

Self Acceptance

Part 2 of 4

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Intro

Started four part series in Jan – first talk on self awareness

Definition of self awareness – understanding to extent possible

Today, talk about second step – self-acceptance

Other two steps in May and June – self-love, self-fulfillment, not linear

What is self-acceptance?

coming to terms with yourself and your life circumstances so that you find peace and joy with the life you have.

Extreme cases v. Most of us

In extreme cases, there is self-hatred, that is really a form of mental illness

Most of us, short of that, but struggle with a conflict; we dislike some things about ourselves, or some circumstances of our lives or both

One thing to be disappointed with ourselves or our lives – another to be allow those disappointments to undermine our enjoyment of life

Self- acceptance means becoming at peace with these things, either through deciding not to let them bother you or through changing them

How do you begin?

How do you achieve self-acceptance?

1. Decide to work on it

you have to believe that you can get on better terms with yourself and your life and that you are willing to expend some effort to do it

if you can't do that on your own, then you need to get help from a professional therapist.

2. Making an Inventory

The next step is to make an inventory of yourself and your life circumstances – both good and bad – part of self-awareness process

Will be things about ourselves we don't like – about ourselves -- temper, defensiveness, tendency to put down other people, drink too much, too disorganized, overweight, physical disability

About our life circumstances – not enough money, house too small (or around here, boat too small), we're just too old

But also things to admire – good parent, ethical, courteous others, at our best, loving to others –

What does it mean to be “our best”? That raises issue of higher self – the person we want to be – we do not live in that person all the time

But I believe it is possible to live in that person more and more and that is one key step on path to self-acceptance

Serenity Prayer

As Serenity Prayer suggests, things we don't like fall into two categories: things that we may be able to change and things that we cannot change

powerlessness is one of worst feelings in the world – nobody imagines a higher self in which they are powerless

so a key to self-acceptance is about having power over both things we can change and things we can't

The *power to decide how to feel* plays a central role when there are things about our life that we cannot change.

power to act plays a central role when there are things about our life that we can change.

Things We Cannot Change

begin with things we cannot change. you cannot become younger; you cannot change the fact that your father was never satisfied with you. You cannot change the reality that you ruined your first marriage.

Depending on your age, you can't change your financial condition to much, perhaps marginally

For the most part, can't change your body
question is how you feel about them and how they affect your enjoyment of life now
probably more than you realize, you have the ability to decide how you feel about these
parts of your life that are immutable
not easy – if it were easy, people wouldn't go through life feeling inadequate and
unhappy
suggest four ways: 1) self-forgiveness; 2) open yourself up to be inspired by others; 3)
appreciate what you have; and
4) most important – realize the things you cannot change are not the most important parts
of life

1) Forgiveness

Forgiveness really an amazing transformative experience for both sides – the forgiving and the
forgiven

Religions traditions about forgiveness

Jewish tradition of Yom Kippur, Day of Atonement

Central to Christian tradition – Jesus died for our sins, so we could start over

A skeptic might say that for millennia humans have created a god myth, then myths about how to
find approval or forgiveness from God

But, if religious traditions work for you, not trying to talk out of them

But if not, then have to do it yourself

You have to take responsibility for your own forgiveness

Ironically people not very good about forgiving themselves, perhaps better at forgiving others

Rather than forgiving themselves, they are looking to excuse themselves

excuses not particularly persuasive to anyone else or ourselves deep down

challenge is to go from making excuses about the past to forgiving ourselves

so good principle – be as forgiving of yourself as you are with others

2) Inspiration from Others

A third thing that can help is to look around at people who are dealing with bigger challenges

Occasionally I start feeling sorry for myself about my disability
Then I go to meeting with people in wheelchairs
Same goes for material wealth, for physical beauty, for professional success
Idea is not to feel better because at least you're superior to someone else
Idea is that these people are enjoying life with much greater challenges
If they can do it, so can I

3) appreciation of what you have

A third thing is pretty simple idea: appreciate what you have
I talked last time about all those dials in the brain – some inherited, others formed by environment, has to be dials that determine your instinctive appreciation of life
Cup half full, v. cup half empty
All the to my cup overfloweth
Doesn't seem to depend on the size of the cup

Importance of the Internal Virtues

Fourth thing – most important
Has to do with the importance you place on things you cannot change compared to the things you can change
go back to the idea of the higher self – pretty simple idea – person you want to be
Have to construct that person in your mind
We have talked about virtues to associate with that person
The classic virtues – courage, justice, reason, and moderation – for the ancient Romans, these were the key – and if they achieved them, they could find the good life
basic idea very appealing – the good life means living in a virtuous life where virtues are within our control
to the Stoics, these virtues are “internal” – they are how we behave -- not external factors such as wealth, beauty, good fortune, conventional success, which depend on good fortune

Nothing wrong with the classic virtues – but we should add the loving virtues – empathy, caring, sensitivity, openness

And the wonderful thing is that, like the classic virtues, these are also internal

You can change the way you behave with others

You can become more loving

You can be more sensitive and open

A big decision for you – how important are these “internal virtues” compared to the external virtues of wealth, conventional success, physical beauty, etc. which for the most part you cannot change

How to Reflect these Virtues

Thought about ways to convince you that they are more important – but ended up concluding you have to decide that for yourself

How do we find the strength to do it

Turn to our higher selves to provide a default guide

Take satisfaction from living in that higher self more and more

Self-acceptance comes, not when the change is completed, because that may take a long time.

begins to come when you have made commitment to change and then see that you are making progress.

What Acceptance is Not

Two final thoughts.

First, what self-acceptance is not: It doesn't mean that you need to accept destructive relationships

We have all had friends who gave us negative messages probably did that because of their own insecurities.

Even more significant – a spouse that is abusive or who is undermining our enjoyment of life
We've heard a lot about domestic abuse lately

Ultimate self-acceptance, is acceptance of our own mortality

Finally a brief word about the ultimate act of self-acceptance, our own mortality

Very big topic – maybe need a whole series on that alone

But some final thoughts about this

We are probably familiar with Ross's five stages of grief – anger, denial, bargaining, depression and acceptance

Not linear, originally developed for terminally ill patients, then later applied to people grieving over death of loved one

Whatever we say, we are probably going to go through some or all of those before we get to acceptance of our own death

But two things can help move us on path to acceptance

First, if it is true that the classic virtues and the loving virtues are the most important things in life, we can find meaning by demonstrating those virtues

Second, we can communicate love and understanding to those around us. As we get older we are probably going to realize that the loving virtues are the most important

Finally, our families and loved ones will be grieving as they contemplate the end of our life with them.

Giving them the message that you are prepared for your death and have found peace will bring comfort to them and you, too. It is a gift you will give your loved ones that they will remember forever