

Self Care 2020_Dr R. Hearn

00:00 Sophia Nelson: Today is Friday, July 10th, 2020. My name is Sophia Nelson. I am in Atlanta, Georgia, and I have on the line... Please introduce yourself.

00:18 Dr. Redell Hearn: Hi, this is Dr. Redell Hearn, and I am in New Orleans, Louisiana.

00:24 SN: Thank you, Dr. Redell. Okay, so we'll just get started with the first question. How do you define self-care?

00:37 DH: I define self-care as those mindful thoughts and actions that contribute to nurturing the mind, body, and soul. Completing these acts allows us to then care for anything we need to take care of.

00:58 SN: Okay. Prior to the shelter-in-place restrictions that took place throughout the spring, how do you think you were engaging with self-care? Were you fully engaged? And if so, what ways were you doing it prior to the shelter-in-place?

01:21 DH: I have been involved in self-care for as long as I can remember---throughout my entire life. Even as a small child, I knew when to “be still.” Prior to COVID-19, to having to quarantine and work from home, I practiced meditation daily. I also like to walk for the journey not just as a means of exercise. I live close to a large park and bayou, so those are my two favorite routes. My environment---outside and inside---is very intentional because that supports a lifestyle of self-care and intentional living. But in addition to my core neighborhood or my home in New Orleans, I work in Jackson, Mississippi which requires a three-hour commute. I treat my commute time as mindful and it includes everything from mindful-based apps and music to silently driving and appreciating the landscape. I work in a museum that has beautiful art in addition to a wonderful garden that I try to walk-thru for mental breaks.

02:51 SN: Awesome. Have you adopted any new self-care practices since the shelter-in-place?

03:04 DH: It is interesting for me, the pace of life that has come with sheltering-in-place is not new to me. I am used to working from home and to embracing life at a slower speed, so that feel like a stretch. The biggest difference for me is balancing time with family, and then also my individual time for spiritual growth. When I am by myself it is a no-brainer but being fortunate enough to have this experience with some of my family, I do not want to take that away. The adjustment has been in me having to find the time to do those things that just come so naturally but in a more structured format. For example, I am a huge fan of the 21-day meditation series created by Deepak Chopra. I may complete on per year, but during the quarantine, I keep one on deck because I can “check-in” on a regular basis. In fact, I am a couple of days in to one right now!

04:26 DH: I also use the Calm app as do members of my family, so that is a fun way to connect with each other around the topic of mindfulness, it gives us something positive to talk about. Those are some of the things that I have incorporated. And then being outside, of course, and walking being outside in nature and outside the house as much as possible, not in other places, but just being able to walk around the neighborhood, go to the park, things like that.

05:10 SN: Okay. Art, public art, public history, documentary, have there been any works that have really helped you process some things by encountering them, viewing them, since the quarantine?

05:34 DH: Wow, that is a good question. I think I have come more in touch with some of the pieces that I have in my house, being able to spend more time. And I really like abstract work, and so what has really been inspiring to me are colors---in whatever form I meet them---floating by in the bayou, growing in my yard, contained in a frame on the wall. I am really appreciating the vibrancy of life found in the colors I see everywhere and not focusing on art necessarily. Looking at things that are... I don't know, just things that are more touching at the spiritual level. And so how those colors reflect to me, how they resonate with how I am feeling or what I'm thinking, things like that. But I have not really been focusing... Not that I have not looked at art, but I've not focused on it in a way that, I guess, as intensely as I have before, because it feels more of work than just being able to engage with something that's inspiring in its own way.

06:37 SN: Okay, okay, how... What are your thoughts around COVID-19, particularly how it's affecting the African-American community a bit more? And then, of course, with you living in Louisiana, there were reports that it was impacting that state a little bit more. Do you have any thoughts around those two areas as it pertains to COVID-19?

07:10 DH: Well, there's a couple. What really struck me when the first conversations started to surface about COVID-19 having a more direct impact on African-Americans than anybody else, I thought that's a dangerous theory to float because people are more vulnerable and susceptible to ideas that elicit fear. I also thought, Black people never get a break! In the unfolding of a global pandemic, we are being reminded that Black people will have it worse than anyone else in the world. Anything that's happening, we're taking a bigger brunt for it. In addition to the actuality of Black people becoming sick---and dying---systemic racism was not taking a time-out thereby looking to disconnect Black humanity from everyone else, from the global community.

