

21 Day Self-Worth Challenge

For the next 21 Days, take a few minutes each morning to read the prompt for that day and commit to integrating it into your thoughts and behaviors as you go through your daily activities. Then, at the end of each day, reflect on how that prompt influenced or changed your actions and thoughts, and how you feel in general about yourself. You can use the blank spaces to journal, if you wish.

And, here is a short checklist for you to post somewhere as a reminder or friendly encouragement:

☐ DAY 1 Do the right thing.	☐ DAY 2 Tend to the causes of accomplishment.	☐ DAY 3 Love.
☐ DAY 4 Do things that ground you increasingly in a sense of your own beingness.	☐ DAY 5 Relax “self”.	☐ DAY 6 Accept yourself as you are.
☐ DAY 8 Accept where you are in the four natural, unavoidable stages of learning and getting better at anything.	☐ DAY 8 Serve the world.	☐ DAY 9 Exercise your capacities.
☐ DAY 10 Reflect on your accomplishments and good qualities each day.	☐ DAY 11 Be in reality about the facts of who you are.	☐ DAY 12 Be fair.
☐ DAY 13 Take in the evidence of your own skills, contributions, accomplishments, loveableness, value to others.	☐ DAY 14 Spend more time with people who like you. Spend less time with people who are neutral, indifferent, or negative toward you.	☐ DAY 15 Ask for appropriate positive feedback.
☐ DAY 16 Get a sense or image of internal nurturing and encouraging figures.	☐ DAY 17 Sort criticisms about you into four piles.	☐ DAY 18 Forgive yourself for your past misdeeds and your present faults.
☐ DAY 19 Stick up for yourself within yourself.	☐ DAY 20 See the empty nature of both your good qualities and your bad ones.	☐ DAY 21 Treat yourself as if you matter.

Do the right thing.

Keep your side of the street clean. Virtuous conduct has tremendous benefits for you personally, including reducing conflicts with others, strengthening your general capacities to regulate and guide yourself, and helping you to enjoy “the bliss of blamelessness.” Doing the right thing is a gift to yourself.

If you have made a mistake, then as fast as you can, see whatever is worthy of correction, guilt, or remorse and take maximum reasonable personal responsibility for it (be careful not to go overboard here and take too much of the responsibility!). Then, make amends and repairs as best you can. Knowing that you operate in this way brings moral backbone to feeling good about yourself.

Think of a recent situation where you faced an ethical choice or dilemma. What did “keeping your side of the street clean” and doing the right thing look like in that circumstance? How did virtuous conduct benefit you personally, such as reducing conflicts, strengthening self-regulation, or allowing you to feel the “bliss of blamelessness”?

Reflecting on times when you’ve operated from a place of moral backbone and integrity, how did that impact your overall sense of self-worth and feeling good about yourself? What motivates you to continue upholding virtuous conduct as “a gift to yourself”?

Tend to the causes of accomplishment.

Do the things that will legitimately earn you success. All you can do is feed the fruit tree; you can't make it give you an apple. Take initiative, be "ardent, diligent, resolute and mindful," and be at peace with whatever happens.

As Meher Baba said: "Don't worry. Be happy. Make efforts."

TIP: As you go through your day, think about your actions. Take a moment to think - will spending time on this produce some sort of positive outcome?

Think about your typical day or week. What are some activities, tasks or efforts that you engage in that could be considered "feeding the fruit tree" - taking initiative and making a genuine effort towards positive outcomes or success?

What are some things you are spending time on that do NOT lead to a positive outcome?

What are some changes that you can make to increase the amount of time you spend doing things that lead to successful, positive outcomes, AND decrease time (or worry) spent on things that do not?

Love.

Practice loving kindness for everyone, including (especially?!) neutral and difficult people. Feelings of love neutralize feelings of shame. Love protects and fuels us.

Feeling loving toward others keeps us out of contentiousness and conflict and gives us a feeling of worth.

When we feel fed and carried by love, we are less concerned about how others respond—accepting that it is out of our hands and we will choose to feel loving regardless.

In what ways (and to who) do you already practice feeling loving?

Think of a person in your life who you find difficult or have negative feelings towards. What would it look like to extend loving-kindness towards them?

How might practicing compassion for difficult people — despite the challenges — help neutralize feelings of shame or conflict within yourself?

