

The Many Faces of Wellness

A speech given to the Senior Alliance

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1. Introduction –

My name is Gurucharan Singh Khalsa. I am a psychologist, a yoga instructor, a Bioenergetics Analyst, and the managing director of InnerWorks Wellness Center. I am also the chair-elect for the Board of the Claremont Wellness professionals. Today, I would like to share with you some things about myself and how I've come to understand wellness. I will intersperse my talking with some experiential pieces – from meditation, bioenergetics, poetry and applied kinesiology. I hope to have time at the end to respond to any questions you may have.

Rather than going too far into my past, by way of introducing myself, let me simply share with you some of my own process in accepting the invitation to speak with you here this afternoon. I share it because I believe it is a good example of one of the Faces of Wellness.

When asked by Carla Sullivan to address the Senior Alliance on the topic of wellness, my initial response was “of course! I'd be happy to.” My first thought was that this would be easy. I'd been teaching yoga and meditation since 1972. As a psychologist, I'd been interested in and teaching workshops in Wellness since the early 1980's. I'm currently teaching a Wellness Series at InnerWorks. In the Mind Series, I shared tools for working with the body, mind, emotions and Spirit to create a healthier, more fulfilling life. I taught imagery, journaling, meditation, dream analysis, bioenergetics exercises and stress management. This would be easy, it would be natural, and we would have fun. I'd be happy to share what I know; I'd be happy to share my experiences; I could talk about how clients and students have benefited from this work. Carla and I played with topics, first was “the Spirit of Wellness, later, “the Many Faces of Wellness”. I was set to go. Then I left her office....

I quickly shifted from my inflated state, fueled by good intentions and my adapted impulse to give; to my contracted, character style (old ways of being in the world). The strategies I had used to survive my youth. I took what at first seemed joyful and made it complex, a burden, another responsibility, a CHORE! Now I didn't do this in any straightforward manner. I was very clever, I tricked myself. I left Carla's office and thought, “Terrific! This is my opportunity to synthesize my thoughts on the subject of Wellness.” I will weave a rich tapestry of wellness drawing from the disciplines of developmental neurology-to explain how our neural networks establish the electrical basis for our life experience, the science of attachment-to describe how relationships are fundamental to our well-being, Eastern Mysticism and quantum physics- to draw parallels between how energy is experienced in such similar fashions by the scientific and the mystical communities, applied yogic thought- to describe the

deep patterns of mind and their influence in our bodies, the mytho-poetic traditions- to show that endogenous cultures have been talking this way since the dawn of time, organic gardening - as model for nurturing the human species, and on and on and on – I made myself absolutely nuts. I immediately set the standard so high that to be successful, I would need to know with precision, absolutely everything worth knowing AND I would need to share it with poetry and grace and humor and style. I got so stressed, I became paralyzed.

What had been a nice thing to do had become an impossible task. I sat with this (for longer than I care to admit.) until one morning in meditation (or perhaps in the shower) I realized that it was probably more important for me to embody wellness than to talk authoritatively about it. I let go... I no longer had to know everything; I just needed to know what I know. I no longer needed to look good; I just needed to be myself, in my own skin, sharing my own experience. From that embodied place – I am OK; you are OK, what will happen between us this afternoon will be OK. It will be of value for you and for me, because we are working it out together. I had recalibrated my values; set my clear intention based on those values and trusted that together we could figure out the rest. Values, Clear Intention and Trust. These are important themes when it comes to Wellness.

The pattern of my process is worth sharing:

I began in a disconnected place (disconnected from the material, from my body, from reality); in a fantasy, unconscious, ungrounded, not mindful, and idealistic. I was omniscient, omnipotent.

I went into a contracted place – tense, burdened, pressured, worried. I didn't know enough; I was not enough.

Then, I remembered my values: being in my body, feeling support, speaking my truth, connected to Spirit. As I let this in, I found freedom. I returned to my self.

It's paradoxical that we need to experience and “own” our contraction in order to have any hope of living free from it. When the fear or the hurt or the loss is too great, we become tense in familiar, frustrated and chronic ways. This tension cuts us off from our resources - our own body, our capacity to think, from our friends. Then comes the withdrawal, the retreat from life, protecting against further wounding. We are isolated from ourselves and from others. Recovery comes as we let go of the tension, reconnect to our human resources, and remember that we are not alone.

I stand before you not as an authority, not as someone who has “perfected” wellness, but as a fellow traveler on the road to health and well-being. Willing to share what I've learned along the way.

