

FULL POTENTIAL

An interesting thought came to me in January, "When we find those who support us totally, no matter how crazy and intense we seem, we become whole. We are allowed to explore our uniqueness in a safe environment and grow to our full potential."

How then do we find our tribe, those who will allow us to be ourselves, to reach our full potential?

Part of our life journey is our search for our own individual identity, our own truth, our unique persona. There is a strong desire, or need, to establish ourselves and take our rightful place in the world. There is also an equally strong desire for acceptance.

Over the course of our life we become conditioned to seek out acceptance. It begins with our parents, which extends to our siblings and relatives, then we start school and we seek acceptance from our teachers and peers, we move onto lovers, employers and co-workers, and, well you get the picture. Early on we learn the pain of disapproval, and learn just as quickly what is required to avoid that experience. It is a countermeasure, equivocating if we think we are going to be in trouble or experience the pain of rejection. It becomes an unconscious habit that governs our behavior. While it can provide a measure of self-confidence and happiness, are we truly being authentic to our unique selves? Or, is who we are dictated by others?

Our desire to be accepted outweighs our self-confidence that we are perfect just the way we are. We create an idealized self-image to cover up our imperfections and foibles, thus creating a tyranny of impossible standards to uphold. We might also have different images we present to different people in our life. While it might strike fear into our very hearts, being our authentic self can bring us the rewards of serenity and self-respect.

We really have a pickle... it is not easy to be human after all, we want individuality and we also want a tribe. However, all too often we are thwarted by the very members of our tribe, the ones we are striving so hard to impress with our "idealized self-image." Open dialogue with our tribe is valuable to our growth, however it must be supportive and not a matter of them trying to make us fit into their ideal self-image.

After my great thought, I really processed it and the people I feel closest to in my tribe are the ones in which all aspects of myself can shine, good, bad, ugly and indifferent. I am welcomed with open arms and not asked to change, I am valued to just be me. In return, I hope they can say the same about me.

Why then, do we not just strip off the mask and present our true self to the world? Makeup off and warts showing! I am beginning to think the world would shine just a little brighter if we did. It might be hard, but what if we tried? How do we start? I am glad you asked!

Begin with accepting your personality as it is now.

Ask yourself – Do I wear different masks to fit in with different people?

Next, assess the thoughts, actions or ideas you hide from others. You will need to be totally honest with yourself, the most important relationship you should have is with yourself. And while that might seem like a "duh" comment, we do hide from ourselves as well. The relationship we have with our self, can be the most difficult to cultivate. We need to allow ourselves to be open and vulnerable to ourselves, so

that we can be open to others. Be gentle with this openness, no need to beat yourself up over what you see as an imperfection.

Once you can look at yourself honestly, look at how you react to the masks others wear. Are you condescending? Do you accept them warts and all? Or do you think they should fit more with your ideals?

Our identity is ours, and we can only discover our true selves on our own. We cannot have others define us, nor can we define them. We take in a lot of information over the course of our life and it is up to us to discern if it resonates with us or not. And just when we think we know who we are, something shifts, we receive a different piece of information and it takes us down a different path of discovery, which eventually mixes and mingles with the substance already there and a new facet of ourselves is born.

Having a supportive network means that you might not all have the same ideals, but something brings you together. One common denominator, the commonality, is the glue that brings you together. You bounce ideas off of each other and grow as you expand your understanding. These close positive relationships are beneficial to our health- the upside- you help their health as well. Research is proving the powerful influence close bonds with family and friends have on our emotional and physical health. The more positive your tribe, the better your health tends to be. Yes, our tribe will include members that challenge us, and we will in turn challenge them. It is healthy to have people question our intentions, beliefs, goals and ideals. It brings awareness to us and helps us to learn moment by moment who we are.

Do not be afraid to be yourself, your true self, take the mask off. Are you able to fully be yourself? By being yourself, do certain people avoid you? Or do they embrace you, wanting to discover who you really are? Understand once you take off your mask you will be vulnerable to the possibility of peer or family rejection, yet also understand that for YOU, you are perfect as you are. Are you confident enough to be who you are? I think so, and really when it boils right down to it – everyone has an opinion of how everyone else should think and act, that includes the person looking back at you in the mirror. It is time that we, as individuals, stopped seeking or withholding that acceptance.

Once we can be ourselves, our tribe connects with us. Our true tribe, not the fake ones we have been trying to fit into. For those who do not accept our wholeness will move on naturally. This is what life is about, if each of us could accept our wholeness, it would allow us to accept others wholeness, and that, my friends, could lead to one global tribe filled with exponential uniqueness being celebrated daily.

Namaste

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