

PLEASE READ: ARTICLE BY ELIZABETH GILBERT, AUTHOR OF "EAT, PRAY, LOVE"

Dear Ones –

I'm worried about something. I'm worried about how much we hate ourselves.

When I say "we", I mean modern people in the developed Western world, primarily. And among that population, it is the women who hate themselves most of all — who harm themselves, sabotage themselves, bully themselves, undermine themselves, and speak to themselves in voices of unthinkable cruelty.

Increasingly, I believe that the vast majority of our suffering is a result of this epidemic. And I am CERTAIN that everything you want for your life — everything you want to feel and believe and become — is on the other side of that dark river of self-hatred and self-abuse.

We have to stop this.

I won't be talking today about the causes of our self-hatred. I don't want to drift into the easy blame of "the media's images of women", or "the patriarchy", or "the internet" or "the emotional disconnect of the post-industrial world" or even "our fucked up families." Because you know what? I DON'T KNOW. I'm not smart enough to know what this is all about, or where the self-hatred comes from. I just know that it's prevalent, it's contagious, it's really dangerous, and that we are destroying ourselves with it.

Sharon Salzberg, the great American meditation master, tells a story about meeting the Dalai Lama in 1990. She asked him what he thought about self-hatred, and he replied, "Self-hatred? What is that?"

Seriously. He didn't know what she was talking about. He kept probing: How could people be taught to hate THEMSELVES?

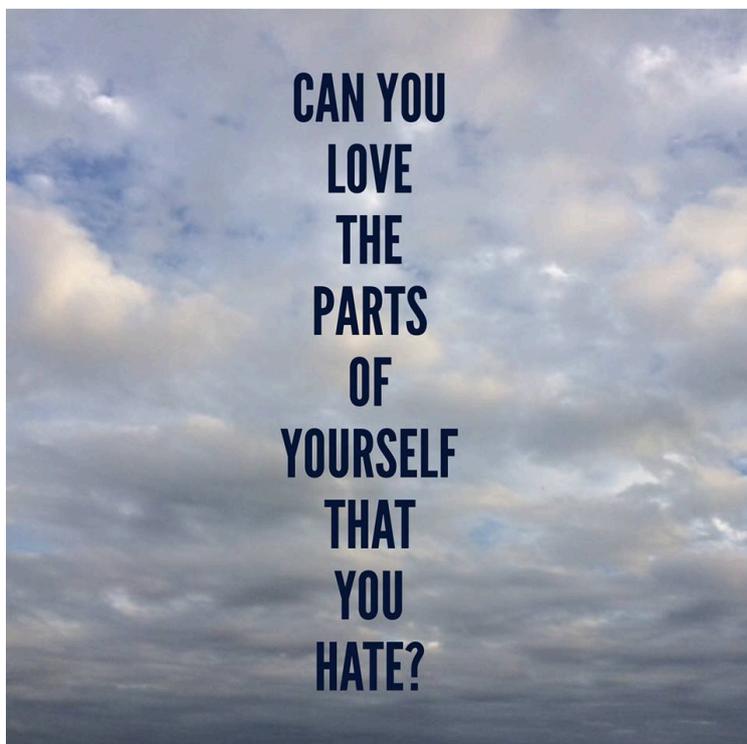
The room was filled with Western meditators, scientists, psychologists, and researchers, and over the next hours they tried to explain it to the Dalai Lama — tried to answer his puzzled question of how a person could be taught to hate themselves. But he remained puzzled. He said, at the end of it all, "I thought I had a good acquaintance with the mind, but now I feel quite ignorant. I find this very, very strange."

And heartbreaking.

Unlike the Dalai Lama, I know self-hatred inside and out, you guys. I know self-blame, shame, self-recrimination, and I have certainly experienced rage against my own machine. I know what it feels like to look at every molecule of your being (physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual) and declare: NOT GOOD ENOUGH, KID. And I know that this way lies madness. Madness and pain, and the death of all good things.

