

Balance is Never Still

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This week, Broadway dancer and legend Ann Reinking passed away at the young age of 71. I wanted to begin by invoking her name because she is someone who I admired deeply. I did not know her, although I had the incredible privilege to audition for her several times and certainly, I saw her dance. The first time was in the original Broadway production of the Bob Fosse show *Dancin'*. I remember thinking "what's she's doing is impossible." I also thought to myself watching that show, "I want to do that." Ann Reinking was part of an intoxicating generation of dancers in the 60's, 70's and 80's...Ben Vereen, Alvin Ailey, Arthur Mitchell, Gwen Verdon and of course Bob Fosse, and so many others. I was hooked and so I embarked on a career in dance.

Although I didn't know her personally, Ann Reinking was both a collaborator, friend and colleague of some of my dearest friends and people who directly influenced my own dance career as instructors, guides and raconteurs of stories from "back in the day." My heart goes out to them in this time. She is gone much too soon.

It is probably no wonder then that I've been thinking a lot about dance and movement this week. My own dance career took me into the "wellness" business which in turn led directly to ministry. Dance and ministry are powerfully connected for me and often still influence each other in my personal theologies.

One of those theologies is what I want to briefly share with you today. It is simple. Balance is never still. As a student of biomechanics and injury prevention and recovery, I looked closely at the way human joints work and how they work with the vestibular system...our sense of balance...and it was just so simple to me. Balance is never still.

Without getting into the physics of it, balance...indeed any stillness, requires opposing forces. A cup isn't just sitting on a table. Gravity is pulling the cup down and the table is resisting...pushing the cup up...so that it doesn't just crush the table. But the physical human balance thing is more complex than that. Our muscle fibers are always

firing...they are not still, even when we think we are. Our systems are in constant motion, with liquid and fibers sloshing back and forth, seeking the path of least resistance. Even when we are stock still, we are a symphony of movement.

When I was a dance based personal trainer, I used to train my clients extensively in balance. So many of them would start off by trying to “hold” a balance. They would clench their teeth and grip their fists and “hold on” and fall over. What I tried to teach them was to let the balance be more like breath that is steady and calm. I told them that there’s no way to stop the motion of being alive so their job to find balance was to let the balance come to them, to feel for it and recognize the subtlety of motion within balance. Part of my learning came from working with several clients who had neurological disorders, disabilities or other ailments. I learned from them the value of letting every individual find the balance that works for them. I also learned the importance of falling down without judgement. One person’s equilibrium is another’s imbalance. Its all relative.

This approach helped many of my clients, particularly elders, avoid injury or serious joint damage and helped others manage and recover from other issues. Their bodies became more supple. Their heart rates and blood pressure lowered. They were healthier all around. They became more forgiving of themselves and their bodies became places of joy as opposed to judgement.

Today, in ministry I like to look at this as a theology. I found in my own experience that when I have tried to “hold” the balance or “grip” some aspect of my life, whatever I was doing becomes brittle and breaks. I find that if I cling too firmly to a program or agenda, when something inevitably changes, I’m thrown for a loop and inevitably I am hurt.

I see so many people so often trying to find balance in life. Work/life balance; family/self balance; fun/ productivity balance, etc. And I also see so many people trying to cling to a way of being that doesn’t want to be. What good does it do to force balance? It creates frustration and anxiety and even grief. I wonder if there’s maybe a little bit of the personal training approach that can help.

So, here are a few “training tips” for life balance...

1.) Set directions not goals – I was often approached by people who wanted to transform their bodies. People either wanted to lose weight or they wanted to have bigger arms or more defined abs, etc. I always leveled with them at the beginning and told them that I wasn't that kind of trainer. Even when I was training clients for Government fitness tests, or modeling I was clear that we were going in a direction toward having their body become as fit and capable as it could be. We were headed somewhere together and the journey that includes health and peace was going to be a big part of it. What if that was the approach to life balance? Is there something to recognizing the value of the journey before getting to the pot of gold at the end?

2.) Forgiveness – I was insistent that people didn't beat themselves up, either in my sessions or in between when they were working out on their own. Forgiveness was one way of showing that you care about yourself. I'm convinced that it's the same with life balance. We are always having to find new ways to forgive ourselves; some do it through faith, others find it in their ethical grounding. Regardless, punishment is rarely productive.

3.) Celebrate success – My clients were always a little suspicious of how thrilled I was with moderate progress. But why not? This goes directly back to the idea of setting a direction as opposed to a goal. There's always a reason to celebrate something. I also know that many of us don't spend enough time doing this in our day to day lives. The moments and times to celebrate are there, even if fleeting. We have to be better attuned to them.

4.) Don't compare – What represents balance for you, will not be balance for someone else. No amount of training will give you someone else's body or their capabilities. Likewise, you could have the same education and opportunities as someone else and your life is doing to be different from theirs. What "balance" means for you will be different. There's no comparison that will ever be fair when it comes to measuring one life against another.

Being a dancer was a joy for me. Being a trainer was a joy for me. In both of those pursuits, I took what I did and loved and translated it into something I could gift to other people. Ministry feels like a continuation. To me, having the opportunity to share

insight that I've learned from creating shape and movement with my body is an awesome blessing. I'm grateful for it every day. But it's not just the physical aspects of embodiment. More importantly, my hope for you is that there's a dialogue or exchange you are able to open up with your own body as a physical manifestation and guide to your life, relationships and world. It is an exchange that invites you into places of balance...equilibrium...that are never static or stationary. Your world is always pushing and pulling and always seeking its own center, its own place of balance.

What always impressed me with Ann Reinking's dancing was the depth of ease that came from her body. There was a strength and fluidity, and a kind of knowing that projected no limitations but always said, this is her unique body language. You could always pick her out of a line up of dancers. Of course, I would never be Ann Reinking...but her dancing made me want to be the best *me* I could be. That's how I hope you can be in balance in your life. Don't grip, or clench or grasp at some kind of balance that isn't yours; instead, try to meet your life and life balance with openness to allow it to be everything it needs to be without judgement. You can be a virtuoso of your own life dance.

May it be so.