**Being at Peace with Self**

“He who lives in harmony with himself lives in harmony with the world.” ~Marcus Aurelius

How can I find peace of mind? It’s a question often asked, but rarely answered in a satisfying way.

Some say peace of mind lies in security. Some say it’s about de-cluttering, and finding stillness and calm in life. Some say it’s about acceptance and letting go. I say it’s all about what you do.

Let me introduce myself. I’m an addict. An alcoholic since my teens, I lived most of my life on various edges.

At twenty-one, I was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder, as if being an alcoholic wasn’t bad enough. If you don’t know what BPD is, it is an unsettled and shifting sense of self, and it’s unbearably difficult to live with.

I possessed a fearful and fraught mind at the best of times. Both my addiction and my BPD led me to do some pretty crazy things. Crossing a drunk person with a personality disorder is not conducive to the sort of life you would wish on anyone.

I spent my twenties clambering out of one catastrophe and into another, doing some fairly disgraceful things—hiding, lying, hurting other people and myself. At least one hour a day was spent in absolute misery and penance, sorry for myself and for anyone who crossed my path of destruction.

But behind the carnage, I was a genuinely good-hearted person. All through my mental illnesses, I tried to make the best of it, to be a nice person. And there was no one more empathetic than me. If anyone else had a problem, I would drop everything to run to them.

But my mind was not somewhere you would want to take a fishing trip, let alone a whole vacation. Of all the people I hurt in my life, I hurt no one more than myself. I hurt myself by doing things that would make me feel guilt and shame later on.

When I finally got the right treatment and got sober, after a decade of madness, I heard people speak about serenity and finding peace of mind. In early recovery, it was still an utter mystery to me.

I saw a counselor who told me to give it time. I went to alcohol services—they told me to work a program. I listened to “spiritual folk” who told me to meditate.

No one seemed to be giving me practical answers about how to achieve something I had been searching for all along: peace and self-esteem. But the answer was so simple. You create your state of mind by the things you do, and you cement that by the things you tell yourself.

As long as I behave with integrity every day, I can feel at peace with myself.

Things will always change. Life will sometimes be tough. People will say and do things that upset you. That’s just the nature of things.

As long as you hang onto your integrity, no matter what is happening in your world, you can go to bed with a clear conscience. And no matter how tough things get, you can still have that wonderful sense of peace within you.

But it takes some practice to really start to feel it, and to live with integrity at all times. Here are some tips to help you cultivate a sense of peace:

**1. Know your ideal self.**

Make a list of all the good qualities you intend to cultivate. Are you going to be kinder, fairer, more tolerant, more magnanimous, more patient, more dignified? What are your responses to difficulties going to be? What principles do you wish to uphold?

**2. Do the next right thing.**

If you’ve been struggling with your emotional or mental state like I was, it may be difficult, at first, to act with integrity all the time. You may find yourself making mistakes and sometimes behaving in a less than ideal way. In order to build up a habit of sticking to your principles, just practice doing the “next right thing” all the time.

**3. Let go of perfectionism.**

I could have made my life a lot easier if I had validated the attempts I was making to do the right thing even when things were a struggle. Instead, I beat myself up and made myself feel worse because I was angry with myself for not living right. It’s all a journey. Allow yourself to be imperfect, and yet still make progress.

**4. Make amends immediately.**

If for some reason you end up treating someone unfairly or unkindly, or doing something dishonest or mean, make amends for it as soon as you can. Don’t wait. Correct your mistakes as soon as possible, and you can find peace of mind in the fact that you have improved upon your actions and done your part to relieve any ill feeling or guilt.

**5. Practice patience.**

Other people around you may not be living in the same way that you have chosen to. It doesn’t matter; they will have their conscience to live with at the end of the day, and you will have yours. Choose to respond in a way that will give you peace of mind. Take a deep breath before reacting to people who push your buttons.

**6. Let your head and heart support you.**

You won’t have a peaceful mind if you allow negativity to dominate your thinking. Try to understand others rather than judging them. Forgive others and you free yourself. Radiate compassion and be a Good Samaritan. Not only will others benefit; you’ll also add to your own sense of self-esteem.

**7. Think long term.**

It may be tempting to lose your rag when you’re feeling angry or frustrated. But think about how you will feel about yourself and your own actions later on. Will you be happy about your behavior? Will it lead to you feeling peace of mind? If not, don’t do it.

**8. Validate yourself.**

You will not get to feel that lovely sense of peace if you don’t take the time to fully acknowledge it. In difficult situations, look at what you did well. If you’ve been struggling, notice when you make progress. At the end of each day, summarize to yourself how you’ve acted well and kept your integrity.

What helps you feel at peace with yourself?