

## Stop the negative self-talk and show yourself some love

Have you ever denied yourself a pleasant experience because you feel you don't deserve it? Simple things like taking time to read a book, or having a relaxing steamy bath seem to come with guilt.

*'Have I worked hard enough today? Is it right to relax when the house is a mess? What if someone needs me?'*

Offering empathy to other people is natural. It's a social expectation to support those around us that are in need. Yet, when it comes to looking after ourselves, we seem to be missing a trick.

When we are children our worth is dictated by our carers. Rewards-based systems are set up to encourage 'good' behaviour. We get sweets if we've earned them. If bedtime comes early, we know we've done a bad thing. There is value in using this system to teach kids that their actions have consequences. Yet, being motivated by rewards and acting out of fear of punishment can bring huge problems later in life.

The first problem is that reward- based systems set up conditions for self-love.

Here's an example:

As adults, we often assess whether we are worthy of pleasure based on our level of productivity. We set ourselves expectations to accomplish a certain list of tasks each day. If we don't achieve what we set out to do, it can feel like failure.

Ridicule and criticism rears its ugly head.

'What's the point? I'm so lazy and scattered, I'll never amount to anything.'

Sound familiar?

The truth is that having low motivation, a short attention span and scrambled thoughts can be a sign that we are overstressed or depressed. Instead of punishing ourselves for those emotions, let's try practising self-compassion.

That means replacing that negative self-talk with a soothing, reassuring voice.

Try saying this:

'I deserve to relax and take time to enjoy the things I love. I am a valuable person regardless of what I achieve. I was made to feel pleasure in my mind, body, and soul.'

Alternatively, make your own mantra to combat the habit of self-punishing behaviour.

The key is unconditional love

We all have the capacity to live with unconditional love.

To do so, we must let go of guilt.

When we ask ourselves 'Have I worked hard enough to rest?' we are stopping unconditional love from flowing through us. We are setting up a condition for self-care.

If we were to apply this rule to our relationships with others, we would be saying things like:

'I'll love you but only after you do this for me.' It doesn't sound nice, does it?

Once we develop an unconditionally loving relationship with ourselves, it's easy to see we don't have to earn the right to feel pleasure. We were made to experience it.

Until we allow love to flow to ourselves freely, without conditions, the love and compassion we have for others is limited.

One step is letting go of rewards-based systems from our early experiences by acknowledging that they no longer serve us.

Another is creating a mantra to combat negative self-talk.

When we are feeling unproductive, instead of exacerbating feelings of inadequacy with self-punishment, let's open ourselves to reassurance and self-soothing.

As soon as we start living with unconditional love, we feel whole and complete. Our connection with others becomes deeper and clearer.

**'When we love without expectations, calculations or negotiations we are indeed in heaven' ~ Rumi**

Release yourself from judgement. Heaven is just a thought away.