Do things that ground you increasingly in a sense of your own beingness, always already awake, benign, and contented.

Amidst all the time you spend “getting things done” make sure to spend dedicated time just being. For example, meditate, spend time in nature, cuddle your children (or sweetie), do yoga, etc.

Engaging in activities that root you deeply in the awareness of your inherent state of wakefulness, kindness, and satisfaction serves not just as a means of personal grounding but also as a profound avenue for self-affirmation and joy.

The more you do this, the more serenity and clarity you will have—which will enhance your immediate sense of well-being and also foster a lasting sense of self-worth and positivity.

What activities or practices help you feel most grounded in a sense of simply “being” rather than “doing”?

How can you intentionally make more time for those grounding experiences in your daily life?

When you spend time just allowing yourself to rest in your inherent wakefulness, kindness and contentment, what shifts in your inner experience? How does it impact your sense of self-worth?

Relax “self”.

Take things less personally. Give up trying to perfect yourself; that’s like trying to polish Jell-O.

When we let go of the grip on a tightly held sense of self, we open ourselves to more inner peace, happiness, and a more fluid and interconnected existence.

Try observing your thoughts and feelings without attachment (mindfulness and meditation practices help with this)— this will help you reduce the compulsion to define yourself rigidly by your experiences or roles in life.

As you learn to relax your sense of self, you’ll discover a deeper well of resilience, compassion, and true contentment, realizing that at your core, you are far more than the sum of your perceived individual parts.

Can you think of a recent situation where you took something very personally or got caught up in trying to be “perfect”? Looking back, how might practicing non-attachment and relaxing your sense of rigid self-definition have helped you respond with more inner peace?

Reflecting on times when you’ve been able to relax your grip on a tightly-held sense of self, what did you discover? How did that looser self-definition allow you to feel better about yourself or have more positive interactions with others?

Accept yourself as you are.

You are what you are, and you cannot change how you are in this instant, though you can create the causes that will develop you in the future. But at any moment of now, there is nothing you can do besides accept it and act to improve it.

In particular, try to accept the vulnerable or not-so-pretty parts of yourself — it’s not bad to be anxious, sad, or needy. We all have parts of ourselves that we struggle with or wish were different. Maybe it’s insecurities, bad habits, or just aspects of our personality that we judge as negative. But rejecting or fighting against these parts of who we are actually causes more inner pain and fragmentation.

The wise path is to open up to yourself with compassion—to accept all of your experiences, all of your feelings, all of your memories, all of your traits wholeheartedly. This doesn’t mean resigning yourself to harmful behaviors, but it does mean regarding yourself with understanding rather than hatred.

When you accept yourself fully, you become more integrated, less thrown around by inner criticism, and more able to work with your difficulties from a place of caring rather than shame.

Believe me, I know how hard this can be. But it’s profoundly healing to simply allow yourself to be human.

What is an aspect of yourself that you tend to judge harshly or wish was different—it could be an insecurity, habit, personality trait, etc.

What are some actions or inner dialogue that you engage in that are overly self-critical or rejecting toward this aspect of yourself?

What would it look like to open up to that part with more compassion and acceptance? How might that shift your relationship to the thing you struggle with?

Accept where you are in the four natural, unavoidable stages of learning and getting better at anything:

- Unconscious Incompetence (you don't know that you don't know - you're blissfully ignorant!)
- Conscious Incompetence (you know that you don't know - but you also see what you need to progress.)
- Conscious Competence (you know that you know, and you're more familiar with the skill, and honing it in.)
- Unconscious Competence (you don't know that you know - you've arrived! Doing this thing has become automatic and easy!)

The second stage – conscious incompetence – is the hardest one, and it's where people are prone to quit. If you're there, just keep going toward growing competence, which will support your sense of worth. Remind yourself of the rewards you'll reap once you get to stages 3 and 4.

Think about a skill or area you are currently working on improving. Which of the four stages do you find yourself in right now?

Reflect on a skill or ability you have mastered to the point of unconscious competence. What was the journey like moving through the four stages? What helped you persist through the conscious incompetence phase? How has achieving that level of mastery impacted your sense of self-worth?

Serve the world.

Donate to charity. Tend to your friends and family (including animal companions). Be nice to strangers.

