



Sometimes  
when you're  
overwhelmed  
by a situation  
– when you're  
in the darkest  
of darkness –  
that's when  
your priorities  
are  
reordered.

Phoebe Snow  
(1950 - 2011)  
Singer - Songwriter

There are days when there is simply too much. Too much stimulation, too much interaction, too many situations to solve or avoid or worry about. We have limits, and when those limits are exceeded, we become empty. We are depleted.

When overwhelmed, empathy may sustain us.

When overwhelmed, feelings shatter our serenity. We're frustrated by the breadth of present demands; we're frightened by what more may be coming. Sadness lingers not far from our surface, for we grieve the loss of our sense of competence. Despair hovers right in front of us, for we can't see the path out. The noise of our emotions can drown out our peace.

When overwhelmed, expectations burden our thoughts. We hear the requests of family and the wants of co-workers. We can't shake the voice within us that insists on attention, response, and impossibly, perfection. Our esteem becomes ensnared with tasks, as if who we are has become reduced to how well we check off items on a list. Even advice becomes another thing to add to the pile. Pressures overwhelm our confidence.

So we breathe. We don't force ourselves to, but we also don't prevent ourselves from. We simply allow air to be inhaled and then to be exhaled. We allow every feeling to exist and every task to remain, yet while we breathe, neither gets to reign. Our breath becomes our solitary focus and our only need. Each breath, in the most basic way imaginable, prioritizes our life.

And with life sustained, hope can take root.

*What are the signs that I am becoming overwhelmed?  
How might I remind myself to breathe?*