

L o v e



*Self love. Our corner stone. We can't grow or glow without it.*

*Susan L. Taylor*

Love is a powerful force. It inspires us to our greatest heights and sometimes moves us to our deepest levels of despair. Love is expressed freely in our culture; television, movies and books express every form of love imaginable. Yet, self-love is often ignored, considered selfish and vain. Unfortunately, a lack of self-love is one of the single most powerful sources of pain in our lives. As survivors of abuse, we must learn to hold ourselves in high regard, respect our own bodies, listen to our unique needs and accept our innate goodness and value. These are the essential elements of self-love.

One of my favorite myths is the story of the Goddess Amaterasu, a Japanese Sun Goddess whose great beauty was responsible for lighting the world. The tale goes that after suffering terrible abuse at the hands of her brother the young Goddess retreated to a cave plunging herself and the world into darkness. In order to coax her from her cave, the people of her village held mirrors at the cave door. Upon seeing her beauty and goodness her grief dissipated. Amaterasu, believing that good had returned to the world, returned also.

It is hard for us to accept ourselves as lovable after the trauma of abuse. Our desire for love and unconditional acceptance is often met with an inner critic that is convinced of our worthlessness. Plagued with guilt and shame this inner voice finds it difficult to believe that the pain, frustration, and hopelessness we are facing will ever give way to joy, compassion, and love. The truth is our spirit is vast enough to include all things. The same person who feels inadequacy and shame can also demonstrate great confidence and self love. Our worthiness is our birthright. It is not based on our actions. Our inherent value is based solely upon our humanity.

When I began my healing journey, self-love was the most difficult quality for me to cultivate. I often vacillated between great burst of inner ego and a deep fear that if I looked too deeply I would discover that I was worthless after all. The turning point for me was realizing the difference between guilt and shame. I had released my misplaced guilt yet shame continued to be part of my life.

Guilt declares I feel regret because I have done a bad thing. However, shame is more evasive. Shame says I am a bad person; the thing that has happened to me has damaged me and stained me forever. Releasing my shame and accepting that my abuse did not define me was the beginning of my ability to love myself.

The writing exercises in this chapter will guide you through this process. Each exercise will connect you to your feelings of love and unconditional acceptance. As you work with the exercises remember to be consistent. If you meet inner resistance be patient, trust yourself and proceed. Your feelings of acceptance and self love are willing to surface. Each time you work in your journal you are learning more about your inner wise-women, the one that holds you in high regard, respects you, trusts you, listens to you, accepts your goodness, and loves you.