

For The Artist

↩ Holistic Foundation ↪

Interview with Dr. Ken Pataky by Frank Frontis

Along with their creative expressions and involvements, a most important endeavor for the artist is that of establishing a holistic foundation for his or herself.

An artist having a holistic foundation built on health, wellness and unity of body, mind, heart and spirit is bestowed with a strong sense of balance, harmony and accord. Such a platform and the quality of order and harmony produced by it may contribute significantly to the creative process suggest numerous studies, articles and reports.

A study published in the April 2012 issue of the psychology journal "Frontiers In Cognition" investigated and determined that certain types of meditation support modes of thinking that are intrinsic to the creative process.

A November 29, 2011 online article titled "Eating and Moving Inspire Your Brain," authored by August McLaughlin discusses how eating certain healthy foods nourishes the brain to aid creativity, while exercise and movement, by increasing blood flow (along with oxygen and nutrients) to it, does the same, as well.

UNC-Chapel Hill psychology professor, Barbara Frederickson, Ph.D., a leading researcher on "positive emotions," writes in her book, "Positivity" (2009), the following concerning their impact on creativity: "Such [positive] emotions provide the basis for creativity, problem solving and even evolution. They enable us to open our hearts and minds. Negativity, on the other hand, closes down our ability to think, create and grow."

Realizing the value of operating from a holistic foundation, what are some effective measures artists can adopt to establish and maintain a health/wellness platform that may be supportive of their creative activities and pursuits?

A recent interview with Naturopath Practitioner and Holistic Health Coach Ken Pataky, MS, CRC, LPCA, RYT, ND (www.phoenixway.net) of Jamestown (N.C.) informs us on the matter.

Interview: Part I

FF: Dr. Pataky, can you explain to the readers of *SimplyElevate Magazine* something about your background and what you do as a Holistic Health Coach and Educator?

KP: Well, Frank, my perspective is wide, as I've had training and experience from multiple aspects of holistic healing, including counseling, teaching, yoga, meditation, tai chi, plant-based nutrition, Reiki, and interfaith ministry. I'm a licensed counselor and certified in all the modalities I mentioned. My goal is to help people awaken to their potential, to really engage with life, making it the most meaningful and rewarding experience for them possible. My work is a combination of education, motivation, encouragement, support, and modeling. I work one-on-one with private clients, give public talks, write books/articles/blogs, and constantly experiment on myself with the information and healing practices I teach.

FF: Do you think there is a strong link between an individual's health and state of wellness and his or her ability to perform creatively?

KP: Surely so. We are holistic beings. Our minds and bodies and spirits are one. Art comes from all of these, not just one. If a person is not holistically healthy, that will show up in his/her art, which will reveal suffering rather than celebration, sadness rather than joy, desperation rather than



Painting by Maniam Selvan

FF: Can you elaborate?

KP: There is a popular myth that suffering leads to great art. Suffering is the great Muse. In so far as suffering gets us in touch with our priorities and what's important to us, it can be a growing and healing experience. But there's the kind of suffering that is from desperation, confusion, resentment, blame and misery, versus the kind that leads to understanding, gratitude, and ultimately growth, maturity and serenity. All of this is visible in the artist's work and the message it conveys.

FF: How might a "holistic foundation" support individuals involved in creative activities, given that very often they expend enormous amounts of mental, emotional and/or physical energies in their creative processes?

KP: Art is beautiful, vital and intense. It does take a lot of brain energy (and often body energy as well). Maintaining the conscious brain is where most of our energy goes when we are not exercising our bodies. If art is a big part of one's life, one's time and energy and focus, then that person runs the risk of being depleted holistically (mentally, physically, spiritually). It's like "burning a candle on both ends"... bigger flash, shorter life. So, it makes sense that for one to be a sustainable artist, that is, for one to live a long and healthy life while continuing to produce great art, one's holistic health becomes paramount. Think about all of the artists who have "crashed and burned" early in life... wasting so many years and depriving the human race of all the gifts which might have been had they lived longer. Living a life with a strong holistic foundation provides the remedy to the toll that art can take to express.

