

Finding Worthiness and Belonging

With LaShelle Lowe-Charde

It is a tragic thing that far too many of us live with thoughts of worthlessness and feelings of shame. With worthlessness and shame comes the idea of not belonging or not being worthy of belonging. Belonging in this context is more than an identity with a particular group. It is a deep sense of belonging to life, to your sense of self, and to our earth. It is the sort of belonging that enables you to get other fundamental needs met like safety, support, nourishment, and love.

A sense of worthlessness coupled with a threat to belonging is painful enough, but more suffering usually arises out of unconscious attempts to compensate for or manage this pain. There are as many ways to manage pain as there are people and at the same time there are few common strategies that you might recognize easily in yourself or others. Some of the most common compensatory strategies for managing emotional pain include:

Withdrawing and limiting life to a narrow spectrum of experiences

Playing the role of the one that everyone needs - the self sacrificing helper

Winning others over through charm and manipulation, telling others what they want to hear so they will let you belong.

Creating a facade of invulnerability, challenging others, and acting as if you are in charge.

Claiming specialness or superiority through achievements, abilities, rank, race, beauty, wealth or anything else that you imagine makes you better than others.

As you reflect on these compensatory strategies to win worthiness and belonging, you might start to see how each effectively blocks the very thing it is pursuing. For example, claiming specialness or superiority means you have to see yourself as different from others and view them as less than. You can't belong from that place. Or, winning others over through charm or by acting invulnerable, prevents the authentic you from showing up and being received in the embrace of belonging.

Sadly the fact that these strategies don't meet the needs they are designed to meet doesn't usually make you give up on them. Instead, these tragic behaviors often escalate in the face of continued unmet needs. Transformation and change occurs when there is a critical mass of clarity about the harm of a particular way of thinking and behaving.

When you fully know that something is harmful, it doesn't take any effort to stop doing it. For example, if you eat a strawberry and immediately have difficulty breathing from an allergic reaction, you won't be tempted to eat a strawberry again no matter how delicious they look and smell. If all harmful behaviors resulted in feedback that was this clear, change would be incredibly easy. As it is, knowing that something is harmful often requires subtle attention and continuous reflection.

You need a critical mass of clarity to truly see the harmful effects of a behavior despite the immediate comfort or relief they bring as they momentarily protect you against feeling shame. When you reach this critical mass of clarity, you will experience it as a deep shift in your relationship to belonging. Sometimes it fruits as the result of years of dedicated and consistent mindfulness, self-reflection, and healing work. Other times, getting to this clarity requires enormous suffering. This is often referred to as "a wake up call."

From a bigger perspective, of course, there is no such thing as worthy or unworthy. This dualism arises from the violent and false notions that some deserve punishment or that one person's needs are more important than another's. Nevertheless, you, like many, might have been exposed to this notion so much that it may run amuck in your consciousness. The result is that you find yourself trying to earn belonging and avoid punishment.

As you become more clear about this fallacy, the essential thing is to catch the worthlessness program running in the moment. It is just a habit pattern, a tragic pattern of conditioning with painful effects. Catch it and interrupt it. The more you interrupt it, the less you are hypnotized by it. In the spaces in between, you can train your attention to turn toward experiences of worthiness and belonging and focus on the felt sense and truth of these experiences. When you trust deeply in the truth that everyone belongs and is inherently worthy, you feel it and see it all around you.

Practice

Take a moment right now and look for even the smallest space inside of you that knows the truth about your own worthiness and belonging.