

## REFLECTIONS ON SELF CARE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE PLANETS

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Care workers of all kinds, from physicians to undervalued elder care workers, will tell you that self-care is necessary if you are going to care for others. This maxim is similar to “adjust your oxygen mask, before assisting others”

As teachers, what methods do we use for self-care? Your choices will of course depend on your own preferences and your constitution. Obviously, the primary focus in self-care is maintaining a balance in our physical, soul, and spiritual health. Steps include nutrition, sleep, inner life, exercise, EMF protection, the arts, and spending time with what enriches your happiness.

The purpose here though is not to suggest any guidance with this very individual path but rather to present more universal activities that can be done as a brief respite during the workday to provide centering and strength. They are organized to reflect qualities of the 7 planets.

MOON QUALITIES Recorder. Reflector. Witness.

One of the easiest activities for taking a reflective pause is the *simple act of washing your hands*. In my first years of teaching, I recall hearing about how the act of washing your hands in warm water could be a centering ritual, giving you time to let your mind go blank and rest. As we know from Extra Lesson and therapeutic work, the pause allows the integration of experience. Luckily with a sink in my room I could take advantage of this advice, followed by lemon hand cream for concentrating or lilac for calming.

For emphasizing the recording aspect of the moon, after a class lesson, *jot down some very quick notes*, even a word or two. “David drifted” or “hand clapping game didn't work”. Basically, this is mirroring the classroom occurrences. Even a day of chaos becomes less exhausting if the blur of whirling activity takes on some distinct edges and clarity.

MARS QUALITIES Initiator. Doer. God of War. Speaking, vitality, and enthusiasm are also Mars qualities.

Those that have experienced the art of speech with a gifted practitioner know that this art is a gift to our pedagogy. I remember asking Ms. Audrey McAllen, “If you only had time for one art practice in a day, what would it be?” She instantly replied “Speech.” A few lines of *well-articulated, meaningful and intent filled speech* will connect to a muse that gives ego strength.

Other activities that strike me as having Mars qualities are ones for practicing *cross pattern movement* which is used in Eurythmy for concentrating the ego forces. Cross pattern movements integrate the brain hemispheres. Brain Gym and Qigong also employ cross pattern movements. A simple one is to stand in place, raise your left leg, knee bent, and give a light slap to the left thigh with the right hand. Do the same thing on other side and alternate about 12 times. Also, make large figure 8 movements (sideways 8) in the air, going up to the right, around and then up to the left.

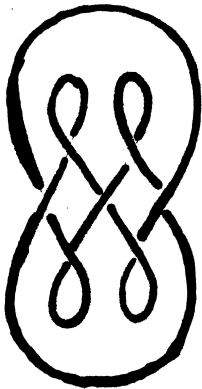
MERCURY QUALITIES God of Healing. Quicksilver and changeability. Movement.

*Can you bring humor* to something disturbing rather than getting locked into it? Laughter feeds our life forces and aids in deep breathing. I recall a teacher at our school who could sometimes be heard down the hall with a raging voice... Oh how I worried for the health of that class.... but then I realized that there was also a whole lot of genuine laughter from all of them and music too. I don't know if there is a correlation, but the graduates of this class far surpassed others for their engagement in alumni affairs.

Rudolf Steiner is often quoted as saying that it is essential that we teach so that the children will breathe and sleep properly. There is a world of research behind that statement for adults too. So, for something you can do between classes or another time when you have a moment, I recommend taking one or two minutes to do “*box breathing*” or even just belly breathing.

- 1) Breathe deeply through your nose into the belly, hold a couple of seconds, then exhale slowly; do this sequence 3-5 times.
- 2) Breathe deeply into the belly, then the middle diaphragm (stomach and heart area) and hold a couple of seconds, then exhale; do this sequence 3-5 times.
- 3) Do the first 2 steps, then breathe and expand into the upper chest, and hold. Exhale. The Navy Seals have a good YouTube on this.

Another movement that is very calming and stimulating is to rhythmically *tap* the area on the chest near the thymus gland. The area is where the collarbones meet, high on the sternum.



JUPITER QUALITIES God of wisdom. Thinker. Planner.

While Jupiter forces are usually known for to achieving lofty goals of foresight and world views, we can look to more immediate Jupiter qualities in self-care such as organization and planning.

One practice I found very helpful, that makes organizing a relaxing experience, is practicing a large, balanced *form drawing*. It might sound counter intuitive at first, but Geometric forms definitely bring out inner organization and watchfulness. Forms require full concentration, and the self-care aspect comes in because the higher force, the ego, is partnered directly to the physical and life forces, leaving that sometimes exhausted soul body in a state of rest. I particularly liked the one shown to the left.

VENUS QUALITIES Caregiving. Goddess of Love. Beauty. Also listening, warmth and nurturing.

Venus is rather like a patron saint of self-care. Anything done that feeds us with warmth, beauty, or calmness expresses Venus.

It is apparent that loving care of our own bodies expresses Venus qualities. There are a number of disciplines that include *self-massage* into a basic series or set of activities. Sensory Integration work uses deep pressure to help release what is termed “fear paralysis” or a reactive state. Deep pressure is

also found in Qigong.

Here is one sample for adults but it can be adjusted for children of all ages.

