



The Art of Spiritual “Retreating” for Healers

Linda Lee Smith RN, MS, HN-BC, HTCP, CCA
Founder, Institute of Spiritual Healing and Aromatherapy

Making a spiritual retreat is a very good practice for self care. It is caring not only for your soul, but for your mind, emotions, and body as well. The meaning and purpose of a retreat can be different for each of us. I have been making spiritual retreats for nearly fifty years and none of my retreats have been alike or even had the same purpose. Most people think of a spiritual retreat as a time of deepening their spirituality within a particular religious context. But that is only one expression of retreating from our normal multi-tasking, depleting, hectic lives. With all our responsibilities in life, it is easy to lose one's grounding or even our sense of identity. We carry too much “noise” inside which leads to chaos, exhaustion, and energetic depletion. Caring for your soul is hard work! It requires an investment of time and energy.

As healers, we owe it to ourselves to practice good self care and that means recouping our energy. Some believe they already do a good job of getting on the table and receiving bodywork or energy work to help settle their busy minds and bodies. Taking time to restore psychic energy is part of our commitment as healers. When that bone, deep-down tiredness overwhelms us, we need to restore vigor for our soul and body. It is curious that the Greek word for healing

(*therapeuō*) means not only to heal but also to render service to the gods and to cultivate a garden! Caring for the soul is like caring for a garden. I spend many silent hours working in my garden from spring until fall which for me is like many “mini” retreats for beauty, stillness, and restoration of my soul. But is “retreating” to a few hours of quiet time enough to restore one's depleted energy? What does it mean for you to “retreat” from the world as a form of self care?

Solitude versus Community Experience

A retreat can be a time of solitude as you go off alone in nature or to a setting like a retreat center that sees to your physical needs while you spend the time recouping those parts of your soul that you have lost or that have become weighed down with pain, grief, and sorrow. Solitude implies a kind of silence not only of the mind and voice—but also a stillness within the heart. It is when we are truly silent that the voice of guidance has a chance to be heard. In solitude, I notice things that I had missed—colors, sounds, fragrances. These can be healing for our souls but they can also connect us to Spirit (Divine Essence) that inhabits everything. I notice that when my life is particularly chaotic, going on “retreat” takes me several days just to slow down enough to listen



to how Spirit wishes to speak in my life.

If we look at our many different spiritual paths, we see that for countless eons, humanity has seen the value of going on silent “retreats”. Whether you are alone with your thoughts and prayers, or being guided by a wise person versed in your sacred path’s scriptures and traditions, it is an opportunity for refreshment and inspiration that gives new life, clears away life’s anxieties and pressures, and renews you for another 100,000 miles or so!

idea in ages, you might want to think about taking some time away—just for you.

Around the beginning of a new year, I like to curl up in my pajamas and re-read my journal from the previous year. I pick a day or two when my staff is not around, the phones are not ringing and there is nothing on my agenda. There is a method in this for me—I want to see where I have been—what weighed heavy on my heart during the previous twelve months in order to gain insights on where I want to go for the

As healers, we owe it to ourselves to practice good self care and that means recouping our energy.

In addition, it can be a brand new experience for you like going to an ashram and sitting in group meditation and quiet. A retreat can be a community experience or done in complete solitude, or even in darkness as is done by advanced practitioners in Dzogchen practice in Tibetan Buddhism. It can be a time of aloneness or a time of great conversation as you explore your inner world with a group of like-minded seekers who are open to helping each other on life’s journey.

Retreat—A Time of Bursting Creativity

Getting to that place of inner stillness can tap into your own innate creativity which begs to be released. Inner quiet makes the mind fertile, giving ideas and inspirations an opportunity to burst forth. That may manifest as poetry, writing, art, music, ideas, projects, or it may simply connect the dots in all the seemingly diverse parts of your life. My best ideas have come from my reaching inner stillness during a retreat from busyness. Without regular periods of withdrawal and relaxation, creativity can simply dry up. So if you are wondering why you have not had a new thought or

coming year. It is one of my mini retreats from emails, facebook, TV, and all those electronic gadgets that I have accumulated to make life “easier.” I am always amazed at such times how Spirit finds a way to lead me through the emotional muck that manages to accumulate with time. Winter for those of us in the Northern hemisphere is a great time for retreating into stillness and that is what this little retreat does for me. I am not surprised when I am led to make a right turn on my journey in life - especially when I am truly paying attention to Spirit’s direction.

For me this year, the theme of letting go in order for new things to come through was particularly strong. So yes, I have made a right turn on my life’s journey and I give thanks for the courage to follow through with concrete expression. Had I not retreated from my busy world—I might have missed this momentous decision to close one door in order to open many more. It is called “*stepping onto the path*,” or “*following the Tao*.” My creativity accepted the invitation to come out and play.

Therefore one of my new activities in 2014 will be

offering “mini” spiritual retreats that will focus on self care for healers. I recognize the value of such times of reflection, meditation, prayer, and healing. I also note that physical relaxation and care are basic if one’s soul is to be reached. The mini retreats I have in mind will address physical rejuvenation as well as personal reflection on one’s path in life. Being a story teller, I will share aspects of my journey as a way of inspiring hope for others. Whether you are able to join me at one of these retreats or find another of your own making, taking the time to care for your soul is one of the most important things you can do on your life’s journey. My prayer is that you will be able to spend the time to gather up all the lost “pieces” of your soul and come into the light refreshed and ready for what life presents to you. €

Linda Lee Smith is offering an upcoming spiritual retreat: *“Living a Blessed and Prosperous Life through the Power of Self Care”* at the Jesuit Retreat Center, Milford, OH, May 2-4, 2014. Contact her office for details—303-467-7829.