Acts of generosity and compassion release oxytocin and activate the reward circuitry, which helps encode traits like kindness and caring as parts of your own self-identity and sense of self-worth.

Additionally, seeing the gratitude and positive impact you have helps counterbalance the innate negativity bias of the brain.

Serving the world—whether through volunteering, activism, caring for loved ones, or simple acts of kindness—provides beneficial experiences of being someone who matters, who can make a difference, and who has value to offer. These experiences get transferred from passing mental states to lasting traits through the mere process of having them. In this way, giving to others allows you to receive a deepening sense of your own worth.

Think of a time when you engaged in an act of service or generosity, no matter how small. What was that experience like for you? How did it make you feel in the moment, and did it impact your perception of yourself in any way?

When you find yourself getting caught up in critical inner voices or focusing on the negative, how might consciously shifting into a mindset of service and kindness toward others help rebalance your perspective?

Exercise your capacities.

If you have talents lying fallow, start using them. “The most expensive piece of equipment is the one not making any money.”

When you apply your natural talents and abilities, you’re actually strengthening your sense of self-worth at a neural level. The brain has a built-in reward system that releases dopamine and other “feel-good” neurotransmitters whenever you use your skills effectively. This reinforces the inner sense that “I am capable and competent.”

Think about the various talents, skills, and abilities you possess. Are there any that you feel you aren’t currently utilizing to their full potential? If so, what’s holding you back from applying them more actively?

What are some practical steps you could take to start “exercising your capacities” more regularly? This could involve picking up an old hobby, volunteering in a way that utilizes your abilities, or simply prioritizing your talents within your current work/life. How might actively using your skills benefit you personally and professionally?

Are there any undiscovered or underdeveloped talents within you that you’d like to explore further? If money/time/resources were no object, what new skill or capacity might you invest in developing? How could nurturing a new talent area provide a sense of growth and competence?

Reflect on your accomplishments and good qualities each day.

Perhaps take brief inventory before going to bed each night, answering questions like these:

- What did I get better at today, even just a little bit?
- How did I act with integrity, courage or compassion?
- What have I gotten done that I can feel proud of?
- In what ways, big or small, did I positively impact others?

Then stay with the answers that arise. Don't rush past them, but really let yourself savor the felt experience of your positive qualities and efforts. Place a hand over your heart if it helps you go beyond just thinking about these things, and really let them land in a visceral way.

By taking the time to do this each night, you'll be hardwiring a sense of value and worth into your brain, just by staying with these good feelings for a few minutes at a time.

Take a few moments right now to practice this nightly reflection with these prompts:
What accomplishments, acts of good character, or ways you positively impacted others can you call to mind from today?

As you bring these to awareness, notice any felt sensations of pride, self-appreciation or self-worth arising within you. Where do you physically experience those positive feelings in your body?

Be in reality about the facts of who you are, and what you have done in your life (the good and the bad).

See yourself as a mosaic made up of hundreds of tiles — some representing our positive qualities and accomplishments, and some representing our flaws and mistakes. Tell the *whole* truth about what is actually there; it’s always mostly good.

It’s so easy to focus solely on the darker tiles and be consumed by feelings of inadequacy or shame. Or conversely, to fixate only on the bright, shiny tiles while denying the rest.

But true self-acceptance means opening our eyes to the entire mosaic.

(Tip: By acknowledging this with kindness rather than harsh judgment, we free ourselves. We no longer need to hide behind a facade or get stuck in denial or self-criticism. We can embrace our wholeness. That is true freedom.)

What are some of the more positive tiles (good qualities and accomplishments) in your mosaic?

What are some of the more negative tiles (flaws or mistakes) in your mosaic?

Which tiles do you tend to focus on the most?

How might you open to the more negative tiles with self-compassion?

Be fair.

You would want to be fair in your judgments of others; why do you, another human being like them, deserve any less?

It’s important to extend the same compassion and understanding to your own struggles and faults that you would readily offer to others.

At your core, you are a fundamentally good and well-intentioned human being: flawed yet ever-evolving, and doing your best given your circumstances and limitations.

When you treat yourself with this basic fairness and human kindness, you’ll find it easier to learn from your mistakes. You’ll feel lighter, more resilient, and motivated by self-acceptance rather than harsh self-judgment.

