

Screen reader accessible Discussion Guide

Sustaining Spirit: Self-Care for Social Justice

Book Cover Picture Description: Most of the cover is a painting by Naomi Ortiz of a woman of color with purple feathered earrings, a purple short sleeve top and blue jeans. Her eyes and mouth are closed in peaceful contemplation. She holds a red flower with green stem and leaves. To the right of the painting is a photograph by Steven Wilhelm of cholla cacti. Text on the cover: Sustaining Spirit. Self-Care for Social Justice. Naomi Ortiz. Cover is designed by Mona Z. Kraculdy. Publisher, Reclamation Press.

Author: Naomi Ortiz

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Welcome!

In these times, you might find yourself asking, how can I change the world when I'm too tired to change my socks? We must speak out, take action, and work with others, but can we remain passionate about a cause without being consumed by it? Is it possible to practice self-care in real life?

Sustaining Spirit: Self-Care for Social Justice provides a guide by focusing on the building-blocks of self-care. The wisdom gathered in this unique book is drawn from interviews with over 30 social justice activists across the country. In addition, the author weaves in their journey of self-care as a disabled, Mestiza and a long-time social justice organizer. Ortiz invites readers to explore how to balance activism, daily life, and the incorporation of self-care on behalf of the communities we love.

How to use this guide

“Self-care is the practice of returning. Of remembering. Of noticing.”

This guide is for social justice activists, book groups, social workers, educators, organizers, and individuals to discuss their own relationship with self-care.

Sustaining Spirit: Self-Care for Social Justice begins by asking the question, “¿Y dónde está tu ombligo? Where are you centered or rooted?” Becoming centered or rooted begins with ceremony. As you delve into this discussion guide, you are encouraged to explore the activities to see if there's one that speaks of ceremony to you.

In this guide, you'll find overall discussion questions which cover some of the themes that run through multiple chapters. There are also activities to help individuals and groups think through a few of the self-care concepts. Lastly, there are specific chapter questions to prompt discussion and self-reflection.

Sustaining Spirit can be used throughout a semester to break up other readings or as a standalone text. In addition to self-care, the text integrates racial justice and disability justice through a lens grounded in nature.

Sustaining Spirit helps people discover practical ways to practice self-care. This is accomplished, not through simplistic rules or domination over time, body, relationships, but through internal examination and crafting tools and techniques to use in our day-to-day lives.

Overall questions:

How do you learn about your likes/dislikes and needs? How do you go about reflecting on relationships with people and the place you live? How do these ways connect with the types of self-care?

What self-care tools in Sustaining Spirit have you used to create balance in your life? What other tools have you discovered?

Ortiz discusses self-care in the context of activism while being part of groups/spaces which are often not accessible. If you were excluded by a group, how could self-care help you to stay connected with your own dignity and worth?

In the chapter, Tending the Fire, Ortiz tries to understand the difference between important activities and those which are urgent. How do you figure out which of your activities are truly important versus just being urgent? How do you go about prioritizing each in your day?

In many of the chapters, Ortiz discusses vulnerability and practicing interdependence with both people and nature. How do you relate to feeling vulnerable? What ways do you practice interdependence?

What makes you feel powerful? Is this different than feeling grounded or content?

Activities

Note: Plan for access needs. People may need to keep their eyes open to watch ASL interpreters or may need assistance with writing lists. When gathering a group together, include enough time to ask people what accommodations they may need and to plan for these access requests.

Self-Care Definition Gesture

Read the definition of self-care aloud. Ask folks to give themselves some room, close their eyes, or turn around to face away from the group. Then, as the self-care definition is read aloud a second time ask people to create a gesture or a movement based on what they feel when hearing the definition. Once everyone has a gesture or movement, ask people to turn around or open their eyes and silently share their gesture with each other at the same time.

An optional activity is to have people in the group share their movement with two partners and learn each other's gestures, creating a short dance inspired by the definition of self-care. Each group can share this collection of movements with the larger group.

Create a Group Altar

When coming together to discuss this book, or any conversation where people want to be fully present, creating a group altar can set the tone for what the group wants to explore.

Make the conversation sacred:

Before the meeting, ask people to think on their own about what they want from examining self-care. Ask them to select a rock, leaf, twig, or some personal small object that they are ok leaving for timeframe of the sessions, to symbolize this intention.

Lay a cloth down flat on a table. Ask folks to take their objects, hold them in their hands (they can close their eyes if they wish) and imagine their intention filling the object.

Add a handful of dirt, a candle and bowl of water, recognizing verbally that the elements of Earth, Air, Fire and Water are around us and support us to survive.

Ask people to add their object to the altar. This altar helps the group remember the direction towards an exploration of self-care during this time. Remind folks that this altar reflects their own individual journeys and as a collective group.

Consider Change

Ask people to create a few simple lists about what they see, hear, touch, smell where they are seated. Give them 3 minutes to create their lists. Then request everyone move to a different seat or location. Ask them again to create new lists for where they are sitting now. (Again giving 3 minutes to complete the lists.)

