

Energy Management for Caretakers

by Debbie Lacy

As a caretaker myself, I am well aware of the energy drain that can take place when I've given more to others than to myself. I should say that I am now a "recovering caretaker." Although I am just as compassionate and giving as I always was, I now know how to balance that with care for myself. It requires ongoing attention, and I don't always hold myself to it, but I've learned some strategies that truly help. The one I want to share here is not so much a tool, but a way of looking at life and people in general.

When I was a youth and family counselor, I naturally used to worry about my clients. I was forever hoping that they would heal, make the healthy decision, stop their self-destructive behaviors, etc. I heard many painful stories and thought it was my job to "fix" people in some way. Ultimately, this way of working with people resulted in complete burnout. It wasn't until I transitioned into the field of coaching and was exposed to a more spiritual and holistic way of working with others that I found a much healthier way to manage my energy. It has to do with bearing witness, investing, and surrendering. I consider these to be the foundation for keeping myself in balance, whether I'm working with a client or getting concerned about a family member or a friend.

Bearing witness to another is one of the most powerful activities in any helping relationship. In fact, the simple act of listening to, and witnessing, another has been shown to be the most significant factor in successful counseling work, more so than any techniques or strategies aimed at "fixing" the problem. Why is this? I believe it's because each soul is on its own journey and when we bear witness to another, we are essentially saying, "I see you and I honor you. There is nothing to 'fix.'" This is deep affirmation – freeing and empowering. That said, bearing witness doesn't necessarily mean condoning and it certainly isn't about enabling. It is simply about sitting with someone wherever they are.

Consider what it would be like to appreciate yourself and your gifts, offer them as fully as you can, *and* also know that you are crossing paths with souls on their own journeys. It can be difficult to bear witness to great pain and suffering, but if you can allow yourself to view others from a place of soul and spirit and not merely as suffering people, you can come to see beauty and strength in their expressions of pain and in the struggles they face.

Everyone has the power within to create their own realities-- to heal, to grow, to find their own answers. We all need to do our own work. Others can support, teach, facilitate, guide, but they cannot *make* anything happen in our lives. If you expect that the people in your life will respond to your help in a particular way, then you're holding a misguided hope, and it carries energy. That energy can drain you. You *can* hold a hope that others' inner wisdom will show up and that they will reach out for whatever is in their highest good.

You may have had the experience of noticing certain themes popping up among several people around you at the same time; these themes are mirroring something you're learning about or being challenged by. That's your soul choosing exactly what you need. And eventually, after you've absorbed a soul lesson, you move onward and upward to the next lesson and make other choices in line with the new lesson. People in your life who are struggling are doing just fine from a spirit point of view. They are meeting the particular challenges that they've been given in order to grow. They have choices on that journey, and they might make the "wrong" ones from your point of view, but they have the right to make those choices. Who knows? Perhaps what looks wrong to you is actually something that will take them one step further towards where they truly need to be.

Caring fully for others while also trusting that their spirits know what they're doing enables us to be compassionate beings in the world without carrying huge burdens on our shoulders. It is how to both invest and surrender. We invest in the process, and in the soul's highest good, and we release expectations for the outcome. In this way, we are free to share our gifts and help others while having energy left over to nurture ourselves.