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The Most Important Relationship You'll Ever Have

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Personal development leader Maxwell Maltz wisely advised, "If you make friends with yourself you will never be alone" and his evergreen teaching continues to prove both useful and comforting. Making friends with ourselves requires a steady diet of appreciation, admiration, nurturing and perhaps even pampering. These are the nutrients that build strong roots at the foundation of our relationships in the world. And we must allow ourselves to receive this comfort unconditionally. To offer ourselves kindness instead of criticism, we do not have to be any different than we are at this very moment.

The tree of life is a symbolic representation of our life structures and the elements that contribute to our growth, renewal and connection. We also can use this symbol to gain a clearer perspective on the structure of our relationships in the world. With this view, we see that some of the relationships in our lives comprise the solid, foundational trunk while others are further away yet almost as dear. Still more loved ones are on the fringes of our lives capturing the sunlight and feeding our hearts and minds from afar. Ultimately, what matters most is the relationship we sustain and nurture at the roots of this tree. The roots represent our inner relationship with ourselves. Without strong, thriving roots, the

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structure of our relationships in the world falters, weakens and sometimes dies. Thus, the greatest gift we can offer our loved ones is the courage to love ourselves.

A Practice of Self-Compassion

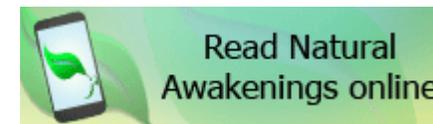
Our old paradigm of self-improvement obsessions provides a tempting rut to fall into. We could easily berate ourselves for our secret areas of weakness, the dreams deferred and extra pounds recently gained. In spite of this addictive pattern, here looms a novel idea: engaging a refreshing self-inquiry. Inwardly, the new idea simply asks, "What if we intentionally and willingly exchanged our self-doubts and criticisms for radical appreciation and even admiration of ourselves?" Let's think of it as being kind to ourselves, an exchange of self-criticism for a practice of self-compassion.

urishing a relationship with ourselves based on kindness equips us to be more forgiving and accepting of ourselves and thus others.

Our bodies, for instance, are the brunt of a barrage of comparisons often leading to feelings of inadequacy. What if we put that barrage on pause and quietly looked to our bodies with wonder and awe? We'd likely notice the miraculous ways our body has been processing and awakening daily. When we truly notice the miracle of the body, awe and admiration are natural responses. Imagine appreciating the miraculous body enough to write a poem about its wonder. Imagine nurturing our relationship with ourselves such that we are seduced into more solitude simply because we love our own company. This shift in perception is a miracle in itself, a shift from self-criticism to self-acceptance, a shift from fear to love.

We can be sure that self-kindness has taken root when our thoughts impart a lightness of heart and gentleness of spirit. Many of us have not experienced such elation since childhood. When we reclaim the wonder and health we are privy to right now we give our children the freedom to do the same. By appreciating our individual gifts and nurturing ourselves each and every moment, we model this path. Together, we can surrender the old paradigm of comparing ourselves to everyone else at the proverbial party. With deep roots, richly nourished in the nutrients of kindness, the tree of our relationships will bear sweet fruits of intimacy, connection and joy.

Sala Chrispin is a co-founder of Little Light of Mine, a spiritually based program for children ages 5 to 11 years. She can be reached at 200-0036 or Sala@lillightofmine.com or LilLightOfMine.com.



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