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Are Your Crippled by Perfectionism?

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It was 2:00 a.m. on the first night of a trip to London when I awakened to hear a voice in my head say, "Eve, you are crippled by your perfectionism." I had been limping badly through the international terminals all day long, due to a hip problem that had developed quite suddenly just four months previously. Although I had made some progress in easing the pain and regaining some flexibility in my hip joint through physical therapy, acupuncture, massage, energy work, and imagery, the problem persisted. And on my long journey from California to London, it had been particularly troublesome.

I knew the message that I was crippled by my perfectionism was in response to my prayer to understand and heal the deeper meaning of my sudden physical disability. Yet, I also knew that this was something I didn't want to hear. Never had I considered perfectionism as one of my primary flaws. Oh, it isn't that I'm not a perfectionist--it's just that I have always liked being that way.

But life has a way of getting our attention regarding those qualities we are most resistant to addressing. And here I was, looking squarely at my perfectionism for the first time to see the ways in which it has crippled me.

It was easy to recognize the more obvious impact that perfectionism has had on my life. For instance, I work too much, and play too little. After all, there is always more to do to perfect one's current project. Also, it is my tendency to be very critical of my own creations. Since nothing is ever quite perfect enough, I have crippled my ability to fully express my creative essence.

To my surprise, as I meditated on my perfectionism, I began to see it as a spiritual disability. I saw how in my need to be perfect, there were important things about myself that I had chosen not to look at. My perfectionistic self caused me to block out awareness of the parts of my own shadow that I find particularly unpleasant. Hence, I had crippled my own spiritual growth in my need to perpetuate a false self-image. This revelation was particularly shocking to me, since it was in such contradiction to my belief that I had been completely honest with myself.

In a series of dreams combined with information received during meditation sessions, I came to see that there is much about myself I have chosen to keep hidden from my own view. And it's not pretty! For example, I have always viewed myself as a non-competitive person. The truth is, I am highly competitive, and my competitiveness combined with my stubborn pride and

envy have led me to avoid competition because I hate to lose! Similarly, where I thought I had forgiven the past, I have found deep-seated anger and resentments. And the list goes on.

It has been a relief and a joy to begin to face the really dark places within me. There is a wonderful sense of personal liberation that comes with acknowledging and accepting my most human flaws. I literally feel lighter each time I shine the light of conscious awareness on the least desirable parts of who I am. And with time, some of these parts have even begun to lose their power to frighten or control me.

For I know that along with my human self, I also have a Divine Essence. And every time I "own" another part of my humanity, I ignite a transformative process that clears the way to accessing more of the light of my Greater Self. Although the perfectionist in me would like to be "finished" and "complete" by next month with this process of personal unfoldment, my wiser self knows that it is a lifelong journey--not a race to the finish line. It is certainly not an easy journey--nor one taken by everyone. But it is the path my Spirit has chosen for me. And for that I am most grateful.

I am also aware that there is a part of me that desperately wants to maintain my mask of perfection. It tries to seduce me into complacency or lure me into again turning my back on my shadow side. My wiser self know that would be a big mistake. I intend to continue to face my negative traits with humility to the best of my ability. And I suspect that life will continue to find ways of pointing out to me those personal deficiencies which I overlook!

Eve Delunas, Ph.D., psychotherapist, author, speaker, trainer.

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