2. So, let us begin. This is “What I know”:

Not only do I know what I am about to say, but I believe that these are things that we can all agree upon. Now, how does anyone know anything? You think it, you feel it, you are taught it; however you do it, some things you know and some things you don't know. These are things I know. I may be right or wrong, that could be debated.

Nonetheless, The things I am about to say.... I know. Now there is one thing you can help me with. Because I think these things are self evident, you can help me by letting me know if you “know” these things or not. So as I go through these things, one by one, I would like you to let me know if you also know these things by raising your hand if you agree with me. OK? Is that a deal? Good. Lets go...

1. *We are human beings.*
2. *We have a physical body, some might say we are the physical body or we live in the physical body; feel free to defines terms as you need to and shift the wording a bit to make it a better fit for you...*
3. *We have a mind, we are our mind, or...*
4. *Somewhere in the interactions of this physical body and this mind, emotions develop. Sensations from the body, body chemistry, the mind makes meaning – we are OK; we are not OK; there is danger; there is love (there is love therefore there is danger☺). Emotions are a part of the human experience.*
5. *We need each other-however we define our selves, our work, we cannot do it alone, in spite of what we were taught or came to believe. Humans are social beings. Recent brain research suggests that something the yogis call “Group Consciousness” is a biological reality in that the minds of multiple individuals can function together in much the same way that the neurons within a single brain function together.*
6. *There is more going on than any of us fully comprehend (there is an unseen world). Spirit is real. The goal of yoga (and of most psychotherapies, for that matter) is to unite the known world with the unknown.*
7. *Each of us is an intricate, amazing piece of living technology, more sophisticated and complex than is imaginable (I had a neuro-psych professor in grad school who said that to create a computer, using the latest micro technology {early 1980’s}, that had the same capacity for electrical connection as the human brain, that computer would be the size of the state of Texas). At the same time, we are fragile and delicate and vulnerable.*
8. *The more whole we are(the less fragmented, the less defended from ourselves, more able to “be with” all of who we are), then the more we have access to the needed resources for managing and mastering our lives.*
9. *In every problem, there is the solution.*
10. *In all garbage, there is compost, waiting to be cooked, in every crisis; there is opportunity for growth and healing.*
11. *Mostly, we “do it to ourselves”. Bad things happen to us to be sure and those things have real impact. This is not about blame or guilt, it is biology; but mostly*

we do it to ourselves. Once we come to believe that we are bad, or deficient or defective, we act as if it were true, even when it is not true. This happens through patterns of electricity and chemistry in the body and through patterns of thought and emotion and through patterns of behavior and relationship. ALL CAN BE CHANGED!

12. God is everywhere. She doesn't play favorites. If you are an atheist, think about nature, or energy, make your own sense of this. Remember; change my words so they fit better for you.

13. Love and Beauty and Truth are all healing, and grand highways to the journeys' end.

OK, this has been me setting the stage, so you can know how I think about these things.

3. History of Wellness

When I first started reading about wellness, 20 years ago – wellness had a very limited meaning. The field of Wellness was based in the medical model. It was about behavior change. It prescribed certain activities - You know what they are – what are they? .../...that's right,... manage stress, what else? Lose weight,... good.

Early talk about wellness included:

- ❖ lose weight; eat less, meditate more
- ❖ quit smoking; take pleasure in your breath
- ❖ reduce stress; diet, quiet, exercise, effective management of stressors
- ❖ receive good medical care (was added later).

But it had nothing to do with wellness. It was really “not-sickness”; behavior changes you could make to reduce your chances of getting sick. Valid, valuable, important, but it spoke nothing of feeling good, having energy, being vibrant, living fully what was possible. There were other voices back then, but they were not mainstream. In 1970, Yogi BhaJan founded the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization. He taught Kundalini yoga, meditation, food as medicine, healing, selfless service and the like. His students around the world continue this mission today. (www.3ho.org) There were others, but it wasn't until research and more importantly billions of dollars a year began to support what is now called the field of Complimentary and Alternative Medicine that wellness began to span all segments of the culture.

I was talking with a physician the other day. He said that he thought that between 75% and 90% of all patients presenting themselves for care in medical facilities had stress related problems. These are pretty well accepted numbers in the field. It is certainly true that those illnesses that were not created by stress do create stress. I will add that a similar proportion of those in prison are there because of problems with drugs or alcohol, which are symptoms of the underlying despair.

Stress poisons the body, suppresses the immune system and impairs the body's ability to heal itself.

Indeed, as psychology began to understand the role of mind and emotions on physical illness, the field of psychosomatic medicine was born, more than 50 years ago. Although this has roots that go back to the early Greeks and even has references in the bible, which tells stories about how unprocessed emotions lead to physical illness. Although it was first talked about by psychologists in the 19th century; it still is not a common part of medical treatment.

