

# THE *Joy* OF RELEASING OBLIGATION



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Reading that family gathering and the intrusive aunt who always inquires why you're not married yet? Feeling pressure to go out with friends every weekend? Running out of excuses to give the annoying co-worker who keeps asking you to dinner? Enter the pandemic and you're finally free as all expectations are lifted and the pressure is finally off! While some of us have been aching to re-socialize and get back to "normal", there is another group of us that are quite happy, even joyous about cuddling up under our tightly woven blankets of introversion. We relish in the thought of not having to succumb to societal and family pressures and were just getting comfortable settling into the peaceful bliss of just being. Sound like you?...**you're not alone!**

When our entire world closed down and we entered into a life of the unknown, very quickly many of us began experiencing changes to our emotional state. It was not uncommon to hear people report feelings of increased stress, anxiety, and depression. Our world had come to an abrupt, startling and, not to mention, terrifying halt. The screeching of the global brakes could be heard and felt from ocean to ocean and pole to pole. Our social lives, livelihood and education came to an immediate stop and with that came the temporary end of any expectation to socialize. For some, the words "self-isolation" allowed us to breathe a heavy sigh of relief. Although for many people it felt like a prison term, others happily welcomed the quiet, peaceful seclusion.



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Well, nothing lasts forever! Here we are with the end finally in our sights as we witness social gathering limitations lifted and vaccine passports withdrawn. Our world is opening up and for some, comfort zones may be shutting down. Stress levels increase and anxiety returns tenfold at the thought of getting back to "real life" and "real expectations".

After having had a taste of what living in peace can feel like, maybe it's time to begin exercising your right to live in peace by the choices you make each day; what you will participate in, the people you choose to spend time with and really examine what brings you joy and, conversely, what creates dis-ease within. But don't confuse choice with avoidance. Avoidance is about not dealing with issues, dodging real responsibility and giving into fears. This isn't a convenient excuse to crawl under the covers and pretend troubles don't exist or allow fear to take hold of the reins. Choice is all about taking responsibility for our happiness, our peace and setting ourselves as a priority ahead of disproportionately "people-pleasing" at our emotional expense.

Perhaps the pandemic has shown us just how glorious life can be when we engage ourselves in what fuels our spirit and not in what depletes our joy.

The next time you receive an invitation, perhaps ask yourself "is this something I truly want to do, or am I feeling a sense of obligation? Is your immediate emotion excitement or dread? Is your mind already trying to create a way out? If the news of a gathering does not elicit a feeling of joyful anticipation, consider respectfully and clearly declining, remembering that long-drawn-out reasons and explanations are not required. Sometimes we get caught up in the minutiae of having to explain and reexplain our choices. "No thank you" is quite simple enough.

Remember to be gentle with yourself. It's always about taking small, but steady steps forward by making small, yet powerful changes each day. Don't get overwhelmed, just keep taking that next right step...  
**it simply begins with you!**

*Exercise  
your right  
to live in  
peace*