08:32 DH: Early on, there were a lot of people who read this as oh well, if this is happening to Black people, that has absolutely nothing to do with me so I can go on with my life. There is so much intentional misinformation about what's happening that it's difficult to really get a clear picture or a clear understanding about what is happening.

09:22 SN: Yes. That's a unique perspective, thank you for sharing that. And Louisiana, with COVID affecting Louisiana, do you have any specific thoughts around that?

09:41 SN: It was unconscionable that people were aware that a deadly virus was in the USA during Carnival Season in New Orleans, when thousands of people from around the world choose to visit the City. So we had this huge months-long celebration going on in the city, and people were aware, there were officials in this country and city leaders and state leaders around different parts of the country that were aware that there was a virus that could potentially upend our lives and nothing was done to curtail activities. The fact that that information, that nobody brought that information to light, I just really was very struck by how that could happen today and with the knowing the amount of people that were going to be involved in this celebration.

10:50 DH: One of the most disheartening things for me to see in New Orleans were the dozens of members of the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club who became ill, and died, shortly after hosting the Zulu Parade, the biggest parade on Mardi Gras Day. This is an African American club, and they had this huge party for the world, which included my family and me, and within weeks so many people who created the parade, and those in attendance, we sick, dying or dead.

12:05 DH: So it really kind of tail-ends on that first question you asked about African-Americans being affected and what level, and definitely, like I said before, I'm not in denial that it's not impacting, but I also think that watching this happen, there are powers that be that are watching this happen or watched it happen to the African American community and just did nothing about it. I will say though the mayor of our city has done an amazing job in working to keep people safe and working with the information and the authorities to make sure that she could do everything in her power to take care of the entire community. I appreciate having LaToya Cantrell in the position that she's in, it has made a huge difference in my level of attention and appreciation.

13:01 SN: Yes, yes. And in your response to COVID, I think I'm sensing that you're talking about the psychological effects of hearing such reports that it is affecting. So, in a similar fashion, psychological effects, how have you been processing seeing police brutality, and then some of the social justice uprisings that have taken place after that?

13:38 DH: Well, again, I'll go back to initially what we were talking about with self-care being part of my life. Self-awareness is also there, a part of my life, as a Black person living in these United States of America. And so, my level of consciousness, in terms of lived experience, in terms of study, I am not shocked by any of it, and it doesn't really move the needle for me, one way or the other in terms of being overly excited about what's happened, or being unmoved by what's happening. And that is not about apathy, it stems from a studied observation of history and behavior.

14:27 DH: If we are really going to see a change in the USA, it will come in the form of action not just from reaction. Seeing people come out in protest after George Floyd's murder and the momentum that was taken on is a wonderful way for people to be able to find, and connect, and feel that they were part of something bigger than themselves. I also understand that movements, the visibility of the movement, does not make the change in this country, that it's policy that makes a difference. I am inspired by the idea of people organizing to vote, talking openly about voting, encouraging, and making movements in the system, making policy changes and embracing individual responsibility for their own actions. It does not take a movement to change the only thing we can change and that is our minds.

15:21 DH: When it comes to the murder of George Floyd, I don't want to become desensitized to Black people being killed at the hands of white people, or anybody else. And so, I have not watched the video. I know what's happening, it's not that I've not seen at a distance what's there, but I've not sat and looked directly at the video, and any other video, and for that reason, because I don't want to be desensitized by it. This is also something that I've been aware of, the behavior, the activities, the actions, the reactions, for my entire adult life, and before that.

16:13 SN: Yeah, yeah. Reparations, and that conversation has come up. It's been, I think, for quite some time, but people are starting to say reparations isn't always about, you know, the money. And I have a friend who is really a champion of like, "Hey, let's just make sure black people can get access to mental health resources, or other ways to help cope with the post traumatic slave syndrome, and everything that's come after the end of people being enslaved." So, do you think there is a need for us to really get to the root of our feelings as a community? And if so, what are some methods that you think we can adopt, and even institute into the public school systems, to start helping children process fear, trauma, and other discrepancies within their communities?