I also know this — that the answer is not to become A BETTER PERSON. The answer is not to IMPROVE. The answer is not TO GET YOUR SHIT TOGETHER. And this is coming from somebody who loves improving, who loves striving, and who is always trying to get her shit together. Look, trying to improve yourself is FINE, if that's what you're into. Exercise more, eat better, become more productive, de-clutter your house — whatever. Getting your shit together is very nice. Do all that stuff, if you want to. (I certainly do all that stuff, and I don't judge it.) But understand this — PEACE WILL NOT BE FOUND THERE. Your house can be so tidy that you could invite Marie Kondo over for dinner with pride, and maybe someday you can achieve rock-hard abs, and maybe someday you could get out debt, and land your dream job, finally stop drinking....and you might STILL hate yourself.

Because the darkness of self-hatred is immune to any worldly accomplishment or success. Achievement does not touch the part of yourself who abuses yourself. The world is filled with highly successful and accomplished people who treat themselves horribly, who talk to themselves savagely, and who abuse themselves terribly. If you could see inside their heads and witness the dreadful conversations going on in there, you would be shocked. You would be shocked, and maybe you would cry. And maybe you would want to take that highly successful and deeply troubled person in your arms and say, "There, there, little small one...there, there...hush, hush..."



Peace will only be found when you can love all the parts of yourself that you have always hated.

I used to think that self-love would only come to me when I had "cleaned up my act" — only when I had gotten rid of all my bad behaviors, only when I had mastered my mind, only when I had driven out all the negative thoughts, only when I had forgiven everyone for everything, only when I had made amends for every mess I had ever caused, only when I could see divinity in everybody, only when I never lost my temper, only when I no longer experienced "bad" emotions like anger, jealousy, resentment, self-pity. In other words, I could not love myself until I had become WORTHY.

Which means...what? Which means: I believed that I could not love myself until I was some kind of polished golden orb of perfection, with an immaculately-controlled mind, a healthy body, and a totally clean record. Someone who would never make another misstep, never speak another unkind word, never be a fuck-up again in any way whatsoever...ever. Then I could love myself.

But who is that? Who is that person I have just described?

That person is nobody. That person is no human being who has ever lived.

And once you realize that, then you realize that we are all this same boat together. That everything you hate about yourself is nothing less than your HUMANITY. Your shared humanity. That you and I, and your neighbor Bob, and your awful sister-in-law, and all those shiny people on Instagram...that we all share the same human dilemma — that we all don't totally know how to BE, and what to do with ourselves. We all have these strange minds full of incomprehensible thoughts. We all have these untrustworthy hearts that often want forbidden things. We all have these funny ape-like bodies with weird urges. We all have these enormous souls filled with a desperate longing for belonging.

You are no different from me, and I am no different from your neighbor Bob, and your neighbor Bob is no different from your awful sister-in-law, and your awful sister-in-law is no different from all those shiny people on Instagram. There is a massive sense of tenderness that comes over me when I remember that we are all the same in our shared dilemma of how to be a person. We are all in this together. We are a bizarre but beautiful species. And if you believe that human beings need love, and deserve love...then you must someday grow into the belief that YOU also need love and deserve love, and that you must stop being so stingy about giving it to yourself.

You must not think that love is something you give to yourself as a reward, only if you have earned it — like some kind of gold star sticker that you get to put on your homework today if you are good...but maybe not tomorrow, if you fuck up.

No.

You have to give yourself love all the time.

Giving yourself love doesn't mean that every day is spa day. (Although, hey. If you can swing it...) Giving yourself love doesn't mean buying yourself fancy presents, or constantly treating yourself, or spoiling yourself. (You are not SEDUCING yourself, remember. You are not trying to get yourself in bed. You are just being kind and loving to yourself.) Giving yourself love doesn't mean becoming Kanye-like in your insistence that you are the greatest.

You are not the greatest. But you are also not the WORST. And I bet there have been days of your life (maybe years of your life) where all you do is walk around telling yourself that you are the WORST. And I bet that nothing good has ever come out of that way of thinking.

You are not the greatest, and you are not the worst. You are just one of us.

I have tried a radical experiment recently. I call it: THE EXTREME LOVE EXPERIMENT.

