

## **Loving and Respecting Yourself**

**By Barbara Ashcroft B.A. M.ED.**

When we love and respect ourselves, we will take the time to nourish and care for our bodies, minds and spirits. Also, the more appreciation we have for ourselves, the more confident and loving we will feel toward others. Believing in one's self worth is a must for having a joyful, productive and satisfying life.

We are all born worthy, lovable and full of joy as we enter this world. Each of us arrives bursting with hope and filled with our own unique, special gifts, tiny seeds just waiting to bloom in the near future. As young children we are optimistic, excited and full of promise, but by the time we reach adolescence many of us have lost these feelings of positive self worth. The sad fact today is that only one in three adults has positive self esteem. What happens over the years to our original gift of self worth, and our passion for life?

*Low self-esteem is like driving through life with your hand-brake on.* Maxwell Maltz

### **Early External Influences**

From early childhood and throughout adolescence we all have numerous experiences that either foster our feelings of self worth or tear us down. It is the accumulation of these experiences, be they positive or negative that eventually contribute to our perception of who we are. Early family, school and societal expectations place critical judgments and evaluations on our behavior. It is then that we begin to doubt our abilities, and our self worth. At the same time our need for approval takes over and we begin to act in ways that will please others even if we have to abandon our own true passions and soul life purpose. Pleasing others becomes our way of life. Years go by and our authentic self disappears as we become what others want us to be. We begin to doubt our abilities, adopt limiting beliefs, and settle for a life of complacency. Our inner self critic gnaws at our every hope for a better life. We become trapped in a life designed by others, prisoners of our own self criticism and vessels of unexpressed resentment.

*Nearly all of us have lost touch with our intrinsic goodness-allowed it to be covered over by memories of a thousand transgressions, real or imagined, so that we feel only partly deserving of life's blessings.* Dan Millman

Every result we experience in life is derived from the perception we have of ourselves. Dr. Phil McGraw states that "self concept is a bundle of beliefs, facts, opinions and perceptions about yourself that you travel through life with, every moment of the day." Many of us may not even be aware of the image we hold of ourselves, but be assured that it is this tightly held belief that impacts the success of our relationships, careers, income, achievements, and inner peace and life satisfaction. All outcomes in these areas have their origins in who we think we are. Whose critical voice do you hear in your head? What limiting beliefs hold you back from reaching your full potential? Whose judgments are you worried about?

*Nobody ever rejects you; they're only rejecting what they think you are.* Anthony DeMello

Too often we focus on what we don't like about ourselves. We are always comparing ourselves to others and we continually feel that we just don't measure up. We fail to acknowledge our talents and our accomplishments. We don't realize that not all people can do what we can. Maybe we are afraid that others will think we are self-centered if we take pride and rejoice in our successes. We may also have come from a culture or environment that did not encourage self-appreciation. In fact, we may indeed feel that self appreciation is egotistical or selfish. Moreover, if we have grown up in an atmosphere of criticism, put downs and negativity, it will be difficult for us to take pride in our accomplishments, as the harsh voices of disapproval echo in our heads. It is the response and reactions of our early caregivers and educators that provide us with a picture of how worthy and loveable we are or not. It is from these initial experiences that we form our view of ourselves. On the other hand, those who are raised in an atmosphere of affection and approval will most likely see themselves as worthy and lovable and will thus have no problems accepting and loving themselves. They will also go on to facilitate this attitude toward others. They are the fortunate ones whose families encouraged them in their endeavors, loved them unconditionally, and supported them emotionally. Did you have a cheerleader in your past?

### **Recognizing Self Acceptance**

Those who love and respect themselves simply delight in being who they are right now. They feel worthy of all the good things that life has to offer and they reach out with confidence to achieve their goals. They know that we are all born with a full cup of joy and they refuse to let others drain it. The only approval they seek is their own. They rise above all the external attacks on their self esteem and hold on tightly to their authentic selves. They think positively, live out their passions, take risks and look forward to all the possibilities of the future. Self accepting people don't worry about trying to please everyone. They know their own limitations and needs, and can say "no" to others without guilt or regret. They do not waste their energy on past mistakes, are assertive and make their own choices. They feel comfortable in their own skin, and are at peace with who they are. They reach out easily to others and do not get upset at others' negative remarks. They are genuinely happy and fulfilled.

### **Taking Action**

If you had a friend who talked to you like you sometimes talk to yourself, would you continue to hang out with that person? If you find yourself constantly engaging in negative self talk, begin to track how often you do this. You first need to become aware of this negative pattern and then note its frequency. You may be surprised at its ongoing occurrence. Begin to catch yourself before you make a proclamation to the world about your perceived inadequacies. Stop these self deprecating put downs. Instead, start to pay attention to the times when others compliment you. Realize that they see something unique and special about you. Never dismiss these comments as frivolous. Most people do not offer false praise. When your talents are recognized by others, begin to note their statements and when you hear at least three people make the same positive observation about you on different occasions, start believing it! Ask others what they think your strongest traits are, what they have seen you do well, and what they respect about you. You may be amazed at what gifts they see in you. Stop comparing yourself to others and begin to notice what pushes your low self esteem button. Start to focus daily on your worth and compose a few affirmations to keep in front of you every day. Find a baby picture of

yourself, and place it in a special place. Every time you look at the photo, note how full of joy and potential you were and still are. Remember that we are all born worthy and lovable. We must get rid of our inner critical voices that plague us from the past and get back in touch with our wonderful authentic selves.

*No one can make you feel inferior without your permission.* Eleanor Roosevelt

We teach others how to treat us. If we have little respect for ourselves, others will act likewise. When we deny our magnificence, we give others permission to do the same. Loving and respecting ourselves is a must if we ever hope to live out our personal purpose in life, and attain inner peace and contentment. It is only when we love and respect ourselves that we can begin to enrich the lives of others.

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