

Storytime: Mary had been feeling exhausted. She was a mom and a successful professional in her late thirties, with a demanding job, long hours, and unrelenting pressure to succeed—all of which had taken their toll on her physical and mental well-being.

She decided to give herself a break and booked an appointment for a luxurious facial. She thought this would be perfect for taking time out and relaxing. The esthetician massaged her face and thought about the long list of errands and tasks.

When Mary returned home, she was still feeling drained. She realized that although the facial had provided a brief respite from her busy life, it had done nothing to address the underlying issues causing her stress and exhaustion.

This experience was a wake-up call for Mary (and us), signaling an opportunity for us all to rethink our approach to self-care.

It's time to recognize the limitations of “treat yourself” self-care in favor of more holistic approaches that foster genuine well-being. On this episode of Spiritual AF Sundays, we'll be looking at how we can reframe self-care as a tool to break away from hustle culture. We'll explore different ways that we can take care of ourselves, both individually and as a collective. New to all this? Don't worry! We'll cover the basics and provide resources so that you can start your journey to understanding this important topic.

So, if you're ready to embrace a more meaningful and sustainable form of self-care, grab your favorite beverage, sit in your favorite chair, and get ready for this episode of Spiritual AF Sundays: The Myth of "Treat Yourself" Self-Care.

[Opening Credits]

Welcome back. I am Jessica, aka The Mystic Geek, and today we are discussing the myth of "Treat Yourself" self-care. How does this line of thinking impact our overall well-being?

Given the title of this episode, you can probably guess my stance on all of this. Finally, what can we do to break away from this thinking and embrace a more meaningful form of care? Let's dive in!

What is "Treat Yourself" Self-Care?

First, let's look at the origin of “treat yourself” self-care. In 2011, an episode of "Parks and Recreation" introduced the phrase to popular culture, with two characters spending their hard-earned money on materialistic indulgences. Since then, companies and advertisers have co-opted the phrase to make “self-care” a marketable commodity.

How big is the self-care industry? Zippia.com valued the wellness industry in the United States at \$1.2 billion in 2021, which is 28% of the global market. They estimate that the wellness industry will grow 5.5% annually from now to 2030.

Since I brought it up in the example, let's look at spa services. Statista.com says spa visits in the U.S. have increased from 143 million in 2009 to 192 million in 2019, about a 3% annual increase. Then it decreased to 124 million in 2020 due to the pandemic and bounced back to 173 million in 2021.

Investing in ourselves is nothing new; society has twisted this concept from its original intent. The idea was simple: when you're feeling overwhelmed and stressed, it's okay to take time out for yourself and "treat yourself to something luxurious or indulgent." It's okay to take time out for yourself and "treat" yourself to something luxurious. It sounds great.

The Reality of "Treat Yourself" Self-Care

At first, glance, treating yourself is an easy way to relieve stress. But in the long run, it can be harmful. Let's look at this type of self-care's personal and collective implications.

On an individual level, materialistic forms of self-care can make us feel like we are taking care of ourselves, but in reality, it is often a distraction from the root cause of our distress. A facial or vacation might be relaxing but won't provide lasting relief or address the deeper issues causing our pain. In other words, if we don't examine and address the underlying causes of our stress, it's only a matter of time before we find ourselves in a similar situation.

I'll admit I'm guilty of buying into this concept, to a point. After a long day, I'll snag a bar of rose and lavender-infused chocolate, spend an hour doing a face mask, or treat myself to a nice dinner out. However, I know this form of "self-care" is a form of escapism. It's focused on short-term gratification rather than long-term solutions to what's stressing me out. I'm under no illusions that indulging in treats will magically make my problems disappear.

Let's go back to the story that started this episode: Mary and her facial. While the facial was a nice gesture, it wasn't enough to help Mary break out of her cycle of overwhelm and stress. To do that, she'll need an approach to self-care that focuses on the source of her distress: hustle culture. She needs to break free from the narrative of "busy is good" and find an alternative to the hustle.

