

Wymansplaining — or Unsolicited Fatherly Advice

Nobody asked me, but here's the answer:

You're okay, and you're enough.

That's all you have to remember. When you are convinced from reading other people's social media posts that your life is an empty, abject failure, say to yourself "I'm okay, and I'm enough." When you have done some embarrassingly dumb thing, say to yourself "I'm okay, and I'm enough." When you have made some foolish mistake, when you have bought the wrong size, when you have said something you wish to hell you hadn't said, when you are rejected for that job, when that special person treats you as less than special, when you completely screw something up, say to yourself "I'm okay, and I'm enough." If you're alone or in a safe space, say it out loud.

Now believe it. It's true. No, really — it's true. Yes, you have made mistakes. Yes, other people have more and better stuff than you. Yes, other people have accomplished more. Yes, other people's relationships/significant others seem more impressive than yours. You are still okay. You are still enough.

If you cannot pry yourself loose from the odium of comparisons, it may help to acknowledge that A) Everyone has made mistakes. Some people have made even more than you have. B) Some people have less stuff and worse stuff than you. A lot less. A lot worse. C) Some people have accomplished less than you. D) Some people's significant others are homelier than yours or non-existent. Some people have no family. Some people have no close friends.

In short, though we generally keep our gaze enviously focused — to the detriment of our self-esteem — on those who seem to be beating us in the Race of Life, if we turned around and changed our focus, we would see lots and lots of people that we are far ahead of. And the truth is, there is no Race of Life. Life is not a competitive athletic contest. Life is our relatively short, absolutely time-limited individual journey on this planet among our fellows.

You are on your own path. No one else is on this particular path, so where other people are in their lives or what other people do is completely irrelevant to your path and your progress. Enjoy your own particular individual path. Acknowledge yourself for the progress you have made. Appreciate what you have rather than focusing on what you lack.

There is an ironic bumper sticker/T-shirt that says "Whoever dies with the most stuff, wins." It's funny because many people live as if it were true. Materialism has become a rather unenlightened way of keeping score in Life. We judge ourselves and other people by their clothes, their apartments/houses, their cars. Nicer than ours? We're envious. Worse than ours? We're smugly gratified. We live this way despite our religious teachings reminding us that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle than for a rich man to enter into Heaven and that Suffering comes from attachment.

I am not a proponent of pious poverty, and I have no desire to pry you or myself loose from the pleasures of life. I just encourage you to be grateful for what you have and to have a slightly looser grasp on material things. As some well-known philosopher once said, You can't always get what you want; but if you try, sometimes you just might find you get what you need. There may be lots of stuff that we want, but what we need is food, clothing, shelter. Almost all of us have those basics, so in some respect we are playing with house money.

That is how you want to approach Life: as if you are playing with house money. And you are — because what have we discovered/decided? You are okay, and you are enough. You are not GOING to be okay IF such and such happens. You are not HOPING to be enough. You are not WAITING for the right job, the right love interest, the right amount of money. You are okay right now. You are enough right now.

So you don't have to play small. To the best of your ability, let go of timidity and hesitancy and anxiety. You don't have to live life out of fear that your acceptability, your sufficiency might be destroyed by a blunder, a gaffe, a mistake. Because guess what? You will make mistakes. And you will still be okay. Just clean up the mistake as best you can and move on.

SERVICE

One of my favorite quotes is from Rabindranath Tagore: "I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy."

I think we all are, by our natures, self-centered creatures. Me, me, me. Taking care of number one. Charity begins at home. And so on. I think this partly stems from that niggling fear that we aren't enough, that we aren't okay, that no one else will take care of us if we don't take care of ourselves.

So we are very careful to stay close to our own interests — tending the embers and flames of our egos, making sure that fire never goes out. Oh, sure, we extend ourselves occasionally for our fellows, sometimes just to look good for others, for the ego-gratification of feeling like a good, thoughtful person. But we make sure never to stray too far away from the home fires of our own needs and ego.

I suggest you turn this paradigm on its head. Focus on being useful, on being of service to others. If you are anything like me, without focusing on taking care of yourself — even focusing on not taking care of yourself — you will take care of yourself. That seems to be ingrained. So turn your focus outward. How can you make a difference in someone else's life? How can you be useful?

My motto is "Only here to help." When my time on earth is done, I don't think it will be my narcissistic, self-aggrandizing triumphs that will be celebrated and remembered. It will be those times I put myself out to help somebody else. M. Scott Peck's famous definition of love in "The Road Less Traveled" is "The will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth." I would simplify that as "putting oneself out for somebody else." The temptation is always there to do nothing or to take care of oneself. Love takes us out of ourselves and connects us with others — and that is where the good stuff is, in human interaction.

The wacky thing about this is that when we do something for someone else, WE feel better.