

For Our Growth

The Call to Self-Care

— Kathy Rinden

The call to become a Waldorf teacher is a very personal experience. In order to realize our goals, each trainee puts in a great deal of time, energy, effort, and personal funds to make our vision a reality. On the day when our careers begin, we feel the honor, privilege, and trust that was put in our loving hands to hold a class of students and their families. Soon after we have taken up this new and exciting work, we also began to experience what it means to work in a “teacher-led school.” The rewards of our work are many, and every summer we re-commit ourselves to carrying a new constellation of children and families.

As the weeks and months of the school year pass by, our high standard of dedication can begin to take a toll upon our physical, etheric, astral, and ego bodies. We find ourselves devoting a great deal of thought, energy, and time to helping the young children in our care develop and grow within the four lower senses (life, touch, movement, and balance). Yet the process can lead to a neglect of our own lower senses.

Early childhood teachers work tremendously hard with each child’s parents. I have often heard colleagues throughout the United States speak of how the parent work takes up a good deal of their

time, meditation, and energy. It is quite common for the early childhood teacher to help families live into Waldorf Education as a lifestyle choice, supporting their growth and change in significant ways. However, I have caught myself many times giving pearls of Waldorf wisdom only to realize that I had lost balance in my own life circumstances.

As teachers, many of us struggle to find the time, funds, and physical strength to practice what we recommend to our families: healthy rhythms and routines, personal self-care and spiritual renewal. Due to many reasonable circumstances, we are often not able to live a balanced, rhythmic lifestyle ourselves. Consistent demands, busy school and committee schedules, family responsibilities, and financial stresses lead ultimately to a significant drain upon our “wells” of inner resources. When this occurs, we become aware that we are giving from a place of scarcity rather than abundance, resulting in a lack of joy and genuine warmth in our giving.

So many of us have heard the airlines’ instructions to secure our own oxygen supply before helping others. We often find it easier to rush to the aid of others before considering the cost to ourselves. While this may be noble on the surface, caregivers

of all kinds know the consequences of making such decisions on a chronic basis. There must be a happy medium where we are able to restore our own wellsprings in order to truly be available to those who need our gifts.

I am very interested in learning how many of you, my early childhood colleagues, find the time within your busy lives to refresh, rejuvenate, and replenish your bodies, souls, and spirits in order to be your best selves for all of those who are in your care. I invite you all to share your tips and strategies for self-care. Please email *Gateways Newsletter* at gateways@waldorfearlychildhood.org, and I will then compile your stories and recommendations for your colleagues in a future issue of the newsletter. Send your emails and offerings by July 15, 2017.

Self-care, renewal, and personal refreshment are never to be considered selfish or superfluous practices. Rather, it is my hope, such activity could be considered to be a positive, nourishing gesture, and essential for all human beings. We can no longer afford to ignore this issue. This must become a topic

that we feel comfortable discussing openly without guilt or shame. If we wish to help our students “breathe” properly, we must model and live this within our own selves first. As we strive for beauty, truth, and goodness in life, we must start providing these basic practices in our lives. Self-care is never selfish. It is necessary nourishment to sustain our work and help us to meet our callings as Waldorf teachers.

I look forward to hearing your stories and suggestions by July 15, 2017. Through such sharing, we can help to support and care for one another. ♦

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