How could Mary "treat herself" in a way that promotes well-being? She could reflect upon her need to constantly be productive instead of engaging in materialistic self-care. She could look for ways to fill her downtime with therapeutic and meaningful activities. Mary could re-examine her need to hustle and find an alternative that works for her.

Does she need to work long hours, make dinner from scratch, and cart her kids around to all their after-school activities?

She could set boundaries and prioritize rest and recovery.

Or is it time for Mary to outsource some of her tasks and create more space? She could hire someone to take her kids to activities, prep meals, or clean her house so she can spend her time doing what she loves.

She could even look for ways to bring more joy into her life by connecting with nature, learning new skills, or creating things that bring her fulfillment.

These are all great options for Mary to examine. At the same time, we must remind ourselves that not everyone will have the same resources or opportunities as Mary. Being able to stand up for herself at work, outsource home activities, and invest in leisure are all privileges that require access to things like money, education, time, and clout.

The Impact of "Treat Yourself" Self-Care on Marginalized Groups

It's also important to consider this self-care type's impact on marginalized groups. For many people, materialistic indulgences are not feasible or available. For example, a single mother may need more time or money to buy new shoes or take a luxury spa day. The idea that self-care needs to be expensive and luxurious is not only false, but it's also harmful. It overlooks the causes of stress disproportionately affecting marginalized groups and encourages us to ignore them.

You might argue that people can find ways to "treat themselves" within their means. For instance, if someone can't afford a pair of luxury shoes or a vacation, they may be able to afford a nice cup of coffee or, say, a slice of avocado toast.

Three issues with that.

First, those in power will use this argument to fuel the cycle of oppression and encourage the idea that worldly indulgences are achievable for everyone, albeit scaled differently based on income.

Can't afford a vacation at a luxury resort? That's ok; take a staycation instead and order take-out.

Is a spa day out of reach? Buy a face mask and take a nice bubble bath.

This type of messaging ignores the actual causes of distress and often perpetuates them, given the disparities in income and resources between various groups.

The second is that we live in a society that focuses more on individual behaviors than systemic change. You may have heard people criticize the poor for spending their money on small indulgences and ignoring the real issues that make life hard for those in poverty. To those who experience poverty, getting a cup of coffee or a slice of avocado toast is not a treat; it's a necessity that makes their day-to-day lives more bearable. To them, it's more accessible than real solutions, such as access to adequate health care, better jobs, and higher wages.

Third, this approach treats self-care as a reward rather than a practice that we should integrate into our daily lives. It sends the message that treating yourself is an indulgence or a reward for being productive and that self-care should only come after we've completed our to-do list. That's not the case—self-care isn't a reward; it's an essential part of our well-being.

One more point to consider in all this - our actions have consequences that extend beyond us. When many adopt a "treat yourself" mentality, it perpetuates a culture of consumption instead of care. We normalize that treating ourselves is the answer to our problems and ignore the need for more systemic solutions. We reinforce the normalization of materialism, which society teaches us is the norm - trippy, huh?

Breaking Away from Hustle Culture: The Basics of Self-Care

Don't worry - we aren't coming after your crystals, candles, or chai lattes (although if that's your jam, go for it!). We're inviting you to peel back the layers and examine the core of self-care: understanding and meeting our needs in a sustainable and supportive way.

Self-care isn't about splurging every once in a while - it's about creating a safe, healing space for yourself on an ongoing basis. It looks different for everyone, but it usually involves setting boundaries, building community, and engaging in activities that bring joy, meaning, and purpose to your life.

So, what can we do to challenge the "treat yourself" mentality?

The first step is to recognize that proper self-care goes beyond materialistic indulgences. It's about taking time for ourselves and understanding our needs – not buying things. This reframing means building self-compassion and caring for our mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

It means breaking away from hustle culture and adopting a more holistic approach to taking care of ourselves – one that considers our internal needs and our external environment. This

process includes building meaningful connections, developing healthy coping mechanisms, and creating sustainable self-care practices.

What does that look like in practice? Here are a few ideas to get you started:

Volunteer for an organization that supports the causes where you have a lot of passion. When we put our time and energy towards something bigger than ourselves, it can be incredibly uplifting. Our actions serve more than a physical purpose; they nurture us on a spiritual level.