Reflect on a situation where you were hard on yourself for a mistake or shortcoming. What kind of inner dialogue did you engage in? And how did it impact you moving forward?

Now, imagine a friend made the same mistake, and how you would react to them. What would it look like to extend the same compassion and understanding to yourself that you would offer to that friend?

Last, think of a time when you treated yourself with fairness and kindness after a mistake or setback. How did this approach impact your ability to move forward in a positive way?

Take in the evidence of your own skills, contributions, accomplishments, loveableness, value to others.

So often, we look outward to find that sense of worth and lovability. We hunger for validation and praise that will make us feel like we matter. But the truth is, no amount of external “narcissistic supplies” from others can ever completely satisfy that craving in a lasting way.

The real solution lies in turning our gaze inward and taking in the abundant evidence that already exists of our positive qualities, our skills, our value to others. By truly allowing ourselves to receive and internalize that good within, we can begin to fill that hole from the inside out, so we’re less hungry for those narcissistic supplies from others over time.

There’s a lot good there — take it in:

Think for a moment of all your talents and positive traits. Your kindness, your creativity, your perseverance in the face of challenges. The ways you contribute to your workplace, your community, the lives of those around you.

Bring to mind specific examples of your skills, your kindness toward others, the contributions you’ve made. And this time, rather than brushing them aside, let them in fully. Savor them. Let them become felt experiences that nurture your soul.

You possess so many wonderful qualities that make you valuable and loveable. It’s already there within you, waiting to nourish you at the deepest level. Let that truth become the bedrock of your being.

Spend more time with people who like you.

Just as a plant needs sunlight, water, and nutrient-rich soil to thrive, our souls require the sustenance of positive interactions with others. We all have an innate need to feel seen, liked, understood, and appreciated by those around us.

When we spend time with people who genuinely like us and appreciate our authentic selves, it's like receiving a wonderful tonic that nourishes us at the deepest level. Their warmth, acceptance, and validation reminds us of our fundamental goodness and lovability.

Try to identify a kind of “go-to” or support team of key people who are major and credible validators of you, and deepen your involvement with them.

Who are some of those people, and how do they make you feel?

Spend less time with people who are neutral, indifferent, or negative toward you.

Being around those kind of people can be incredibly depleting. It slowly chips away at our self-confidence and sense of being enough. Over time, it can lead us to question our worth and even dislike aspects of ourselves.

If people are critical, it can help to reflect on the myriad factors that led them to treat you that way, and understand that their negativity often has far more to do with their own inner turmoil than anything about you. Doing this can put their behavior and reactions in context and make it feel less personal.

If appropriate, stick up for yourself. Set boundaries around unacceptable behavior. Limit your exposure, and don't keep subjecting yourself to a steady stream of criticism or disregard. If appropriate, ask others to stick up for you too.

Who are some of those people, and how do they make you feel?

Ask for appropriate positive feedback.

It is a lot more useful to know what you are doing right than what you are doing wrong, since the latter only tells you that you’re missing the target, not where it is or how to hit it.

Additionally, if all you ever hear is what you’re doing wrong, it can start to deflate your spirit over time. You may begin to wonder, “Am I really cut out for this? Maybe I’m just not good enough.”

(Don’t get me wrong - constructive criticism does have value and shouldn’t be ignored—that input is essential for our learning and development. But when we become consumed by that negative focus, it can breed insecurity, self-doubt, and a skewed perception of our abilities.)

So don’t be afraid to speak up and ask others about the things you are doing that are working, that they do appreciate, etc.

You can make this request of loved ones, friends, colleagues, mentors — anyone who has a grounded, realistic perspective on your strengths. You could even let them know you’re trying to build up your self-confidence by taking in more positive feedback.

As you make space to consciously receive and internalize that appreciative input, you’ll start to see yourself with more compassion and clarity. You’ll be able to say, “Hey, I’m a good person doing my best. I have these wonderful strengths that make me valuable.”

From that place of inner solidarity, you’ll be able to learn, grow and shine with greater freedom and resilience. You’ll be motivated by self-acceptance rather than harsh self-criticism.

Take a moment to reflect on the things you’ve been doing well lately. What strengths or positive qualities have you been embodying? How have you been showing up as your best self?

