

THE FIRST SACRED RESPONSIBILITY: SELF-CARE

Good health is not just an absence of symptoms; it's the presence of high energy, endless stamina, creative intelligence, an interest in work, and a peaceable disposition.

—Penny Kelly

I know, who has time for self-care these days right? We have filled our lives to the brim, and if that is not enough, we cruise the real estate sites and vacation sites looking for the next big trip, that dream home, that thing to run to or distract us from being present to our own self-care responsibilities. The first item on the agenda is to dissolve the illusion of Self-Care as Selfishness.

Dissolving the Illusion of Self-Care as Selfishness

Self-care will look vastly different for all of us.

Self-Care is the First Sacred Responsibility and it is the most difficult one to fully embrace, especially for women. It is the one Sacred Responsibility that will push our buttons and the buttons of those closest to us. We need to reprogram our mindset to include moments throughout our day where we fully acknowledge and embrace doing something good for us without judgment.

When we prioritize self-love, our Self-Care practices are done with reverence and we are inspired to love and care for ourselves. This means we do not need to make up an excuse to do the things that increase our vitality.

It means being true to the activities that lift us up and being truthful with ourselves around the activities that deplete us. Sometimes that will mean saying no to invitations that decrease our energy and yes to staying in with our feet up reading a great book. Or, saying no thanks to an evening of sitting around rehashing the same old dusty conversations and instead going out dancing.

The simple self-care protocol directs us to fully experience the self-care we are giving ourselves. This means that when we pause for three sweet deep breaths we no longer push through them like a task. Oh no, sisters, we luxuriate in those three breaths, we breathe sensuality into our cells as we breathe with our full presence to our own self-care.

Interestingly enough, when we do things that are good for *us* everyone benefits. Our families and communities benefit more from us when we come from a place where we are grounded in a solid foundation of self-respect, self-care and self-awareness. Everyone wins when we treat ourselves well and with loving-kindness. When we make our self-development an exciting activity it gives everyone around us permission to do the same, and it becomes contagious.

Having practices that support self-care, respect and love for life, and a commitment to taking responsibility for our happiness builds a solid foundation for getting our balance back when we are

hit with the unexpected. It also establishes an understanding of the importance of inner peace. I know that when the shit hits the fan we are not feeling so Zen. That's ok, dive in and feel it all fully. It is your shit hitting the fan, take responsibility for it, learn from it and grow in the process.

We now take Sacred Responsibility for our Self-Care by pioneering a new way of living. Living in an empowered mindset without believing the old programs like "if someone catches us caring for ourselves, that means we are not working hard enough". As we get honest with ourselves and embrace the things that increase our vitality, the old programs can begin to dissolve, but not until we truly understand that we are worthy of choosing self-care. In order to thrive in the First Sacred Responsibility of Self-Care we must end the belief that we need to give excuses for our choices to do the things that increase our energy and make us happy. No-one said we had to say yes to every great invitation we receive. Say no and use that time for Self-Care and your self-development.

Anyone who has flown on a commercial airplane knows that the safety rules tell us to put on our own oxygen mask, then put our child's mask on. This is direct and to the point; the rules tell us to look after ourselves first and others second. Mentally, I get it. Make sure we are strong and capable so that we are able to look after the more vulnerable in our lives. Emotionally, I'm not so sure about choosing myself over the child or Elder beside me. But what I *can* relate to, is this as a metaphor for day-to-day life. That if I commit to self-care now and maintain a certain level of health in my mind and body that if the time comes when I am in one of these situations I will be prepared and able to respond swiftly from a place of strength and clarity. Because I have been wearing my own oxygen mask all along.

Take three luxurious breaths and hold space for yourself to receive that it is ok to put yourself first right now.

Inhale, retain, exhale, pause....

Inhale, retain, exhale, pause....

Inhale, retain, exhale, pause....

What would it take to get inspired enough to put your self-care in a position of high priority in your daily life? To become personally inspired, to truly know Self-Care as a Sacred Responsibility. Does the Universe really need to take you out with a health issue or an injury for you to know that you are worthy of all the care you give out to others?

I hear it time and time again, women telling me how they were forced into self-care because of sickness or injury and this takes a little piece of my heart each time I hear their stories. What I do know is that things happen, we get sick and hurt whether it be heart, mind, or body, things happen. I also know that how we live our lives has a direct impact on how quickly or slowly we heal and bounce back from illness, injury and disappointment.

