

"Better a diamond with a flaw, than a pebble without" - Confucius

"The world offers itself to me in a thousand ways, and I ache with an awareness of how infrequently I am able to receive more than a small fraction of what is offered, of how often I reject what is because I feel it is not good enough." - Oriah Mountain Dreamer

Are you berating yourself these days for not being "better" in some way? As you reflect on your life at work, at home, at play and in relationship, can you see instances where you wanted to be perfect, and you weren't? What's that like for you?

Success and failure

One way we measure success and greatness is by assessing our failures. That is, what have I learned about myself in the throes of failure? There is no perfection without fault - none. The self-reflection that follows failure is the catalyst that fosters improvement, growth and greatness.

Do you spend time on the way to/from work, lying in bed at night, while watching television or exercising lamenting you'll never be perfect? Do you hate yourself as you list all the things at which you'll never be perfect? Do you have memories of someone telling you you'll never be good enough? Do I feel like the diamond with a flaw? Do you constantly ask, "What have I done wrong?", feeling like a victim?

Wholeness, not perfection.

The way to our truest, deepest and authentic self is via the road of darkness, the road that leads not to perfection, but to wholeness. In truth, there is no point at which we can say, "This is perfection." Perfection, being a "10," is an ego-driven, mental idea. We think that being a "10" means that I have no flaws, no imperfections. Perfection excludes negative realities - an impossibility (no matter how hard our mind wants to convince us otherwise). We strive for perfection hoping to remove or mask our defects, our flaws. In essence, perfection means denying our self.

Wholeness, on the other hand, is an archetype - something unattainable - a metaphor. An archetype is intended to guide, inspire, support and affect our reality in various ways. We embrace and manifest archetypes by being self-aware, conscious, affecting our attitudes and our approach to life and living. The archetype of wholeness points to both the positive and the negative, all parts of our self.

At the outset, pursuing perfection can be a useful first step in our growth process as it motivates and provides a focus on the positive. However, it must give way to the pursuit of wholeness where our duality (the light and the shadow, the good and the bad, the positive and the negative) has meaning. Focusing on perfection is focusing solely on the personality, the outer, the "packaging." Focusing on wholeness puts our attention on the essential truth, beauty and goodness within our soul.

Wholeness is not a process of identifying what is "wrong" or imperfect and trying to fix or eradicate it, but to discover what our "flaws" have to teach us and learn from them. Our "flaws" exist as a means of challenging us to learn what we need to see about ourselves. No flaws, no challenge. No challenge, no growth. No growth, a pebble. When we learn what we are challenged to learn, the "flaws" often lose their charge, and in the process they often disappear.

Who are you?

"We have the need to be accepted and to be loved by others, but we cannot accept and love ourselves. The more self-love we have, the less we will experience self-abuse. Self-abuse comes from self-rejection, and self-rejection comes from having an image of what it means to be perfect and never measuring up to that ideal. Our image of perfection is the reason we reject ourselves - the way we are - and why we don't accept others the way they are." - Don Miguel Ruiz

The reason striving for perfection is often a struggle - exhausting, exasperating, frustrating and overly emotional - is because we've lost connection with our core self and become mired in some self-image or concept of who I think I should be. The negative feelings and emotions that accompany striving for perfection are a signal to stop, take a deep breath and identify with our True Self - the peaceful, compassionate, tolerant, loving, and beautiful person I really am - the diamond. When I stop the relentless striving and beating myself up, and take time for silence, meditation, and inner exploration, my essence will arise, my sense of wholeness manifests and the strength and courage to accept my self as I am arise.

Fear drives us to the self-sabotaging quest for perfection. Love allows us to open to all that we are with curiosity, passion, excitement, and acceptance.

Wholeness then sees flaws and imperfections as eminently useful and necessary so we can embrace all parts of our self and can value every experience.

Pain is a reality; suffering is optional

The first fact of life is suffering and affliction, flaws, exist. Accepting this fact of life is the basis of our life's journey. Our desire to escape from our flaws, rather than embrace and learn from them, is what leads to suffering.

Most folks have a tendency to feel shame about, or deny, their flaws. In fact, our flaws are one of our greatest spiritual assets. When we consciously deal with our flaws they lead us along a spiritual path. Unfortunately, at an early age we learned to push affliction away, to deny, hide from or otherwise deny our flaws and seek perfection. Rather than be open to suffering as a fact of life, we become defensive and live a life of avoidance. It's in the defensiveness that we first begin to reject ourselves, experience shame and guilt and engage in self-destructive, repressive and suppressive behaviors to avoid suffering.

When we seek wholeness, accepting our flaws, our diamond grows brighter and brighter, as our soul qualities of compassion, tolerance and understanding arise. When we are OK with our flaws and imperfections and allow our soul's love, power and confidence to arise, we not only avoid suffering but we actualize our potential to support others to relieve their suffering.

During the coming week reflect each day on how often you express who you really are, your wholeness, and how often you only express some personality (perfection-seeking) trait.

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

- What do you seek – perfection or wholeness? Examine closely and honestly your pursuit of perfection and the areas of life in which this pursuit takes place. What are the consequences of this pursuit on your soul's quest for wholeness?
- What motivates you to move forward?
- In your relationships with some important people in your life, how can you share more authentically your true inner self with them?
- What do you judge as wrong or evil? Can you see wrong or evil from the perspective that it is serving some useful purpose? What can you learn from it?

- What are three defense mechanisms that you frequently use to deny your flaws? If you stopped using one of these, what happens to you, your feelings and your relationships.
- What was perfection-seeking like when you were growing up? How did you learn about perfection?
- Can you envision a world where folks seek wholeness, not perfection?

"After enough mirror gazing, we all develop our 'cosmic sense of humor.' We no longer try to be perfect, or try to get all our work done in time. We become content with whatever life brings. Just to deal with what comes up without crucifying ourselves or others is enough of a challenge." - Paul Ferrini

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