



# Peace or Pretence?

by Ilana Ridge

Most of us aren't exhausted because we're doing too much.

We're exhausted because we're **pretending too much**.

Pretending to be fine.

Pretending to agree.

Pretending to care about things we no longer believe in.

Pretending not to feel what's real, because it might be "too much" for others to handle.

This is the slow-burn erosion of energy that happens when we live from the outside in.

When we shape-shift for approval.

When we manage connection instead of embodying truth.

## In life...

We do it ourselves instead of asking for help, because they won't do it the "right" way. Then we carry the unspoken weight, and quietly resent it.

We stay silent in a restaurant when the food is wrong, afraid of being seen as difficult or being judged.

We tolerate poor service, cross a boundary, swallow a truth, and pretend to keep the peace while our nervous systems whisper: *This isn't peace at all*.

We offer support when our own tank is empty.

We nod even when we want to say no.

We adjust.

We absorb.

It's not that we're dishonest. It's that we've been trained to not challenge the system, the pattern, the dynamic because we have learned that realness is risky and comes at a cost. So we stay polite. Palatable. Invisible. Small.

## At work...

We take on more, even when we're at breaking point. Afraid our role is at risk if we say no.

We don't want to disappoint. We don't want to seem difficult. We want to be seen as team players.

So we stretch ourselves thin.

We pretend we've got it covered.

We absorb more, hoping they'll notice, but they just hand us more.

We pretend to know the answer, even when we don't.

Because saying "*I'm not sure*" feels risky.

Because "*Let's explore this together*" sounds like weakness in a culture that values certainty over curiosity.

We stay silent in the meeting, even when something feels wrong.  
It's not our department. It's not our place. And besides, disagreement often gets labelled as negativity, not care. But we can see what's coming.  
And still, we don't speak.  
Because the cost of conflict feels greater than the cost of letting it unfold.

We watch our tone.  
Read the room.  
Edit ourselves in real time.  
And **that constant internal monitoring is what's burning us out.**  
Not just the workload.  
Not just the pace.  
But the truth is, **the exhaustion doesn't come from the work alone.**  
It comes from **how much of ourselves we have to hide to do it.**



## What real peace looks like...

It's not polished.  
It doesn't require perfection, in us or anyone else.  
It makes room for honesty, even when it disrupts the mood.  
It lets us speak clearly without fear of rejection.  
It trusts that truth can be held, and that we don't have to carry it alone.

Peace doesn't come from keeping things light. It comes from living **lightly with ourselves**, because we're no longer carrying the weight of self-betrayal. We're no longer monitoring our words, managing everyone else's comfort, or second-guessing our own needs.

We're in relationship with our own truth, not fighting it, not fixing it, just *being with it*.  
That's what presence makes possible.  
And when presence arrives, peace follows. Not because everything is perfect, but because **we are no longer split and fractured inside ourselves.**  
We can breathe again.  
We don't have to rehearse the next sentence.  
We feel steady, not because life is easy, but because *we are here*.

And still, **truth does not give us the right to harm.**  
Authenticity is not an excuse to unload.  
Real truth, spoken from presence, always holds **compassion and safety** for the other.  
It's not a weapon. It's a bridge.



## A Moment of Reflection

Here are 7 Spiral-aligned questions to explore your inner landscape with presence:

1. Where in my life am I choosing harmony... but at the cost of honesty?
2. What emotion am I pretending not to feel, and what might sit underneath that pattern?
3. Where am I being polite instead of present?
4. What part of me believes I'll lose connection if I show up fully?
5. Where am I over-functioning to manage other people's comfort?
6. What am I protecting by pretending?
7. What would peace look like, if it didn't require my silence?



## Why This Matters

Because we can't keep calling it "high performance" when what we really mean is high tolerance for self-abandonment.

Because nervous systems weren't designed to sustain constant self-editing.

Because pretending is not sustainable, not in life, not in leadership, not in systems that are meant to evolve.

If we want to build cultures of real connection, real innovation, and real integrity, we need people who are not just **saying the right things**, but *living aligned to their truth*, from the inside out.

And that starts with a single, powerful shift:

**Peace over pretence. Presence over performance. Truth over tolerance.**

Not for perfection.

But for wholeness.

And the possibility that what's real is enough.

