

## Chapter Four

# THE FOURTH SACRED RESPONSIBILITY: COLLABORATE

*I can promise you that women working together—linked, informed and educated—can bring peace and prosperity to this forsaken planet.*

*—Isabel Allende*

**H**aving help, getting help, asking for help, and accepting help are all the empowering practices of someone who knows Collaboration as a Sacred Responsibility. There are three aspects to collaboration I have observed so far.

First, there is the collaboration that happens when we consciously step into the role of Collaborator, to help or serve another.

Second, when we accept or encourage another to work with us or help us.

The third collaboration reveals itself in the natural world, like the collaboration between the moon and the tides, between seed and soil, and between the trillions of cells in our bodies working together so that we may thrive. Over 35 trillion cells in our body, and one of the greatest examples of collaboration of all times!

There is collaboration everywhere and we need it to survive as well as thrive. We are a collaboration of fiery and fabulous women walking a sacred path together, each one of us contributing to the universal collaboration in our authentic and unique way.

### **Sacred Reciprocity: a fancy term for collaboration**

I call the great collaboration in the cycles of giving and receiving Sacred Reciprocity. This Sacred Reciprocity is found in our breath. On the inhale we receive, on the exhale we give. It can be found during our exchanges in conversations where we find the best conversations have an uplifting quality that comes from a balance of listening and speaking. We find Sacred Reciprocity in our relationships where all people are respected and the exchange of loving duties to the relationships are shared equally.

Sacred Reciprocity does not mean a 50/50 equal split on everything, although it does ride the middle path in that way. As we are needed to support each other we will find that sometimes we are giving more and receiving less, and sometimes we receive more and give less. There is an ebb and flow as we move through life, give support and receive support.

It is crucial for our energy levels to be well maintained and that we keep Sacred Reciprocity at the front of our hearts and minds. As you have begun cultivating your Self-Care practices, you will be better able to see the dance and the balance of sacred reciprocity in your lives and use your observations to serve your own energy levels with respect.

We are now experimenting with keeping our energy at the healthiest levels possible, and this is dependent on how balanced the energy in and energy out is in our lives. When we find that people, places or things increase our vitality, being in those situations is like filling up our energy bank account; it is a collaboration of energies swimming in sacred reciprocity. We now go to the places, and do the things with the most supportive people that increase our energy levels because we understand that it is our level of energy propelling us forward or holding us back.

### **Together we are stronger**

It is not a symbol of strength to avoid asking for support or to work together and saying you don't want to bother anyone, or you don't need anyone's help, you are just fine on your own; if you want it done right you might as well do it yourself, or any other BS excuse you tell yourself not to trust and enjoy collaboration.

We simply do not survive without each other and we most certainly do not thrive as a species alone. Both our health and happiness are compromised when we lack community and connection. All things in nature are in an integrated cycle and we know that we are not separate from nature. We are set up, or hardwired if you will, for connection.

On a recent radio program, they were discussing how more and more people are dying from loneliness. Just let that land for a moment. What is going on in a world populated with billions of people and we are dying of loneliness? When I heard this news, I felt heartbroken and I began to wonder how this could be—and frankly I began to watch my own behavior more closely.

Was I the best neighbour I could be? Did I spend the time to hear the older lady from the fifth floor of my building telling me her snippets of news gathered from her morning walk? I wanted to know if I actually left people feeling like a caring connection had been made when we crossed paths.

Did I hold a door, or take a caring pause, and actually look someone in the eye when I said hello as we passed in the hallway? Was I too busy, or too late, or too darn important for someone? Were my grocery bags too heavy to stand and listen to someone for a few moments? Was the weight of my apples and carrots more important than a human interaction?

I began to observe myself and I found I had an opportunity to change a little. To slow down a little. What I discovered is that I was a pretty good neighbour. But to be a great neighbour I was going to have to up my game! So, I began to leave my apartment a bit earlier than necessary, so that if I ran into someone on my way to the car, I could relax and enjoy an extended hello or listen to a story or two from one of the older folks in the building.

To be perfectly honest, I have no idea if my self-inquiry is helping anyone feel any less lonely, but I don't need to have an endgame or an equal exchange here. I don't need to know anything other than I took a piece of information that affected my heart and I found a way to accept responsibility in a way that made sense to me, and in a way that I could truly act as a change-maker in my own life.