Whenever I have a dark thought — a "forbidden" thought, like anger, jealousy, resentment, lust, shame, contempt — I immediately say to myself, "I love the part of you, Liz, who is full of anger right now."

or: "I love the part of you who is ashamed of yourself right now."

or: "I love the part of you who can't stop judging yourself right now."

or: "I love the part of you who feels weak and helpless right now."

or: "I love the part of you who just had an explicitly violent fantasy about watching that person who is talking loudly on her cellphone suddenly have her head blow up."

or: "I love the part of you who is still having an argument in your head with a man you haven't talked to in 15 years."

or: "I love the part of you who broke your New Year's resolution on January 4th."

or: "I love the part of you who believes that she is such a spiritual hypocrite, it's ridiculous."

or: "I love the vain/insecure part of you who stands in front of the mirror lifting up the dangly flesh on your neck and wondering if there's some kind of plastic surgery for that."

or: "I love the part of you who is jealous of that other novelist for winning that big award."

I used to try to banish all those parts of myself. Because they were BAD. They were WRONG. They were UNEVOLVED. They were NEGATIVE.

But banishing the parts of myself that I hated has never worked. The more I try to banish them, the stronger they grow. The more I hated these parts of myself, the more they multiplied. It's like my self-hatred was fertilizer — creating a dark, warm, nourishing environment for all those "bad" thoughts and impulses to grow...and as they grew, they destroyed me.

Now I just say to the dark thought, "I love this part of you"...and the dark thought loses its power.

I understand now that I am not a SELF. I am SELVES. I am thousands of different selves — and all of them are worthy of love.

To say, "I love you," is the only force strong enough to diffuse darkness.

And here's the crazy thing — this habit is starting to spread out of me, and I can now do it toward others.

For instance, I now have the capacity to think: "I love the part of my husband who is constantly interrupting me. This is just his weird humanity at play."

Followed by: "And I love the part of me who gets so freaking irritated about how my husband is constantly interrupting me."

Followed by: "I love the part of me who doesn't really BELIEVE that I love the part of my husband who is constantly interrupting me."

Followed by: "I love the part of me who is saying that this EXTREME LOVE EXPERIMENT is total bullshit, and it will never work."

Followed by: "I love the part of me who wonders if I will ever truly love myself."

And it goes on like that. But I go on, too. I just keep throwing love at everything that comes up...until finally it all gently quiets down.

And it does all finally gently quiet down.

I love all these dark parts of myself not because they are wonderful and adorable and perfect and fantastic, but because they are THERE. My dark bits are with me and they will likely always be with me. Just as your dark parts are with you and will likely always be with you. All that is there needs to be loved.

That's OK.

As they say: "It's not a bug; it's a FEATURE."

Our humanity is not an ERROR. Our crazy thoughts are not MISTAKES. Our scary longings and giant failures and ongoing disasters are not ABERRATIONS.

This is merely what it is to be a person — messy, weird, inconsistent, doubtful. This is how we ARE, and that has to be OK, or else nobody is OK.

We are not some early Dell Computer Operating System, here to be de-bugged. We are not some new product for sale, here to be perfected. The goal is not to become an immaculate golden orb. The goal is to return to a place of kindness, where you can be gentle with yourself and others, no matter what arises. This requires, I think, a friendly sort of loving humor about who you are and who we all are. Why does the Dalai Lama have such a twinkle about him? Because he gets it. He gets that it's kind of funny, how we are. Even when it's terrible. The whole thing is...very, very strange. And

that's OK. It's strange, but it's sacred.

And I believe there no is gentler or safer place to stand on this earth than in a place where you can say to yourself, "I love every bit of you, you beautiful freak."

The Buddha said it better, of course. The Buddha said, "You can search the whole world over and never find anyone as deserving of love as yourself."

In other words: Be good to you, OK?

Please put down the knife you have been holding to your own throat. You don't deserve that kind of abuse, and it won't help.

Just try it. Try saying to your scariest bits: "I love this part of you."

And then say it again to the next part...and the next part...and the next part...and the next part...and ONWARD.

Good luck in there.

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