17:38 DH: I am interested in reparations. The fact that it is still a discussion and not in motion is

frustrating. I live in a country that prides itself on wealth. And if we're not having a conversation and negotiating with people that only understand money, and they only understand wealth, then we are devalued, as a people. It's not the money we want, we want the money, and everything else that goes along with it.

18:24 DH: There is a precedent for reparations in this country. White slave holders were paid reparations for the slaves that they lost (I am aware of the language I'm using here) after slavery ended. They were paid money because they were believed to have suffered financial losses of their property, so they received reparations. So, to talk about it as if it's something that we don't know anything about in this country, and we don't know how to do it is a fallacy. And to shame Black people into thinking that we shouldn't be asking for money, limits our ability to gain something that is essential to, not only our survival, but our long-term health, and growth, and our ability to thrive in a country, again, that worships at the altar of money.

19:32 DH: When we talk about some of the things that we want to help, that second part of your question about mental health and getting to the roots of post traumatic slave syndrome and educating and strengthening our mental healing and our awareness of how much we're suffering internally, then we have the resources, we can make the decisions about those things that are going to best serve us. We have the knowledge, the skill, the know-how, the resources, having that kind of financial support to be able to bolster those things where we're not asking somebody else to supply those things for us because they were never going to get the best things that we can. When it comes to the tools, the resources for mental health, really, acknowledgement and then stability and ongoing...incorporating that into our lifestyles, I think that is essential.

20:33 DH: Black people have been in a continuous cycle of suffering for generations, yet we have and never taken a moment to even think about healing. We were enslaved for hundreds of years and treated like animals. Our bodies and minds were bought and manipulated with no mental and physical therapy provided to address the wounds left behind. We've never had a self-healing. We're living in a country that doesn't even acknowledge what happened. We're dealing with the descendants of human traffickers who don't even have to acknowledge that they receive help from that. They get away with saying, "Well, that has nothing to do with me now, that's something that happened in the past." Well, we cannot afford to say that's not affecting me emotionally, psychologically, physically now because that happened in the past, because we're still living it.

21:39 DH: I'm a mindful practitioner helping people expand their awareness of spiritual enlightenment. It is key to being able to focus on some of those things that can really help strengthen us as individuals, that will then help to strengthen our families, our communities, and help us to heal, but not let go of those other things that are important. Going beyond just this idea that Black people fight the fight, we also need to know how to release some of the burden and pain, how to surrender, and to heal so that we can more robustly love ourselves and each other as well.

22:27 SN: Yes, yes. So I have to bring in this next question. I haven't asked anyone this before, but just this past weekend, across the United States, we lost probably over six children under the age of 13 to gun violence. Do you have any thoughts around gun violence and the state of it today?

23:00 DH: If you don't love yourself and value yourself, you won't recognize how to love and value anyone, or anything, else. You can say it, but it's an ideal. If we have people in proximity to you that don't value their own lives, they won't value yours. I'm not on... I don't have a train of

thought that would allow me to say we have to take back streets and we've got to fight. No, because, again, fighting doesn't heal open wounds it keeps them open and painful. And that's a serious wound there when we have people that have no value for life. Every action is put up as a mirror and magnified when it comes to Black people; the suffering for children and anybody being killed, or somebody losing someone they love to murder or a senseless act of somebody else that results in their loss, is difficult enough as it is to heal or to deal with as it is. But then to be held up for it to be something that black people do or considered acceptable; means we must go beyond whatever questions we've been asking to create new ones that yield answers at the heart of the matter. We need to ask some different questions. Whatever actions we've been taking, we need to take some different actions.

24:48 DH: That means not just coming at this the way we always have and then saying, this incident is tragic, or this act is unfortunate, because I've heard it so many times. Here in New Orleans, if I've been here in this city, of children being killed in cross-fire and that comes on the news and it's a story and then it goes away until there's another story, and there's a vigil and people talk about taking back the neighborhood. The bottom line for me is really what I just said a little while ago was, if you keep thinking the same way, you keep taking the same approach, you keep taking the same actions, then you're going to continuously get the same results.

25:44 SN: Yes, yes. So with all of these social conditions that we've discussed, COVID, mental health, gun violence, are you in any way applying yourself to making change through your work, through your community, community involvement? Are you applying yourself to affecting change?