Living Large

As a thriving woman over fifty, I am not about to allow myself to miss out on the fullness of life and the fullness of life will, at times, include what it feels like to lose someone, to feel hurt in a situation and to feel a broken heart.

I am up for a rich life and all experiences, all emotions and all responses that are available to me and I am committed to being fully responsible to the ways I respond to the tough stuff in my life. Over my life I have learned that reacting is never as good for me as responding. I have also learned that it is a gift of self-love to allow myself to be honest, authentic and vulnerable and to stand up for those parts of myself. I have learned not to dim my light and my love of life even when I have been sucker-punched (metaphorically) by those I held closest to me.

I have learned that I am indeed resilient and that I will not do a disservice to the hard things in life by allowing myself to be happy. The truth is that happiness and upset can live just fine together. I do not need to cut happiness out of my life because I am experiencing something challenging; both can live harmoniously together. The trick is hitting the sweet spot where we allow for the experience without being all-consumed. Balance is found in that sweet spot, just like in a yoga posture.

I will be honest, my preference is a life of rainbows, butterflies, and dancing my ass off to loud music, but I know that it is *all* of my life experiences, great and not so great, that make me unique. It enables me to be an example for someone else to see that we are incredible, resilient and wonderful humans who get back up no matter how hard we have been knocked down. But in the end, the quality of our life and our experiences will depend on where we choose to focus our attention—on the pain or the joy.

The Story of the Two Wolves

This is a beautiful traditional story, passed down in slightly different variations but it is a story that continues to inspire me, so I share it here. With gratitude to the Indigenous Story Tellers of Turtle Island, if not for you I may have forgotten everything.

One evening a Cherokee Elder told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, “My son, the battle is between two wolves inside us all. It is a terrible fight between these two wolves. One is evil—he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.”

He continued, “The other is good—he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you—and inside every other person, too.”

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf will win?”

The Cherokee Elder simply replied, “The one you feed.”

Self-Care and having a plan

When you are in a place in your life where you feel you have not found a way to cope, it can be difficult to stay focused on self-care. We have all been there for one reason or another, many times. Yet here we are today creating our plan for living joyously with our past stresses behind us and in many cases forgotten completely.

We now have our practices and refreshed mindset, and taking sacred responsibility for our happiness every day is our bold move to build up our resilience and our coping skills.

We have a plan to thrive

Do not forget we have a plan. When we take responsibility for our emotional health as well as our physical and mental health we are hitting the holy trinity of living like our authentic human selves. I cannot stress this point enough—the simplicity of our practices is actually the path.

Even though all of us fiery and fabulous women over fifty are embarking on many creative projects that may feel like we are starting a new career with all the bells and whistles and late nights that our projects can take, *this* time around, we come at our second adult life from a place of simplicity. This new time in our life is indeed rich with activity, yet now we have released our need to attach stress to our activities. Now, we find ourselves actively creating without the stress program playing. This is one of the benefits of being over fifty!

We are fiery, fabulous and at peace with who we are. If you are not there yet, we have your back and we are getting there together. Our self-care practices include making choices for ourselves that are authentic for us at this time in our lives.

Go grey, burn your bra, get streaks, eat salads, drink bourbon, dance all night long, nap in the sunshine. Just be you. It is your time to be authentically you.

Self-Care as a Sacred Responsibility has just as much to do with the care of our body as it does with the care of our heart and mind. We tend to our self-care in a holistic way where we look at our whole life, including the environment we live in. Be ready, resilient and resourceful when it comes to Self-Care. Know what things bring you more energy and what things deplete your energy. This is a big part of where to begin for all of us; when immersed in Sacred Self-Care we find ourselves more often in the places that feel the best, with the people who treat us the best, doing the things that we love best. Every day we perform tiny devotional rituals, slowly restoring self-honour that in turn make powerful shifts in our lifestyle and personal attitude.

By choosing a new way of treating ourselves we ignite a new way of responding in our lives that is more authentic, more easeful, and more fun!

Our Self-Care and the needs of others

Part of being fiery and fabulous over fifty is that we are imbued with the gift of being capable of personal Self-Care *and* still having our antenna up for anyone we care about who needs us to care for them. We have many years under our belt of caring for other people, so it is easy to shift that kind of focus onto ourselves now, and still be available to shift our care expertise to someone close to us whenever they may be in need.

