

Top Three Ways to Cultivate Self-Love:

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I never really understood what self-love meant or how to do it exactly. I would hear people say, “You have to love yourself first before you can love someone else” or “When you love yourself, this won’t happen” or “If you love your *self* you won’t get into these kinds of relationships.” What??? I didn’t know what that had to do with anything, let alone how to do it. Do I hug myself? Declare “I love me!” publically? How do I know when I have gotten there? What is self love?

Self-love, as I understand and practice it, is a state of appreciation for oneself. To go a step further: it is an appreciation of your *WHOLE* self. I hold the idea of “self” as that greater part of your consciousness, the true essence of you without labels; meaning you appreciate the good, the not so good, the physical, the mental, and the spiritual.

Why is it important? Think about what life would be like if you believed that you were truly loved no matter what. Whatever you do, no matter how you look or where you are in your life, you are loved, you are enough, and you are good, without exception. If you walked into the world with this belief every day how might you feel? Do you think you would approach life differently? Would you be happier? Feel more secure? If you show your *self* to the world from this place of *self* appreciation how might your life be different? Would you attract more positive people to share in your joy?

I think the answers to most of these questions is essentially, yes! People who have a strong foundation of self-love are happier, feel more secure, and as a result tend to attract more positive experiences and relationships into their lives. I think this happens because we tend to surround ourselves with people who are like us. Much like having friends with whom you have things in common, such as hobbies, you share a basic appreciation for your *self*. Appreciating your *self* makes it easier to appreciate others.

Three Ways to Cultivate Self-Love:

1. Observation

Be a silent observer of how you are feeling and what you are thinking. Take time to notice how you are feeling without judgment, only observation, such as, “I am feeling really happy right now” or “I am feeling really sad right now” and just observe it for thirty seconds. In addition, notice where you experience these emotions in your body. Do you always feel sadness in your chest or joy behind your eyes? You have to first know what is going on inside before you can make changes.

2. Self Talk

What you say to your *self* matters. Create positive affirmations to repeat to your *self*. If you think it doesn’t work, consider how negative messages that you say to your *self* impact you. Were you ever told something as a child so many times you came to believe it? The same holds true for positive messages. If the message you are sending your *self* is “I hate my body,” you might reframe it and say “I am beautiful, I feel comfortable in my body.” If the message you are sending yourself is “I’m stupid” you might say, “I want to learn and I am learning.” You can also have positive self-talk that is

less specific but encouraging such as “I am getting better every day” or “I have unlimited potential.”

3. Imagery or Meditation

Imagine a person (real or one you create) who loves you unconditionally. You can use a person you know or even someone who you think embodies this quality, such as Maya Angelou or the Dalai Lama. Take five minutes a day to close your eyes and connect to the feeling of what it is like to be in this person’s presence. Notice how you feel physically when you imagine being with this person. Do you feel more relaxed? Warm? Joyous? Once you have created this experience and are able to connect to the feeling you can take it on the road and use it when you may be having a bad day or simply want to feel better. Take 30 seconds to close your eyes, take a deep breath, and connect to the feeling you created. You will be amazed at how this can change your outlook.

Please know the tips listed above take time to develop and become second nature; it will take time to show results. It takes dedication to change your thoughts and feelings. In addition, I would also suggest you keep the practice to yourself for a while. Until you are more comfortable and confident, don’t give anyone the opportunity to discourage your ideas. Let them see the change and wonder what is different or simply why you are smiling more.

Until next time, “The spirit in me honors the spirit in you.” Namaste