It is our mistake to believe we can't make a difference unless we are part of a more elaborate activity like a march, a rally, or a protest. Ladies - attend them, attend them in great numbers, but also join forces close to home.

### **In the beginning, there was collaboration**

From conception to exiting this life, we make connections with one another. Let's take it from the top and look at pre-conception, as a couple makes the decision to collaborate on bringing a child into the world, then the reciprocal relationship between mother and growing baby. Between the expectant parents during pregnancy. There is collaboration in raising the child, not only from the parents but from the extended family of grandparents, aunties, uncles, brothers and sisters. It extends out into the community as friends and neighbours all contribute to the wellbeing of our families. Straight up, it takes a village to raise a child and it takes collaboration.

As we begin to really understand that collaboration is everywhere and integral for us to thrive, we can start viewing the world from this perspective. From this viewpoint we now act and live as if everyone is on our team, and we feel it. Feeling it is key to thriving in our connections and it is the part we have to practice most, to truly feel ourselves as part of a whole. Part of the wholeness of life. This is the part where we start to understand in our hearts and minds that indeed we are part of something greater than simply our individual journey. That is highly respected also, but now we have an expanded understanding of our contribution to the greater collaboration of life.

### **Collaborating in relationships as a sacred woman**

We are on a journey of Self-Care, Knowing our Self, Self-Inquiry and Self-Discovery. That is a whole lot of focus on our self, and none of it is selfish until we stop collaborating with others. It is a fine art to shift into our third act and support everyone around us during our own process of renewal and, dare I say it, the thing we all resist most: change. And, as if it is not hard enough coming to terms with our own change, we need to manage the changes in those who are closest to us, too.

If we position ourselves to be on top of, or above others we will inevitably exhaust ourselves building that platform alone. Yes, we want to continually elevate in our levels of joy, gratitude, and creativity, but we take others with us through inspiration, cooperation and collaboration. You will be at the top of your game, this I can assure you, and you will have arrived there by way of your practices, and celebration of all who collaborated with you on your journey. You will not have gotten to the top of your game without the collaboration of like-hearted people who stood beside you, who related to you at pivotal times, who celebrated, loved, and believed in you.

We also give great thanks to the ones who didn't stand beside us when we needed them: the one person we held closest to us who we thought failed us when we needed the most intimacy and support; the ones we needed to be more courageous than we were able to be at a particular time in our lives. It is here that these people from my life are honoured. As you read this, feel it apply to you and those in your life with whom you have a similar experience.

Thank you to those who have distracted me, pulled me off course, put me down, and tried to dim my light. I have learned so much from each of you about self-respect, keeping myself safe, and raising myself up at my lowest points. You have all been a sacred gift to my resilience. I am grateful for your short, but lesson-filled, time in my life. May your journey be blessed.

These people are a rich part of our life's tapestry and the sooner we release our disappointment in them or ourselves for choosing those relationships in the first place the sooner we can thrive in the

wisdom that came from our experiences with them. Many times, those are the exact relationships that make us fight for our own happiness, respect and freedom to thrive joyously in our lives.

The next time you find yourself talking or thinking about those who disappointed you or judging yourself for letting those people close to you, flip the script and take sacred responsibility for your happiness.

Write down one thing (or many) that you learned from that particular relationship. If you are not able to write when those thoughts surface, then take your three Magical Moment breaths and allow one thing you can identify as wisdom to come into your mind. Sometimes the wisdom is, “I now know how I don’t want to be treated.”

Whatever the wisdom is in that moment, name it, then send it from your mind to your heart. Let the wisdom leave an imprint on your heart and set free the disappointment you have been hosting in your mind, if only for a moment. Do this as often as the need arises. This is a collaboration of the heart and mind for your freedom from attachment and, therefore, suffering.

This is an ongoing practice and, believe me, finding the wisdom in our places of pain can be like finding a needle in a haystack most times. But what we have now, ladies, is the power of being in our third act. There is something special that moves into us at this time of our lives, a new level of strength, a more flexible foundation. Perhaps it is the desire to enjoy our lives more fully than ever before, or it is the maturity of our minds or the wild fire burning in our hearts that seem to ‘burn off’ the burden of carrying disappointment. Whatever it is, it is in service to us now and we will receive it with open arms. Bring on forgiveness! Bring on letting go of all the things that no longer serve our greater good! Bring on collaboration with freedom!