Even though we are enjoying putting the focus on us in this changing time in our lives, caring for others is like riding a bike for us and we don't have to forget others to tend to our own self-care. We can do both, because our practices are simple, powerful and takes just a few minutes a day. We have plenty of time for the days someone else is in need *and* we will be more grounded and helpful than we have been in the past when we are called upon.

“But I don't have time for self-care.”

I hear this often and I have even thought it. Then one day I hit the jackpot! A depth of understanding flooded over me, and I knew in my bones that when I get up and wash my face and brush my teeth I have immersed myself in Self-Care as a Sacred Responsibility.

I began to pay attention to this morning ritual, to treat it as a prayer of gratitude to start my day. I began to *feel* the moment of gratitude and appreciation for the day, for the fresh water and for my healthy teeth and my shiny eyes in the mirror. I began to be fully present to what I was doing each morning and that indeed I had been acting in Self-Care as a Sacred Responsibility all along! I realized that I could no longer honestly say, “I didn’t make time for any self-care today”, that I was fully immersed in it upon awakening.

This was a game changer for me. So, sisters, this is where it begins.

Today you start by honouring what you already do. I know you have a self-care practice already and I am happily going to expose you right now. Yes you, who gets up each morning and takes a few deep breaths and stretches even before you put your feet on the floor. When it is done with intent and mindfulness you have a morning yoga ritual in place already! You cat-stretch yourself in to the day, drawing in deeply on your inhale. This indeed is the way to start a day in self-care.

Or, you take a few minutes to journal your dreams and creative ideas in those first moments of wakefulness. You have a practice of self-care for your creativity! For those of us with creaking bodies and whose deep breaths are more moans as we hit the snooze button, you are not out of the spotlight of my exposing your current self-care practice either. Stumbling to the bathroom, you wash your face and brush your teeth preparing to present yourself to the day. You have a self-care practice.

If you are reading this book it is likely that you are blessed with clean water and a toothbrush. Start looking at that as a blessing and brushing your teeth as a self-care ritual.

We begin the road to re-establishing our connection to Self-Care by honoring what we are doing right now, and I mean truly honouring it.

From this moment forward each time you brush your teeth and wash your hands I’d like you to get into it like it is the best thing you could ever do for yourself. Stay present to the few moments it takes to perform the self-care ritual of brushing your teeth. Get to know the inside of your mouth, each tooth and your tongue. Get to know what is going on in there! This is the place that all your beautiful words flow from. It’s the place you speak your truth from, the place you taste nourishment from and most importantly this is the place you laugh from. Begin now to give it the honour and respect it deserves.

Visionary Barbra Marx Hubbard tells us, “your voice carries the great creative process in you”. With this in mind, tend to your brushing as if you are establishing your own artist’s palate. From here your most creative songs and stories can emerge and inspire.

The S Word

Stress. The World Health Organization has called stress the Global Health epidemic of the 21st century. Stress, and the amount of energy we give to stressful situations in our lives, will be a very important place to observe our responses.

It's true. Life can be messy at times and some days it will be more difficult than others to find our center. It requires approaching our stress in a way that allows for every possible stress-reduction tool to be considered. We don't have to be a victim of our stress. In some cases, a little stress can light our fire and get us moving and shaking things up. While we practice the techniques of stress management, we are taking Sacred Responsibility for our stress reduction through the Eight Sacred Responsibilities.

Let me remind you what they are so that you may read them slowly and let them sink into your awareness. Self-Care, Rise and Shine, Know Yourself, Collaborate, Honour your Intuition, Create and Play, Relax and Celebrate and Gratitude are all paths to a life where you are not operating from a place of high stress when it is not appropriate to be stressed. Remember we are building our resilience so that we become better able to re-establish balance for ourselves during challenge and change and the demands of life.

Stress is not only an issue when big life problems arise. It is the accumulated stress that sneaks up on us and can make us sick. Two excellent websites for those of you who would like to get a deeper understanding of how stress effects our lives, or the lives of those we care for, are both in the resource section at the back of the book. I highly recommend reading the website materials posted on both *The Alignment Project* and *Heart Math*.