Small Group: answer the following questions

What did you notice about where you were situated?

Did you have expectations that things would be different when you moved? Why or why not?

What, if anything, changed in the different location?

Return to the large group. Discussion prompt: When attempting change, we can sometimes have high expectations of feeling radically different. Yet, through our effort to gather our things and move to a different location, we tracked subtle, but noticeable changes.

Do small changes count? How do you notice and observe change? How do you manage your expectations for internal or social change?

Journal Prompt: A Self-Care Commitment

Individually, think of one commitment you'd like to make to yourself about self-care. This could be in the areas of work, school, friends and family, or it could be a cultural, traditional or religious commitment. Write this commitment down.

Next, think about what you need in order to fulfill this commitment.

Tackle Blocking Responses

As a group, brainstorm a list of self-care activities. The group might want to pick a specific area like work, school, or family. After you come up with a list of five or so ideas, create a second list of blocking responses. For example, if the self-care activity is to take more breaks, blocking responses that you might hear in your head could be, "But you can do just this one other thing." "These things HAVE to get done!" "I can't take a break UNTIL..."

Finally, create a list of response statements to these blocking statements. For the example of taking breaks, a response statement might be, "What's the worst that will happen if it doesn't get done? Can I handle it?"

Chapter Discussion Guide

Grandfather Sun

What are challenges people face in attempting social change work? Are there other challenges the author didn't include?

"Part of self-care is really about deepening our relationship with our own value." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

The author says, "We often come to the work of social justice from a place of deep wounding, where we have witnessed or experienced the harm of injustice." How do our wounds play into doing activism?

Earth

Liberando las Fronteras

The author coins the term, Rule-bearer, to describe their experience with The Rules. How does this concept differ from our typical description of dominant culture?

What are the ways the author discusses shame? What are their responses to this shame?

The author describes their four names versus labeling them. How do these multiple names help them to exist in the in-between?

First Light

How does the author describe their relationship with ancestors?

How do ancestors help the author to develop the skills of strength, awareness, focus and clarity?

What unseen forces support your journey with caring for the world?

Flitting Butterfly

What is the difference between critical-thinking and critical-feeling?

How can critical-feeling support self-care?

How does critical-thinking support self-care?

Obsidian Reflection

How do you know when you need to make time for self-reflection?

Is self-reflection important?

What is the tension the author describes between efficiency and reflection? How does this tension impact our work with others?

Taking Flight

Why is perspective as important as goals?

The author describes their relationship with goals as being in anticipation of happiness sometime in the future, saying, “Goals without perspective are shallow endeavors. They may not serve me or move me toward what I really want or need.” What do you think about this statement?

How are goals building blocks for doing work in the world? How is perspective?

Metate

In Metate, the author says, “Understanding what my needs are requires the skill to listen to myself.” How does the author describe practicing this skill?

I just have to figure this out, is code for the ways the author tries to meet their needs. What are things you say to yourself or emotions that you have which indicate you have needs that aren't being met?

In what ways do demonstrate to yourself that you have value?

Desert Rain

How do you approach giving?

Do you reflect on what you are trying to give others? Why or why not?

The author says, “If we can’t receive, we can’t survive.” Do agree with this statement? Why or why not?

Slow Growth

The author says, “(When) we want to make big a change, we want it fast, to be complete, and we want it now.” What’s your reaction to the statement?

What are micro changes? How do micro changes connect with doing the minimum?

How do you know when the minimum can or cannot be built upon?

Fire

Cedar Ashes

How do you engage in advocacy?

How do you know when it’s time to keep pushing or time to let go (at least for now)?

Confronting injustice rarely leads to a tidy resolution. What are the tactics the author employs to deal with things not being acknowledged in the way they want or resolved in the way they hope?

Piercing the Dark

What contributes to the authors development of hypervigilance?

The author describes trying to satisfy their needs through centering others. How do they do that?

How does the author go about shifting their approach to their responsibilities?

Luminarias

How does the author define boundaries?

How else can boundaries be defined?

How does the author know that their boundaries are working? How do you tell if boundaries are working for you?

Aloe in the Embers

The author, when in pain, describes feeling out of control. What are ways you respond when you feel out of control?

How do you feel about social media when you are feeling isolated?

How do you want people in your life to interact with you when you don’t feel well?

Tending the Fire

How does the author define urgent versus important?

Sometimes situations are both urgent and important. What skills can you use in these situations?

What do you think about the statement, “Infinite need, finite you”?

Kindling

Why is it important to have nourishing activities along with obligations? Or is important at all?

How do we prioritize nourishing activities?

What ways have you found to respectfully back out of commitments?

Firebreak

What does the author mean when they say, “I am being asked to respond differently... to treat my heart as a precious plant in a freeze”?

How do you stay true to yourself when you feel excluded?

In this chapter, the author describes their layered journey with accountability. What do they ultimately conclude as criteria for how they engage with accountability? Do you agree? Why or why not?

