

## **Please Stop Trying So Hard**

Were you told as a child by lots of different adults that all would be well as long as you tried really hard at school or at any extra-curricular activity that you took up such as playing a musical instrument or joining a sports team?

I was constantly being told to try hard as I was growing up, although as far as my mother was concerned, I not only had to try hard, I had to succeed. Even my best exam results never seemed to satisfy her.

Well, I have some really good news for you. You can finally stop trying. Whatever activities you are currently engaged in, you no longer need to excel at them. You are now a grandparent? You do not need to try to be the best grandparent in the whole world. You belong to a choir or attend a weekly tai chi class? You do not have to try to be the best singer or mover – you do not even have to try to be ‘good’ at singing or tai chi.

Now this idea might sound quite heretical to you if all your life you have tried so hard to get everything right. But this month, I want to encourage you to liberate yourself from this never ending treadmill of seeking external approval. I want to strongly suggest that you just stop trying so hard to please everyone with whom you come into contact.

Why do we all tend to give our power away by doing everything we possibly can to please those around us? I think that fundamentally, we all have a belief that we are not infinitely loveable just the way we are now. We then compensate for this core sense of unworthiness by constantly worrying about how others perceive us.

When someone new joins one of my tai chi classes, I do my best to put them at their ease by telling them they cannot get anything wrong. But because we have all been strongly socialised from an early age to fear any teacher’s disapproval, most people instinctively tense up when they believe that they are being assessed or judged by anyone in authority.

Tragically, many beautiful individuals even tense up trying to please their own loving partner and then feel inadequate or even responsible, if their partner slips into a bad mood of any kind. This is a form of human madness. Other people’s

moods and preferences are entirely their affair. Whether someone likes us or loathes us is also entirely down to them.

As Byron Katie has wisely pointed out, when you worry about what someone thinks of you, you are their business, not your own and *much of our stress comes from mentally living out of our own business.*

Someone you know criticises your political views, your weight, or your new hair cut – not your problem. Let them disapprove of you as much as they like, just do not disapprove of yourself. Embrace all aspects of your personality-self, all your perceived strengths and weaknesses, with infinite love and self-compassion. Once you do this, you will begin to notice that other people's opinions of you matter less and less.

The really sad fact about human beings is that if someone tries too hard to please us, we tend to undervalue that relationship. A woman can meekly turn herself inside out to please the man of her dreams only to find that he has ditched her for a woman who makes totally unreasonable demands on him. A man can try his very best to do whatever his partner wants him to do –such as shopping for clothes on a Saturday afternoon instead of watching football - and his partner still is not happy.

Now of course, I am not suggesting here that we should selfishly put our own seeking for pleasure above meeting the needs of others. If our partner or child becomes really sick or disabled, of course we should put our own life on hold for a while to care for them. But this type of selfless love is quite different from needily trying to please someone in order to gain their love or approval. I did that year after year when I was younger and all it brought me was a load of heartbreak.

So now, I do my very best to support my friends and to care for my loved ones, but I no longer needily cling to them. I am finally much more comfortable in my own skin. I also accept that most people in our lives will disappear at some point and that there is really nothing we can do about this quite heart-breaking reality. But once we finally learn to love ourselves unconditionally, we will find that we can truly enjoy incredibly enriching relationships with others without anxiously clinging to them and without fearing their disapproval of certain of our beliefs or habits.

However, there is another way in which many of us try too hard in this world. When someone we love is suffering in any which way, we often try too hard to find a way to relieve their pain. Maybe we try to give them some really helpful advice, but in my long experience of doing this, it rarely ever works and often seems to just annoy the person I am trying to help. Maybe we pray and pray to God to end their pain or keep fervently wishing that they could be healthy and happy.

But who are we to try and control someone else's life experiences in this way? Perhaps it will be through suffering they learn an incredibly important life-lesson that will bring them much joy at some point in the future?

So now, whenever I notice that I am trying to fix someone, or trying to fix a particular problem for them, I remind myself that I am getting caught up in someone else's business. My only truly helpful role when someone else is suffering is to hold them lovingly in my heart as I extend a wave of compassionate energy from my heart to theirs. I now do my best to support others like this whilst letting go of insisting on my preferred outcome to whatever challenge they may be facing in their lives.

So this month, please join me in letting go of any compulsion to try hard to attain any worldly goal, even the goal of relieving others of their pain and suffering. Soften and relax around any tension created by your trying to control the world around you. Then simply do your best to float calmly on the top of the river of life. Let go of that strong tendency to try really hard to push your life in the exact direction you think it should go so that you can really enjoy the journey itself as it unfolds perfectly day by day for your highest good.

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