

Mother Nurture

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Finding Your Footing

Obviously I know what I'm supposed to be doing hour to hour in a day, but in terms of the big picture, I feel like everything got turned kind of upside down since I became a mom, like where I was headed in life -- and this has all gotten more confusing since I went back to work . . .

It's really natural to feel pulled in a million directions when you're a mother. And, unfortunately, some important goals or needs of yours can get pushed to the back burner indefinitely.

To deal with this, it helps a lot to have some sense of your guiding purposes and priorities. This is not lofty and abstract, but a practical, daily matter; it's like having a roadmap for your life: then you know where you are headed.

OK, so first things first: Are you for yourself or not? It may seem like a dumb, obvious question, but actually many people have a hard time seriously getting on their own side, so that they feel mobilized to reduce their suffering and increase their happiness. Here are some quick methods:

- Reflect on how being for yourself – so that your well-being and functioning improve – will help other people, especially the ones you care about most.
- Reflect on how you want to treat others with ordinary consideration and kindness. Then apply the same standards of fairness and decency toward yourself that you would naturally apply to anyone: why not you, too?
- Consider children in general and your stance of care toward them. Then get a sense of yourself as a child and apply those feelings of caring to that child you once were - who is still deep inside you.
- Inside your mind, wish yourself well, in the form: “May you _____.” Such as, “May you be happy. May you be at peace. May you be well. May your heart be at ease. May your body be at ease.”

When you're for yourself, you want to support the virtues and priorities that lead to a good life, and contribute mightily to others.

Regarding virtues:

- In your mind or on paper, list three or more important virtues that you routinely embody. A single word will often do, but it's OK to have more. Then go back over your list, and for each one, take a few seconds for the sense of it to sink deeply into your heart.
- Next, list three or more important virtues that you would like to live by better. Do some soul-searching here. Sometimes it helps to be a little quiet in your mind and ask your innermost being – or even God, if that's meaningful to you – for what it thinks. But remember that you are being a good person in your willingness to acknowledge where you could be even better. Some classics: Patience. Restraint of anger. Courage. Sobriety. Cheerfulness. Determination. Love. Generosity.

After getting clear about these, think about what would help you live more by each one. Then see if you can make a commitment to doing that. For real.

Regarding priorities:

- In your mind or on paper, make a list of major areas of your life. Like Health, Spirituality, Love, Pleasure, Marriage, Childrearing, Career, Creative Expression, Finances. Have a few broad or many specific areas, however you like.
- Next, make yourself put that list in priority order. Sorry, no ties are allowed. It's just an exercise; in real life we tend to pursue multiple priorities.
- When you have your priority list, take an honest look at it, and tell the truth to yourself about how you are and how you are not living your life accordingly. Let that truth sink in even if it is uncomfortable. Recall your feelings of being for yourself.
- Then make a real plan about what you could do, concretely and practically, to live more by your true priorities. Stare at that plan and see if you can really commit to it.

To be blunt, we generally end up where we've been heading. So it's vital to head in good directions, and keep telling the truth to ourselves about whether we're still actually on course. Then we have the best possible odds of ending up with the family, the children, the marriage, the life that we deeply want and long for.

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