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On Barney and Breaking Free

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Each Saturday morning when my two- and four-year-old daughters appear in my room to wake me up, our routine is to go downstairs, heat some waffles and put on their favorite show, *Barney and Friends*. Most parents dread the singing purple character, but I find myself enthralled by the show mostly because of the lyrics of the songs. There is one song in particular that really hits home with me called "You Are Special." My favorite part of the song says, "You're remarkable, you really are, you're the only one like you. . . You are special, special; everyone is special each in his or her own way." It has only been the last few years of my life that I have embraced these lyrics as being true for myself.

A few years ago I hit a tipping point in my life: I felt dissatisfied with my job, my finances were in crisis and my personal relationships added to my daily anxiety. On top of this, my oldest daughter was diagnosed with a condition called Benign Congenital Hypotonia. Websites on the Internet told me she might never walk, she might never talk and she might never be normal. I was overwhelmed and unhappy. My stress level ran so high; I feared I was on the verge of an emotional and physical breakdown. I didn't want to feel so sad inside. My heart cried out for something more--for joy, peace and satisfaction.

Part of me thought that if I went back to school and got my MBA, I would begin to feel positive about myself again. Perhaps pursuing my MBA would give me a sense of direction and achievement. Yet, the thought of the extra hours of homework and classes was too much given my already hectic schedule. I saw that if I tried to add anything more to my plate I would personally disintegrate.

Many days I woke up feeling sick inside, exhausted even before I started my day. I tried to put on a smile to those around me, but I was often on the verge of tears. I seemed to be just existing, waiting for the time I could crawl back into bed and find peace again.

A recurring thought, whispering in my mind for several years, was to try meditation. At the point of my highest frustration, I decided I would try. What I found as I meditated

was that I had a very busy, self-critical mind. It was challenging to slow my thoughts, and was shocking for me to see how judgmental I was towards myself. Since I couldn't quiet my mind, I'd sit quietly for fifteen minutes and watch my mind each night after the kids went to bed. I saw that my mind controlled me - my negative, fearful thoughts ripped into me creating tremendous misery.

I believed I was not good enough and not doing enough. I had decided I wasn't achieving enough. Sitting in silence helped me to grow in awareness of my self-talk, my self-limiting beliefs and my fears. As I became aware of these negative thoughts, I began to judge them less and instead asked questions about why they were in my mind at all.

Why wasn't I good enough? Was there really something wrong with me? Could I choose new beliefs about myself and reprogram my mind? I decided that I could choose to view myself in a new way.

I was determined to do this. I took a piece of paper and made two columns on it. In the first column I jotted down my negative self-talk; in the second column, I created new, loving, affirming thoughts to replace my negative self-talk. I had been allowing negative self-talk for most of my life; it was ingrained in my mind. I knew that in order to develop new habits, I had to be determined and focused in my efforts to create a new habit.

Day by day, one moment at a time, I practiced and practiced and practiced my new self-talk. If my thought was "I'm not doing enough. I never get enough done," I would refocus my mind to a new thought like, "I do my best in each moment. I get everything done that I can. I was able to make it to work on time, make sure the kids had breakfast, run several errands, and take the time to smile at people I passed on the street..." and I'd list everything and anything that I could focus on that I DID do. It changed my emotion from one of harsh judgment and negativity, to one of self-appreciation and gratitude for all that I did get done.

After months of practice, I began to feel better inside. I began to see my own value and the beauty in my life. I came to understand that neither my achievements nor the approval of others brings me value. I am valuable and beautiful just by simply being me. I am amazing and unique. I programmed my mind so that I felt good about myself and my life.

What tremendous relief came as I accepted myself completely. By loving myself, I recovered immense time and energy I'd lost trying to prove my value to others. I began focusing my energy on looking into my heart to visualize what would bring me joy. Then I began following my heart. I'm pursuing a career that brings me true satisfaction. I slowed to a pace that lets me really enjoy my children and play with them. I maintain my focus by expressing gratitude each day for all the beauty in my life.

Imagine if you truly believed the lyrics of Barney's song, that you are remarkable and

special in your own way. Would you spend your time and energy in different ways?
Would you release fear of what others think of you and begin following your heart?
Would inner peace replace the turmoil you feel from relentlessly criticizing yourself?

I leave you today with a poem I wrote to reflect the amazing changes I've undergone in the past few years. I trust that it will inspire you to open to experiencing the changes your heart desires so that you can truly break free.

I've Broken Free

I've broken free--
No longer bound by fear, guilt, shame and worry.
New Energy has filled my Soul.
New Energy has brought me strength,
Courage to know that
I must follow my heart's true calling.
Promises of living my truth
Bring great joy to my Being.

I've broken free--
No longer listening to the voices around me,
Instead I go deep inside
Connecting to the Inner Voice,
Connecting to my Empowered Essence.
I must follow my heart's true calling,
Conviction that I share responsibility
In using my gifts to make Our World a better place.

I've broken free-- No longer seeing people with a judging eye.
I have new Sight when I look into their eyes,
New Sight when I see into the gateway to the Soul.
I must follow my heart's true calling,
Desire to reflect to others the possibility of freedom
Inspiring true acceptance of Self.

I've broken free!
My Heart sings.
I've broken free--
A song of deliverance.

I've broken free!
A peaceful Soul
I've broken free--

Fully Awakened.

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