

Chapter 5:

♥

Self-love is...



In 2006 I did a series of body-empowerment workshops for a prominent woman's magazine. At the first workshop I looked around alarmed. Sitting around the tables were impeccably made-up, beautiful slim women. What *were* they doing at a body-empowerment workshop? I had my suspicions and I asked, 'How many of you in this room would like to be married to the voice you hear in your head when you look in the mirror?'

Only two hands in the entire hall went up. For the rest of the room, the harsh inner critic within each woman was constantly judging her so that, if verbalised, the voice would be offensive. Think about it: if someone else tells you, 'You're fat and revolting,' you'd be upset and hurt. *So, does saying it to yourself over and over make it okay?* Talk about double standards!

Those women in the room were how I once aspired to look (and how I did look when I was at the height of my body hatred and stuck in Diet City). Like me back then, they were living round the clock with 'someone' (themselves) exacerbating their daily stress by constantly pointing out where they didn't match up. Think of the harm you do to your mental state and your relationships when you self-sabotage like this? As one woman said: *I hated myself so much I was trying to make everyone around me hate me too, and then my self-hatred would be justified.*

But most importantly, what harm does living with this constant internal critic do to our cells, our immune system and ultimately our health? When you're trapped in self-hatred, you'll find that the goal posts are forever moving. *After years of hating myself, I realized that it didn't seem to matter what size I was, there was always a size that seemed better.* That's because self-hatred can never really get you to where you want to be. *Screaming at me, hating myself, restricting myself is not helping. I haven't ever lost weight being like that. What a lot of hating and screaming for nothing!*

Remember, we *always* respond better to love than hate, so what good does being so mean to yourself do? You know that golden rule: treat others as you'd like to be treated yourself? How about flipping that round and

treating *yourself* as you'd really like others to treat you? Being self-loving is living life intelligently. After all those years of dieting and disliking yourself, if it was such a wonderful cure-all, you'd all be living in Nature's Valley by now. Why insist on keeping on doing something that hasn't worked in the past, won't work in the future, and makes you feel more desperate so that you eat more? Do you have anything to lose by choosing self-love over self-dislike? More importantly, what do you gain?

Members of the Mind over Fatter online e.mentoring group (it's free – sign up at www.ditch-diets-live-light.com) continually comment on what a difference is made by the love, kindness and acceptance they experience in the group. Sadly though, most body pilgrims find it vastly easier to be supportive and loving towards others than towards themselves. I can't say this strongly enough: *It is never more beneficial to be self-hating than self-loving.*

Many body pilgrims will struggle with this idea of self-love. We've always been told that self-love is selfish (not!), arrogant (not that either) and indulgent (nor this). We often feel we have to hide those wonderful parts of ourselves to prevent us from being considered conceited or vain. So we hardly dare to love ourselves in healthy and respecting ways. But loving yourself not only enriches your life, but also the lives of those around you when they interact with the fulfilled, happy person you become. Consider that you've been created in your Creator's image (and by 'Creator' I mean whatever God-figure you feel comfortable with, be that God, Allah, Buddha, Krishna, the Universe, the Source or any other.) You have all been imbued with Creator-like qualities – which are not about achieving a certain 'perfect' weight or fitting into a particular size of clothing. Nowhere in any holy text have I found any references that dictate what physical measurements our Creator expects us to conform to! Creator-like qualities consist of values such as patience, compassion, love, tolerance and acceptance. These are what we should be encouraged to cultivate.

If you're still struggling with applying those Creator-like qualities to yourself, think of the religious tenet, Love your neighbour as yourself. This implies that you need to have self-love that at the least is equal to the love you might have for others.

Do you remember those old 'Love is...' cartoons by Kim featuring the two nude innocents? Well the Nature's Valley cartoon strip features a 'Self-love is...' series. Its central theme is returning to a state of innocence, to a time before cultural beliefs about our body become engraved into our neural pathways.

Be warned though, self-loving actions on the The Joy-Filled Body journey are often exactly opposite to the ones you're used to. In Diet City it is

good to weigh yourself; in Nature's Valley that can be a particularly non-self-loving act. [31] *I made the mistake of weighing myself at gym the other night. It's so depressing. Guess how I handled the extreme stress of my weight gain? Malva pudding and cream, of course! The scale is an evil invention.* Diet City tells you having lists of illegal and legal foods is a way of taking care of yourself. In Nature's Valley self-love is making all foods 'legal'. *I just wanted to say that I've definitely made progress in my journey. I still eat junk, but I no longer feel ashamed and I no longer beat myself up.* By Diet City standards this would not be progress. It would evoke a howling protest of, 'If you're eating junk food and not feeling guilty, you're going backwards, not forwards. You're letting yourself go!' Diet City encourages you to punish yourself with guilt when you don't stick to a diet.

In Nature's Valley dieting and guilt destroy self-love. Diet City wants you to compare yourself with others. In Nature's Valley, the belief is that comparisons are often the swiftest route to destroying self-love. *Every page I turned there were more beautiful bodies to see – I felt sick when I realized how far I was from ever matching that. How do they get to be so cellulite free?* Self-loving actions include trusting your body and being gentle with yourself when you forget to live in body-wise ways. So let's meander down the self-love labyrinth into Nature's Valley.

