

Finding Stillness

*I'm unworthy – and no matter what I'm doing
I should certainly be doing something else...
If I'm talking on the phone I should be working on the lawn
which looks disgraceful from the things I haven't done
If I'm working on the lawn I should be concentrating on those
Magazines inside, since I have not read one*
Cheryl Wheeler – *Sylvia Hotel*

It's easy to get lost in a state of perpetual motion, to create a schedule that is so busy that the thought of sitting still and being present seems beyond ludicrous. This state of existence is like being a hamster on a treadmill: we keep going and going and going until we collapse. We learn to celebrate this way of living in a culture that tells us that busyness is next to godliness and that idle hands are the devil's playground. Collapsing periodically seems like a small price to pay to keep from looking lazy and therefore "bad." The problem is that for all that running, we're not really getting anywhere. Sure, maybe we get a few things done and interact with a lot of people, but in the grand scheme of things, does it really matter? Is the payoff really worth the cost?

You might automatically answer yes to this question because the pounding of your feet on that treadmill helps to drown out some of those pesky voices that have been echoing around in your head for years. You know those voices, they are the ones that say mean things like, "You're too fat/skinny/short/ugly/lazy/stupid/unlucky/messed up/much of a loser up to ever be worth loving." Who wants to hear or think about that?

Unfortunately, this strategy doesn't work. First, you can't completely drown out these voices by staying busy. They still whisper (sometimes very loudly), pushing you to run faster and faster, to do more and more. Second, you can't keep running indefinitely. You're bound to collapse every so often, and when you do, those nasty voices take over.

Another problem with living in perpetual motion is that when you do have a moment of down time, all you want to do is tune out. You might curl up under a blanket or dissolve into a book, you may sink into the couch clutching the remote control or get lost in cyber space, you may crawl into a bottle of alcohol or sink into some other chemically based stupor. But these strategies only work for so long. At some point, you're bound to wake up, slide back into sobriety, or just get bored. And those voices will still be there, waiting to taunt you.

The biggest problem with running in place on that treadmill is that all that pounding drowns out the voice of your soul. This is that deep, quiet voice that pulses from the core of your body and tells you, "You are enough. You are worthy of love just as you are." Even though this is a central message of many religious paradigms, our culture doesn't want us to hear it. The messages that tell you that you are not good enough, or at least that that you won't be if you don't keep busting your butt to stay where you are, are so strong that the message, "good enough," sounds like a lie. To even contemplate the idea that you don't have to earn love by gaining or losing weight, sculpting your body into a socially desirable form, sporting an ipod or a shiny new car, making more money, or otherwise doing something to demonstrate your success is scary.

It's also easy to dismiss the voice of your soul because it's hard to hear. Unlike the critical voices, the voice of your soul doesn't usually speak in words. It's more likely to spread through you as a sense of peace. It's the voice you hear in moments of inner stillness. It breaks through in moments where you surrender your ego to the moment. You might have felt this voice in those times when you've intentionally stopped what you were doing to watch the sun set on the horizon or sat in front of the fire place and watched the flames flicker and dance. Sometimes this voice breaks in when you are busy doing something else. You might catch sight of something that leaves you in a place of awe like the sight of the full moon rising on the desert or of a rainbow painting the sky after a storm. Part of the peace you feel is the recognition of the truth that happens when your ego dissolves and you feel yourself in connection with the universe or God or at a minimum, something greater than yourself. And, the more able you are to sit in stillness and trust that you are to believe that you are good enough, the less distracted you will be by doubt, and the more able you will be to live up to your highest potential.

The critical voices are rooted in anxiety. The voice of your soul is rooted in trust and love. Hamsters may be perfectly happy running like fiends on their little wheels, but they aren't the brightest of creatures. And they don't have much choice about how they live their lives. You, in contrast, have a choice. You can get off the treadmill and connect with the truth of who you really are, or you can keep running faster and faster into nowhere.

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