Take time to meditate and connect with your breath. This exercise is more than simply clearing your mind. Meditation allows you to separate yourself from the immediate moment and teaches you how to break away from the thoughts that weigh down your spirit. When you become aware of your thoughts, you can more easily assess what matters and make choices that reflect your values.

Practice self-love in how you treat yourself and talk to yourself. Address the negative thoughts in your head with kindness and compassion—just as you would to a loved one. It can be hard to recognize our self-worth, but it's essential to start valuing yourself to make positive changes. Often, when we urge ourselves to hustle, feelings of inadequacy fuel that unhealthy drive. When we acknowledge our self-worth and accept that we are enough, we can make deliberate choices on prioritizing our time and energy.

Find ways to practice gratitude and kindness. There are countless ways to do this, such as writing in a gratitude journal or sending notes of appreciation to friends and family. These small gestures can make a significant impact on your day-to-day life. When we reflect on the positive things in our lives, we gain greater perspective, can more easily recognize our worth, and make choices that reflect our values. When we practice kindness towards others, we remember our shared humanity and how much we have in common. We no longer see ourselves as isolated entities but as part of a larger community.

Community Care

Proper self-care isn't a solo endeavor. Although it's essential to cultivate our individual needs, we must consider our communities' more extensive collective needs.

Recognizing how our actions affect others encourages us to look outward and take a more active role in our community. Community care means recognizing the interconnectedness of us all and understanding that our actions shape our environment and those around us. We can create a more equitable society by advocating for those around us and supporting social justice causes in our day-to-day lives.

We can also encourage our community to take collective action by having conversations about the issues that concern us and mobilizing people to make positive changes. Community care

ultimately means recognizing how our actions affect the collective and taking steps to create a more equitable society.

Community care is a collective effort that encourages individuals to make positive changes in their local communities. It can include action in areas such as voting, protesting, advocating for social justice causes, and supporting those in need.

Mutual aid is when people help each other out. It can be part of community care. People might help each other by sharing food, money, and resources. Everyone in the community can work together to make it better.

Providing mutual aid to others is an act of kindness and a way of showing love and understanding for our fellow human beings. It can provide a sense of purpose and well-being, as it allows us to make a positive difference in the lives of those around us. Mutual aid can help build stronger communities by bringing people together and creating a sense of inclusion and belonging.

The concept of mutual aid pulls care away from a transactional, quid pro quo model and emphasizes the need to think beyond individual self-interest and prioritize collective needs. It is an essential element of community care that centers on cooperation, solidarity, and support for one another.

Conclusion

Self-care can be more than “treat yourself” days and luxury items; it's about valuing ourselves and our communities enough to practice compassion, understanding, and kindness. We can break away from hustle culture by cultivating gratitude and practicing mutual aid to ensure our collective well-being. By breaking away from a materialistic model of self-care and focusing on community care, we can create a more equitable society and meet everyone's needs.

It's time to start putting proper self-care into practice. We can break away from hustle culture by taking small steps towards understanding what it means to care for ourselves and our communities. Start by reflecting on the positive things in your life and cultivating gratitude. Send notes of appreciation to those you are grateful for in your life. Make a conscious effort to support social justice causes and offer your time and resources to those in need. These small acts of kindness can make a real difference and create a more equitable society.

We hope this episode has given you some food to examine your self-care practices so that you can live a more meaningful and connected life.

If you are looking for ways to give back and positively impact your community, explore the opportunities available at local organizations that need volunteers. You can also join groups dedicated to providing mutual aid.

I'm throwing this back at you, my dear listeners. What do you do to care for yourself and your community? Let us know by emailing me at jess@themysticgeek.com or leaving a voice message at speakpipe.com/themysticgeek.

Curious about what we're talking about next? Join us next week on January 22nd as we discuss spirituality, submission, and power. In two weeks, on January 29th, we're going to have our first Sabbat special, where we discuss Imbolc and its counterpart on the wheel of the year, Lughnasadh.

Now, go out there and get spiritual AF! Thank you for listening.

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