



From the Desk of Caroline Haskell

Activist Self Care and Community

Activist Self Care and Community

Wanting to heal the world is sometimes an extension of wanting to heal ourselves.

We see the injustice and suffering around us and do what we can in our own forms of activism, and can grow despondent when constantly surrounding ourselves with images and facts of this brokenness in the world, growing even more despondent when our efforts don't appear to bear much fruit (at least not immediately, or at first glance.)

Brokenness in the world can manifest as brokenness in ourselves.

We take to the streets with chants of, "Health care, child care, anything but warfare."

Self-care should be added to that list. Too many activists don't practice it, or enough.

There is a reason why depression and despair run rampant in activist circles, and why it too often leads to tragedy. People who are passionate and creative can often lean towards depression and anxiety in the first place, and when you factor in the way that being a community organizer can consume one's life, emotions can be hard to deal with.

After the rally, when the placards are put away and the sound system is broken down, there is isolation. Maintaining a satisfying personal life is hard when you are being run in what seems like 15 different directions. Then there is the time necessary to spend working. It does not leave a lot of time to simply unwind, meditate, go to church, take a trip, or do whatever it takes to find balance.

Factor in personal problems (breakups, issues with parents), work problems, and a host of other day to day stressors, and the combination can be lethal.

I notice that many activists are spiritual - not necessarily religious, but have some sort of appreciation for something bigger than ourselves, something beyond the physical world. Working towards ideals of social justice is a way of putting that spirituality in action. But there has to be a way to put some of that energy that we send out into the world, back into ourselves.

It takes more than a warm bubble bath to soothe loneliness. And yes, even when you're surrounded by hundreds of like-minded, chanting demonstrators, you can still feel lonely. It takes more than watching a movie (or two, comedies of course) to erase thoughts that maybe what you're doing isn't going to mean a whole lot in the long run.

Healthy lifestyle choices, socializing (for non-activist purposes), and just doing things for ourselves takes time and effort - the bulk of which we usually reserve for our activism. But that is not where we make the biggest mistake.

Our biggest mistake is not reaching out to our comrades. We need to look after ourselves and each other. That is why it is called an activist "community." Pay attention to when you may not be feeling well, and for signs in others - which may often be subtle.

We won't be able to save the world if we can't save ourselves.

From the Hard Conversations On Line Course