

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.**