

The Role of Rhythm in Our Lives by *Jim Greiner*

Why is rhythm important to our lives? To borrow Sir Edmund Hillary's famous response, when asked why he wanted to climb Mt. Everest, "Because it's there." Rhythm is there! Rhythm is everywhere. Our lives are driven to an enormous degree by the internal and external rhythms that are a fundamental part of life at every level.

Internal rhythms include heartbeat, breath rate, our circadian rhythms (internal biological patterns with a period of approximately 24 hours.), and the rhythms and patterns of our thoughts. These rhythms and patterns have a profound effect upon every aspect of our physical, mental and emotional lives.

External rhythms envelop us and effect us on many levels. These include the cycles of the day, the seasons, plant and animal cycles, and even the eons-long geological cycles. External rhythms also include the patterns of our actions that we create in our personal, family, community and professional lives. These patterns of action, these life rhythms, shape our lives in both positive and negative ways.

When we become aware of these internal and external rhythms, we take the first step in developing our ability to shape our responses to them into patterns that uplift us, focus us and empower us to take positive action... that is, to create life rhythms that help us live the lives we want to live.

We call these, "good habits". Of course, bad habits are those rhythms and patterns that keep us stuck in a groove that does not serve us. Again, when we recognize our bad habits, we take the first step in developing our innate ability to change them into good habits.

Humans long ago realized and acknowledged the profound impact that these rhythms of life have upon us. Throughout most of human history, survival depended upon working with, not fighting against, these rhythms. Hunting or gathering food at the wrong time of day, or without an effective group plan (a group rhythm), would not only be ineffective, but might also make people vulnerable to attack by predators. Creating group rhythms that interfered with the clan's ability to work together to survive would lead to the clan's demise. In today's high-tech world we are able to survive as individuals without an immediate dependence upon following the life rhythms that so dominated the lives of our ancestors. For example, we can get food at any time of the year by going to a market.

But, we also pay a price for ignoring these rhythms. Stress-related diseases, environmental degradation, feelings of isolation, disconnected families, and the high level of anger, miscommunication and mistrust we see all around us, are all examples of what happens to people who ignore their internal and external rhythms.

We humans long ago discovered that we could tap into a fundamental rhythmic awareness by playing percussion instruments. Percussion playing has become one of humanity's universal activities because it helps us connect to, and shape, the rhythms of our lives.

Whether we play percussion by ourselves or in a group, the core principles involved are the same core principles of living a productive life: intention, focus, perseverance and celebration. These principles are reinforced by the experience of playing percussion instruments.

These principles are the foundation for creating positive, powerful Life Rhythms!