A sample from the Alignment Project's web site:

Research shows that even one stressful situation promotes a cascade of over 1,400 biochemical changes in the body, producing harmful hormones like Cortisol and depleting our bodies of regenerative hormones, like DHEA, also known as the vitality hormone.

Pick your battles

Understanding this can be a very successful way to come back to center when overwhelmed with stress. We simply do not need to take on everything for everyone in every moment...we just don't. Find out what amount of your stress is self-inflicted and begin to gently undo yourself from overwhelm. One item at a time, one breath at a time. Do not let anyone rush you. Take full responsibility for any stress that you have chosen. We waste a lot of time blaming others when we have so much unnecessary stress we could liberate ourselves from. Breathe, realize, respond if even just with yourself.

Respond

Let your thoughts, words and actions be a response not a reaction. As we establish practices of stress reducing activities we begin to respond with deeper understanding of any situation where we are stressed. Reducing our levels of stress is a practice. In some situations, we are able to be the one who keeps calm and carries on, other days we are sure it's the worst day ever. Somewhere on the middle path lies the practice. Begin to pay attention to what the signals of stress are for you.

Heart Centered Listening

Sometimes the strength of a sacred woman can be mistaken for her not having problems, pains or heartaches. It is easy to not hear her when a strong woman is trying to say she is not coping, because she has been strong her whole life. As women of wisdom we cultivate our deep listening skills. We go inward and listen intently to our own inner voice. It is our responsibility to hear our own calling and our wise inner guidance for ourselves so that indeed we thrive. As we cultivate these listening skills by practicing on ourselves, we develop deeper listening skills for others. This focused listening is also known as Heart Centered listening. Practice being a deep listener, as listening is not passive at all, it is fully active. Did you know that the quality of your heart centered listening can calm the person speaking? We can defuse upset and calm each other when we practice heart centered listening with one another.

Inhale, retain, exhale and pause...Inhale, retain, exhale and pause...

Inhale, retain, exhale and pause... And listen...

(Listen and silent are made up of the exact same letters.)

Become Open to Possibilities

Become more open to the possibility of a stress-free day. We are here to live our lives fully and that includes stress free days, plenty of them! If we are stuck in an old idea that “life is stressful”, it will be more difficult to see the shiny stuff going on all around us. Remember Dr. Joe? If we can’t think greater than we feel right now, then we are thinking in the past.

Life can be stressful, and it can be peaceful and joyous, loving and downright hilarious. Life can be everything, so become open to other possibilities outside of stress.

Be mindful of your thoughts, words and actions as these are the foundations of how you communicate, these are the foundations of how you show up in the world.

Sleep, The Other S Word

If we don’t sleep well all our systems suffer. Most people are in their greatest state of rejuvenation from sleep when they get 7-8 hours per night. This changes with age, younger people need a little more, older people need a little less and each of us has our own sweet spot when it comes to a good night’s rest. We all know the difference of how we feel energized and clear minded when we are well rested, just as much as we know how sluggish and discombobulated we feel when we didn’t sleep well.

This is basic stuff, sisters, and it is serious stuff. Our body, mind and spirit all need sleep to thrive. When we sleep we are in a deep state of self-care, all of our organs rest, our mind rests, our body rests. We enter the dreamtime state where we can catch glimpses of stories from our own inner spirit world. This is a non-negotiable part of our self-care practice.

In Lesley Stahl’s article, *The Science of Sleep*, she writes that world-wide large-scale studies report a link between short deep sleep times and obesity, as well as heart disease, high blood pressure, and stroke. Lack of sleep impacts our appetite, our metabolism, our memory, and how we age. The link to her full article is in the resources section at the back of our book but her conclusion is that when we talk about diet and exercise as our healthy life combination it must include sleep.

I don't want to be downer here but let me conclude the note on sleep with this. Humans are the only ones who treat sleep deprivation as a badge of honour and brag about how much you can accomplish when you don't "waste time" on sleep. We were wrong on that one. Studies prove time and time again, that when we are sleep deprived, when our deep sleep state is interrupted, we get very sick. It is dangerous how deeply our ability to function is compromised. Know yourself, understand the right amount of deep sleep needed for you to be at your best each day. Sleep is a Sacred Responsibility of Self-Care, period.

A few tips on getting a good night's sleep.

