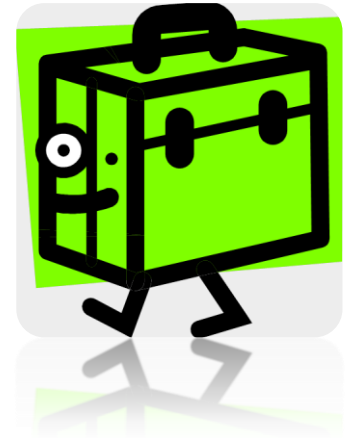


Retreat and Renew at Home

We have all had a time when we wanted to pack our bags, leave our cares behind and retreat to a far away place where no one can find us. A retreat conjures up images of self-discovery, stress-free living, revitalizing opportunities and a chance to have distance from every day demands. And what if we could create this experience at home? What if we could give ourselves permission to take a deep breath and replenish our energy without having to go anywhere? What would that look like?



Every year in the fall, I have the opportunity to go away to a Women's Retreat at a YMCA boy's camp on a lake in New Hampshire. There are anywhere from 20 to 40 women who attend. We are able to put on our sweats, let our hair down and renew our energy through yoga, dance, craft classes, workshops, fabulous food, great conversations and the pleasure of doing nothing if that is what the spirit needs. Each year I ask the question:

"What do you want to take away from these 4 days?"

For some women, the answer to the question has to do with being out in nature and experiencing the elements: earth, water, air and fire. Nature is all around us every day, all day.



Giving ourselves PERMISSION to walk in the leaves, go to a park, sit at the beach, stare up at the sky, bring some flowers home, light a candle or breathe is the first step. It doesn't take much time to go outside and just be in the moment and take in the day.

Some of us simply need to connect with friends and share a good meal, a few laughs or tears or hugs. The sense of community can feel like a retreat from the norm.

This year at the retreat, water was the element that spoke to many of us. We had the great joy of experiencing exercise in the lake with an Aquasize instructor. Our bodies felt the warmth from moving all of our muscles without the jarring impact that we often force ourselves to do at the gym. Water is the element that relates to our emotions. Sometimes the release of tears and a good cry can feel restorative. If a pool isn't available to us, giving ourselves PERMISSION to wash away the stress of the day with a shower or bath can prepare us for a rejuvenating sleep and a better day tomorrow.

Music is another theme of retreat. Have you ever seen a sullen face on anyone doing Zumba? Probably not. Music is infectious. The beat, the rhythm and the movement gets our endorphins



flowing and the cares of the day seem to float away. Can't get to an exercise class - put on some music at home and dance with abandon.

More and more people are experiencing the benefit of a natural approach to relaxation and renewal with flower essences. These are wonderful gifts from nature that help us to strengthen our electrical system when it is out of balance. I would

like to suggest the Australian Bush Flower Essence, **Alpine Mint Bush**. This essence is for caregivers who are mentally and emotionally exhausted with the job of caring for others. It's not meant to take away the job responsibility and role. Instead, the flower essence revitalizes our energy and helps to bring joy back.

Retreating and renewing is personal. What feels like an escape to me may not be the same image that you have. Brainstorm with a friend and determine what would realistically work for you. Give yourself permission to be the best you.