

Give Yourself a Break!

As I write this message, I am still full of sunshine energy after going for a really refreshing walk in Dunham Massey Park in Cheshire. Have you treated yourself to a sunshine break recently, or have you been too busy?

How good at you at saying 'No.' when you are overloaded with things to do? How often do you listen to your body when it tells you that it needs a rest?

In our modern, hyperactive world, we all seem to be addicted to constant 'doing'. We think that everything has to be done today – or even sooner. In the olden days, people waited weeks for a letter to arrive from abroad for example, but now, we can instantly communicate with someone on the other side of the world. In one sense this is fantastic! My adoptive mother was American and she was really homesick when she lived in the UK in the 1950s and 60s because she basically lost touch with all her American friends and relatives. I clearly remember as a small child the excitement in our family as we waited for a once a year Christmas phone call from the USA – once a year! Now Gloria rings home to the States whenever she wants to do so, and it even costs her absolutely nothing thanks to our special phone deal.

But we all pay a big price for all of this instant communication, unless we become supremely mindful and resist the big temptation to think that everything has to be done immediately. Because we can connect to the internet all day and night long, we become addicted to over-exciting our brain. We tend to watch bad news constantly and then wonder why we feel slightly anxious – or worse-virtually all of the time.

When I was on retreat with Jason Chan over Easter, I was actually pretty busy, but I did not hear any news about the world for a whole week and I noticed that my mind felt far more peaceful without being bombarded by fearful news day in and day out. So, I know it is hard to do, but please think about taking a short break from the news for maybe a whole day or even a week. I think you will be surprised to notice how relaxing that break can be.

Another aspect of taking a break that I want to share with you this month is the art of saying no to all activities that do not make your heart sing –or at least saying no to those tasks that really make your heart sink. Many of us have been brought up to believe that we should put others' needs above our own. But in my experience, when we help others primarily because we have been guilt-tripped into doing so –either by the person we are helping, or our own conscience - we actually do not do a very good job of being truly helpful. Our resentment towards the person we are helping tends to spill out and pollutes our relationship with them.

For example, when I was a young woman, my adoptive father was needily attached to me and was always asking me when I was going to go home to see him. But then, because I only went home to see him because he guilt-tripped me so much, I really resented him and even said very unkind things to him from time to time in a vain attempt to push him away.

Now, I am so much better, although by no means perfect, at saying no to requests for help that do not sit right with me. I have noticed that I no longer feel the need to say nasty things to anyone to try and push them away. I am so grateful to one of my first meditation teachers, Elisabeth Mellor,

who taught me the art of saying a firm 'No' to any request for my help that I was really reluctant to give. Not only did she really encourage me to practise saying 'No', she also taught me not to then slip into a long, apologetic spiel about why I could not do what someone was asking me to do. She advised me to stick to, 'I am sorry that's just not convenient for me.' because the other person has no come back to this strong assertive statement. Whereas, if you say something like, 'I am so sorry, but I am really busy tomorrow taking my grandchildren to the dentist.' the other person will come back with, 'No problem. You can do it the next day.'

At first, when you say no to a request for your help, you will probably feel really uncomfortable. But I promise you that you will get used to it. Then, you can become a truly helpful person in this world. You will always help others with love in your heart, rather than any kind of fear or resentment. In this way, you will spread real joy wherever you go, rather than a fake kind of concern for others.

So there are two very different ways to take a break: stop listening or watching bad news and say no to requests for your help which are going to push you into helping overload.

The third way to take a break is so simple - and yet I see so many stressed individuals in our crazily busy society that never do it – rest when your body is tired!! Now I know that I am blessed not to have to get up early to go to work every morning, but I see plenty of retired people who still seem to be incredibly busy bees. They buzz around day after day and hardly ever seem to take a well-earned rest. But if we do not listen to our bodies when they are telling us they need a rest, they may well force us to listen to them by becoming so sick or injured that we just have to stop everything we think we really need to do for a while.

I would much rather rest as soon as my body tells me it is tired than wait until it is shouting at me in real pain or distress. After one of Jason Chan's intense, but miraculous, retreats I quite often sleep 9, or even 10, hours a night for a while to re-balance my physical body and my energy system. Now I know that many people just cannot sleep for that long, but everyone can lie down on the sofa and completely rest for an hour or so.

Please do not tell me that you never have the time to do this. We all have the same 24 hours a day and we are not slaves. If you are choosing to look after others 24/7, or choosing to fill every minute of your time with tiring activities, without ever giving yourself a proper break, that is *your* choice, even though I know it probably does not feel like it to you. So please, this month at least, choose to look after yourself and give yourself some kind of restorative break, if only for an hour every now and then. I can absolutely guarantee that you will feel so much better if you do this and that you will still get everything done that really needs to be done.

Peggy Foster
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