### **Life Cycles and Collaboration**

Consider the ways you see cycles unfolding in your life. Understand in your bones that all things have a cycle. The cycle that takes us from one day to the next, morning, noon, night and the dreamtime. The human cycle of birth and death each one of us is on the path of right now. The birth and death cycles of plants and animals. The cycles of the seasons throughout the year.

Really begin to see all the places our lives are informed by cycles as part of your natural day to day observance. Acknowledging these cycles we all live with is a powerful way of deepening our appreciation for our own lives, as well as our connection to the natural world. Start to see the cycles in everything around you and honour that everything has both a beginning and an end, as well as a rich space of experiences that goes on between the two, including the journey of your own life.

Having conversations about the cycle of birth and death for most of us is often like someone tossed a hot potato into the room, but it is a fascinating topic regarding knowing ourselves. For just a moment, take a few breaths and think about your response to the cycle of birth and death. What comes to your mind as you sit considering the flow of the cycles in your life and the lives of others close to you?

How comfortable are you discussing life and death? How frank and relaxed are you when you find yourself in a conversation about death? How responsible would you say you are around your own after-life arrangements? Will you donate your beautiful organs when you pass? Have you talked with loved ones about your wishes when your life is complete? As the wise women in our circles, it will

most likely be us taking the lead in conversations, like this and mentoring others on the natural cycles of life and the plain old facts of being in these fabulous human bodies.

On a scale of 1-10 circle how comfortable are you with the conversation of death with #1 being “I can’t bear to think about it” and #10 being “I feel fully at peace with this part of the life cycle.”

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

There is no right or wrong answer, just simply identifying where we are at this particular moment in connection and collaboration with the natural cycles of life.

My dear teacher and mentor of Toltec wisdom, HeatherAsh Amara speaks to this in her book, *Warrior Goddess Training: Becoming the Woman You Are Meant to Be*. In her section on Cyclical Living she says it beautifully.

*When we align with life, we choose to align with all of life, not just the parts we like or are comfortable with—and not just when everything goes our way. Aligning with life means truly knowing and accepting that aging, death, sickness, natural disasters, accidents, humans and their wacky ways—all these things are bound to alter our course. Aligning with life means understanding that you cannot control the cycles of nature.*

Links to HeatherAsh Amara’s website and contact info are in the resources section. All of her books are considered recommended reading for fiery and fabulous women!

Know that you are supported by the flow of foundational living. This is where we build foundations in the areas of our lives that most support our vitality and our ability to thrive. Continue building foundations in your relationships as this is our cornerstone of collaboration as a sacred responsibility. Allow yourself to build a strong foundation of understanding on how you relate to this world and its cycles and let it be a guiding light.

Collaboration also touches the we-are-one perspective. We are all connected, yes, we are individuals, yes, but we are each a thread on the grand tapestry of life. Allow your thread to be strong, pliable and resilient. In a world of collaboration, we can liberate ourselves from separation consciousness, loneliness, and isolation as we trust ourselves to work together lovingly in deep relationship to everything that is conspiring to support us. The quality of our life is directly related to the quality of our relationships and collaboration is the key.

## **Our Fourth Sacred Practice**

### ***Our Daily Statement***

*Today I open myself fully to living a sacred life, I call in now the people, places and things that lift me up, light me up and hold me up as the accountable, responsible and authentic woman I am here to be. And so it is.*

## **The Collaborate Imagination Practice (Imagining/Thoughts)**

Today we are cultivating a daily practice of non-harming as we honour the Sacred Responsibility of Collaboration. We have a day where there is nothing we do that harms another being, including ourselves of course. Our thoughts, words, and actions are in harmony with collaboration and *Abimsa* the yogic principle of non-harming.

This exercise begins with our imagination setting the stage and we carry it out into our physical day. A collaboration of imagination and present moment action.

Imagine now that you are observing yourself go about your day as you normally would.

Imagine you are observing a day in your own life from a few feet above your body.

Imagine you are out of your body and in your sweet soul, hovering gently over you, observing and guiding you, as you move through your day of non-harming.

Imagine observing yourself wake up and stretch and then make your way to wash your face and brush your teeth.

Imagine observing your interaction with yourself in the mirror, how you interact with the water and imagine yourself in such gratitude for all that you have in this moment.

Imagine yourself going about your day, interacting with people, animals, plants and the elements, all from a place of non-harming.