In college, my mother would snip Ann Landers and Dear Abby columns when they were about something she thought I needed to hear. 20 years, later, when Abby and Ann were talking about the benefits of yoga and meditation and a vegetarian diet, I began to send their columns to my mother. The tide had begun to turn.

For a variety of reasons, the way we think about wellness today is vastly different from just 20 years ago.

4. Modern view of Wellness is much more sophisticated.

Early wellness looked only at patterns of behavior; there are many more patterns that need attention. As you widen the picture frame to include patterns of mind and emotion, relationships and movement and subtle energy, you change the question from “How do I prevent Illness?” to “What is possible in this Human Experience?”

We are born with 100 billion brain cells - lots of neurons, but relatively few connections. By the time we are 18 years old, the total is down to about 18 billion, fairly well connected. The patterns are formed, rooted in our life experience. We sacrifice what is possible in order to make it through the reality of our early lives. Here is how it works:

- Encoded into the brain, in the patterns of neural connections, is who we believe ourselves to be, what we believe the world to be like, what is possible for us, the nature of relationships, what to expect (expectation leads to intention, intention leads to outcome.). It is all very unconscious and very biologically based. Fortunately, modern research now shows (something that was talked about in the yogic literature thousands of years ago) that neurons can grow back and more importantly, new connections can be formed in close, open, affectively tuned, relationships, like the psychotherapeutic relationship. Patterns can change, even biological patterns, especially biological patterns.
- Encoded in the body are bands of tension. These developed as our response to an unresponsive or perhaps overly responsive environment. We hold against feelings and experience that at one point in our lives overwhelmed us. This character armor once protected us, now it imprisons us. It inhibits our ability to know ourselves, to have ourselves, to express ourselves, to be fully alive. Tension can be released.
- Within our social systems we develop patterns of relating; we have roles; we have strategies for getting what we need to live. As we grow and change, those systems change as well.
- Underlying all of this are patterns of subtle energy, called prana, chi, ki or life force in different parts of the world. All is energy, vibrating at different frequencies; patterns develop as a result of life experience. What you do

matters, also, what you think, how you feel, how you relate, how you choose to spend your time, your connection to spirit. Working at this subtle energy level has long term benefits.

- Daily practices: Meditate, sweat, be with nature, laugh, love someone, be loved by someone, speak your truth, serve selflessly, remember what is important, establish rhythms and routines that nurture you; find your passion and your purpose, take risks in a safe environment, be safe in a risky environment, feel, have courage, connect, eat to be nourished, dance, touch and be touched, get a good night's sleep, wake up early, remember your dreams, talk to your soul, be open to the unknown, be gentle with yourself, learn something new, see the Divine in everyone and everything.
- Everything matters: There are patterns alive in us today that promote wellness and patterns that promote unhappiness, stress and disease. Love and health and peace and joy are all within the realm of human possibility. We simply need to develop the lifestyles, the relationships, the rhythms and routines, the patterns in the body/mind that support who we want to be; that is, who we are becoming.

5. One way to think about the Many Faces of Wellness is to consider the many practices that promote it.

What follows are some of the many practices in which you can engage to enhance the Well Being in your life. The list is not meant to be exhaustive, but all of these services are available at InnerWorks. They each potentially impact every aspect of who you are. Their focus can be very different - body, mind, emotions, relationships and Spirit. Their experience can be very different as well. Most you can do on your own or with a friend. For some, you will need training. For others, an ongoing professional relationship is required. Some are practiced individually, some in a group, some with a single other person.

Exercise: 3-5 days a week. Sweat, it releases toxins. Cardio, strength and flexibility are all important. Your body is your friend. Love it. Many bodily systems simply do not work without movement.

Pilates – The focus is on the body core (abdomen and pelvis), moving from your center. It works on skeletal alignment, muscular strength and length. It is a low impact, low stress mind body program. You cultivate a subtle relationship with your body.

NIA Movement - Connect your feeling for life to your movement through it. Gentle cardio dance that cultivates Joy and Spirit in self-expression.

Laban Movement Analysis – Who we are meets the world through movement. Alignment, movement and expression- as these become more authentic, we are able to show up more fully in the world. Good posture and efficient movement leads to less stress and more energy available for life.

Yoga – Many types of yoga, each very different. All engage the body with the mind through the breath. Great for flexibility, balance and nervous system strength. A great antidote to stress. Also prepares the body for deep meditation. Links the known self

with the unknown self; the manifest with the potential. Claim your full identity, not just the current patterns.

