

SELF-ACCEPTANCE

“Acceptance of oneself is ...the acid test of one’s whole outlook on life.” C.G. Jung

Hello, this is Jose Parappully, Salesian priest and clinical psychologist at Sumedha centre, Jeolikote, with another edition of Psyche & Soul.

This weekend we shall focus on Self-Acceptance which is a foundational requisite for emotional health and happiness.

Self-acceptance, as the great psychologist Carl Jung points out, is not only an essential requisite for emotional wellbeing, but also influences our way of being in the world. In his own words: *“Acceptance of oneself is ...the acid test of one’s whole outlook on life.”*

However, many of us find self-acceptance a big challenge. This was the case with Anjana. Let us listen to what she says about herself.

“I don’t like myself. Actually, I hate myself. I hate my body. I hate the person I have become. I get angry so often. I shout and scream at people. I am not very successful in much of what I do and get blamed so often.” She seems angry and disgusted with herself.

It’s hard to accept oneself, and more so to love oneself, when we are confronted with so many of our frailties and weakness. Yet, if we want to be emotionally healthy persons, we need to accept the whole of ourselves without rejecting any aspect of our being: body, gender, sex, mind, limitations and weakness, strengths and talents, and our personal and family histories.

Self-acceptance is based on genuine knowledge of self, grounded in realistic appraisal of our resources and limitations. This knowledge comes also from what others are saying about us.

Manifestations of Self-Acceptance

When we accept ourselves, we have genuine appreciation for our own worth, and we do not engage in irrational self-reproach. We are happy with who we are, and do not feel the need to boast of our accomplishments or to inflate them.

We are willing to admit faults and failures without embarrassment, rather than trying to cover up or deny. We are willing to accept corrections.

When we accept ourselves like this others too will find it easy to accept us and relate to us, since we do not feel any compulsion to hide or defend our mistakes, or to boast of our talents or achievements

A corollary to this self-acceptance and self-appreciation is the ability to allow others the right to be themselves. We are able to accept others as they are with their flaws and limitations. We do not impose our own views, expectations or needs on others. Neither do we feel the need to put others down or downplay their achievements. We are not threatened by the beauty, giftedness or achievements of others; rather we are able to rejoice with them and speak appreciatively about them to others.

Manifestations of Self-Rejection

Self-rejection, on the contrary, shows itself in the following unhealthy forms of behaviour: chronic self-disapproval and self-disparagement; feelings of being unworthy; excessive guilt; pretending to be who/what we are not, going out of the way to boast or impress others; feeling others are against us, view us unfairly, or don't understand us.

When we do not feel good about ourselves, when we lack self-esteem, we may try to over-control our environment. We become overcautious about making mistakes. We feel the need to do everything right and perfect. This can lead to *Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder*.

Lack of self-acceptance often results in scrupulosity. Because of the fear of rejection by others and especially by God, we tend to become perfect by striving to avoid even the least wrong doing. Since we reject ourselves because of our shortcomings, we tend to believe that others and God also will reject us if we are not "perfect." Perfectionism deafens us to the good news that a loving God unconditionally accepts and loves us just as we are, that we don't need to earn God's love.

Challenging Situations

Self-acceptance becomes a challenge especially for women in the context of the relentless media pressure to conform to perfect body shape and appearance offered as ideal. These images tend to confirm self-doubts about goodness of one's own body leading to a feeling of not being "good enough" and frenetic efforts to change one's body shape and appearance to match the ideal. When one fails in the attempt one tends to live with a sense of deficiency. It is good to remember here that attractiveness and acceptance depend on more than just physical appearance.

Some of us have deformities or blemishes that affect our self-image and our capacity to function effectively or relate well. Remedial measures such as corrective surgery here is wholesome. However, often expensive cosmetic and surgical interventions are purely to allay our feelings of inadequacy and fears of non-acceptance by others, or simply to conform to ideal images of beauty, even when we are endowed with sufficient grace and beauty.

The Power of Self-Acceptance

The power of self-acceptance is demonstrated by the wonderful accomplishments of physically challenged athletes and artists. These men and women have disabilities that profoundly affect

their mobility and other capacities. However, they are able to accept their limitations and triumph over them and go on to win laurels.

Emotionally healthy persons are able to accept themselves as they are, with their deficiencies and their limitations. This acceptance is not resignation. One accepts, but also strives to overcome the limitations wherever possible.

Introspection

- Am I able to accept myself, with my frailties and limitations, or am I like Anjana, rejecting and despising myself?
- What is my challenge in regard to self-acceptance?

In Psalm 139 we read: “For it was you who created by being, knit me together in in my mother’s womb. I thank you for the wonder of my being, for the wonders of all your creation. (13-14).

We could stay with these words of the Psalmist, paying attention to the thoughts, images and feelings these evoke in us. We could then spend a few moments talking to God about whatever is arising within us. Allow God to lead us into recognising and loving the wonder of our being.

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Have a pleasant weekend, where in you can recognize your beauty and goodness, and accept and love yourself the way God accepts and loves you.

Be well. Be safe. Be blessed.

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