Make yourself comfortable. For some of us, it might be time to replace our mattresses, pillows or bedding. Use the resources you have to make the place you sleep as comfortable as possible.

Clear your bedroom of devices. Computers and cell phones in the bedroom? No... just no. In order to fall to sleep in a reasonable amount of time leave your screen time behind when you go to bed. Even better, shut off the Wi-Fi when you go to bed. (Yeah, that's right, I said it, shut the wi-fi off when you go to bed!)

Soothing Music. If you like to fall asleep with something playing in the background, experiment with music that will lull you to sleep instead of falling asleep to the TV screen. Set a timer so the music drifts off shortly after you do.

Romance. One of the great ways to sleep well and deeply is to fall asleep content with romantic connection. Sex is a great way to reduce tension and anxiety, both of which are big culprits of sleep disturbance. Get romantic, get a good night's sleep.

Before bed bath or shower. Have a warm soak or a brief steamy shower and rinse the busyness of the day down the drain. I call it "the rinse cycle" and it is one of my best sleeping tricks. A five-minute shower clears my mind and relaxes my body for sleep.

Count your blessings. Relax your heart and mind by ending your day with closing your eyes and counting your blessings. Running gratitude through your mind at the end of the day will help to relax you and flood your cells with a feeling of wellbeing.

Romance. Oh, I said that one already... but it is worth repeating.

Water

In my quest to seek out the professionals around me to help me understand how best to serve my body, I worked with two of the wisest women in my circle on this, and both of them asked me the same two questions. First, "how much water do you drink a day?", and "how much sleep are you getting each night?".

Remember what we are doing together is taking Sacred Responsibility for ourselves so that we can move into our third act as a fiery and fabulous woman who is thriving and happy. Make drinking enough water an act of self-care.

I'm being fully transparent with you, sisters, both sleep and water have been a struggle for me. I have had all the excuses in the book to rationalize that I stay up way later than my yoga teacher would

ever believe! And I do not drink anywhere near the amount of water that I personally need to feel my best.

I say, “I am a night hawk” or “Oh, I’m not a big drinker”, and on and on blah, blah, blah. But when I began to write this book I knew this had to change and it had to change immediately. I was not willing to impart my words of Sacred Responsibility as a sleep-deprived, thirsty gal.

As adult women, we are approximately 55% water (when we were born we were closer to 75% water). It is imperative that we maintain a constant relationship with water as physical coordination and our mental performance become impaired at about 1% dehydration. Water is distributed around our body in a perfect flow. In an article by Dr. Anne Marie Helmenstine PhD, published on *ThoughtCo*, September 2018, she answers the question, “Where is water in the human body?”

According to her, two thirds of the body’s water is fluid within the cells (intracellular) and one third is extracellular (fluids outside the cells). The heart and brain are 73% water, lungs 83%, muscles and kidneys are 79%, the skin 64%, and the bones are around 31% water.

Dr. Helmenstine goes on to share functions of water in the body: Water is the primary building block of cells. It is used to flush waste from the body and carry oxygen and nutrients to the cells. It acts as an insulator for the brain, spinal cord and organs by acting as a shock absorber. (The link to the full article is in the Resource section at the back of the book).

I believe that when we have more understanding of what our bodies actually require to thrive, we will be more likely to make it happen. We don’t know until we know and well... now you know. Water is essential to coordination and mental performance, enough said.

***TIP:** Have a personal water jug. Look around at what you already have in your home that could be your fabulous hydration container and fill it up with the best water you have access to and drink up. I find that the majority of people I work with erroneously believe they drink enough water daily. If you have your own jug, you are able to keep a mental note as well as a visual on how much water you are drinking each day. This is an area of my health that matters to me and I have to monitor myself and be sure to drink my jug of water each day! Add drinking your jug of water to your non-negotiable list.*

A Personal Test and The Amazing KG.

The benefits of committing to a more Sacred Relationship with sleep and water were quickly obvious. I did a really big test when I booked myself in a loft cabin in the country for a week to write undisturbed. I also hired one of those fabulous professionals I had been working with to help keep me on track. Working with Nutritionist Kassia Gooding was like hiring a personal trainer for my habits. She prepared meals that were incredibly delicious and fun, she had water drinking requirements of me and she even served me fresh herbs to inhale for cognitive function while writing. The difference in how I felt was amazing, I thought I was feeling fantastic when I got there, then this experiment took everything to the next level. The water and deep sleep were key to how clear minded I felt that week.

