

A Special Valentine Treat
By Patricia Spataro



Valentine's Day focuses on love, specifically romantic love. Valentine's Day is also seen as an opportunity for disseminating information about heart healthy practices; my favorite is the long awaited heart healthy information that gives us justification for eating dark chocolate...it's good for your heart.

I wanted to write about love for self instead of the usual romantic love; because I don't think we embrace this concept too readily. After a Goggle search I found out I was right about this. My Google search brought to light our pathological view of self-love. I had to scroll past links to sites on narcissism and the sin and danger of self-love to get to sites on self-love that were even remotely positive.

Surprised as I was by this discovery I was not deterred from pursuing this concept of self-love. I am not talking about selfishness or narcissism but rather love for self that supports healthy self-esteem, self-acceptance, self-respect, and the ability to take care of our "self" emotionally and physically.

Flight attendants tell passengers "in the event of an emergency secure your own oxygen mask before attempting to help others". This is the best way to describe what I am talking about. Many of us feel this goes against our better judgment. Many of us would be inclined to put that mask on the child or loved-one next to us before putting it on ourselves. Better judgment or not we will be more useful to those around us if we are breathing. Just how much can someone do when they are unconscious?

It is said that your time is the best gift you can give someone you love yet most people seldom give this valuable gift to themselves. The idea of taking time for yourself is one that has been identified as a way to manage stress and stay healthy. This may seem impossible to do but perhaps this doesn't have to be an unrealistic goal.

Today's world is filled with visual and audio stimuli so much so that we accept this background noise as normal, unaware of its contribution to our stress level. There are three things that can help us with self-care/self-love and they are **stillness**, **silence**, and **solitude**.

Stillness gives us an opportunity to stop rushing and racing and just be. Our body has a tendency to move as fast as it needs to keep up with our racing thoughts. Remember, you are a “human being” **not** a “human doing”.

Silence gives us an opportunity to stop and think, better yet an opportunity to stop thinking and be aware. Awareness of our thoughts, feelings, and actions helps us to live more mindfully and more consciously and ultimately more peacefully. At the end of very busy days you may find yourself falling into bed saying “what just happened here?” Dissatisfaction with life is often the consequence of living without awareness.

Solitude gives us an opportunity to rest and not tend to the needs of others but to focus on our own needs. It is challenging to see solitude or time alone as something different from loneliness. A quote from May Sarton may help distinguish between loneliness and solitude... “Loneliness, May says, is the poverty of self; solitude is the richness of self”. Pearl S. Buck once said “I love people. I love my family, my children . . . but inside myself is a place where I live all alone and that's where I renew myself”.

This Valentine’s Day enjoy that heart healthy piece of dark chocolate and make the moment , that’s all...just a moment, you savor this treat a moment of **stillness, silence, and solitude**. I guarantee it will be a moment to remember.

