

During these past few weeks I've taken a quieter life. Yes, even Sasha Fierce needs a break too. Actually I'll admit, burning out is why I welcomed rest. I reached the threshold of production and of pleasing, despite the never-ending to-do list and the disappointment haunting me. I once equated silence and solitude to nothingness — miles of dust. I thought I would hate this empty space. I'd never thought I'd say this, but I don't. Actually, I've *enjoyed* it. It has allowed me to be in tune with myself. The stillness has given me a chance to connect with my breath, as this world, in the middle of a global crisis, tries to literally regain its own.

I've been told as an Enneagram Three, I have the superpower to perceive people's thoughts and feelings. While this may be true, I sometimes feel more like the young and untamed Charles Xavier (in the 2011-2016 movies). Various opinions, expectations, cultures, wants, and needs inundate me. I can hear cries of inner children even in silence. When I am unhealthy, others' thoughts and feelings unconsciously crowd out mine.

At first, the unhealthiness may be undetectable. It may disguise itself as selflessness — appearing as community projects, spiritual advice, or cooked meals for friends. While these may host good intentions, underneath these behaviors can be the need to prove that I am *not* selfish. The need for such acknowledgment creates a frantic or aggressive energy. The lack of inner peace leads to furious attempts to forcefully create harmony in another person or an environment. The irony is that it cannot. I cannot give what I don't have.

This unexpected personal retreat has given me a chance to disconnect with the summons that surround me. I pause to feel my breath and therefore, to care for my voice. Nurturing the deepest layers of my heart allows me to care for my relationships and my art. When I come to acknowledge my breath as a sign of beloved existence, I can enjoy the lovely existence of others. An overstimulated discernment quiets down to the ability to sense a whole person before me, without feeling like their energy will overcome mine.

In being present, I let go of the compulsion to fix something or someone else. I give myself time to truly celebrate my own successes and those of others. Being in the moment means that I cease from the constant escapism to what I wish could be or what I could redo in my past. In an unhurried state, listening is easier and others find liberty to speak without my interruption. Furthermore, I can be honest without fearing rejection.

With my heart receptive and listening, not only are my relationships better, but also, true art begins to emerge from my innermost being. The authentic voice has space to resound. When I have not taken time for myself, it is too easy to make art that pleases perceived expectations, rather than expresses core beliefs.

Art for an Enneagram Three, ideally, is a unique but universal creation. It's like a perfected fried rice. For most, fried rice is a *mélange* of random fridge leftovers splashed with soy sauce, perhaps sriracha, that could be easily whipped up in ten minutes. I was shocked when my mother told me esteemed Chinese culinary competitions also require fried rice. A good fried rice has the correct crispiness, and is embedded with the freshest seafood — all housed in a decorative pineapple.

A more American example is the chocolate chip cookie. My friend Elias, a chef, stalled baking the household staple because everyone seemed to have their own opinion of it. Since stopping to rest, he has experimented with different recipes. In his most recent dabble he elevated melted chocolate chunks with coffee and topped it off with a dash of sea salt. He enjoys boldly reinterpreting this beloved treat.

Likewise, as I pause, I'm experimenting with my own musical and poetic recipes. My desire is to craft fine meals from ingredients grown from natural tempos. They are the mastered plates with the undocumented history of tossed tasting spoons, overcooked batches, and sour faces.

I submit to experimentation knowing that there will be potential wandering,
the stretching of time,
multiple failures,
unanswered questions,
and the perception of being confused or even *lost*.

I could create works just to have something for show and to meet the “shoulds.” Everything in my upbringing suggests that discipline, directional clarity, consistency, efficiency, and economy are the character signs of a successful, might I dare say, faithful person and craftsman.

These are certainly admirable qualities, but they are not the focus at the moment. I set these aside to experience the goodness of mundane activities.

To play just to play and not to produce.

To unhurriedly flow with the strange unwinding of the hours.

To soak in the sun and to delight in rainfall without feeling inconvenienced.

To find beauty in the commonplace.

I began this unexpected sabbatical with every fiber of my being suffocating, sore from neglect. But as I continue to embrace the open quiet space, I find Freedom and Truth graspable, and with them clarity of my beliefs. When the time is right, my message will emerge unadulterated, ready to be a gift to the world. And I'll welcome to the table those who are ready to share that same taste, as well as, a united breath with me.