

Ep #21: You're a Human Being Not a Human Doing



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With Your Host

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Self-love and self-care are such common buzzwords right now. If your social media feed is anything like mine, it's full up on posts about self-care and the best ways to do it, and it often seems to involve lying on some perfect Grecian island with cucumbers on your eyes wrapped in seaweed as your ticket to truly loving yourself.

And while I'm in no way opposed to spa days, these external practices of self-love and self-care that have to do with going to a place and doing a thing and basing your story about loving yourself and showing up for yourself on whether you've done these certain acts is not my framework for self-love.

While I think techniques for increasing the love we feel for ourselves, like journaling, meditating, exercising, pausing negative self-talk, managing our minds are vital, I also know this externalizing framework can cloud our vision and make us think it's all about doing. Today, I want to focus on a return to being. You are a human being, not a human doing and you are worthy of all the love in the world just for showing up and being you.

You're listening to Feminist Wellness, the only podcast that combines functional medicine, life coaching, and feminism to teach smart women how to reclaim their power and restore their health! Here's your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine Expert, Herbalist and Life Coach, Victoria Albina.

Hello, hello, my love, I hope this episode finds you doing so well. When I was doing my morning breath work meditation today, I had this beautiful moment of clarity around one of the biggest blocks in my life, which has been my own focus on doing things and making that doing mean something about me.

I have spent so much of my life focused on external credentials, on getting the impressive job, working for the big deal agency, on getting the fancy

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certification and degree, on learning, on improving myself and my practice, absolutely. And all of that is so vital and beautiful and important, for sure. And I can now see that sometimes, my focus was also on proving myself; proving myself to be worthy of love and attention through my doing.

That's the part I'm working on letting go and moving through and invite you to investigate for your own life. For most of my life, I've let getting things done be a stand in for focusing deeply on myself and my true inner wellness. I've been working since forever it feels.

I worked in high school, through college and grad school. At one point, when I was living in North Carolina for a quick minute, I was working five different jobs. So I had a fulltime day job and then I had pickup gigs in the evenings, so many weekends. I've always held that hustle energy that push-through-it energy, that do-more energy.

And while that brought me some temporary satisfaction and certainly helped with my student debt, no doubt, those days are coming to an end for me and I'm starting to cultivate a deeper appreciation for getting present, bringing my full attention to what I'm doing and saying no to those tasks that don't bring me joy, to curate my choices versus just jumping at the next chance to do more for the sake of doing more.

And this practice of letting go of the mantle, the energy, and the language of busyness is creating more space in my life to do the tasks that I promised myself I would do, by holding more space for being. Being in my body, being with my spirit, doing my daily breath work meditation, holding space to feel my own feels versus covering them up with tasks and hurried energy has been an amazing way to make space for stillness; even when it's really scary.

Even when that loud, sometimes quiet voice inside me is saying, "Totally, you should go to the gym, meditate, do your breath work, but first, the

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kitchen sink needs a scrub and, you know what, those emails aren't going to read themselves. Go work on all the work that needs done. Go now, you can take care of yourself later.”

And when we conflate the number of things we do in a day with how lovable we are, which is not something I think most of us do consciously, but so many of us do unconsciously or subconsciously, we are feeding a dangerous beast. The habit in which we feel we need to keep accomplishing, keep producing, keep cleaning, keep running around, doing, doing, doing, in order to prove our worth, our value, to ourselves as much as to others.

I know because I've been there, for sure, and all it led me to feel was burned out, resentful, full of grump and not full of the self-love and confidence I was chasing. And for sure, busyness is so tempting. It's such a socially and culturally glorified buffer against feeling our feelings. It's a way to channel our energy into something demonstrable; a piece of paper you can hang on the wall or letters you can add to your name, an outward success, a way to focus on what other people think of us instead of our own ideas about ourselves and can keep us in that addictive dopamine cycle of getting that next hit of someone saying, “You are so impressive, how do you get it all done? Do you even sleep?”