I was lucky enough to have a friend and professional in Kassia to help me on this part of the journey. What I needed was to immerse fully into the simplicities of daily health under the guidance of someone who cared about my success as much as I did. It was one of the best things I have ever

done for myself. A few weeks back I had a conversation with Kassia and asked her if she would be willing to be our official Holistic Nutritionist. She said, yes! Now our community of fiery and fabulous women has access to her amazing wisdom and loving heart on our journey and she is thrilled to join us!

I have added her web site link to our resources section in the book and we will invite her for online interviews, cooking classes, and she will speak to us on areas that best support women's nutritional health in their third act. Go ahead and write down your questions and we will go to the expert! Welcome to the community, Kassia! (Remember to join our online community through our website so you don't miss any of the fun! www.reachyogalifestyle.ca.)

Simplify Self-Care

Try things, let it be that simple. Just go ahead and try things. Most of us are new to making our self-care a priority and just because we are onto it now doesn't mean every current person and activity gets tossed aside in a frenzy of immediate change.

We will find, more often than not, when we bring into our lives the things that make us feel good, the things that bring us more joy and increase our life force, the things that do not do it for us anymore tend to fall away gently. So, try things out that you intuitively feel would make you happy, contribute to your vitality and that spark your interest.

Get judgment out of your system

You can stop judging yourself right now for what you think are bad habits. Those things will begin to be so out of sync with your new state of being that those habits won't even feel like they belong to you anymore. Go ahead and write down any of the judgements you might be holding around the ways you do the opposite of self-care. Write them down as your first action towards bringing them up and out of your mind and your body.

If you can't think of any ways you judge yourself right now, just know if a self-judgment statement comes to mind later be sure to write it down. Let it come up and out as self-judgment no longer serves your greater good. Now we add a twist, write it in past tense. Remember the subconscious mind doesn't know the difference if we are physically in any given situation or just thinking about a situation, and the subconscious mind will do all that it can to execute our thoughts for us. We are rewiring our thought patterns as we bring the things we judge about ourselves up and out to be transformed.

I used to judge myself for

I used to judge myself for

I used to judge myself for

Walks, baths, tending to your nails and your body's outermost needs as tiny devotional acts of self-care are simple ways to begin your personal self-care rituals. Begin to pay attention to any areas of your body that are calling out. Your body is highly intelligent, and it will give you signs and signals asking you to take Sacred Responsibility for yourself. A sacred woman pays attention to her body and engages in Self-Care from a state of love for self, respect for her beautiful body, and honour for the life force flowing through her. Self-care body rituals are part of preventive planning. We take care of ourselves as a Sacred Responsibility so that we are not forced into self-care because we chose not to make body care our priority.

Massage as a non-negotiable

One of the best ways you can stay tuned into your body is by self-massage. I put massage in the non-negotiable category because it is self-empowering to have a deep relationship to your physical body. Every inch of your body is waiting for you to love it, to care for it and to enjoy it. We are going for being happy in our physical bodies on this journey. Your muscles work hard for you, treat them with gratitude. Find a nice natural oil that you like. You might like coconut oil, or almond oil. Take a few drops in your hands and begin by massaging your hands and fingers. Take a full minute to do this, then sit back and feel your body's response to your hands being massaged. Massage your knees, your feet and your forearms, all the places that are easy to reach. Do one area of your body one day, and another area another day, if only for a few minutes a couple of times a week. Move from place to place and make your way over every inch of your body eventually starting the process over—well every inch you can reach! We have time and we care about feeling good in our bodies. Make massage a non-negotiable because you love every inch of yourself, inside and out. And, because it feels great!

Each of us will step into our self-care in our own unique way. Many of us may enjoy lots of the same self-care activities, of course, but the way we experience our self-care will be unique to each of us. What we have in common is the willingness and the desire to begin to take Sacred Responsibility for all areas of our lives.

Living in a conscientious way can assist us in deepening our Self-Care practice. We are conscious moving through our daily routine, the way we move from one activity to the next, from the way we wake up in the morning to going to bed at end of day. All our daily activities can easily be done consciously. Slow down, observe your surroundings and participate in this life consciously.

