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HOW DO I TREAT MYSELF?

This is a good question because its answer tells us more about ourselves -- and may lead us to treat ourselves more sensibly and more humanly -- and it also assists us in understanding our relationships with other persons. For our attitudes toward our own selves and toward others are interwoven strands of the same psychological reality and the one reflects the other. If we become more sensitive to what we are actually like, the chances are we will become the same to others. Everything gets better when we approach our own personalities with greater understanding. We give the best parts of ourselves a break and we more easily forgive the aspects of ourselves that are immature, mystifying, or at times at least, apparently just plain crazy.

Well, how do we treat ourselves? What is the transaction like? Does it resemble writing a letter or is it more like sending a bill? It may be more like passing a law or, on occasion, sentencing a prisoner. Sometimes we regard ourselves with unflagging suspicion, as though we were tower guards surveying ourselves in the yard below. None of these arrangements are very comfortable, of course, because they all reflect certain hesitancy about ourselves and our poorer possibilities.

There are others, of course, who do not regard themselves suspiciously but expectantly; they are always half-filled with longing for approval from somewhere outside of themselves -- from teachers, parents, or employers -- and dark are their moods when this praise is not forthcoming. Still others have different and more melancholy expectations; they live with themselves like somebody who is constantly under a tornado warning. The worst may happen at any moment and so they survive, after a fashion, by holding their breath and waiting for the blows to fall.

One could devise longer lists but these may prove sufficient to inspire a gentler look at ourselves and a willingness to treat ourselves a little more fairly. This does not mean, obviously, that we let everything go or that we abandon discipline altogether. It suggests rather that a deeper and more understanding view of ourselves may lead to more real growth and personal development than all the harsh and anxious indictments that we may make of ourselves. Being more compassionate toward ourselves prompts us to design our goals more realistically and boosts our chances of accomplishing them.

Renewing ourselves does not demand that we remake ourselves entirely but rather that, like the earth itself, we draw on the life that is already present, the possibilities that have survived and that we give these a chance to grow.

From [Free to Be Human](#)
By Eugene Kennedy

Read by Kenneth Haystead
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