

# The Spirituality Corner

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## Do you love yourself?

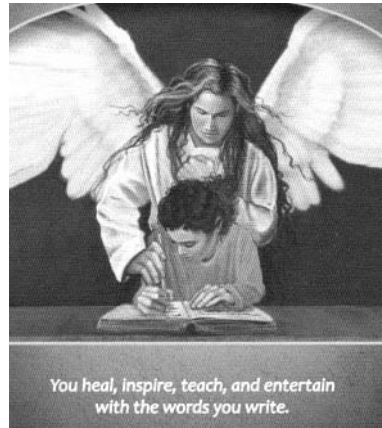
Does this simple question bring a smile to your face or make you feel uncomfortable?

Do you know that it is the way we nurture ourselves that enables us to have love to give? We cannot give a gift we do not have, so, loving ourselves is the only way to fill up our "love pockets" and spend freely. Just like a bank account, we need to make deposits that more than balance the withdrawals if we don't want any nasty surprises.

But our society has a strange way of twisting this, leading us to neglect ourselves. Probably this concept has to do with our interpretation of the words from the Bible: "Love your neighbor as yourself." We need to notice in that Bible verse that it doesn't say love your neighbor instead of yourself, before yourself, rather than yourself, yet many people behave as though it does. Consider this: If we ARE loving our neighbor as we ARE to ourselves, is our neighbor getting a good deal? If we do not love ourselves first, I do not think so!

One might argue that self-love is egotistic. It is perhaps true when self-love is taken to an extreme as one constantly disregards the wellbeing of others and strives solely for personal gains. However, most of us do not fall under this category. In fact, many practice so little self-love that our low self-worth diminishes our abilities to love others.

What is self-love? There is not a simple answer to this profound question. Acceptance, forgiveness, and caring for oneself perhaps are the essential fundamentals of self-love. In accepting, forgiving and



loving for ourselves, we learn the necessary skills to do the same for others as we develop healthy, caring relationships.

Very often, I've heard people saying: My goal is to be less judgmental, more forgiving, accept others the way they are, love everybody with no exceptions. This is a beautiful goal, but how can we offer all those gifts if we don't learn first to give all the above to ourselves first?

We cannot give to others what you deny to ourselves. In other words: Being a loving presence to others is an inside job. We only can serve the world after we have learned to apply the concept of forgiveness, tolerance and acceptance to ourselves.

## How do we love ourselves?

Here are a few suggestions:

- Accept who you are! Yes, even when you least feel like doing so. You are a beautiful, amazing human being who offers the world much goodness through your unique talents. Each life is a gift to be celebrated.
- Do not envy others as that takes away special opportunities to recognize your own beauty. We can be and we are loved just the way we are. What we need to remember is that unless we fall in love with ourselves, no one else will.
- Be aware of your self-talk,

(those things that you say to yourself inside your head) I am too fat, I am not pretty, I am too old, etc., that is the image you pass to others and that will be the way others will perceive you.

- Forgive yourself first. We are all human, and that means we are bound to make mistakes, in fact, many of them! We normally measure ourselves to some ideal and flawless standards that are simply impossible to achieve if we value our sanity. It's OK to make mistakes, and it is OK not to be perfect. We all need to stop kicking ourselves, and instead, give ourselves more pats on the back for trying our best. If our mistakes bring us growth and understanding, perhaps the difficulties are worth it.

- Again, be aware of your self-talk. Speak to yourself in ways that are more kind, and less mean or abusive. Many of us have very harsh inner critics: When we make a mistake, this critical voice inside our head beats up on us, saying things like, "That was so stupid! ... I can't do anything right! What a loser!" We need to replace these negative messages with other, more positive ones. For example, "I made a mistake. That's okay: That is how I learn. I'll know better the next time." With awareness, over time, you can "catch yourself" when your self-talk is negative, and change the message to something more positive

- Don't just "catch yourself being wrong." "Catch yourself being right." In other words, don't just catch the voice of

your inner critic, and stop it from beating up on you. When you do something well, or when you find yourself saying the right things to yourself or to others, be sure to reward yourself: acknowledge yourself verbally, give yourself a pat on the back, or treat yourself to something special.

- There are so many ways for us to love and to care for ourselves... the possibilities are infinite. You may want to "treat" yourself to things like a massage, a facial, a pedicure, go to a sporting event. Taking breaks and having fun are important, as well. Whether alone, with a friend, or with a partner, you may want to have a night out on the town: go out for a nice dinner, go dancing, and/or attend the theater, a concert, the ballet, or a movie.

Of course, treating yourself does not need to involve great expense: you can take a bubble bath, eat dinner at home by candlelight, or watch a sunset. These are just a few ideas... you can put your own imagination to work.

- Starting today, do one thing daily that is good for you, only you. Making changes in our busy schedule is not something that comes easily, but with intention we can do it.

The more you love yourself, the more you will be able to give love to others - and the more others will want to be around you and give back to you. This is a win-win situation. Loving yourself will ultimately benefit the lives of others you encounter, as well as your own life.

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