between the angels and me, I finally surrendered: “So if it is important to my path that I do care, then please help me care, because right now, I don’t.” And in the next week, various TV shows, phone calls from friends, radio shows, magazine articles, all came to me without seeking. In a matter of a week, I could genuinely say I began to care about something I really did not care about before! **Just ask for help with the step in front of you. That is enough.**

Courage also takes the form of social integrity. It takes courage to be honest with others about who we really are while weighing the consequences of doing so. Not everyone will be comfortable with our truth. Social integrity is a balance between comfort, safety and courage. It always involves evaluating the perceived risks and costs of being honest, and the costs which come with not being as genuine as possible with others. Social integrity and courage means taking the time to re-evaluate our levels of honesty and the perceived costs, honoring that our perceptions, values, and situations can change. **It is important to not judge ourselves or others, but to always seek appropriate amounts of clarity and courage to be as honest as we believe possible.**

Many people have shown great courage in many ways: Rosa Parks when she claimed a seat on a bus; the men and women who have survived the personal tragedies of September 11, 2001; people who persevere in the face of great physical, social or emotional challenges. **Remember though, that life is a series of steps—and we only need to be where we are and ask for the courage for the next blessed step.**

I would like to end with some wonderful observations about courage from Maya Angelou:

I am convinced that courage is the most important of all the virtues. Because without courage, you cannot practice any other virtues consistently. You can be kind for a while; you can be generous for a while; you can be just for a while, or merciful for a while, even loving for a while. But it is only with courage that you can be persistently and insistentlly kind and generous and fair... if you don’t have it, sooner or later you will stop and say, "Eh, the threat is too much. The difficulty is too high. The challenge is too great."

“Courage allows the successful woman to fail--and learn powerful lessons from the failure--so that in the end, she didn't fail at all.”

This newsletter is dedicated to my mother, Betty Jane Hafner, May 13, 1929 – June 22, 2006

Look for fascinating interviews with Maya Angelou, Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King, Oprah Winfrey, etc., at the Academy of Achievement website: www.achievement.org.

~ When I dare to be powerful—to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid – *Audre Lorde (1934-1992)*

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When you are on a journey, it is certainly helpful to know where you are going or at least the general direction in which you are moving, but don't forget: the only thing that is ultimately real about your journey is the step that you are taking at this moment. –*"The Power of Now" by Eckhart Tolle*

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~ Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage. –*Anais Nin*