

Unconditional Worth and Love

In the month that celebrates Valentine's Day, I thought it might be appropriate to share some ideas about love. Although it is vital for one's emotional well-being to feel a loving connection with others, it is equally essential for an individual to be able to recognize his/her own worth.

When babies are born, they are usually celebrated and affirmed for their very being rather than for what they can achieve. However, as people grow up they can lose their sense of validation for who they are and become lost on a treadmill of endless achievements. This cycle may not be broken until an individual finally realizes that achievements can never be a substitute for a lack of love for the core self.

Unconditional human worth refers to the belief in oneself as a valuable person. As Glenn Schiraldi writes in *The Self-Esteem Workbook*, worth is seeing the core self for what it is: unique and precious. You are as important as any other person, and your core self has infinite and eternal value. Every person has equal value as a human being. External factors, such as money, appearance or achievements, do not affect a person's unconditional worth. Even if someone rejects you, your worth remains unchanged. Worth does not have to be earned or proved, only recognized.

Just like the newborn baby, the core self is fundamentally right and whole albeit in a state of continuous development. As Schiraldi explains in his book, a person is complete in the sense that each one has every attribute that is needed to be whole. The core self is beautiful, lovable and full of potential. It only needs to be recognized, affirmed and appreciated. Some external factors, such as a mistake or criticism, can hide the core self and make it difficult to see and experience one's worth. These factors change the way worth is experienced, but not the worth itself. It is impossible to earn core worth through personal performance or status, or any other external factor. It already exists within you.

Unconditional love can help you realize and experience your own human worth. Love is a feeling, an attitude, and a decision. It is also a skill that is learned. Love wants what is best for the beloved at each moment, and psychological health is not possible unless the core self is accepted, loved and respected. Unconditional love is not affected by temporary challenges and fluctuating self-evaluations. The affirmation and acceptance that is the defining characteristic of unconditional love is stable, and unaffected by changing moods. For example, a person can still love and affirm oneself even when performance on a particular task or chore has been unsatisfactory. Love does not define your worth, it can only help you realize it.

One way to foster more unconditional love for yourself is to imagine what your life would be like if you already had the external factor, such as the "perfect" body or job or partner. Identify how you would treat yourself and others if this was your actual life situation. Then, remove the external factor (appearance, occupation, relationship status, etc.) and progress directly to the practice of treating yourself in the way you imagined. This is probably similar to treating

yourself as a full, whole and complete person, which is what you actually are already. Practice treating yourself with respect and appreciation, and then let it flow out to others. If you are truly and deeply feeling good about yourself, you are most likely going to treat others in the same loving manner.

Like a gentle touch or a soft balm, unconditional love is extremely healing. From the rich and satisfying soil of unconditional love, much growth is possible. In turning the focus away from gaining status and worldly achievements to the simply recognition that we are already whole and complete beings that are specifically designed for love (and hence relationships of all kinds) at our innermost core, the need to prove anything falls away. There is only the glorious experience of being, and shining in the unique way that only you can. This is the surest path to living out authentic love for oneself and others.