

You are lovable, period

Adapted from *Healing the Shame that Binds You* by John Bradshaw

Toxic shame's greatest enemy is the statement I love myself. To say 'I love myself' can become your most powerful tool in healing the shame that binds you. To truly love yourself will transform your life.

Scott Peck has defined love, "as the will to extend myself for the sake of nurturing my own and another's spiritual growth." This definition sees love as an act of the will. This means that love is a *decision*. I can *choose* to love myself, no matter what the past has been and no matter how I feel about myself.

Try this experiment: imagine that the person you currently love and respect the most is sitting across from you. (Don't pick someone you're in emotional pain about.) The person can be a spouse, lover, child, parent, friend, hero, etc.

Now get in touch with the feelings you have when you experience that person with you. I felt warm and vitalized and appreciative when I saw my best friend. This is my felt sense of that relationship.

Now close your eyes and see yourself sitting across from you. If you're shame-based and you've done nothing to heal your shame, you will probably feel intense feelings of rejection. *The rejection of self is the core of toxic shame.*

Accepting Yourself Unconditionally

To counteract these negative feelings about yourself, make a decision to accept yourself unconditionally. You do this by an act of *choice*.

"I love myself. I will accept myself unconditionally."

Say this out loud and often. What this amounts to is unconditional love.

I can remember vividly the first time I truly accepted and loved myself unconditionally. It was awesome! I later read a book by Gay Hendricks where he talked about the same thing. He described how he would confront people in his workshops with the simple statement, "Will you love yourself for that?"

At first when I read the dialogue of one of his therapeutic interventions with a group member, I was taken aback. Surely there are things we do that are unworthy of love. As Gay went on and on, asking the person if he could love himself no matter what he did or didn't do, I realized that our love needs to be for who we are, *not* for what we do. You are lovable, *period*.

Remember that toxic shame turns you into a human doing because toxic shame says your being is flawed and defective. If your being is flawed and defective, nothing you do could possibly make you lovable. You can't *change* who you are. Understanding the distinction between *being* and *doing* is one of the great learnings of my life. I tried so hard to achieve and do better and better. But no matter what I did, I still felt that deep sense of defectiveness that is the mark of internalized shame. Saying "I love myself for whatever. . ." is a powerful counteraction to the voice of shame. Saying "I love myself. I accept myself unconditionally." can transform our lives.