

An “Attitude Overhaul”: Welcoming What Arrives at Your Door

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Here is a simple and potentially profoundly liberating way to improve your health and well-being in this brand new year: embrace a change of attitude.

Instead of wanting things to be different in some way from how they are right now, allow things to be exactly as you find them. Instead of pursuing self-improvement or self-criticism, allow yourself to be exactly as you are.

Sound simple? It is. Easy? Far from it. This kind of attitude shift goes to the core of how we see ourselves and the circumstances of our lives. Consider, for a moment, just how often during a week, a day, an hour, you might find yourself saying or thinking, “If only things were different, if only I were... (smarter/less anxious/healthier/thinner/had more money/had a different partner/job/parents/ children), THEN I would be...(happy/worthy/lovable/OK).”

Does this sound at all familiar? If so, not to worry—you are just like the rest of us human beings. Our evaluative, comparing, critiquing, judging minds, brilliant when it comes to problem-solving, are also at the very root of how difficult it is to experience the peace, well-being, health and vibrancy we so long for. We want what we don't have; we're not satisfied with what we've got.

What I'm suggesting here is that we reverse the order: starting right now, let's appreciate where we are. Let's accept who and what we are just as we are, for the simple reason that this is what is true in this moment. This is not an attitude of passive resignation, of giving up, but of coming to terms with the way things are—an essential starting point for taking any kind of positive and beneficial action.

Are you experiencing pain? Illness? Depression, anxiety, grief, loss? A sense of lack of purpose or meaning in your life? Unless the reality of your particular circumstances is addressed, acknowledged, accepted in this moment, it is almost impossible to be clear about how to help yourself move toward greater health and ease. When our “default mode” is so often to deny, repress, reject and suppress what we are actually

feeling and experiencing, we have few options other than to numb ourselves with such things as food, work, alcohol and drugs. As many of us can attest, this approach rarely gives us more than short-term relief, if that, and prolongs our being at odds with what is true and real in our lives and in our hearts.

There is another option, one that is based upon a kind and compassionate recognition of what is here, at our doorstep, be it good, bad or ugly. Perhaps the most emotionally dangerous assumption/fear that we commonly have as human beings is that we are not capable of holding the whole show—of holding our emotions, our grief, anger and despair, as well as our deepest joy and delight. Yet it is possible for each one of us to reclaim our birthright, to experience the full range of what it means to be human.

Fortunately, we don't have to go it alone in making these kinds of profound attitudinal changes. Current medical and mental health care interventions such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) teach systematic, evidence-based methods for cultivating our innate inner resources for embracing our lives and ourselves as we are. (1) MBSR and other acceptance-based approaches to greater health and well-being, drawing on the wisdom of ancient Buddhist mindfulness meditation practices, emphasize a universal insight: no matter what arrives at our door, we all have the potential to wake up to the moment-by-moment miracle of being alive.

(1) Baer, Ruth, A., (Ed.). (2006). Mindfulness-Based Treatment Approaches: Clinician's Guide to Evidence Base and Applications. New York: Elsevier Academic Press.

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