



7 Steps to Loving Yourself Unconditionally

~ by Deepak Chopra, MD

A mother loves her newborn child without reservation, and romantic love, in its first stages of infatuation, can make the beloved seem perfect. But most of us doubt that love without reservation, completely forgiving and accepting, exists in our everyday lives. Looking in the mirror, all of us see too many flaws and remember too many past wounds and failings to love ourselves without also putting a limit on it.

In order to expand the love you experience now into unconditional love, a spiritual element is involved. There's a path to unconditional love, as with any spiritual aspiration, and on this path success depends on allowing the goal to unfold naturally. The world's wisdom traditions have provided many road maps, but here I'll offer a few common elements without religious overlay.

Step 1: Make Contact with Your Inner Self

This implies paying more attention to self-care. Through meditation, self-reflection, or contemplation, and the experience of quiet at least a few minutes every day, you make contact with your inner world. You learn to appreciate and enjoy it.

Step 2: Honestly Face Your Inner Obstacles and Resistance

Most people don't like to face their weaknesses and flaws because they judge against them. But you are only human, and you will find that your sense of insecurity and anxiety represents feelings from the past that can be healed. In fact, they want to be released if you will give them a chance.

The first step in healing is to look inside and let the process of releasing begin. Healing can proceed along many avenues—from therapy and support groups, to energy work, massage, mind-body programs, and various Eastern medical approaches.

Step 3: Deal with Old Wounds

One could also call this advanced healing. As old residues of negative emotions are released, you find that you are stuck with resentments, hurts, and scars that must be dealt with. Beneath the scar such wounds feel very fresh. It takes help from someone else who understands the situation to go into these dark places—it could be a close friend, mentor, confidante, priest, or therapist. No one can do this work alone, I feel, but I'm not underlining any sense of danger or fear. The work can be done safely, without anxiety, and once you start, there's a tremendous



sense of exhilaration, even triumph in the process. Just find someone who has walked the path successfully and sympathizes with you fully.

Step 4: Forgive Your Past

You shouldn't jump too quickly into forgiveness. It's all too easy to pretend to yourself that you forgive old hurts and abusive treatment, when in fact what you are eager for is to escape the pain. The absence of pain, achieved through healing, gives you the right foundation for deep, lasting forgiveness. Self-acceptance is required first, and the realization that you – and everyone around you – has been doing the best they can from their own level of awareness. This can be quite a challenge when someone has hurt you deeply, but you can't fully separate from wrongdoing until you accept that others are trapped inside a reality they can't escape.

Step 5: Accept where You Are Right Now

This, too, is a stage you shouldn't jump into too quickly. The present moment isn't free of the burdens, memories, and wounds of the past. They must be attended to before you can look around, breathe easily, and love the moment you are in right now. A good beginning is to catch yourself when you have a bad memory and say, "I am not that person anymore." For the truth is that you aren't.

Step 6: Form Relationships where You Feel Loved and Appreciated

The path to unconditional love isn't meant to be lonely. You should walk it with people who reflect the love you see in yourself. You are likely to look around at some point and realize that not everyone among your family and friends are in sync with your aspirations. Without rejecting them, you have the right to find people who understand the path you're walking and sympathize with it. They are more likely to appreciate you for who you are now and who you want to become.

Step 7: Practice the Kind of Love You Aspire to Receive

Long ago, around the time I wrote a book called, *The Path to Love*, I encountered many people – most of them women – who were constantly waiting for "the one" to show up and sweep them off their feet. But the only way to realistically find "the one" is to be "the one" yourself. Like attracts like, and the more you live your own ideal of love, the more your light will draw another light to you. This single point, I am told, has helped most people find their love.

If you spend time every day with one or two of these steps, you will find a practical road that takes you to more love than you have in your life today. The steps unfold naturally once you begin to devote attention to them. You were born to be perfectly loved and completely lovable. The loss of that status is what's unnatural – not wanting to return to it – and the return means reconnecting with your true self. The path has been walked successfully for centuries, so I hope you take heart and join the fortunate ones who aspire this high. There is no better time to begin than now.