26:17 DH: Absolutely, I am. And the way that that is for me is who I be, not what I do. There's a lot of individual ownership and responsibility, I feel, when it comes to the bigger picture of anything we're dealing with in society, because we are a civil society that's made up of individuals, partnerships, family, community, and so it grows up from there. I take that individual responsibility in terms of what my thoughts are, what my actions are, how I'm living my life and that's really, for me, that's how I make my contribution. It's more in that vein than in going out to protests or making a post on social media or things that are visible. I take a lot of energetic action outside of the popular visible realm.

27:38 DH: I'm a practitioner, and I developed a business a few years ago that is grounded in meditation. It's called Soul-Sip and consists of guided meditation and wine appreciation. I've created an entire curriculum around using those two elements to create self-reflective sessions that generate conversations about all sorts of topics. Once the tone is set and people feel safe to express what they feel---first to themselves---they are more willing to delve deeper into dialogue about what is really affecting their lives. During this time in quarantine, it's really been an opportunity for me to talk the talk, or is it talk the talk, talk the walk, walk the talk? [chuckle] I keep thinking how that goes, but for all of these things that were very ideal for me, and I've been teaching this method for a few years now, but having to really rely on it as a source for myself, and thinking about how to share that on a broader scale with people now that I'm able to offer classes online which opens up a whole new realm.

29:02 DH: I'm realistic and analytical. I'm trained as a philosophical thinker, but I respect and value the importance and power of spirituality. You can't think your way out of everything, sometimes you must feel and be able to move by a sense of feeling, not just what you think you know.

29:30 SN: Yes, yes. And there's a lot of analysts that are looking at how things will function in the future, particularly schools. Are the kids going to go back to school three days per week, will they be online? If you could prescribe a solution that would include health and wellness and digging in deep, would you be able to prescribe some solutions for a better future that we can offer to our kids at this time?

30:12 DH: I've been in the museum field for over twenty-five years. An anchor for museums are mission statements. I wrote my first personal mission statement twenty years ago, based on the idea that if knowing your mission as a museum guided your growth and sustainability, it could also work for a person. I also incorporated this exercise into the museum studies courses that I've taught. I have never re-written the original statement, but I revisit it annually to adjust as needed. I run everything through that statement. In fact, even the outgrowth of my spiritual work with Soul-Sip was vetted using my personal mission statement.

31:28 DH: I teach graduate students and this philosophy influences how I engage my students, create curriculum and assess my overall work. It's not just about saying, "Okay, well, we're going to integrate or introduce meditation into an elementary school curriculum," for example, and you're going to have kids doing everything that they normally do, and then you bring somebody in and they have meditation for half an hour, three days a week. It's about getting to the people that are teaching them so that what emanates from the teacher can be mimicked by the student.

32:51 DH: I work to be the best person I can for myself and for those I meet on all levels of life. Society is more open to mindfulness today than when I was a child. However, I grew up in Southern California in a general community that was open to spirituality. I went to Venice High School, a mile from Venice Beach. In that community there were yoga studios, meditation spaces, chanting, chakra readers, vegetarian restaurants, all these things that have recently gained popularity were part of the blueprint of my childhood. Now, people are seeking solace, peace and an alternate to the chaos that passes itself off as a lifestyle in the USA.

34:01 DH: We have tried the mass method before, we've been living under the mass method, and that's not working. This country is an ideal, we operate as if everything has been written in stone and we need to go back to what was written in stone. Not the case, so therefore, we can try things that have not been done before. How do you incorporate meditation into elementary curriculum? You incorporate meditation into elementary school curriculum. How do you incorporate it into a workplace environment? You incorporate it into a workplace environment. There are things that absolutely should be done. I hope that I'm a part of the movement to center mindfulness into education, museum work and everyday activities.

35:20 SN: Wow, that's amazing. Thank you, thank you. We're closing very soon. I want to ask, you mentioned technology and how you engage is different today, probably with different software like, Zoom, Skype, Facebook Live, stuff like that. So yeah, can you tell me how your relationship with digital technology is today versus how it was maybe prior to this change?

