

COMMUNITIES OF CARE, ORGANIZATIONS FOR LIBERATION

by Yashna Maya Padamsee

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Stop talking about Self-Care

In the last 3 years as I talk about the Healing Justice (HJ) work I am involved in I am met with dueling responses of either deep yearning and curiosity about sustainability or a look that says “how sweet” and “call me when you’re ready to do some real work.”

Each response often leads to the introduction conversations that get stuck on the idea that HJ is only about the practice of “self-care.” Self-care is important and essential but lets not get stuck here.

I love the idea of exploring ways to care for ourselves and our sustainability such as honoring what unions won for us by working an 8 hour day (instead of working 10-14 hour days all the time), or other common self-care options like taking a bubble bath, or eating comfort food.

If we let ourselves be caught up in the discussion of self-care we are missing the whole point of Healing Justice (HJ) work. Talking only about self-care when talking about HJ is like only talking about recycling and composting when speaking on Environmental Justice. It is a necessary and important individual daily practice- but to truly seek justice for the Environment, or to truly seek Healing for our communities, we need to interrupt and transform systems on a broader level.

We need to move the self-care conversation into community care. We need to move the conversation from individual to collective. From independent to interdependent.

Too often self-care in our organizational cultures gets translated to our individual responsibility to leave work early, go home- alone- and go take a bath, go to the gym, eat some food and go to sleep. So we do all of that “self-care” to return to organizational cultures where we reproduce the systems we are trying to break; where we are continually reminded of our own trauma or exposed and absorb secondary PTSD, and where we then feel guilty or punished for leaving work early the night before to take a bubble bath.

Self-care, as it is framed now, leaves us in danger of being isolated in our struggle and our healing. Isolation of yet another person, another injustice, is a notch in the belt of Oppression. A liberatory care practice is one in which we move beyond self-care into caring for each other.

You shouldn't have to do this alone.

Why are we seeking Care?

There is a growing rumble of yearning for healing in our movement work. Oppression and trauma do influence our well-being. On-going generational trauma and violence affect our communities, our bodies, our hearts, minds and spirits. Racism, sexism, classism, eats at our very beings. This leads us to seek care. We know this. Our bodies know this. Our friends can read it in our faces even if we have learned to ignore it.

We put our bodies on the line everyday- because we care so deeply about our work- hunger strikes, long marches, long days at the computer or long days organizing on a street corner or a public bus or a congregation. Skip a meal, keep working. Don't sleep, keep working. Our communities are still suffering, so I must keep going. We risk and test our bodies to go further and we stretch our hearts or close our hearts to keep going- whatever it takes- and ultimately what it takes is a toll on us. This leads us to seek care.

We want to deny it- but ableism still shapes our movement work- "go hard or go home". In the the [Needs Assessment](#) by [Kindred](#) Southern Healing Justice Collective, they state, "Changemakers are dying as a result of spiritual and physical deprivation from trauma, stress and unrest in our movements."

We are burning out faster and at higher rates- unable to do the work we love. How can we win when our bodies individually and collectively can't keep up? We are risking not just burn-out, but organizer loss and movement fragmentation. We cannot afford this.

How do we move from Self-care to Community-Care?

In his Letter from a Birmingham Jail, Dr. King says "I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." In that same spirit- can we be cognizant of the interrelatedness of our own bodies, of our own well-beings? I cannot sit and read a manifesto for liberation of mind without going deep and healing for liberation of body and spirit. I cannot sit and care for my body without being concerned with what happens to the bodies of my sisters. We are connected.

Can we understand how creating another world will require, or rather, demand our well-being? From small-town collectives and national organizations to strategy and pop-ed sessions to shared meals and parties- it is our responsibility not as individuals, but as communities to create structures in which self-care changes to community care. In which we are cared-for and able to care for others.

Disability Justice is mightily leading the way in showing us that we don't have to keep doing our work in the same way nor do we need to do it alone. For example, [Sins Invalid](#) ("a performance project that incubates and celebrates artists with disabilities") rescheduled an entire production due to a member's health concerns and performed when it was safe for everyone's bodies. Or another shining example is [Creating Collective Access](#)- creating a "new model of being in our movements ...by resisting against the individualization of access" by organizing for collective care at social movement gatherings.

If your liberation is wrapped up with mine- for me that means that it matters how you *feel* and what you are *feeling*. Your well-being is our liberation, and I would hope that you would say the same.

We can take the lead from the field notes of many [Healing Justice](#) & [Disability Justice](#) organizers, collectives, [events](#) and organizations, work from [visionary poets](#) and examples from [national organizing campaigns that center the principle of Care](#). There are resources out there and treasures that are many generations old. Find them, talk about them, [practice them together](#), honor them.

Organizations for Liberation

"We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." Dr. King (Letter from a Birmingham Jail)

As our conversation develops from the limited idea of self-care to the expansive reality of community care we are able to honor the depth of Healing Justice work and the depths of ourselves. We need to switch our thinking- individually and organizationally- to including well-being in our work for justice. Because when we are able to do that- that means we are cognizant of Dr. King's "network of mutuality." Because when we do that we will truly be working towards a liberatory and visionary new world.

So go on and call me when you are ready to do some real work.

...and because I did not do this alone- gratitude for the brilliant concept conversations & feedback-

[B. Loewe](#)

[Alexis Pauline Gumbs](#)

[Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha](#)

[Cynthia Oka](#)

Shonettia Monique