

Wisdom from Our Sources

“Masks” by Shel Silverstein

*She had blue skin
and so did he.
He kept it hid
and so did she.
They searched for blue
their whole life through,
then passed right by -
and never knew.*

(From an interview with Tara Brach, PhD, who was raised a Unitarian, and now identifies as a Buddhist, author of the book - “Radical Acceptance”.)

“When some people talk about accepting themselves they have this fear that they're condoning some bad behavior, or that if they accept themselves, that means they'll never improve. But the truth is, we're not saying, "It's OK that you did that bad thing." All we're accepting is the actuality of our experience in the moment: I'm accepting this shame is here, I'm accepting this fear is here, I'm accepting this anger, I'm accepting that there's craving, I'm accepting the truth just now, that I acted out of that craving and I ate too much. I'm accepting how bad I feel about that.

But in the moment of accepting, we're not condoning. We're just acknowledging the truth of what's here, with kindness. The reality is, if we can do that, it actually begins to free us so we can in the next moment, and be a lot wiser.

One of the great psychologists, Carl Rogers, put it this way, 'It wasn't until I accepted myself just as I was in this moment, that I was free to change.' So a pre-condition to true transformation, is to accept ourselves in the moment.”

A Poem by Rumi

*This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture.*

*Still treat each guest honorably,
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.*

*Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.*

Homily – Radical Acceptance by Rev Laura Shennum

A story by Pedro Pablo Sacristan

When you go to the land of the fairies and ask who is the most beautiful fairy in history, they'll all answer without hesitation that it is Pionina. Everyone, that is, except Pionina herself, who will shake her head and silently think about her sister Fiorina.

No one has yet seen her, but Fiorina was clearly the most beautiful of the two fairy sisters. Both were born from the same big, perfect, dewdrop, and for years they spent their lives together inside the same flower. The problem was that they were so shy that they never wanted to go out into the world. As they didn't know any other fairies, they wondered whether they themselves were beautiful or ugly, intelligent or stupid, fortunate or unlucky.

They thought about this so much and so often that they ended up convinced that they were ugly, stupid and unlucky. So much so, that they resolved never to leave their comfortable flower. There they stayed, living their lives regretting their misfortune. How could they show themselves to the world, when they were such a pair of disasters? What would others say about them? And what if others rejected them and ridiculed them?

That was, until one day when Pionina summoned up enough courage to leave the flower.

"It's not my fault I'm so horrible," she told herself, "I will try to be kind and cheerful, and maybe that way they will forgive me my flaws,"

Now determined to venture out, Pionina tried everything to get her sister to go with her, but Fiorina didn't feel capable of overcoming her shyness. Even though she was really dying to leave the flower, she decided to stay...

When Pionina leapt out, and began her acrobatic flight across the land, a special gleaming light enveloped the whole countryside. Seeing this light, hundreds of fairies emerged from their flowers to take it all in. They all watched in admiration as they beheld the most beautiful fairy anyone had ever seen.

Before long, there was a huge commotion all around Pionina, and in only a few short minutes she had become the most famous of all fairies, thanks to her beauty, her intelligence, and her good fortune. Pionina then hurried off to tell her sister how mistaken they had been for all those years. The problem was, she didn't know the way back to her flower. In that land there were hundreds of thousands of flowers, just like her own. Pionina couldn't tell which one was the one she had lived in. She searched and searched, but could never manage to find Fiorina.

And there Fiorina remained, hidden in her flower, filled with fear, believing herself to be the most horrible of fairies; never knowing that if she ever decided to come out, she would realise that she was the most beautiful and fortunate of all the fairies.

Fiorina lives in all of us. Maybe at different extremes, but the self doubt and self criticism is part of our human nature. We might have moments and maybe even days we can fully accept ourselves. However, those stories we tell ourselves about our worth have a tendency to creep back into our minds. Those stories limit our ability to engage in the beauty of the world and the love we have.

Tara Brach invites us to embrace radical acceptance of ourselves, to embrace everything about ourselves with love, warts and all.

She states:

“Radical Acceptance reverses our habit of living at war with experiences that are unfamiliar, frightening or intense. It is the necessary antidote to years of neglecting ourselves, years of judging and treating ourselves harshly, years of rejecting this moment's experience. Radical Acceptance is the willingness to experience ourselves and our life as it is. A moment of Radical Acceptance is a moment of genuine freedom.”

When we enter into this place of radical acceptance, we are letting go of the judgment and rejection of who we are. This idea is the defining foundation to our

Universalist roots. God loves everyone just the way they are, without judgment. This is what defines our first principle in honoring the worth and dignity of every person. We honor that worth and dignity, because God's unconditional love for all beings justifies it. It is important for us to understand this love is not just for others, it also includes ourselves. In addition, it is important because we cannot harness that love for others if we do not first love ourselves, which reinforces our connections through the interdependent web of life.

For those of you doubting the ability to love yourself or think this idea might be a bit corny, I ask you to take a moment and reflect on this question: How much of your day do you spend doubting yourself or judging yourself? If it is none, then please see me after the service, because I want to know your secret. If it is any time at all, then think a moment on what your day would be like if that doubt and judgment was love and acceptance.

Activity – Beauty of Ourselves and Others

So, let's explore this idea of radical self acceptance through a meditation and an activity. Again, I invite you to participate in however you feel comfortable.

First, get comfy in your chair,
feel free to close your eyes,
place your hands gently on your stomach
just breathe and feel your stomach rise and fall with the breath.

Turn your attention to your heart
search your heart and find someone you love.
Picture this someone clearly in your mind.
It could be a favorite pet, it could be God,
it could be a parent, it could be a partner.
Let your heart expand with the love you feel for them.

Think of the ways you love that someone
See how beautiful they are.
Sit in that love for a moment,
Treasure it.

Now picture someone who loves you,
it might be the same or someone different.
Picture that being looking at you in love.
Think of the ways this someone loves you,
See how beautiful you are to them.
Let your heart expand with the love they feel for you.

Sit in that love for a moment,
Treasure it.

Breathe in, saying I am love;
Breath out, saying I am loved.
Again, Breathe in, saying I am love;
Breath out, saying I am loved.
When you are ready, slowly open your eyes and return to the room.

Hold the love you felt during this meditation and take out the flowers and leaves you were given as you entered today. I invite you to write or draw on the leaf something you love about yourself. I invite you to write or draw on the flower something you love about someone else.

These will be collected by our children and brought up to the front for a community creation.
(Tree created, music plays)

As you can see the love we carry with us, when put together, can create something truly beautiful. Let us remember and embody Lady Gaga's words:
I'm beautiful in my way
'Cause God makes no mistakes
I'm on the right track, baby I was born this way
Don't hide yourself in regret
Just love yourself and you're set
I'm on the right track, baby
I was born this way

Embrace who you are and celebrate the way you were created.