

## Achieving Self-Love

I remarked that, “The path to love is having the ability to give it to ourselves and accept it from others.” A friend who heard this remarked that he liked the idea, but asked, “How does one achieve self-love?” When I decided to attempt writing an answer to the question I was perplexed with the dilemma of trying to put something so complex into a few sentences, but the more I thought about it I realized there is really only one key deterrent to achieving self-love.

If you think about it, the natural process of human development involves the achievement of self-love. It happens in the context of relationship from the beginning of life and is always moving to a higher level. Observing a toddler or small child one can see how freely he or she interacts with loved ones. You can see clearly that as the interaction is rewarded and enjoyed the self-confidence and self-love of the child is also enhanced. This kind of self-love does not lead to selfishness or self-centeredness, but instead results in a greater capacity to give and receive love in the midst of all the distractions and disappointments life imposes.

The primary deterrent to achieving self-love is shame. Often we think of shame and guilt as being the same. They are not. Guilt makes us feel bad when we make a mistake and hopefully helps us to correct it. Shame makes us feel like we are bad. Shame is the belief that there is something innately wrong and undeserving in us. If we are experiencing shame, we cannot love ourselves, nor can we allow other people to love us. Of all the experiences we have in life, the experience of shame is the greatest threat to the self-love that enables us to truly love others.

The obvious question for another time is— How do I deal with shame?

