

Serenity & Expectations

Serenity and Expectations - intimately interrelated

Expectations

{xtypo_info} "I spent most of my life doing the Serenity prayer backwards, that is, trying to change the external things over which I had no control - other people and life events mostly - and taking no responsibility (except shaming and blaming myself) for my own internal process - over which I can have some degree of control. Having some control is not a bad thing; trying to control something or somebody over which I have no control is what is dysfunctional." {/xtypo_info}
Quote from Codependence: The Dance of Wounded Souls

Self-honesty is the foundation of the Twelve Step Recovery program - the principle underling the first step. There are many different levels of honesty, including "cash register" honesty, emotional honesty, being honest in interactions with others, etc. All levels of honesty are important in various ways but early in my recovery process I learned a great deal about being honest with myself from Dr. Paul's chapter in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous - "Doctor, Alcoholic, Addict." That level of honesty had to do with being honest with myself about my expectations.

There is an old joke about the difference between a neurotic and a psychotic. The psychotic truly believes that $2 + 2 = 5$. The neurotic knows that it is 4 but can't stand it. That was the way I lived most of my life, I could see how life was but I couldn't stand it. I was always feeling like a victim because people and life were not acting in the way I believed they "should" act.

I expected life to be different than it is. I thought if I was good and did it "right" then I would reach 'happily ever after.' I believed that if I was nice to people they would be nice to me. Because I grew up in a society where people were taught that other people could control their feelings, and vice versa, I had spent most of my life trying to control the feelings of others and blaming them for my feelings.

By having expectations I was giving power away. In order to become empowered I had to own that I had choices about how I viewed life, about my expectations. I realized that no one can make me feel hurt or angry - that it is my expectations that cause me to generate feelings of hurt or anger. In other words, the reason I feel hurt or anger is because other people, life, or God are not doing what I want them, expect them, to do.

I had to learn to be honest with myself about my expectations - so I could let go of the ones that were insane (like, everyone is going to drive the way I want them to), and own my choices - so I could take responsibility for how I was setting myself up to be a victim in order to change my patterns. Accept the things I cannot change - change the things I can.

When I first started realizing how much my expectations were dictating my emotional reactions to life, I tried not to have any expectations. I soon came to realize that it was impossible to live in society and not have expectations. If I have electricity in my home I am going to expect the lights to come on - and if they don't, I am going to have feelings about it. If I own that having electricity is a choice I make, then I realize that I am not being the victim of the electric company I am just experiencing a life event. And life events occur for me to learn from - not to punish me.

The more I owned that I was making choices that caused me to give away some power over my feelings and that those feelings were ultimately my responsibility - the less I reacted out of a victim place - the more serenity I had about events that occurred. To believe that unpleasant stuff should never happen to me was a truly insane, dysfunctional notion. The reality of life is that 'stuff' happens.

Of course, getting to the place where I could accept life on life's terms was only possible because I was working on letting go of the belief that it was happening to me because I was unworthy and bad - which I learned growing up in a shame-based society. It was essential for me to stop blaming myself and feeling ashamed of being human so that I could stop blaming others and always feeling like a victim. In other words, it was necessary to start seeing life as a Spiritual growth process that I couldn't control in order to get out of the blame them or blame me cycle.

I found that there were layers of expectations I had to look at. I wanted to feel that I could be a righteous victim if someone told me they were going to do something and didn't. But then I had to own that I was the one who chose to believe them. I had to also realize that falling in love was a choice and not a trap that I accidentally stepped into. Loving is a choice that I make and the consequences of that choice are my responsibility not the other persons. As long as I kept buying into the belief that I was being victimized by the person I loved there was no chance of having a healthy relationship.

The most insidious level of expectations for me had to do with my expectations of myself. The "critical parent" voice in my head has always berated me for not being perfect, for being human. My expectations, the "shoulds," my disease piled

on me were a way in which I victimized myself. I was always judging, shaming and beating myself up because as a little child I got the message that something was wrong with me.

There is nothing wrong with me - or you. It is our relationship with ourselves and life that is dysfunctional. We are Spiritual beings who came into body in an emotionally dishonest, Spiritually hostile environment where everyone was trying to do human according to false belief systems. We were taught to expect life to be something that it isn't. It isn't our fault that things are so screwed up - it is however our responsibility to change the things we can within ourself.

God/Goddess/Great Spirit, help me to access:

the serenity to accept the things I cannot change (life, other people),

The courage and willingness to change the things I can (me, my own attitudes and behaviors),

And the wisdom and clarity to know the difference.

(adapted version of Serenity Prayer)

Serenity is not Freedom from the Storm - it is Peace Amidst the Storm. (unknown)

Go to Gratitude