Meditation – Freeing ourselves by letting go of old, no longer useful energetics patterns (karmas, samskaras) – patterns of mind and emotion. You clean your house; you tune your car; meditate daily to clear your mind.

Mysticism – Develop a tangible relationship with the unseen world, the Divine in All.

Nature – We are a part of Nature. We need the natural world to be whole. It can be through caring for a plant, relating to a pet, watching a sunset or sitting against a tree.

Diet: Eat whole, unprocessed foods. Something like a lacto-vegetarian diet seems optimal. You are what you digest, not what you eat. Vitamins help. Food (along with herbs and spices) is medicine. Be grateful for your food. Bless it. Most Americans need to drink more water; eat more fruits and vegetables. Eat consciously.

Ayurveda – 5,000 year old approach to health, from India. Balances the doshas-harmonizes the energies of life, including spirit and the natural rhythms of the planet. Uses diet, herbs and oils along with lifestyle considerations.

Chinese medicine – when chi flows through the meridians in harmonious way.

Reiki – Energy from the Infinite flows through us all, as we allow it. This balances the body's energy centers to promote health and vitality.

Massage – through touch, increased circulation, receiving energy, detoxification.

Psychotherapy- Works to integrate life experiences in a way that reclaims the full human potential. Focuses on the importance of healthy relationships and having adequate support. The goal is to love and work without reservation, fully engaged in life. Most people experience debilitating depression or anxiety at some point in their lives.

Bioenergetics – Goal is to optimize self-expression, self-possession and self-awareness. Works with the patterns of tension in the body, freeing the underlying emotions in a safe, supported environment. Reclaim energy and aspects of the self.

Journal – By writing down your experiences and how they affect you and what feelings come up, you create a cogent narrative of your life. This is necessary for optimal psychological health. Interestingly, daily journaling, even for just a few minutes strengthens your immune system.

Dream – Recording your dreams, studying your dreams, learning from your dreams, provides you with a pathway to unexplored aspects of yourself.

Imagery – You can listen to your body's needs, and develop new habits through imagery practices. A wonderful skill that can serve you in many ways.

Community – We are social animals. We need opportunities for service, recognition and reflection (seeing ourselves in the eyes of others).

6. All of these Tools of Wellness have Common Themes. What follows is the essence of Wellness; what is true across modalities. All approaches to wellness embrace the following:

A. Working with energy

Mechanical – bones and muscles – movement, manipulation, exercise, stretching, surgery, touch; chemical – endocrine system, medication, diet/nutrition; electrical – nervous system; subtle energies – prana, chi, ki, life force, magnetic, spiritual.

B. Balance

Of energies, of lifestyle, of habits, of beliefs, meridians, chakras, in giving/receiving, of holding on and letting go, action and inaction, patience and persistence, self and others.

C. Integration

Within one's self, knowing where you stand, standing your ground, wholeness, fullness, time and activity aligned with purpose and vision; self with community.

D. Connection

To others: serving and being served, loving and being loved, supporting and being supported.

To mentor, teacher, guide, facilitator.

To something greater than yourself: Spirit, Mission, Purpose, Community.

E. Daily Practice

Exercise, meditate, share your heart with a trusted friend, connect with Spirit, connect with Nature, connect with the rhythms in your own body – breath, heart beat.

F. Two Models for delivery of Wellness Services

A. The Claremont Wellness Professionals(CWP) (<http://www.cwpnetwork.org/>) is a non-profit association of independent, holistic-oriented practitioners. Its mission is to enhance health of the body, mind and spirit through holistic principles. It has regular breakfasts, retreats and training for mutual support and networking of its professional membership. It also offers educational programs for the public. Its membership includes medical doctors with holistic practices in the area, body workers, wellness coaches, creative arts therapists, yoga teachers and psychotherapists. It is co-sponsoring two programs in non-violent communication coming up this summer (June and July of 2005). Flyers are on your tables. Its networking breakfasts are on the 1st Friday of the month, at 8:00AM at the Euro Café in Claremont. All interested professionals are welcome.

B. InnerWorks Wellness Center(IW) first opened its doors in 1989. It is located on Monte Vista, just north of Foothill. It was the first yoga studio in the area.

- In addition to Kundalini Yoga, it offered Pilates and structural integration.

