

Today, I felt a slight tug to write a little about '*you don't deserve anything*', which is used in various spiritual or religious and non contexts. I looked at some dictionary definitions and uses first. The Macmillan dictionary provides an example: "I work hard, and I think I deserve to be well paid". Do people deserve to be paid for their labor? Most of us would answer *Yes* and most would also expect to be paid for their labor or maybe not. A while ago I wrote about *Modern Slavery* and referred to childhood slavery or put differently unpaid child labor in horrific conditions. Are these children of a lesser God? Do these children deserve a more decent life? Do they deserve a nurturing environment, food, clothes and opportunities to grow and express their proclivities? Do they deserve the security that luckier children in wealthier countries enjoy?

In the Merriam-Webster dictionary *deserve* is defined as: *to be worthy of something or suitable for some kind of reward*. Are people worthy of winning Nobel prizes or being recognised for their work? Are women worthy of equal rights to men and are all people worthy of the same civil rights irrespectively of their skin colour, intelligence, origins, class? Are all people worthy of creating and are they worthy of love and belonging? Do those in need deserve societal support and their fellow human beings' assistance? Do future generations deserve a healthier planet or can we cynically suck it dry?

A few days ago a small group of Syrian refugees arrived here. The island will serve as a hospitable transitory space until they are sent off somewhere else. The photo in the media portrayed two young mothers with their babies. Do we have the right to tell these people that '*you don't deserve anything*' and that '*life is and has always been unfair.*' Don't they deserve to have a choice over being uprooted or not? Don't these families deserve to remain together? Don't their babies and children deserve a more stable environment? Don't they deserve peace? In the previous post on addiction I referred to Dr Gabor Mate's mention in his book of the communal fragmentation processes, dislocation, exploitation and dispossession of the native and aboriginal peoples. Could we honestly tell vast numbers of people, across the globe, that 'they don't deserve' from our own place of more abundance, security and opportunity?

It is true that life has always been hard and harsh for large numbers of people. People have struggled to survive in harsh conditions and their fellow human's cruelty and violence probably since the beginning of humanity. Life contains chaos and uncertainty. It is messy and complex. Kindness, fairness and justice have often not been our guiding principles.

Good things happen to people who do a lot of harm and bad things happen to kinder people, Often we have control over so little and each day that we get to wake up is a gift granted to us. As a species we continue to wreak havoc around the world, sacrificing humans and planetary resources. Power over and greed rule the world and our older parts of our brain set us up for ingroup favoritism and outgroup aggression and so on. There is also randomness. So, from a certain perspective one could say that nobody deserves anything.

As a meaning making species we then try to make sense of all this. We tell ourselves stories. Dani Sapiro writes: ‘We tell ourselves stories. Every near miss has a narrative. Since the time of the cave dwellers we have attempted to take the random events of our existence and fashion them into something that makes sense.’ We come up with scarcity ideologies and comfortable explanations of inequalities and violence to reinforce old patterns, to soothe our guilt, to exorcise our survival fears and our fear of the deeply dispossessed and the deeply disenfranchised. Sometimes we cloak our opinions with spiritual or religious connotations. Sometimes we use clichés or certain phrases to cloak deeper uncomfortable causalities of societal ills or provide an exegesis that serves our ingroup, fits our pre existing schemas or covers our uncertainty and ignorance.

Deserving is like power. Connecting to our personal power and agency is a positive thing. In relationships *power with* is also positive. It is *power over* and domination that becomes problematic. Likewise, being worthy of mental, emotional, material and spiritual goodness and well being in this one precious life that we have been gifted does not necessarily mean unhealthy entitlement or denial of reality. Neither does it mean claims to extraordinariness or grandiose specialness. *Deserving with* others is very different from *deserving over*.

Many people have grown up or have been reduced by circumstances to believe they are inadequate and expandable. They have sat too long on the sofa of bad conditioning and disempowering practices. Many have been told during their formative years in diverse contexts that they do not deserve. Authority figures like teachers and priests may have instilled beliefs of not enoughness, toxic shame or guilt. While discussing *shame and perfectionism* Brene Brown says that we should ask: *Who and What* do they ultimately serve? Similarly, one could ask *who and what purpose* do catchy phrases and ideas serve?

Many of us grew up being taught that wanting or needing something is selfish and also not to rock the boat or talk about uncomfortable things. Dr Jonice Webb believes that these messages set people up to not express or seek to fulfill needs and desires, to sacrifice themselves, to never rock the boat and to not stand on equal ground with everyone else. Healing requires a long journey of undoing the damage of disempowering lifelong patterns and dynamics. A healthy sense of deserving to be here allows us to connect to our inherent worth, agency, desiring, core values, our voice and our heart, healthy responsibility, accountability and humanity. Feeling that one is worthy of good things is the basis for healthy boundary setting. A healthy sense of being worthy of is empowering. It is like reflecting on Mary Oliver's verses: *Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?* without the burden of others' displaced guilt or arrogance, chest constriction or fear of punishment from God or others.

What if we thought of *deserve* as *being worthy of despite our imperfections and flaws*? What if joy, love and actualization is everyone's birthright? Could it be that we are all worthy of our needs being met? What if we all deserve opportunities in life and the right to employment? What if we all deserve material security and peace? What if we all deserve respect of our integrity, labors and humanity? What if we all have the right to creative expression and visibility? What if we all deserve to be here? What if we all deserve a helping hand when life is unfair, when floods wash away our dreams, bullies pulverize our efforts and earthquakes tear the ground under our feet apart? Irrespectively, of religion, spiritual path or not, origin, ethnicity, colour, gender or sexual orientation, class, education, social and financial status, political views, etc. What if we all deserve positive experiences? Positive experiences and having our needs met is good for us and others. Dr Rick Hanson says that negative experiences sensitize the brain to the negative, making it easier to have even more negative experiences because neurons that fire together wire together and mental states become neural traits, which scientists call experience-dependent neuroplasticity. He says: 'nurturing your own development isn't selfish. It's actually a great gift to other people.'

We have for some reason or other all arrived at this physical plane and it would be healthier to assume that we are all welcome and deserving of the goodness and beautiful things this planet has to offer. Suffering is part of the human condition. There will be death, loss, illness and betrayals. We will struggle with our existential fears, disappointments, uncertainties, emotions, ignorance and darker aspects of our psyches, but

accepting that all people are worthy of good things could be a good start and a buffer against many ills. Our current ways of being have resulted in so much unnecessary suffering for so many, and also, in a tragic waste in all areas of life. Waste of human lives and human potential, planetary resources and opportunities for more health, contentment, security and peace.

To conclude, words have the power to soothe, to empower, to clarify or to confuse, to stifle and manipulate. They can be loaded with political stances. Our own mindful use of words and mindful reception of others' words and circulating ideas leads to a little more presence and a little less automatic living and responding. From that place our own and others' ideas and views can be open to revision and reflection.