

Chapter 24

Loving Myself and Forgiving Others

Love after love

The time will come When with elation You will greet yourself Arriving at
your own door.
In your own mirror, And each time with a smile At the others welcome,
And say sit here eat, You will love again The stranger who was yourself.
Give back your heart to its self The stranger who has loved you all your life,
Whom you have ignored for another, Who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters From the book shelf, The photographs,
The desperate notes, Peel your image from the mirror, Sit and feast on your
life.

Derek Walcott

I always wished I had love I was desperate for someone to love me. I would do anything for a lover anything just for them to love me, I was so passive and have been all of my life, I am so accommodating so needy so desperate just for someone to love me. To hold me and say everything is going to be all right, to run their hand through my hair, or to wipe a tear from my face. I wanted someone that love and adore me, to need me, to want me. I wished I could find someone who couldn't live with out me, someone I could call my own, have that family that I always dreamed of.

The key that could unlock all this love I had pinned up in my heart. All of the roses and poetry waiting to be written, All of the songs I wanted to dance with someone. I just wanted to love someone, have them hold me and really want their arms around me. I would fantasize about walking in the park and holding hands with the one I loved, lying on the beach and have her run her fingers through my hair. Kiss in the middle of the night, holding hands under the covers.

Having lovers was a relief from the fact that nobody really loved me. I had no family that cared about me, all I had was my lovers, I would force them to prove their undying love for me, by either making them say "I love you" a million times or forcing them to say "I'm sorry" every time I was hurt by them.

I would even go so far as to make them do things they wouldn't normally do to prove their love for me. I drained my lovers of all of the love they could possibly give me. I needed them emotionally, totally. I had to have their love, all of it, all of the time, I wanted them to compensate for the lack of love I was received as a child.

No one loved me except for my lovers, and in the midst of all of my relationships, I knew even this love was temporary, no matter how many times I would force them to say that they loved me and would never leave me. No one could have loved me enough. No one, that is, except for myself. For years I battled the question, "What does it mean to love yourself?" So many people have told me, "You have to love yourself before you can truly love others." So I'm back to my original question: What does it mean to love

yourself? I've been searching for love all my life, no matter how much love I receive from others it's never enough. And it would have never been enough, because the love I was searching for was inside me. I was crying out to myself, and to my surprise, I finally answered.

Me: Why doesn't anyone love me? Why doesn't anyone care? Everyone I know has a family that loves them. Then why don't I? I know if something were to happen to me, nobody would care.

I AM: I would, and I do.

Me: I don't care about myself.

I AM: Yes, you do. You just don't realize it. You're expecting some wonderful feeling of love to come over you, and since it hasn't, you don't think you love yourself. But I'm here to tell you that you do.

Me: People who love themselves don't drink, smoke or do drugs.

I AM: Who's to say the stipulations of what people must do or not do in order to love themselves? Love is a feeling, not necessarily an action. Even though you were drinking to the point where you were out of control, you still loved yourself. Even though you were hurting yourself.

Me: That doesn't make sense.

I AM: And why doesn't it? Hasn't it been said that we end up hurting the ones we love the most? I remember times when you would cry out to God to help you save yourself from drinking, because you had lost control. He eventually answered you, and you no longer drink. The same holds true for your smoking. You used to smoke two packs of cigarettes a day, and now for the past four years, you haven't so much as touched a cigarette. People don't plead for God to help someone that they don't care about, even if that someone is themselves.

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What more can I say?

You've apologized hundreds of times before
But this time sorry isn't enough anymore
Resentment is growing where love used to be
You're hearing my voice,
but you're not listening to me
The frustrations so often and anger intense
That the simplest of phrases no longer make sense
There's no promise in our future of any relief
Our relationship is blossoming nothing but grief
To change this strain between us
It almost seems ambiguous
The love we had forevermore
is the very thing we cannot restore
at this point I wish you would just go away
I don't know what you expect from me
What more can I say?

My biggest battle is to overcome resentments. I have much stored up over the years, to the point where it's all consuming. I have it for the adults who

were supposed to take care of me. For the childhood I never had. When I see a happy child who is being held and loved there is a very sad part of me that says, "That could have been me" or "What could I have been if I had a loving and supportive family?" I yearned for the life I could have had. Living in the what could have been. I lived in that mind set for many years, hating and wishing things could have been different. I drank because I wanted to forget all that had happened to me, and to drown out the self pity, I have learned that I had to face what has happened, accept it and go forward not letting the past stop me.

I yearned from strangers the love I never had from my parents. A friend of mine said "Family are the friends we choose" I learned it is never too late to build on what I have left. I stopped chasing the love of people that do not love me. I have created a new family through the people that care about me. For many years I called my mother hoping that the next conversation would be the one that made me feel loved, but the phone bills piled up and the love just wasn't there. So I finally gave up. And started giving my love to those who reciprocated that love back to me.

I had hate for the lovers that took advantage of me, knowing I was desperate for love. and dangling their love in front of me making me work for the little love that I got. Some of them knew that they could treat me however they wanted and I wouldn't leave. I had no where to go, No family, no nothing. Looking back I see that they did to me what I allowed. I could have left. I should have left. I didn't because I was broken, but over the years and through the education of life I realize that I should only be with people that treat me with respect, and who show me love. Desperation will not make someone love me. I can't make anyone love me, but I can love myself and do good things for me.