

Resting in Your Heart

How are you doing as autumn begins to roll in? How much time have you spent recently just resting in your loving heart? In modern societies, we place an awful lot of emphasis on smart, logical thinking. We all tend to value IQ far more highly than EQ (Emotional Quotient). But many spiritual teachers emphasise the crucial importance of connecting to the intuitive intelligence and infinite, non-judgemental compassion of our own loving heart. This key spiritual advice hit home with me recently as Gloria and I spent a few days in Assisi meditating with Ruth and Bruce Davis who run Simple Peace Retreats, a great non-profit organisation offering spiritual retreats in Assisi and California.

Bruce gave a short talk each morning and each day he emphasised that true meditation was all about centring in the softness of our own heart. This really struck a chord with me. Mindfully slowing down and watching our breath or our thoughts for a while is a great way to counteract the endless stress of living in our hyperactive, crazy modern world. However, if we yearn to find the true meaning of life, or if we long to dwell constantly in an unchanging, unshakable, inner peace, we need to go deeper and connect over and over again to the silent, compassionate wisdom of our heart.

If you simply pause for a while and observe what is going on inside your head, you will notice that from the minute you wake up in the morning to the minute you fall asleep at night, a constant stream of thoughts pours uninvited through your mind. These endless thoughts are predominantly negative and so they almost constantly create stressful energy that then keeps flooding through your whole body. This stressful energy can eventually make you seriously ill (If you do not believe me please read the brilliant book *When Your Body Says No* by Gabor Maté).

Listening all day long to fearful 'What if?' thoughts or angry 'That is outrageous!' thoughts is now known to be incredibly bad for your long-term well-being. Unfortunately, however much we try to do so, it is almost impossible to block out this constant stream of polluting inner chatter.

The best way I know to counteract all this extremely unhealthy inner dialogue is to spend a little time each day simply resting in my heart. So this month, I invite you to join me in this simple but life-transforming daily practice. This really will not take up a lot of your precious time. All you have to do is pause whatever you are doing maybe once every hour. Then, soften around any tense parts of your body, but in particular your jaw, your shoulders, your hands and your solar plexus. Next, place your palms gently around your heart. Then, just take four or five deep, slow, calming breaths as you imagine your heart softening and opening like a tight flower bud uncurling in bright sunlight. As you do all of this, smile warmly to yourself, particularly if you are feeling anxious, irritated or depressed.

Now that does not sound complicated or too time consuming does it? But from my own experience, these days, we are so busy thinking and doing that we completely

forget that we desperately need to take a quick break from our thoughts and frantic activities. Whilst I was on retreat in Assisi last week, I got high in the wonderful spiritual energy that permeates the air there and so I found it really easy to pause several times an hour to soften my body and rest in my loving heart just for a moment or two. But since I have been home and Gloria and I have been going through the trauma of her breaking her wrist, I keep forgetting to pause and connect to my heart. I am still caught up a lot of the time in a load of negative thinking such as, 'Why was A&E such a hell hole?' and 'Why do I feel so tired all of the time?' I know 100 percent that I need to keep pausing to connect to the restorative energy of my own heart, but when life is challenging, it is so easy to forget everything we know about how to look after ourselves on the deepest of levels.

It is so easy to drown in more or less constant anxiety or constant anger because we are living in a crazy world that just seems to get crazier and crazier by the minute. Now we certainly cannot magic our world into a peaceful, rationale, loving planet. However, we can at least begin to take some responsibility for our own unhelpful reactions to the world around us. For example, whenever we notice that we are tempted to add another wave of anger or fear to an already incensed and terrified collective consciousness, we can remind ourselves that we can help ourselves and others by pausing and simply centring in our infinitely compassionate, soft heart for just a moment or two.

If this month, you go for days without remembering to do something like this to restore your inner peace and joy - no big deal! On no account, beat yourself up if you keep getting lost in the craziness of life on Planet Earth – we all do. Guilt gets you nowhere in this world, so please never feel guilty for not always engaging in activities that enhance your own well-being and the well-being of others.

This month, please just love yourself unconditionally come what may. In particular, love the part of you that really resists engaging regularly in activities that promote your health and well-being. One day, you may well decide that you have suffered enough and that it is time to do at least something to rise above all the fear and anger in this world. Then eventually, if you keep mindfully choosing love over fear in most circumstances, you will come to rest more and more often in a deep, quiet well of pure love and peace that is already waiting for you within your own heart. You will then have begun to master the highly complex art of living peacefully and joyfully in this world without becoming more or less constantly overwhelmed by all of its madness.

Peggy Foster
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