Self-Care Tips for the Sacred Woman

Be true to yourself.

Give your body the things it loves most.

Laugh often.
Sip water all day long.
Move your body.
Make massage a non-negotiable.
Remember that your bones love weight-bearing exercise.
Enhance the quality of your meals.
Engage in interesting conversations.
Enjoy your own company.
Listen.
Laugh, dance, make-out, repeat.
Sleep deeply

Cathy's Self-Care Non-Negotiable

I care for my feet. Start now if you have not yet begun to do this for yourself. You will thank me later if you pick up the non-negotiable Self-Care act of foot care. Thank your feet every day, learn to massage them, moisturize with natural oils, nail care, flexibility and strength. Wear shoes that fit well and are comfortable *and* put your bare feet on the ground. Go for a barefoot walk on the grass. If you are not comfortable walking barefoot, sit on a chair with your bare feet in the grass. Barefooting is a grounding game changer for us, and we are extremely fortunate to have the Barefoot Pilgrim Sue Kenney in our community.

Her latest book is called, *How to Wear Bare Feet*. I have added it to our reference section. It is full of her experiences of healing her feet, her body and her heart while on the barefoot journey. From Sue's book we learn, "There are no real negative side effects of barefooting. It reverses the aging process, improves brain function, boosts self-esteem and makes you feel happy. It's natural medicine."

And she is so fiery and fabulous that she has even walked El Camino de Santiago barefoot, *many times!* She and I have even done it together. Sue will be showing up to share her wisdom with us online and at our retreats.

Sue and I are exactly one decade apart in age. She is an incredible mentor for me and a shining example of a fiery and fabulous woman in her third act. I always tell her, "I look at you and know pretty much how I will be in ten years."

She is also one of the first women in Canada to be a Certified Wim Hof Method instructor. In case you haven't heard of this yet, Wim Hof is "The Iceman" the amazing man who has taken science by surprise with his three-pillar method of cold plunge (Ice Baths), breathing, and commitment. He continues to break world records and is the subject of extensive research at Stanford University. His purpose is to inspire people to be happy and healthy. We love his plan!

Care for your feet, so you are as comfortable and as mobile as possible always. We have places to go, sisters!

What is your Self-Care Non-Negotiable? Write it down and maintain it and share it to inspire others to choose a self-care non-negotiable. Choose just one self-care non-negotiable and be loyal to it, until it becomes part of who you are. Then choose another one.

My Self-Care Non-Negotiable:

Our First Sacred Practice

We Women share in the protocol practices with reverence for the potent possibilities that lie dormant within us. We accept our practice with open hearts and open minds in the knowing that these tiny acts of self-care grow quickly into a renewed love of our lives. We know in every cell of our gorgeous being that our practices fill us with the vibrancy of universal life-force.

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 Self-Care Imagination Practice (Imagining/Thoughts)

Choose one self-care practice to imagine. It could be anything that you feel is key for you to fully embody self-care as a Sacred Responsibility. It can be something you have done in the past or something you dream of doing for yourself one day. It can be as simple as imagining yourself on a beautiful walk in your neighbourhood, or as elaborate as imagining yourself at a private spa in the Swiss Alps. Remember this is your imagination, and nothing is impossible in your imagination. Once you have chosen the practice, you are going to imagine.

Take a few minutes and close your eyes and begin to see yourself there. Imagine you feel like you are totally comfortable, you know your way around, and you are rocking this self-care ritual for yourself. Breathe deeply, and relax into your visualization, let your mind wander to all the best places you can take this self-care ritual. Then really begin to feel it, feel like you are there, notice what you are wearing (or not wearing!), notice the atmosphere of your surroundings. The sounds, the smells, the time of day you are imagining. Get right into it. Take five minutes and go deep into your imagination, practicing feeling your self-care as if you are actually there.

I will share my favorite example to get you going. Some of you may like this one too!

My example: I love to exaggerate my own self-care practices in my mind. It makes me happy and makes me feel like a Goddess!