FF: Share with the readers of Simply Elevate Magazine the basics of building a holistic foundation.

KP: Look at the fingers of your hand. How easy would it be to do everything you do with your hands if you were missing a finger or two? The "fingers of the hand" of holistic health includes (1) healthy diet/nutrition, (2) adequate exercise/rest, (3) stress management, (4) healthy relationships, and (5) positive spirituality. A healthy diet is primarily plant-based, at least 50% raw/ live, and devoid of fast food, denatured food, processed food, chemicals and drugs. Healthy nutrition includes natural herbs and medicines, clean/pure water charged with earth's wisdom, clean air, sunlight, and regular contact with the earth. Adequate rest is a minimum of seven hours sleep per night; less is deprivation for most people. Adequate exercise means moving every day, preferably 30 minutes minimum of brisk walking and some strength/calisthenics. Stress management includes yoga/tai chi, meditation, aromatherapy, sound therapy, baths, massage, counseling/coaching as needed, and time in nature.

Since stress occurs every day, not doing daily stress management is not an option, if we want to be healthy. Healthy relationships mean being around people who give and take, who support us and make us feel good... this includes friends, neighbors, family and co-workers. We have the choice of who we spend our time with. We have the responsibility to make a change in that circle, if we are not supported for who we are. "Spirituality" means the connection we have to this life, this world, its creator, and everything in it. This includes how and why we do the work we do, how and why we guide our families and others, our place in this universe, etc. Our spirituality determines whether we are primarily grateful or resentful, graceful or irritable, judgmental or forgiving. It's essentially how we roll on our deepest levels.

FF: Since states of physical relaxation, mental alertness and emotional calm are conducive to artistic and creative activity, what types of routines, exercises and practices might best support such states?

KP: I've mentioned many already. In addition, artists who use their hands and eyes a lot need to rest these. They are organs and limbs and get exhausted and overworked. Daily eye exercises to accompany one's meditation are important as is letting the eyes relax periodically by looking at distant patterns in nature, such as clouds or trees moving in the wind. Hand stretching and massage are equally important. Physical relaxation, mental alertness, and emotional calm are our birthrights, but we quickly lose our capacity to sustain these when we are young as we are bombarded with stress at an early age, before we have adequate coping mechanisms. We then have to relearn these skills later in life by developing the coping mechanisms we previously lacked.

For artists, think about your down time, when you are not working. What are you doing? Are you relaxing with junk food, drugs/alcohol, TV, hookups, and other risky behaviors... which deplete your health, or could you consider other alternatives? Walks in nature would do wonders. So would eating healthy plant food, which calms and balances the mind and creates more alertness and energy... and getting adequate sleep and exercise... reducing and eliminating the need for unnatural stimulants like caffeine, sugar and nicotine.

Do those fiery relationships with emotionally unstable people really serve you and your art? On the contrary, they will ultimately lead to your early end. I'm not saying that your life needs to be boring and sedated... far from it. Here's one for you to consider: What if the peak experiences of the world are only available to those healthy enough to experience them? Think about avid and regular rock climbers, scuba divers, parachutists, astronauts, marathoners/triathletes... what do these people have in common? They are healthy! You can't really do these things regularly without health. I'll wager that this is also true for artists... at least those who want to live long and be productive along the way. If your eyes are weak, your hands are unstable, you are wracked with pain, your digestion is weak, you are exhausted... how can you produce quality, sustainable art?

Second and Final Part Of Interview To Be Continued In Upcoming Issue!



Photo by Albert Munsell

About the Author:



Frank Frontis has a background as a professional feature article writer, having worked for several publishing companies in Memphis, TN where he wrote pieces related to art, health and wellness. Currently he's focused on fiction, working to compile and complete an anthology.