

Yoga and Self-care

I'm right in the middle of reading a brilliant book called 'Your path is everywhere' by Matt Licata. He encourages those on the spiritual path not to consider themselves as one big never ending '*self improvement*' project but to be authentic to the full glory of the mess and the magic of our lives.

It is easy to slip down the obsessive healing /fixing/transforming rabbit hole when surrounded by commercial yoga products and services that promise a long list of mental, emotional and physical benefits. It's not that there are no benefits from yoga or spiritual practices, but rather it is that we have to hold these things lightly so we don't get strangled by a demand to move away from any negative experience and be filled only with light and love.

Self-care can sometimes be a term that is highjacked in the same manner; just another demand to be free and joyful, rather than to allow myself to feel just what I feel. So, in an attempt to set the record straight and shrug off this unhelpful association, here are some of my thoughts on self-care.

It Starts with Making Space

Most people have busy lives, full of connecting and looking after other people, responsibilities, work and things that fall into the 'have to do but don't really want to do' category. There is an unending stream of doing, punctuated with sleep and occasionally a spot of just being.

In the noise of all this eternal doing, my sense of how I am and what I need to look after myself (self-care) gets rather trampled. Even my attempts at self-care can end up as more to-dos if I'm not careful. For me the simplicity of a bit of time and space is vital. This is often not a big retreat or holiday; sometimes it is 10 minutes of quiet before bed or first thing in the morning.

Thinking Small

I love something grand and luxurious just as much as the next person, but actually looking after myself can also be about simple bitesize support. When I was recently experiencing a tough time, a wise friend of mine said *“look for the smallest of pleasures today and savour them”*. She was right – can I stand and enjoy the sensation of warmth from a cup of tea or notice the way the little Robin wobbles and dances around protecting its territory? Sometimes I want to really explore my internal landscape in quiet, sometimes there is a need to express in writing, singing or art and sometimes I need to escape into the magical world of books.

Releasing judgement

It is not a selfish act to look after myself. Sometimes I have to repeat that to myself a few times. Particularly if we have caring responsibilities for others, it is easy to feel that you should spend your energy and time on that. But everyone needs a break.

More often than not after taking this time, I am able to show up more for those who need me. As one NHS worker staying at the Ashram commented recently; *“when I do my yoga practice in the morning I am so much more present to the clients I see that day”*. See if you can notice if there is a negative judgement when you are doing things for yourself and explore that.

Mandala Yoga Ashram www.mandalayogaashram.com is running its first ever *‘Restore, replenish and renew’* retreat in late February where there will be a feeling of creating space and time for yourself. We will be exploring some of the theme from this blog and supporting participants to create their own realistic plans for introducing more self-care to their lives over the next year.