Let’s practice! Think of someone in your life who would be in a position to offer genuine, positive feedback to you. Write down how you would ask them for this:

Get a sense or image of internal nurturing and encouraging figures.

We all carry within us the tender wounds of times we didn’t receive the unconditional love, validation, or emotional safety we needed, especially as children. Perhaps a parent was harsh, critical, or emotionally unavailable. Or we experienced rejection, neglect, or even abuse from caregivers. Those painful experiences can leave an inner void and longing for the soothing balm of being truly seen, cherished, and encouraged in our inherent goodness.

The solution lies in turning inward and consciously cultivating the nurturing inner presence we’ve always yearned for. By building up the vividness of these internal “nurturing parents” and compassionate guides, we can finally provide the unconditional acceptance and loving encouragement we have been craving.

So try to call up images such as the loving eyes of your doting grandmother, a guardian angel, or simply a clear voice of reason about your good qualities. Build up the realness of those internal “nurturing parent,” “protector,” or “guide” figures, and listen to them more often.

Over time and with regular practice, this inner nurturer can become a lifelong source of profound nourishment and grounding. No matter what storms you weather in this life, you’ll be able to return again and again to its unwavering embrace.

What qualities would your ideal nurturing inner figure possess? Kindness, patience, wisdom, and/or strength? Describe the words and tone of voice they would use to encourage and reassure you:

What unmet needs from childhood is this inner nurturer helping to fulfill? Reflect on the tender wounds or emotional deficits you experienced growing up that left you longing for more unconditional love, validation or emotional safety.

How might regularly connecting with this nurturing inner voice help heal those areas?

Sort criticisms about you into four piles –

(1) not valid, (2) valid but to heck with it, I’m not going to change that one, (3) not a moral fault but worth putting in correction from now on, and (4) deserves a healthy wince of remorse.

Take maximum reasonable responsibility for the third and fourth piles. Make appropriate changes sincerely and diligently (perhaps even specific amendments or expiations for serious wrongdoings), and move on.

When you metabolize criticism in this balanced way, you’ll find that the judgments of others have less power to derail your sense of self-worth. You’ll be able to respond with grounded presence rather than reflexive defensiveness or self-loathing.

From that place of inner solidarity and self-acceptance, you can then make wise choices about what to take in and what to leave behind.

But at your core, you’ll remain rooted in the unshakeable truth of your infinite worth as a human being, flaws and all. The voices of criticism may come and go, but they’ll no longer have the power to make you abandon yourself. You’ll be free to keep shining with ever-increasing wisdom and self-compassion.

Think of a recent criticism or judgment you received from someone. Which of the four piles would you place it in? Walk through your reasoning for categorizing it in that way.

Can you recall a time when you struggled with harsh criticism or self-judgment over a mistake? How might approaching it from a stance of self-acceptance have changed your experience? What would it look like to make amends or positive changes from that grounded, caring place?

Forgive yourself for your past misdeeds and your present faults.

This does not mean letting yourself off the hook for them, but rather not berating or whipping yourself over and over for them.

In a way, self-flagellation is a kind of avoidance of responsibility. When we take true responsibility, there is a kind of forgiveness, an honest facing and then a moving on.

If you like, write out sentences like, “I forgive myself for _____. ” Or imagine others forgiving you, like the other people involved, or beings who have a powerful meaning to you (e.g., a teacher, Jesus, the Buddha).

Think of something you have struggled to forgive yourself for — a past mistake, misdeed, or way you fell short. What does the self-judgment and shame feel like when you bring this to mind?

Now imagine a dear friend or someone who loves you unconditionally insisting you’ve carried that burden long enough. What would they say to convince you it’s time to forgive yourself?

Have there been times when harsh self-criticism prevented you from fully reckoning with a situation and moving forward? How might facing it with honesty and self-compassion allow for deeper learning and growth?

Stick up for yourself within yourself.

Talk back to irrational or self-critical thoughts.

Maybe it’s the tendency to compare yourself unfavorably (and unfairly) to others, obsessing over where you fall short. Or equating the worth of who you are with the success of what you do. That ruthless inner voice can be relentless, distorting reality and leaving you feeling inadequate and ashamed.

When that inner voice starts comparing you unfavorably to others, remind it “I’m on my own journey with my own unique strengths. That comparison is irrational and unhelpful.”