36:00 DH: Well, prior to the change, it felt like I had to two different lives. I've been teaching in a graduate program in museum studies for eleven years. Prior to that, I created an onsite graduate program in museum studies in New Orleans, then an online program after Hurricane Katrina destroyed the campus. For a large part of my career, I've been using platforms to communicate and to teach museum studies online. Currently, I'm currently working in a museum, developing a

department of academic affairs where I teach museum studies to interns and fellows inside of the museum. Prior to this, it felt like they were two different things. I had my work in the museum where I was physically there, and then I would have my teaching time online. And they were separate, and I liked them both for distinct reasons. Being online is completely comfortable for me, because I'm used so used to the format. .

37:50 DH: The biggest challenge after quarantine has been my “on-ground life” coming online, which has creating a never-ending day of staring at a computer screen because the museum staff is working remotely. The learning curve for everybody that I'm dealing with in that world is quite different from the one where I've been teaching online. We've been business as usual in terms of operations, and how we communicate and how we do our work. The big part for the museum is trying to engage an audience remotely that exists because of what we offer physically. I'm sure as people become more comfortable with engaging online, they will embrace some of the many benefits, but that will certainly take some time and experience.

39:13 SN: Okay, and how are you staying involved with those decision making... That decision making or incorporating your ideas, your vision.

39:28 DH: Oh, the biggest part for me is, and I'll speak specifically to what I'm doing at the Mississippi Museum of Art. In January 2020, I started developing a department of academic affairs that will bring students from four local colleges and universities into the museum for practical experience in various departments and for exposure to museum studies through a series of learning modules that I will teach. The curriculum is designed for students to learn about museum theory in the same place they are engaged in museum practice. Two months later, I've had to rethink this as a virtual experience for students.

40:33 DH: That's really what I'm thinking about now. Not just how to make it happen, but also how to make the most of the alterations. How to have that experience be as informative as possible during this period where we're separated from the museum. I trust that there's going to be some point when we'll go back to that ideal, but in the meantime, it's important to find ways to make that experience as meaningful and as engaged as possible. What that will look like is how the different departments in the museum are able to create projects and activities for interns. I also have two postbaccalaureate fellows that are part of the staff, and they're working and doing that same hybrid of working on assignments and then also studying online with online curriculum with me.

41:39 DH: We're figuring it out. The other challenge is the state of colleges and universities, and their decisions about when and how to return campus in the fall. There are still so many unknowns, because this, like everything else, is a political tennis ball that's being batted back and forth to the benefit of those playing the game. We really will see. I haven't said I don't know as much in my life as I have in the past few months. I've never have said it that much, but that's really the bottom line for a lot of things right now. It's just not knowing.

42:43 SN: Absolutely. Well, my second to last question is, who is Dr. Redell Hearn?

42:52 DH: Whooh! [chuckle] Well, there's two people in there. Let's see, who is Dr. Redell? Dr. Redell Hearn is a museologist, with over 25 years' experience in the museum field, from working in museums to teaching about museums, inside this country, all over this country, as well as abroad. That's Dr. Redell Hearn, the thinker. Redell Hearn, the spiritual practitioner, is the creator of Soul-

Sip, which is a class that blends the sacred and social elements of guided meditation and wine appreciation with the focus to help relax the mind, elevate the senses and savor the moment, and that's really a metaphor for how Redell lives her life.

44:00 SN: Awesome. Awesome. And in conclusion, is there anything that I haven't asked you that you want to make sure we have recorded at this time?

44:11 DH: We only ever have the moment that we are in, or as my brother Dwayne says, "This precious moment." With all my heart, I hope that people can avoid getting crushed by the wave of chaos, toxicity, venom, and anger, for any of the challenges that they find themselves in, and that they find some way to enjoy the precious moments that are life. We are not living in "unprecedented times," time is what it is. We have the choice about what we do with the time we have. It doesn't mean that we don't push for what we want, but it's also important to embrace what we have. I hope that people can find some peace, some joy, in the precious moments that they have in their lives.

45:25 SN: Beautifully said. Thank you. Thank you so much, Dr. Redell Hearn. This has been a true honor to record your feelings around self-care in 2020.

45:38 DH: Thank you, again. I really am honored that you reached out and offered me this opportunity to have a conversation with you. Thank you so much.

45:47 SN: Alright. And I'll stop that right there.