

THE KEYS TO POSITIVE CHANGE



Is there an area of your life you'd like to improve? Do you wish for more loving relationships? Less stress? More time? More money? Better health? Someone to share life with?

Some people call these longings "divine discontent." We seem to be programmed to wish for more, no matter how much we have. The blessing in our discontent is that it forces us to think about how we might change things.

Usually, our early attempts focus on changing other people (if only he/she would...) or changing our circumstances. In time, however, we learn that trying to change others is a waste of energy – it simply can't be done. And many of us learn the hard way that even when we decide to change our circumstances and leave what's causing the pain behind, things turn out much the same with the new love interest, job, or home.

Another trap is getting caught up in self-improvement and goal setting. This kind of wishful thinking promises everything will be great if we just lose those 10 pounds, get the degree or promotion, or move into a more expensive house. Even though these accomplishments are commendable, we find they still don't satisfy for long.

When all these strategies inevitably fail, some people simply resign themselves to the situation (that's just the way life is), some fall into depression (is that all there is?), while others use drugs or alcohol to numb the pain. On the other hand, there are those who are lucky enough to experience some kind of crisis – an accident, illness, or serious addiction – that forces them to finally understand that meaningful change can only come from within.

According to Louise Hay, the world renowned, best-selling author of over 18 books on this subject, there are two simple keys to personal positive change: self-approval and self-acceptance.

Sounds simple enough but, for me, learning to accept and approve of myself took a lot of work. Even as a child I had a hard time understanding the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself." Even at an early age, my experience was that I loved other

people better than myself. (In the popular psychology of the 1970s, this used to be described as a You're Okay, I'm Not Okay worldview.) Anyway, common sense told me if I were to treat others as I did myself, they'd all move as far away as they could, as fast as they could.

I was ready for Louise's advice when I read her best-known title, *You Can Heal Your Life*, and started to practice catching and correcting the negative self-talk that went on in my head all day, every day.

Do you know that voice? It's the one that says things like: You're not smart enough; you don't deserve that; you look awful; you're lazy; and you should lose weight.

As I practiced changing these negatives to positive statements, I found I had a better, brighter attitude about life. By countering those thoughts with positives like: I can figure it out; I'm deserving of everything my heart desires, I look wonderful; and I could lose weight, my growing sense of self-acceptance told me I was finally onto something that could make a difference. And it was so simple.

Why not try this yourself? Just experiment with it for a week. It certainly couldn't hurt and it may help a lot. To get the most out of the exercise, start by writing a brief summary of how you've been feeling and list the negative messages you are conscious of telling yourself each day. At the end of your experiment, summarize how you feel, what you've learned, and the new positive messages you are practicing.

It is through small steps like these that we quiet "divine discontent" and learn to love and accept ourselves exactly as we are.

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