

# When You Have a Voice Telling You You're Inadequate

This week I had conversations with a couple of loved ones who struggle with an inner voice that tells them that something is wrong with them. It made me think about many years where I felt this sense of inadequacy, a deep sense of not being worthy. I still struggle with it sometimes.

This is a particularly difficult problem, because it affects everything in our lives. It causes us to struggle with trust and insecurity in our relationships (personal and work). It makes us less happy with ourselves and more likely to catastrophize when something goes wrong.

This last bit makes it hard when we are working on improving our sense of self-worth, but then we mess up and because we have a feeling something is wrong with us, we are harsh on ourselves and our efforts fall apart.

So what can we do when we have this inner critic, this voice inside us that doesn't seem to feel that we're worthy?

There's no magic bullet, but here's what I've found to help.

## The Practice of Self-Compassion

The first place to start is with the ancient meditation of compassion and loving-kindness. This is because when we have been beating ourselves up for years, there's a deep sense of pain and a lack of kindness to ourselves. We need to reverse this, every day.

So the practice is just to take a minute every single morning (or evening), notice your pain, and silently wish for it to end. Wish for your own happiness. Then do the same for people you know.

For example, you might repeat each of these phrases three times, trying to genuinely feel these wishes in your heart:

1. May there be an end to my suffering.
2. May I be happy.
3. (Thinking of someone you care about) May there be an end to their suffering.
4. (Thinking of someone you care about) May they be happy.

What you're cultivating is a capacity to care for yourself and others, to be kind, to be friendly and loving. This doesn't immediately cure everything, but it's a capacity we don't often have, and by developing it over time, we are developing a new relationship with ourselves (and with others).

You can apply this anytime you're having difficulty as well. Just pause when you notice you're stressed, anxious, frustrated, angry, or hurting. Then wish for an end to your own suffering, and for your own happiness. Several times. With real feeling!

## A Mantra to Replace Old Habits

One of the biggest problems here is that we have a story we tell ourselves, in our heads, about ourselves.

It might go something like this: "Gawd, I keep messing this up. What's wrong with me? I can't do anything right. I suck, I suck. I wish I wasn't so terrible."

Of course, your own story will be different, and you might have several versions of it depending on the situation. But the plain fact is, there's a story we tell ourselves, and it's not helpful. It makes us feel bad about ourselves.

If we're doing this to ourselves, how do we stop? How can we flip the script and learn to be more positive?

**First, you need to find some gratitude for your amazingness.** There is an inner goodness in yourself that's there all the time. Check on it now: see if you can notice, in the area where your heart is, not only a pain or stress but also a sense of tenderness. This is your tender heart, your basic goodness that's there all the time. (It's OK if you don't notice it right now, check in several times today and see if you can notice that tenderness.)

This is your good heart, the part of you that loves the world, that wants to offer your incredible love to everyone, that wants to be happy and not hurt. It's the part that feels hurts so acutely. It's an amazing quality, and you were born with it.

Find gratitude for this goodness, and for all your other amazing qualities. List the things about yourself that you're grateful for, instead of focusing on the parts you dislike.

**Second, come up with a mantra to replace your unhelpful story.** A mantra is something you can say to yourself repeatedly, but especially during times when you need it. It's a new story, more helpful than the old one. It's based on this sense of your own inner goodness, the gratitude for the amazing qualities you have.

For example, a mantra might be: "I have an amazing heart, and the world loves me."

The mantra I've been working with is: "The world craves me and my gift."

It helps, because it shifts how we see the world, shifts how we feel about ourselves. It's based on this place of gratitude and inner goodness, and it radiates out to everything we do.

## Set Yourself a Self-Care Challenge

Taking care of yourself is a loving act, and loving yourself in as many ways as you can is a good tonic for the self-harshness you've practiced over the years.

Set a challenge to do something to care for yourself every day for 30 days. That might include:

- Spending time talking with people you love, who give you love
- Setting healthy boundaries for yourself — saying no to people, setting limits to how much of yourself and your time that you give, using boundaries to take care of your mental and physical health
- Do things that make you feel confident, from learning a skill that makes you feel competent to walking into a room with your head held tall, to strolling down the street like a silverback gorilla
- Get support from others whenever you need it, asking for help, asking for someone to talk to, going to therapy if it helps, joining a support group, etc.
- Do something that helps you cope with stress — meditate, go for a walk, exercise, do yoga, take a bath, massage your neck and shoulders, do some deep breathing, drink some hot tea

These are just a few ideas, but you get the picture. Taking care of yourself becomes your default mode, and when you are taking care of yourself, you start to feel better about yourself.

With a regular practice of self-compassion, a practice of gratitude towards your amazingness, a mantra that changes how you see yourself, and a regular habit of self-care, you'll start to soothe the unhelpful inner voices and develop a new loving relationship with yourself.