Water

Fluid

What are the ways you reflect on what’s happening, when swept up in crisis?

Are there other ways you would want to try?

When the author says, “My nerves only remember to move when there is external pressure,” what is the author trying to describe?

Finding the Flow

How does the author describe engaging, what is?

Can being aware be helpful in assessing crisis?

What places make you feel the most present or aware?

Eclipse Surrender

How does the author know when they need to resist surrendering?

The author talks about trying to act on the advice, “When the going gets tough, the tough have fun.” Do you agree with this advice? Why or why not?

How does the author discuss gentleness?

Touchstones

How do you adjust expectations when things are different than you thought they would be?

What tools do you have to be with others when feeling depleted?

How do you check in with yourself to see if you are, or are not, too depleted to provide support?

Gritty Grief

How does the author engage with their grief?

In what ways does the author find support?

How are relationships outside of people (with plants, rocks, etc.) helpful?

Monsoon Nourishment

How does the author talk about choice? What do you think?

Do you receive nourishment from nature? If so, how?

As humans, we can become fixated on negative events and situations. Is it important to notice positive events? If so, what are ways to consciously soak them in?

How does taking nourishment in affect others in your life?

Soaking the Fibers

What are ways that you try to clear your head when feeling frustrated?

How does the author define healing? How is mending different?

How does mending interact with letting go?

Bridge to Palatable Pleasure

Does fun feel like work?

Do the simple pleasures the author describes feel like they would actually bring joy to your day? Why or why not?

How can simple pleasures make us more resilient?

Air

Chaff in the Wind

The author states, “As an activist, I hold tight to the belief that change in the world comes through consistency.” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

How does the author discuss the difference between values and needs?

How does, good enough, play out in your life?

Harmony

On print book page 168, the author says,

“Harmony isn’t about bringing every part forward in all situations. It’s about knowing myself, knowing all of my instruments inside and then making a choice about the music to share. In order to feel comfortable, I need to be aware of what parts of myself I desire to bring forward on a day-to-day basis and those parts that I ignore or hide away.

For example, employers are easily pleased by my skills of completing tasks with knowledge and problem-solving. Because these skills are admired and help me to fit in, I can use these skills for everything. Yet, if knowledge is a violin, and problem solving the cymbal, then I am essentially serenading and startling people whenever I interact with them. I need to bring other instruments forward to create a softly yielding transition.”

How do you figure out what skills of yours to use in a situation?

How can you practice new skills?

Does the concept of bringing parts of ourselves forward, and then back, align with being our full selves?

Stepping Stones Through Fog

What daily transitions are opportunities to check in with your body or heart?

What nourishing or replenishing activities can be done in 3 to 5 minutes?

How does the author discuss boundaries in this chapter? Can boundaries be part of personal rituals?

Echo Locations

Do you agree with how the author defines interdependence? Why or why not?

What do you think about living in multiple worlds and the struggle for credibility? How does interdependence address this tension?

What roles do accessibility and interdependence have in social justice movements?

Sacred Space

How can community ritual support a group's development?

In describing community ritual, the author says, "Questions have a home here because answers are not the point." What are your thoughts about this statement?

How does community ritual honor a group's emotional journey?

Shooting Stars, Falling Stars

What does the author describe as the purpose of anger?

The author discusses how self-protection often makes us want to pull away from what we don't understand. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Where does the wisdom and patience come from to do social justice work?

Sage Scents

Elders see themselves as part of community instead of outside of community. Could this perspective shift how you approach social justice work?

What Elder wisdom from the chapter did you connect with?

What are some ways to honor Elders?

Grandmother Moon

This chapter begins with the author describing the challenges of trying to make internal changes. What do you think of The Spiral Way?

The author ends the book with a letter naming the experience of living inside the storm of capitalism, materialism, and militarization. How do these forces create social chaos?

Returning to the concept of rootedness, how does rootedness help us in the storm?

To learn more about Naomi or to check out recorded talks and workshop offerings, please visit: www.NaomiOrtiz.com

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Naomi Ortiz is a writer, poet, visual artist, facilitator, and the author of *Sustaining Spirit: Self-Care for Social Justice*, a guide on self-care for diverse communities. Currently, Ortiz is focusing on her creative projects exploring disability justice, intersectionality, and connection to place, as well as speaking to individuals and groups delving into the substance of self-care. Her leadership style emphasizes facilitation, inclusion and spiritual growth.

Ortiz has published writing and poetry in numerous publications and anthologies. Her visual art is on permanent display at the University of Arizona's Disability Cultural Center and she have performed her poetry at events such as Chicago's nationally organized Disability Pride Parade. Ortiz is a proud disabled mestiza, living in the U.S./Mexico borderlands.

Headshot: Picture description: Light-skinned Mestiza with short dark hair looks intently to the side. An earring with a concentric circle design swings below the hairline. The backdrop is a mountain, cacti and desert trees.

Discussion Guide for *Sustaining Spirit: Self-Care for Social Justice* © 2020 Naomi Ortiz