

2010-01-15

SELF COMPASSION

Some of our great traditions can lead us to some of our most destructive beliefs. For years I thought compassion was not only a beautiful word, but I knew it was one of the cornerstones of my personal faith. Christ was “moved with compassion” -- right? So, in order to “please God,” I, too, must be loving, caring and considerate of all others. In forty years of active compassion toward people, I never thought of being compassionate toward myself. Self-compassion was a set of words I never put together.

“Self-care,” “self-love,” “self-esteem” -- they were not only absent from my vocabulary -- they weren’t even in my dictionary! But “self-control” -- that I knew, for I had been taught it well! It added up to the idea that “God will like you better if you make yourself miserable.” Another derivative of that same thought pattern was, “No matter how hard you try, you can never be good enough.” I had been taught from childhood that at the core of me there was rottenness -- nothing about me was good -- and, left to myself; I would end up doing evil. Somehow, at that core of me, I really didn’t believe that, but I didn’t really know what to do with it. Old belief systems -- like the “old soldiers” -- never die, and they rarely fade away!

What really changed it for me was a series of long, serious, and honest sessions in front of a mirror. I had generally avoided looking squarely at myself. An unexpected encounter with a three-way mirror, for example, could “freak me out.” But sitting looking at the man I was -- rather than just at the body I had that I wasn’t too comfortable with -- I had a faint glimmer of recognition! I felt genuine personal regard for that man -- he was “a people,” too! I began to look for what I liked in me -- and my world began to change. It surprised me that I was not overcome with pride, as I’d been conditioned to expect -- but I was filled with love for me. I wanted to hold myself in my own arms! That was an experience I will never forget.

My life has never been the same since that experience. I now have “me” for a friend -- literally, my own best friend! It occurred to me that to show others compassion and exclude myself was to treat me like a non-person. I’m a real flesh and blood human being, too, you know! What a marvelous discovery and unfolding that has been. And -- “it’s only just begun.”

Self-compassion means “treating yourself like a guest in your own life” -- something every client of mine hears me say often. And it works! It works miracles! What a wonderful way to begin your fall season -- exploring a new-found friendship with *yourself*. Get your mirror out. Start a dialogue -- you’ll meet someone you can really like -- and trust.

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IT SEEMS TO ME
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