And please, trust and believe that I get the allure of it. I get deeply why it's a tempting framework for a human life, because focusing on the external accolades and opinions of others and this busyness, this success-busy, success-busy cycle keeps us from deeply feeling what may be a scary calling within ourselves to do this life in a different way, to shift our focus from – and you'll please excuse me for being so cheesy here for a minute with this one – but to shift this framework for our lives in which we are a human doing versus being content and full of self-love and allowing ourselves to embrace the fact that we are indeed human beings.

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That is, shifting away from defining ourselves, our worth, our value by what we accomplish, and instead focusing on the energy we bring into this world and how we're showing up for ourselves, the people we love, the world itself. And we can absolutely talk about the ways in which busy culture keeps us from enjoying our lives, keeps us from slowing down to look up at the blue sky, to pause and feel the sun on our faces, to actually stop and smell a rose.

New York City is such a perfect place to see this. Folks just race around here, often with our faces in our phones, headphones on, walking at the speed of New York City life, avoiding being present while hurry, hurry, hurry to what's next.

And my question for you, my love, is how can we deeply enjoy and appreciate our lives while we're racing through it, while we're bouncing from task to task, while we're creating self-care as a to-do list and not an opportunity to deeply pause and get present? How can we keep our promises to ourselves when we're racing through the day?

See, I promised myself, as part of my healing, that I would create space to connect with spirit, space to breathe, to re-parent myself. And when I keep those promises to myself, I am so much more able to do the daily tasks that must be done and to release those that are a distraction. Because the more tuned in I am, the more I can truly see what is what.

So my brain might scream for me to watch Netflix when I promised myself I'd create a podcast for you. My brain may hint at the importance of cleaning out the linen closet when I promised myself I'd work on my upcoming breath work course. My brain might implore me to go have a snack when I'm not even hungry when I'm faced with replying to the hundreds of emails I get every day.

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And the more I bring in stillness and learn to see my brain in action, the more I can identify the thoughts that lead to feelings, which could lead me to take a buffering action that would keep me from my work, from completing my promises. So I gently remind my brain that I do what I promise myself, because one of the biggest parts of my healing is learning to trust myself again, to feed me well, to take me on walks like a puppy, to water me, to speak kindly to me, to do the tasks that will help me meet my goals versus keep me spinning.

And this is how we heal, by prioritizing our true needs, by keeping our promises, by learning to trust ourselves again. And all it takes is a sliver of light that comes into the darkness of this busy, busy, busy rush and run. And that makes me think of a Leonard Cohen song, "Ring the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offering. There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in."

Once the light is in you, it's hard to turn away from it. It's also easy to turn away from it if our internal needs, quiet, introspection, time in nature, deep attention to self-love aren't getting met in the world we've created for ourselves. The go, go, go world of responsibility, social engagement, achievement, and all the rest that we have brought into our lives to help confirm the underlying thought or belief that all this activity will bring us the peace and joy we so desire.

To zoom out for a moment, capitalism demands that we keep moving at all costs, that we keep producing, keep proving ourselves, that we keep making money so we can spend money. And folks who are socialized as women are often taught to believe that we need to be these magical doing machines to have value, work at a job all day do the emotional and physical labor of maintaining a household, not just going to the store and buying the toilet paper, dish soap, groceries, new socks, but also holding onto an internal inventory of everyone in the household's life; their needs, their schedule, their food preferences, their grades, their everything.

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So many demands that we do it all, that we're superwomen, that we keep being cogs in the machine, along with our focus on the next promotion, the next sale, on and on. And for so many people, there is a true need to work two to three jobs to literally make ends meet. And yeah, the rent's too damn high.

I want to acknowledge the privilege I have to even be asking these questions and contemplating how to bring more stillness and less busyness into my life. I am grateful and acknowledge my own social location and that not everyone has the financial means to work fewer hours. But I do think that everyone can find the space to move through our lives with more ease, more joy, and less busy energy, regardless of what the world that you're currently living in demands of you.

And while capitalism, misogyny, racism, intergenerational poverty, I mean, these are all things that keep us in these cycles where we need to go, go, go, do, do, do, do, earn more, earn more. I also think that part of the problem is that people are frigging scared of solitude.