I love taking long hot baths and I like to feel that I am soaking in a healing tea. So even though I am in my sweet little apartment in a fifty-year-old 6'x 8' bathroom, in my mind I am in an Egyptian

Temple and the high priestess has run my bath. The water is the purest water from deep in the earth. It feels like I am bathing in silk. The fragrance is intoxicating and there are flower petals floating upon bubbles. The tub is made of alabaster and it amplifies the beneficial properties of the healing bath. The steamy, mysterious fragrance of essential oils rises from the water and candlelight flickers dancing shadows on the walls. This is most certainly heaven. I am served tea while I soak, and I have all the time in the world. I am here to receive the self-care ritual of the sacred baths.

I can do this visualization anywhere at any time I feel like a self-care ritual. I also do this when I wash my hands. I imagine that the water and the soap are deeply purifying my entire being right through the palms of my hands. I imagine pulling in the mineral rich water through my hands and my wrists and even as the water swirls down the drain I imagine it as crystal clear water being taken through ancient tunnels, purifying again as it goes.

I also do this with vacations. I visualize fully a vacation experience. Remember the brain doesn't know the difference if the experience is an inner or an outer experience. So, if my mind and body need to feel like they have been on vacation to reduce my stress levels and raise my happiness levels then I am all in! There is no additional cost to imagining more great self-care experiences, so feel free to be abundant in your imagination.

The Self-Care Breathing Practice (Breathing/Words)

This practice of fully conscious breathing is how we began our journey, breathing from the four parts of our breath.

Inhale, Retain, Exhale, and Pause.

As a foundational practice, this breathing becomes our formal operating system for the body as well as the mind and we call it our Magical Moment. We breathe in through the nose and out through the nose for this practice. Inhale, Retain, Exhale, Pause.

Inhale easefully and deeply.

Now **retain** your breath, hold your breath for a second or two but allow this retention to be its own full part of the breath, so hold just a moment or so but let the retention have its space.

Exhale easefully and deeply, take your time and exhale completely.

Pause for as long as is natural for you. You do not need to force your inhales as they will come naturally. Just hang out in the pause at the end of your exhale until your inhale comes.

Do as many Magical Moment breaths as flow naturally over the course of one minute to become familiar with this gentle pattern. Then expand to two minutes, then three and so on. Breathe this way for as long as feels good to you.

Extra: Add a self-care blessing to your Magical Moment breath. As you inhale think to yourself, "my body, I love you" as you exhale think to yourself, "my body, I thank you."

The Self-Care Physical Practice (Physical/Actions)

Our movement practice to anchor Self-Care into the body is a simple yoga exercise that can be done standing or seated.

Begin with your hands at your heart, palms together in prayer position, gently connecting thumbs to your heart space in the centre of your chest.

Pause here and connect to your breath, when you feel ready to move, and in harmony with your inhale, raise your arms out to the sides and up over head, as high as they go naturally. Retain your breath in this position, arms up. When your exhale comes at its natural pace lower your arms, hands back to heart centre. Again, inhale and raise your arms overhead, exhale hands back to your heart. Continue to move in this way, establishing a harmonious connection with your breath and your body.

Adding on: Inhale, raise your arms out to the sides and up over head and when your exhale comes begin to fold forward as far as you go naturally, hang out in the pause at the end of your exhale. Then as your inhale comes naturally, bend your knees a little, press into your feet and come up slowly. Then follow through, raising your arms up. Retain your breath and when your exhale comes naturally take your hands back to heart centre. Repeat this gentle flow establishing a harmonious connection with your breath and your body.

Work your way up to 8, and from there you can do as many as makes you happy. Make it your focus to move in harmony with your natural breathing pattern; inhale, retain, exhale, and pause. Some days you will be a little faster, some days a little slower, just maintain a collaboration between your breath and movement.

Never force your movements during the practices. Simply meet your body wherever it is at each time you do the exercises and you will see that it will change from day to day. As well, as you become stronger and more flexible you will notice changes. I understand for some of you when I say work your way up to 8, it will seem too basic for you since you are physically capable of doing 108. What a blessing that you are so strong and flexible. Sister, so go ahead and do as many as you love!

This yoga flow is great for re-establishing harmony of breath and body. It cultivates co-ordination, increases our energy levels, and strengthens and stretches the spine. It maintains our range of motion in our shoulders and brings more blood flow to all the moving parts of our body, including the spine. Compressing the abdomen and organs on the forward folds helps maintain the healthy organs and cleanse our system. Moving our body in harmony with our breath retrains us to use our energy in a more balanced way, increasing our energy, maintaining our energy longer.