



Step 19: Use Love as Your Motivation to Change

“People who have a self-image of worth are going to see value in what they do. This is the attitude that motivates them to be and to do their best. It’s a drive that comes from within people.”

-William Walton

Many women who want to love their bodies, myself included, go about it backwards: they treat it as a then-when proposition: When I lose weight, then I’ll love my body. This makes for a hard, hard road.

If you want to create love for your body, and attain the peace that comes with it, one of the easiest ways to manifest this desire is to think about the essence of what you want; to be unattached to the outer form in which it appears. This means letting go of a number on a scale, a clothing size, or a wrinkle free face. Instead, dig underneath that desire for a better-looking body (however you define it) to find the essence of what you want.

What’s the essence? I think what you really want is self-acceptance. What you really desire---the motivation behind the wish for weight loss, a more youthful complexion, or a toned body---is to feel good. To look in the mirror and like what you see. To go clothes shopping and feel terrific. To frolic on the beach in your bathing suit with ease. To go to a party filled with other women and not feel envious or lacking in comparison.

Here’s the kicker: those feelings have absolutely nothing to do with what you see in the mirror. Those feelings have everything to do with what’s in your head. I think of when I looked my physical best, at least according to Hollywood’s standards, when I was an emaciated 19 year old. Did I feel pretty? Um, no: I still had a long list of things to “fix” before I felt thin and beautiful. By contrast, when I’ve felt the most beautiful is after giving birth to my children, when I’m naked, unstyled, flabby, sweaty, and make-up free.

Here’s the good news: You can give yourself those feelings of body love without losing weight, getting a face lift, or tightening your butt. You can give yourself those feelings by loving and accepting your body as it is, now.

Here's even better news: By giving yourself the essence of what you want, first, your body will naturally cooperate and evolve to be its best self: the best you that you can be. If you are over or underweight, your weight will stabilize at its natural set point: the place where your body looks its best. If your body looks icky from poor health or bad habits, it will become more beautiful through self-love, as a result of your tender loving care and good habits.

How? Let me explain.

It's all a matter of motivation: Are you trying to look your best in order to compete with other women? Are you pursuing health for appearance only, for vanity? Are you willing yourself, fighting yourself, in an effort to control your eating, control your ageing, or control your body? Is your ego in charge?

I've lived this way---under the thumb of my ego, my vanity, and my need to be better than others. It's what kept me nuts, trying to be a size 4; trying to lose my baby weight as quickly as possible; trying to fight the changes of pregnancy, age, and motherhood.

Compare those motivations to those that come from love, your higher self; motivations that are driven by your higher good: Giving yourself enough nourishing, delicious, healthy food that offers nutrition and pleasure. A body that loves to be used and appreciated, whether it be its physicality or its sexuality. A desire to let your inner beauty shine outward. A healthy appreciation for your outer physical beauty, yet free of clinging or attachment; flexible to accept the changes that come.

Doesn't that sound like a better way to live? Doesn't it feel freer, more joyful?

Vanity, you see, is a terrible motivator, because it's never, ever satisfied. The will isn't any better: forcing yourself to do something that you really don't want to do, or forcing yourself to do something that harms your body, can never last over the long term. The ego is even worse, because it keeps you fearful and neurotic: even if you lose the weight or get the Botox, it will immediately start harping and fretting over the regain of the lost pounds or the return of the frown lines.

How do you get off this track? Tap into the essence of what you want. Spend time meditating on what loving your body feels like: Can you remember a time when you felt okay about your appearance? Sit with those feelings until you feel them in your body. Bring about the essence and feel it: in your gut, your heart, and your mind. Now, can you give yourself that gift, that essence of acceptance and self-love, to your body as it is, right now, in this moment?

That is love. Following love, not your will, is the quickest, easiest path to changing habits that harm your body. If you love your body, and love yourself, looking your best will happen naturally, organically, without extraordinary amounts of will and effort. You won't need to find motivation to exercise, or eat foods that make you feel good: you will automatically do these things as a consequence of self-love. You won't stuff yourself with food until you feel sick. You won't starve yourself, either. You will give your body what it wants: a variety of foods and textures. More importantly, you'll trust yourself to give yourself these things, and silence the critical voice that goes ballistic when you enjoy a piece of pizza.

As you trust yourself, and honor yourself, and treat your body like the precious creature that it is, this becomes a regular pattern that feeds your self love, until it becomes a mutually beneficial cycle: as your self love grows, then your self care increases; as your self care and self love increases, your body looks better than ever; and as your body looks great, you feel more love towards your body, and yourself, which only increases your self care.... Then a beautiful thing happens: your body will find its natural set point/equilibrium: where it looks its best, as a naturally, unfolding consequence of kindness. Just as a house that is loved and cared for will look its best, as you treat yourself kindly, your body shines from the love and care you bestow upon it.

When love is your motivation, you'll know whether to lose weight, gain weight, eat more, eat less, exercise more, exercise less. You'll know when your body needs a day off, and you'll rest, instead of pushing yourself on the elliptical machine. What's even better is that you'll be able to rest without your inner critic/taskmaster going haywire: ("You need to go to the gym or you'll get fat!") You'll know whether you are loving yourself or you are berating yourself. (Berating yourself is doing something because you think you should---because you feel like you have to. Loving yourself is doing something because you want to.)

Which do you choose: the will, or the heart? Vanity, or acceptance? Hatred, or love?