SELF-LOVE IS KNOWING THIS JOURNEY IS A SPIRITUAL ONE

Self ♥= remembering that self-love is our birthright

Why are we so drawn to babies? Because of their innocence. They remind us of how we were before we forgot we were sacred, of what we can return to become – beings with unlimited possibilities. As toddlers we lived in our bodies in a carefree state. We were still living in Nature's Valley; we hadn't yet forgotten our sacredness by becoming preoccupied with the outer illusions proffered as steps to happiness. Indeed, the belief that we can never be thin or rich enough go way beyond the logical. *If a genie had to pop out of a magic lamp and grant me three wishes, one would be to be thin. Somehow deep down in my psyche – much deeper than my logic can reach – is still the thought that if I was thin (and wealthy), then my life would be better. I would be accepted into the 'in' crowd, and I'd be able to afford doing what I wanted in life. If I was thin I'd automatically get everyone's approval and admiration, not their scorn and disdain.*

We need to return to that place that existed before our culture infused us with ideas of what we need to do (and become) in order to get ahead. That place where we recognise that self-love and self-esteem are our

birthright. *I always think – how can we possibly expect to 'hear' our own body's signals of hunger, fullness, sadness, accurately if we don't value our body's worth?! In other words, we cannot ever hope to break free from the chains of emotional eating until we can restore (and maintain) our self-esteem.*

Self ♥= realizing we are much more than our physical body

A major key to escaping Diet City is when we really 'get it' that the physical is only one aspect of our bodies. *The one thing that really worked for me in terms of being able to honour myself by no longer abusing myself with food was to have a concrete body cast done. It is a cast of my torso (at my maximum) and the day I looked at it – really studied it – and admitted to myself that the cast was really quite beautiful, like an ancient fertility goddess, was the day that I was able to relinquish the constant need to feed in an uncontrolled and frenzied manner. It is hanging on the wall in my TV room as a constant reminder that my body is (was) beautiful! Another aid has been hot rock massage. I go to an alternative therapist and the physical, emotional and spiritual nurturing that's part of each session has been invaluable to me. Leaving behind the identity of a Dietonian is multi-pronged – it's a physical, emotional and spiritual liberation. Just tackling your eating or your exercising isn't enough – this really does need to be a holistic approach if we're to find lasting peace.*

Self ♥= realizing that self-acceptance is found *within*

Advertisers would have us believe that the answer to every problem exists in bottles on shelves; that the solution is an easy matter of 'swallow this pill,' 'drink this potion' or 'rub on this lotion'. What these don't do is teach you self-acceptance. *My problem? Self-acceptance! Can't one buy it in a bottle somewhere? Previously I thought it was hidden in all the diet potions and pills, but at the end I realized it was not. You see, if I want something, I want it now – instant gratification! Now I know that self-acceptance has to come from within me. But it is taking so long... Being mean to yourself isn't going to get you anywhere healthy. I'm the one step forward, two steps back pilgrim. Beating me up about it is not going to make the unwanted, extra me disappear. So it is back to Square One again. Time for some tender loving care for myself. Try to take yourself back to the days as a very young child when you had no interest in potions or lotions, and your happiness didn't originate from your looks, products or possessions, it just bubbled out from within.*

Self ♥=believing in yourself

Western cultural beliefs have taken our thinking and whisked it down the rabbit hole, where it's been turned upside down, inside out and twirled around so we're facing the wrong way – focusing on the exterior. Having myself obsessively exercised down to a teeny 92lbs, I imagined I'd feel like an absolute princess. But those external changes weren't enough to fill me with confidence or wipe out my bad body thoughts. It really is all about how *you* are seeing yourself in your head.

When I was in my early twenties I probably weighed 175-195lbs. I refused to date, because I thought my body was disgusting – how could any man find me attractive? Then in my mid-twenties I weighed 265–285lbs – but I felt attractive and had a lot more male attention than when I weighed 195lbs! It's all about the confidence. And, until that confidence comes naturally, I say, 'Fake it till you make it'. If you're thinking, I'm not going to lie to myself, pretending I'm the confident person I'm not, consider this: you're already lying if you tell yourself you aren't worthy of love. So, if you're going to 'lie' to yourself at least choose a 'lie' that has a base of truth – fake that self-love until it finds its way back to you.

I was experiencing the agony of self-loathing, and dreading going to a party, when my aunt took me aside. She told me that if I went into that hall feeling like a queen, walking like a queen, showing the whole world how self-confident and self-assured I was, I would actually start feeling like a queen and lose my shyness. I must be a wonderful actress, because within TEN MINUTES I already had two guys dancing with me. I spent the whole evening (including Mills & Boon-style romantic walks on the beach later) with one of them! Acting 'as if' is extremely powerful because you get out of your ego's way long enough to allow your Essential Self to surface again.

SELF-LOVE IS OUTSTING OUTDATED HABITS

Self ♥= debunking cultural myths

The deep essential truths (you are all born equal and special) are enduring and empowering and don't change historically, or from one culture to another. Surface ego beliefs (the shape of your body is what makes you special) are never stable; they're the ones that create self-doubt. Challenging surface beliefs is absolutely central to escaping Diet City. Fortunately, a bit of further investigation easily debunks the myths. *Instead of lusting after the glamorous lifestyles of pop divas and movie stars, I've started watching out for stories about their lives. What I've discovered is that, despite being physically*