Most of us aren't raised to have peace with being alone, with being truly still or quiet. I want to also acknowledge and name that this drive to be constantly busy can be a trauma response, a distraction from what we fear we'll see, feel, and learn if we took the time to slow things down, to sit deeply with ourselves and the reality of our lives.

So let us pause on the naming of fear as a driver for busyness and let's enjoy a nerd moment together, my love. Because evolutionarily, we know that this fear of being alone with ourselves makes a lot of sense. If your fellow villagers are not around, you're at greater risk of being attacked, falling sick, or being eaten. And if you're alone in the woods, let's face it, you might be wolf meat.

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If you're alone on the great plains, well, you may be lion meat. The point is, we are evolved to know the importance of social connection, and the science backs me up on this. There are actual physiologic markers that change when we have deep and meaningful social connection and I believe that true connection with others, true vulnerability and openness, the stuff that builds us up and buoys us up in the rough times and the good is most possible when we make the space to truly know ourselves, to love ourselves, to sit with ourselves.

I'm talking about intentionally taking the time to quiet your mind, connect in with your body, find true stillness, and to learn to listen to mind-body intuition, spirit, universal life flow energy, whatever you want to call it. And again, the science backs me up here. The evidence base shows that meditation is helpful for everything, from PMS to high blood pressure, to anxiety, cortisol, focus, cognitive capacity. Lowering cortisol is a pretty powerful technique for living a calm and more peaceful life and improving your physiological health as well.

When you pause before piling tasks that don't really serve you onto that to-do list, when you savor doing less and do it with full heart, you breathe more deeply and you're able to engage your parasympathetic nervous system; the one that allows your gut to heal, your thyroid to have optimal function, the one that helps you truly relax. And you've invited your sympathetic nervous system to chill for a bit.

The studies are also clear that people who report experiencing more moments of relaxation throughout their day also report more happiness than people who label themselves as stressed or busy. And we can take all of these studies and use them and frame them as a way to say, if you meditate every day, you'll be a better worker. You'll have more focus, get more things done. All the Fortune 500 CEOs meditate every day, it must be a good idea.

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And while all of that is true, all of that is valid – please, meditate every day for whatever purpose, for whatever drive, for whatever reason – I also want to posit a completely different framing. I want to return to the importance of cultivating a connection with stillness and our own inner voice. Not to make you more productive, though again, it will and that's great, but rather as a way to connect and reconnect with the fact that your purpose on this planet isn't to sell more paper.

It's not to get that next raise so you can buy more stuff – which the studies show, buying more stuff doesn't bring us more joy anyway. Your purpose on this planet is to be a vessel of light and love, to show up fully for your own joy, your own grief, anger, and sadness, and to show up for yourself and the creatures we all share this planet with as your highest self.

And I don't mean highest self in some dichotomous divisive way. I'm not saying, like, a good-bad thing, "Some people are their highest self and some people are losers." Come on, that's not me. And I deeply believe that we are each here on this planet for a divine purpose. And the more you can learn to cultivate stillness and be okay being truly alone with yourself – which is different from lonely, which I'm planning to cover in an episode very soon – and create space to hear your thoughts and connect in with the feelings your thoughts create for you, to listen deeply to your body in its infinite wisdom, the more space you'll have in your life to manage your mind, to support your body in deep healing, to connect inward and outward with the people you love, and the more joy you'll bring to your everyday.

I talk a lot on the podcast and with the clients in my care about being our own watcher, and that when we are able to separate our thoughts from facts, our thoughts from our feelings, when we're able to learn to watch our brain's thinking, this is when we are really showing up for our self-care with self-love. When we create the space to respond to life with thoughtfulness, to take a beat, to connect inward before lashing out with reactivity, which can mean saying something harsh or mean, screaming at a kid, coworker,

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or dog, getting angry because we're resentful of just how much we're doing and that someone else is chilling on the couch.

