



Introduction
to Love Your Body Regardless

The Gaze of Love
A Body-Loving Invitation to all Women

On the way home from a Women’s Mindfulness Group I was filled with gratitude because I had found what I was looking— an experience of unconditionally loving attention. Out in the world, the attention is judgmental in one way or another. Either the gaze of others finds me attractive and thus worthy of attention, or unattractive and unworthy. I was not alone—women in the circle had experienced the constant assault of body-focused gazes and critiques.

Sarah, a grandmother in the group, felt like Mother Bear whenever she was with her adolescent granddaughter in public places like parks and malls. She felt compelled to shield her granddaughter from the objectifying gazes of men. Sarah was committed to finding ways to fortify her granddaughter’s self-esteem and body-acceptance.

In the circle, we acknowledged how painful it was to experience the critical gaze of other women and to recognize that the same inclination was within us. Competitive comparisons had become a daily experience as we looked (or tried to manage the impulse to look) and then sized each other up from head to toe to determine who was thinner and more attractive, who looked younger, and who posed no threat in our competition for attention.

Jenny, a young mother in the group, confessed that she picked her friends from the pool of women she considered less attractive than herself. She instantly sized up women—when she felt out of their league, she became intimidated, hostile, and jealous, and when she felt superior, she pursued friendship. Jenny expressed the need to quiet her inner critical voice so that her relationships would be less manipulative.

We acknowledged our inclination to hide our bodies beneath layers of clothing, our sensuality beneath layers of shame, and our feelings beneath layers of restraint. And most fundamentally, we were all exhausted from hiding the reality of our lives beneath layers of seething resentment in response to and avoidance of the persistent body and weight scrutiny of media images and advertising expectations, of our families, friends, and lovers, and of our own inner critic.

At the final group meeting, Liz read from her journal: “I am shedding my sense of shame about being a woman—and learning to accept my female body. As I heal, I am able to look at myself in the mirror. I am taking dance lessons and receiving massage. I am embracing my body’s inevitable aging with compassion and gratitude. Negative feelings come up with these self-caring actions—healing will take time.”

Sitting in that group, I felt at peace. Yes, we all wrestled with the same self-critical and competitive demons, but at least the intention of that particular support group was the creation of a safe place for 3 hours a week. In that vulnerable and tender circle, we told the truth, and looked upon each other with mercy, listened to each other with respect, and celebrated life with laughter and solidarity.

My experience in the Mindfulness Group birthed a personal affirmation and body-loving invitation to the community of women. These expressions emerged in one of those moments when the inner voice grows so loud that you have no other option but to listen to it. I imagine them as gifts from the Mother of All Living, expressing her deep concern for her daughters. I imagine them passing from woman to woman, from mother to daughter in that powerful flow of woman-connection and power.

An Affirmation: “There is No Blemish”

I return to the Breath of Life and I am soothed into acceptance of this moment, just as it is. I am comforted by the truth that I am whole, perfect, and complete in body, mind, and spirit. I rest in acceptance, and all is well.

There is no blemish in me. I am the Daughter of Life and my body is lovely just as it is, in its perfect shape and size. I am at peace—the war is over. There is only comfort, soothing, and acceptance.

I am at home in my body. I am at ease with my body's sensations. I am at play with my body's sensuality and at peace with my body's natural cycles. I speak about my body with reverence. And so it is.

An Invitation: "The Gaze of Love"

From my heart to yours as you begin reading Love Your Body Regardless . . .

Today, and everyday, may we turn toward our own bodies and the bodies of all women with mercy and unconditional acceptance. May we let go of the competitive, scrutiny-based sizing up of each other and the put-downs and diminishments expressed when we're threatened by each other. May we allow healing attention to flow one to another until the gaze of love heals us all.

A gaze of love, calling wise women with their beautiful silver hair and life-lines out of hiding. A gaze of love, inviting our smart and gifted daughters to reject the tyranny of thinness and to cease from harming themselves. A gaze of love, welcoming the full, rounded bodies of our friends, bodies that refuse to be battered into shape by diets and admonishments.

A gaze of love so powerful and encompassing, that it embraces the entire community of women, all sizes, shapes, colors, ages, and languages, with the widest welcome, the deepest affirmation, the highest calling, and the strongest YES.

A gaze of love, inspiring us to bite into life and the fullness of its possibility; to express life through us in color and shape, sound and movement; and to honor life by turning our body-loving energy toward projects of justice, relationships of comfort, strategies of wellness, and words of affirmation.

We are all in this together. One breath. One body. One life. And so it is.

Body-Loving Blessings, Patricia