

Holding Space For Yourself Isn't Selfish Or Wrong, But Necessary

[BY CAROLYN RIKER](#)

What is stress telling us?

We juggle and multitask and wipe up real and metaphorical spills while being placed on hold to antiquated tinny music.

We answer texts and messages while simultaneously making breakfast, and pouring coffee, while sweet honey soaks over our oatmeal.

Mountains of laundry vie for our eye and the weeds grow and grow and grow. The everyday demands of self and others can feel endless:

“Where are the band aids? MOM, the cat is in the dryer! Is my favorite shirt washed? I think my tongue is swollen. I'm hungry. When is dinner? Do I have to go to school? I have a flat tire. What happened to my binder, shoes, cat, and soccer ball? I thought I left you a note because I need the car too!”

Morning becomes night, and the email's sharp blue-glow rests waiting to be opened. We instinctively start to triage. What is most important? Who needs more and sometimes more and more?

However we might start to ask, “What and where our limit is?”

Combine all of this with the world's outcry and ache for justice. Where equality is not seen or heard and sexism, racism, homophobic and anti-Semitism trumps loudly. Justice screams from behind the orange pale of closed eyes and sleep may evade us: *if only we could do more.*

On the downside, when all the stressors start to pile up, we snap or collapse. One more query is one-too-many and that last person may get the full throttle of our mighty – or tears, or cold shoulder. We've overstretched our ability to give and give and give. The well of our sensibilities and kindness are shaken empty.

Too often we forget to take care of ourselves. Pushing our needs down, down, down because we are the only one handling it all, all, all. We turn the key and go, go, go. We tentatively try the word no and stop but that's not always enough. Sometimes we need to voice a stronger, 'No more!'

These overstimulating, constant and demanding situations, are a built-in warning system and can lead us to find flat spaces of refuge, or a ledge to scream: 'Leave me the f*ck alone!'

I'm reminded of Rainer Maria Rilke's words, "I hold this to be the highest task for a bond between two people; that each protects the solitude of the other."

And yet many of us don't have someone to support us and protect our solitude. Therefore we have to strengthen our own resolve – our own inner self-solitude – and fiercely protect it.

Our various roles often morph into infinity. Be it parenting, divorcing, partnering, soloing, and paying bills, caretaking, working and too often ignoring what makes life meaningful, soulful and joyful. That butterfly flutter inside of our heart that sings with passions and knows – THIS is it. I must do x and y to also find the space to rejuvenate and listen to the answers inside.

With practice, we can recognize the signs of our daily-grind and exhaustion and set boundaries to protect that much needed solitude to kindle our creative juices. This is a place of honoring our soul and spirit. The same place that is signalling to us, a more sustainable practice of self-care.

Practice what you preach to others: Take time for yourself. Carve out patches of listening to music and reading, and writing. Naps lifts the edges when our eyes can no longer blink. Walk your favorite path. Sip that espresso. Curl into a pillow. Make Netflix a verb and watch the silliest and simplest to create spaciousness that will fertilize a mindless meadow. It helps to relax even for a tiny bit.

Less is more: Let go of the clutter. Bag by bag. Week by week. Gather the unused and misused accumulation of clutter. Empty one drawer. Dust off one shelf. Donate those shoes that pinch and the ones with the heels or the flats that don't support and the six sizes of clothes you hope you'll morph into (or not) – someday.

Minimizing gives room to breathe and the clear, clean edges of solitude will echo.

Try something new or revisit something old: Do you have a passion? Want to take that writing course? Begin a blog? Take a photography class? Paint a scene? Paint a room? Relocate? Change jobs? How about gardening? Quilting? Volunteer. Read to a child. Visit a nursing home. Sing. Dance. Meditate.

Take social media breaks: Social media is on constant chatter mode and it can become exhausting to sort and hear and assimilate. Even moreso if you are highly sensitive. The streams of word-picture-stories flow and vibrate with feelings and moods of other people. Have you ever felt some Facebook walls scream? It can be a violence to our souls. Step back and take a walk through a book. Write a poem. Bake a batch of cookies. Sip tea. Or take 5 and do nothing. Nothing at all.

Just be.

Take breaks: There are days that breaks are next to impossible but even 5-10 minutes of closing your eyes can help. Daydreaming is divine. Turning off one's cellphone. Announcing, "This is my quiet time." Protect it wholly to keep you holy.

Set your 'business' hours and downtime too: More and more people are self-employed and this leads some to believe you are available all-the-time. That's not true. By setting our hours and keeping them clear is healthy. Teaching and modeling boundaries is essential. Setting limits on self and others, is a practiced skill. It helps to prevent exhaustion and burnout. With all honesty there's only so much one person can do.

And so I sit here clicking away and it's all misty and grey and crisp in the Pacific Northwest. I don't feel as rushed. My home is still quiet. The fence outside glistens with a blanket of moss. Even the birds are unusually silent. I'm holding space for myself and it is not one bit selfish or wrong. It is necessity for me to carry on.

For more self-study, [The Urban Howl](#) recommends [The Universe Has Your Back: Transform Fear to Faith](#) .

Sip a little more:

I Don't Know (But I Really Do)

"When we are asleep
in this world, we are
awake in another."

- Salvador Dali

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