Which I use that example because that was totally one of my resentments for a long time. I did some good work on that. I've let it go. Which often leads to a fight or disagreement, which means we spend time on the backend apologizing or making amends, trying to explain that you're so sorry, you were just stressed, you were tired, you did too much today. All of this is a consequence of the busy story; this activity versus thoughtful responsiveness.

I've seen it in my own life and my life coaching clients' lives a billion times over. And you have the power to begin to shift how you show up for yourself and the people around you as you tune into your watcher capacity and your ability to sit with love and peace with your own mind.

And the truth is that when you do fewer tasks in your day, when you do less and focus on what really matters and the energy you're putting into it, in the end, you have more time, more energy, more joy to pour into the things that really feed you, into what matters most. And from personal experience, it's usually not having a shiny gleaming freshly polished sink, no matter what my brain would have me believe.

I have found that when there are 10 billion things on my to-do list, I don't do any of them well, or even up to my own standards because I go into that day looking at this massive list and feeling panicked, stressed, rushed, busy. When I put, say, eight things on my to-do list for the day, I can give each one my love and focus and can find the time to connect with the blue sky, with my breath, with my happiness.

I can be more present for each task, and that, just that, leaves me feeling so much more complete, more satisfied, more accomplished than when I

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raced through a billion tasks, half of which didn't even really matter at the end of the day.

When I'm focused on what matters to me versus maintaining my veneer of busy, when I invite my brain to focus on the task in front of me versus jumping mindlessly from task to task, the more I do this, the more present I get to each thing I'm investing my time in, the more focused my brain is over time, which feels amazing.

Okay, so one more time, your homework this week, my love, is to take a moment each day. It can be two minutes, 10 minutes, whatever you need, to feel your breath move in and out of your body, maybe do a body scan meditation. And, of course, because I adore you, I have a downloadable body scan for you, for free, on my website. Go to victoriaalbina.com/bodyscan to get that for your perfect self.

Look at your to-do list for the day. And I do recommend writing it out while you're learning to prioritize and do less busywork, and ask yourself what really needs to get done and how you can bring as much joy, or at least, hate the task a little less just for today so you can move through what you need to do and want to do while cultivating a little more space for yourself.

Savor the tasks you choose to do. Pour yourself into it and don't allow for distractions. Unitask instead of multitasking. Put the phone away while you're writing the memo. Focus on the memo. Don't rush, but rather get present to what you're doing. Not only will you do it better, you may just find some peace in your heart while you're getting it done.

Take a deep breath between tasks and give yourself some props. You got it done and you can now take a moment for yourself, to center yourself in your perfect body, to ground yourself and breathe before rushing to your next accomplishment.

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Okay, my love, that's it from me today. I hope this episode of the *Feminist Wellness* podcast has been helpful for you. I know it's a radical shift to invite us all to do a little less each day, and I strongly believe in it. Take a moment to be your own watcher, to check in with yourself, to say, "No thank you," to busyness as a badge of honor and make time for what really matters in your life.

If you're not on my email list, I highly recommend signing up now so you can be the first to hear all about the magic that I'm planning for y'all in the coming months. We've got courses, we've got breath work events coming up. I'm doing a couple breath work plus sound meditation events here in New York City, and of course, my online breath work course is headed your way soon. And a retreat is officially in the works, which is so exciting, so much delicious goodness, so many things that I really want to be working on, which feels amazing.

So, head on over to victoriaalbina.com to be sure to be in the know. And if you like this episode, leave a comment on the show notes. I read and personally respond to each comment and it brings me so much joy to be connected with y'all. So, hop on over, leave me a little note, sign up for some emails.

Oh, and I'll also be announcing a giveaway for my breath work online course over on my Instagram, so click that follow button and don't miss out on a chance to take my online breath work course for free, on the house, because I adore you.

Alright, well, be well, my love. Be gentle and kind with you. Take some deep breaths and remember that you are indeed a human being and not a human doing. So cheesy, I just love that saying. Alright, so remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Take care, my perfect darling, and I'll talk to you soon.

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Thank you for listening to this week's episode of *Feminist Wellness*. If you like what you've heard, head to VictoriaAlbina.com to learn more.