Imagine a full day of non-harming from the time you wake up to the time you lay your head down on your pillow. Just walk yourself through an imaginary day of non-harming as you go.

Take as long as you like to visualize that everywhere you go and everything you do is coming from a place of ease, peace, joy, and no harm.

Like all of our imagination practices, they are never over when we think we are finished. This is part of the brilliance of imagining and visualizing; it is like dropping a pebble in a pond, these practices continue to ripple out into our day. You will find yourself connecting with non-harming as you make choices, observe your thoughts, words, and actions and even those of others you interact with. Hold your ground on your practice of non-harming.

If you find yourself up against a situation where you are unsure of how to respond, ask yourself the three questions of a conscious, caring person.

Will this harm me?

Will this harm someone else?

Will this harm my environment?

Observe how deeply you can celebrate your day of non-harming. Have reverence for all of the living things around you, and keeping your connection to the natural world in the forefront of this practice.

It relaxes the nervous system to be kind, and it will agitate the nervous system to act in ways that are unkind, and agitation is for washing machines, not our hearts.

## **The Collaborate Breathing Practice (Breathing/Words)**

Our breathing practice is a collaboration between breath and imagination.

Begin to settle into your natural breathing pattern of inhale, retain, exhale, and pause.

Get centred in your body, bringing your awareness to the physical centre of your body, wherever that is for you. Maybe it's your heart centre, maybe the solar plexus, maybe low in your belly. Find the space that feels like centre for you today.

Imagine that you are being mentored on collaboration by the cycles of the day.

See yourself waking up as the sun begins to rise.

Begin to imagine now that you are in collaboration with everyone and everything in your life.

Imagine yourself as you prepare your first meal of the day.

Imagine how all the ingredients collaborate to create an incredible taste experience.

Imagine now how the beautiful fresh water you have filled the kettle with is in collaboration with the bubbles dancing within as your tea water boils.

Imagine your gratitude for the collaboration between boiling water and kettle.

Continue to imagine collaboration between the hot water and the tea leaves you are steeping.

Looking deeper at the collaboration of mixed plants that created your morning tea.

The collaboration between cup and handle, handle and hand, hand and fingers.

Begin to deeply experience collaboration and the gratitude that comes when you experience all of the things that support you on your journey of collaboration.

Continue to imagine all the ways you are supported by the nature of collaboration in your day.

Imagine yourself walking out of your home and responding to the collaboration between feet and the ground as you walk, feet connecting, ground supporting.

Notice the collaboration between foot and shoe, between shoe and laces, and so on.

In a practice of observing collaboration from the tiniest of possibilities to the largest possibilities, we begin to increase our levels of rich appreciation for all of the many ways we are supported by a symphony of collaboration. Even honouring each muscle in our face collaborating to produce our beautiful smile.

Allow your imagination practice to come and go in your mind naturally throughout your day. Continuing to observe collaboration all around you, finding yourself in a collaborative flow where there is space for everyone and everything to support each other. As we keep an open-hearted connection to collaboration, it becomes nearly impossible to see ourselves as separate from the natural world or alone in this world.

## **The Collaborate Physical Practice**

### **(Physical/Actions)**

This exercise is a collaboration of flow, strength, balance, movement, and breath. This exercise is meant to be done standing, yet can be done in a seated position by simply engaging in the upper body portion of the exercise.

Stand with your feet comfortably wide apart, much wider than hip width while maintaining stability for this practice.

Toes slightly turned out, your knees and toes will go in the same direction.

Now go ahead and drop into your seat. As if you were sitting on an invisible chair.

Knees bend as little or as much as is comfortable for this wide leg squat.

As you get stronger you can squat deeper.

Take your hands to your heart in prayer position.

Breathe deeply and feel the strength in your body, starting with the connection of your feet to the earth.

Stay in this position for a few breaths.

Beginning your collaboration with balance, focus, and strength.

Taking a deep breath now, inhale.

As you exhale your right hand will cross your body pressing your palm towards the left.

Inhale bring your hand back to prayer position at your heart.

Exhale left hand crosses your body pressing your palm towards the right.

Inhale bring your left hand back to your heart.

Exhale and reach your right hand across your body pressing as far as you can go.

Inhale right hand comes back to prayer position.

Exhale left hand crosses the body pressing as far as you can go.

Matching your breath and your movement as a collaboration.

Continue and do as many as you're comfortable with, eventually working yourself up to three sets of eight, or as many as you love.