- The model has evolved. InnerWorks Wellness Center is now a community of healers and wellness professionals, led by a registered nurse and a psychologist (my wife Carolyn and myself).
- Today, it offers over 20 classes a week (*there are schedules on your tables.*) in a variety of yogas (Kundalini, Hatha, Yin, Gentle, Children's, Vinyasa), Pilates training on equipment and mat, NIA - a movement therapy/celebration/dance, REIKI - a beautiful approach to energetic healing, Ayurveda – the ancient Indian system of healing rooted in the rhythms of nature, diet and balance; Laban Movement Analysis – a sophisticated approach to health through bodily support, connection and movement, Bioenergetics- a psychotherapeutic approach to emotional and relational healing through finding expression beyond old patterns of tension (fear, grief and anger) in the body, Meditation and a variety of workshops. Two workshop series developed around two different approaches to wellness:
 - i. The Mind Series – Stress management, Journaling, Imagery, Bioenergetics exercises, Dreamwork and Meditation. This workshop series is designed to offer you practical tools for working with your own mind, body and emotions. Using these skills, you will be better equipped to support your own health and healing, enhance feelings of joy and fulfillment, increase your availability for loving relationships and assist you in successfully bringing all of who you are fully into the world.
 - ii. The Body Series – Based in Pilates and Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis, this series will focus successively on different areas of the body including the feet, knees, hips and shoulders in the interest of self care and daily practice for prevention and recovery from the aches and pains of an active life. Each class will include both lecture and lab to review important anatomical landmarks and biomechanical information as well as give you the opportunity to experience exercises that will help counteract common compensations.
- InnerWorks has partnered with a number of community programs in La Verne, Claremont, Upland, Industry and Rancho Cucamonga, including city agencies, educational institutions and private businesses to provide Wellness services to their staff and their customers. InnerWorks' certified staff of yoga and Pilates instructors, movement therapists, their registered Nurse and psychologist are available to design services in your organizations to support your staff and clientele.
- We are offering a discount to the member organizations of the Senior Alliance, a 20% discount on a 10 class card. We always offer this discount to full time students and to senior citizens. Now it is available to your staff as well as your clients.

You are all professionals who provide services to a vulnerable segment of our community, older folks in need of support. When I think of your work and the work of others who serve vulnerable populations, I think of this poem by Rainer Maria Rilke. It reminds me of how important it is to join people in their need and, in order to do that, how we must work through our own burdens. Your work requires courage and innocence and humility. This is how Rilke says it.

Sonnets to Orpheus IV

O you lovers that are so gentle, step occasionally
into the breath of the sufferers not meant for you,
let it be parted by your cheeks,
it will tremble, joined again, behind you.

You have been chosen, you are sound and whole,
you are like the very first beat of the heart,
you are the bow that shoots the arrows, and also their target,
in tears your smile would glow forever.

Do not be afraid to suffer, give
the heaviness back to the weight or the earth;
mountains are heavy, seas are heavy.

Even those trees you planted as children
became too heavy long ago—you couldn't carry them now.
but you can carry the winds... and the open spaces...

Rainer Maria Rilke
Translated by Robert Bly

My image of Wellness

Wellness is like a flower; its many faces are the petals of that flower

Each of your organizations are petals on the flower of wellness as are each of you.
What you bring to those you serve – information and energy; beauty, support, love,
resources, truth – enhances the glory of the wellness flower in our community.

Exercise-visualization: Consider your personal wellness flower, as you view the petals of your flower, identify the resources you embody – Let each petal represent an aspect of your self that promotes your own wellness – What makes up your own flower? What are the **activities** that you engage in that promote you own well being – exercise? Yoga, walking, meditation, prayer, spending time with those who love you, friends, family. What about those **relationships**? How do they support or perhaps challenge your wellness? Relationships at work, within your families, with loved ones and friends. Can these relationships be added to the petals of your

wellness flower? Have you let these people know how important they are to your own well being? Are there patterns in the relationships that if healed, could promote well-being? Let your attention focus inside more deeply. What about those patterns of **mind** and **emotions**? What are your attitudes and beliefs about your self that promote your own wellness? Do you have emotional outlets that work for you, that meet your values and standards for being in the world? ...for your anger,...for your sadness,for your fear,for your love,for your joy. What about your **spirit**? How do you connect within your self with that which is Divine? How do you express that in the world? Where is your **support** and **connection** in the world? Let all of these be the petals of your wellness flower. Enjoy the beauty and the fragrance that is your expression in the world and is yours to share in the world. What is not there? What is needed? How can you go about enhancing that flower? Take some time now to feel your roots go deep into the earth, to feel your leaves and petals turn up and reach to the warmth and light from the heavens. **From this place, envision your day...** When you are ready, before you open your eyes, hold on to the image of your flower; while letting your mind turn to the others in the room, each of them a flower too, each with their own beauty and fragrance, their own wounds and needs and dreams for themselves, for those they love, for those they serve. As you open your eyes and look around, see the others as themselves and as flowers. Enjoy their gifts as you find expression for your own.