If it tries to define your entire worth by your achievements or relationship status, you can counter “I am so much more than any single aspect of my life’s journey. My fundamental value as a human being is inherent and cannot be measured externally.”

You can even give that inner voice a silly name to separate it from your true self. “Thanks for the input, Vicious Vinnie, but I don’t actually buy into that today. I know my worth.”

At first, it may feel awkward or even embarrassing to verbally stick up for yourself in this way. But keep at it! You’re reclaiming your inner sanctuary from the harsh judgments and irrational beliefs that have been allowed to fester there.

Think of a recent example when your inner critic was being particularly harsh or irrational in its judgments toward you. What were the specific thoughts or comparisons it was making that felt unfair or distorted?

How might you “talk back” to those thoughts using the examples provided (e.g. reminding yourself of your unique journey, inherent worth beyond achievements, etc.)?

See the empty nature of both your good qualities and your bad ones.

They are all compounded from smaller parts. They’re the result of ten thousand factors (give or take a few), and they arise and disappear interdependently with the whole wide world; therefore, they have no inherent static independent existence.

They are simply qualities, some good, some bad. The good ones are worth encouraging, and the bad ones worth discouraging – for the sake of yourself and all beings – but none of them are worth identifying with.

The wise approach is to embrace positive qualities with an attitude of non-attachment, while letting go of negative traits without aversion or self-hatred.

Seeing both the good and bad as ultimately empty, impermanent phenomena arising due to conditions allows us to be balanced — encouraging the positive while discouraging the negative, but not identifying with or clinging to any of it as a solid, unchanging self.

Take a moment to notice some of the positive and negative qualities that tend to arise in your mind and behavior. What are some of the recurring “good” patterns like kindness, patience, or diligence?

What are some of the “bad” patterns like anger, laziness, or arrogance?

How can you mindfully encourage the positive ones that lead to wellbeing for yourself and others?

And how can you discourage the negative patterns with wisdom and care, without getting caught in self-judgment or self-loathing?

Treat yourself as if you matter.

Listen to your innermost hopes and dreams — don't dash them, don't rain on that parade, but rather, encourage them in realistic ways. Give yourself empathic attunement — which may have been in short supply when you were a child — for your own feelings. Be mindful of them, friendly towards them, and accepting (meditation is great for developing this ability).

Let yourself let down sometimes: drop the load, put your feet up, and relax. Maybe you need a good cry, for real. Build in routine times for rest and respite. Take more long baths, long walks, long lovemaking, long board games with the kids, long chats with good friends.

By treating yourself as if you matter, you are not being selfish or indulgent. Rather, you are engaging in the sacred act of self-care, replenishing the well from which you draw the strength and resilience to face the challenges of life. When you prioritize your own well-being, you become better equipped to serve others, to pursue your passions, and to live a life of purpose and fulfillment.

What are some of your innermost hopes and dreams that you may have been dismissing or neglecting?

How can you begin to encourage and nurture these aspirations in realistic ways?

Identify one simple pleasure or self-care activity that brings you joy and rejuvenation (e.g., long baths, walks in nature, quality time with loved ones). How can you intentionally incorporate more of this activity into your routine, treating yourself as if you truly matter?

Final Reflections and Goals.

As you conclude this 21-day journey toward self-acceptance and self-care, take a moment to reflect on the progress you’ve made, the obstacles you faced and the things you have learned to take forward with you.

What has been the most significant shift in your mindset or behavior during these 21 days?

How have you learned to prioritize your own well-being, and what positive impacts has this had on your relationships, work, or overall sense of fulfillment?

What challenges or obstacles did you face along the way, and how did you overcome them?

What are some important takeaways you’d like to reminder yourself of going forward?

Suggestions for going forward:

1. Establish a regular self-care routine that incorporates activities that nourish your mind, body, and soul.
2. Identify and challenge negative self-talk or limiting beliefs that may be holding you back from fully embracing your worth.
3. Cultivate a supportive network of friends, family, or professionals who can encourage and uplift you on your journey of self-acceptance.

**Feeling good about yourself is not a destination,
but a continuous journey of growth,
self-discovery, and self-love.**

**Embrace the process, celebrate your progress,
and never lose sight of the inherent worth that
resides within you.**