1) cross arms over your chest and press down on the shoulders and move down your arms, sliding and pressing or squeezing all the way to your wrists. 2) Massage the neck. 3) Massage or swipe your kidneys. Don't skip this area of the lower back. Fear can “settle” in the kidneys. 4) Now rub the calves. 5) Feel the earth under your feet and you could try wiggling your toes. This activity of deep pressure usually helps breathing, regulates the heart, can lower blood pressure, and helps you to feel that you have a second skin.

Another way to bring Venus into your environment is to use *essential oils*. The olfactory sense has a direct path to the emotions and can bring calmness, security, or attention with various scents.

And of course, the standard cup of herbal tea - warmth, nourishment, scent – it has it all.

Creating beauty within the time frame we have been speaking of – a 2 to 5 minute respite – may not be so easy to achieve. However, there are possibilities. One suggestion is to have *dry painting paper* handy which is taped onto a board that you can easily access. When you have a few minutes, use a damp brush, dip it into light colored pigment and paint a few veils of color. You might find that the Yellow Sun in Blue Sky painting exercise is very good for this activity

SATURN QUALITIES    Researcher.    God of Time.    Architect of the skeleton

When you take a moment to initiate the Moon quality of reflecting, you might be surprised how these notes help tie the day together, connecting events in time and providing a sense of continuum which then connects the Saturn quality of the passing of time. *Continuity* provides security as events start to connect and have meaning. Individual events begin to come together more thematically. Opening up to Saturn characteristics of the effect of time, you might be prompted to consider how you have lived in time, remembering your own story and why you came here in the first place. Listening to the unfolding of your destiny and being connected to your purpose gives you strength to go through the sticky points.

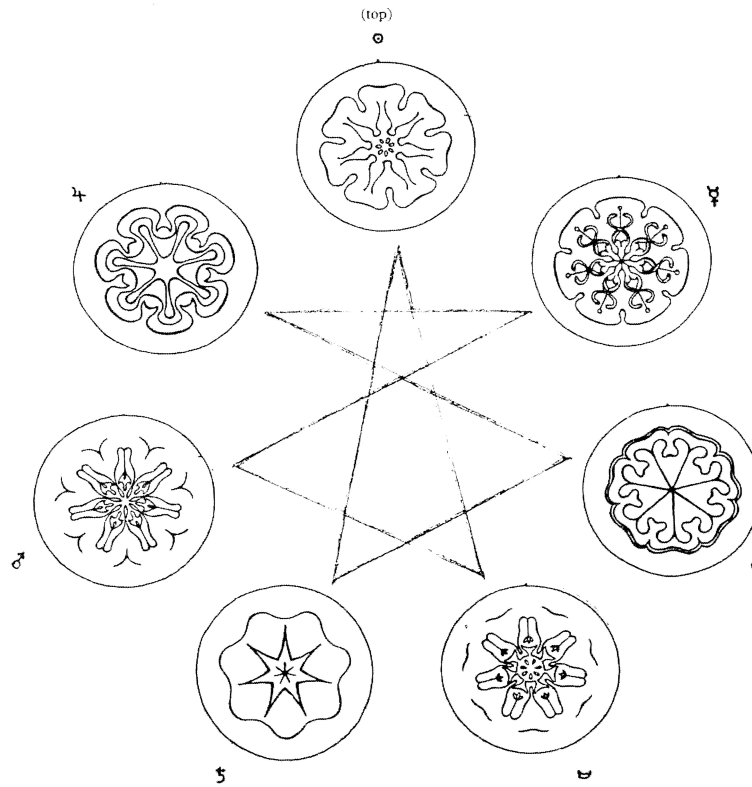
The Extra Lesson exercise that has a pronounced Saturn quality is the one originally titled “*lifting one's weight*”. As one goes onto the toes, a “U” is formed and there is a strong sense of the upright position. The lengthening and stretching of the calf muscles is also very refreshing.

SUN QUALITIES    The sun of course is a star, the center of the harmony of our immediate home in the universe.    Harmonizing and balancing.    Deep and attentive interest.

The most profound demonstration for Sun qualities that we can do in brief moments in the classroom, to my mind, is *Eurythmy* – especially the Halleluiah and the Soul Exercises. Over time, frequent, hopefully daily, practice will bring significant changes to body, soul, and spirit. Recall how Dr. Steiner stated that Eurythmy and Form Drawing were actually the only two unique subjects that separated Waldorf education from other pedagogical streams.

While Eurythmy fills the space with the archetypes of sound and movement, creating a beautiful *harmonious room* can provide a visual balance. Do you have, for instance a rock and a seashell, examples of the hardness of granite and the softness of calcium? Or a little space with representations of the 4 kingdoms: a stone, a small plant, a beeswax candle from the animal kingdom and a small picture of a worthy person or saint?

# Planetary Seals



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## **RELATED MATERIALS:**

*Soul Exercises article in this newsletter*

*Planetary Qualities for Working Groups by Lee Sturgeon Day sturgeonaday@gmail.com*

*AHE web site videos*

*You tube.... Daily QiGong Routine*

*You tube – various Eurythmy exercises with Cynthia Hogan and others*

*Extra Lesson by Audrey McAllen*

*Who Speaks by Hans Pusch*