

Morning Ritual

There are certain rituals many of us perform in the morning as we prepare for the day's activities. For some, it's a simple matter of a silent prayer, while others engage in a complex series of comic faces in the bathroom mirror. "Saturday Night Live's" Al Franken made fun of this practice with his character, "Stuart Smalley," and his daily affirmations: "I'm good enough. I'm smart enough, and gosh darn it, people like me!" Whatever our individual technique may be, all of them serve a singular goal – to help set us in the right frame of mind as we begin our day.

My particular ritual has evolved over several months into a remarkably powerful personal "manifesto" that goes beyond resetting my morning frame of mind – it reminds me of who I am and why I do what I do.

People tend to collect "symbols" – personal possessions that contain meaning that transcends their utility or appearance. My personal daily ritual revolves around three such symbols I've collected in various places.

I have, for example, a chain maille rainbow bracelet made of brightly colored aluminum rings. Every morning, as I attach the clasp around my wrist, I am reminded of my first gay pride parade in Dallas last year. I purchased the inexpensive bracelet after riding on the PFLAG float through the streets of Dallas on a day when the rain came down in buckets... but this didn't affect the crowds of smiling faces, or deter us from celebrating the fact that we are free. Wearing this bracelet identifies me as a gay man in one of the most profoundly prejudiced locales in the nation -- East Texas. While I probably wouldn't feel the need to wear it at all if I lived in Dallas or elsewhere, I wear it here to let everyone know that I am not ashamed to be the person I am. But it also provides me with a powerful personal reminder... it reminds me to have courage in the face of perceived adversity.

The next part of my morning "ritual" involves a red silicone AIDS awareness bracelet, which I place on my other wrist. This bracelet reminds me of how far I have come from my deathbed to being well enough to help others and be a positive influence in their lives. This bracelet reminds me both that "hope" is real, and that I must never forget to feel compassion for others.

The third part of my ritual is a lump of glass in the shape of a small, polished river stone that fits in my pocket. I call it my "gratefulness stone," and it reminds me to live in a spirit of thankfulness... not only for what has come, but for what will come. It reminds me that pain is an illusion, and to view the world through a spirit of calm appreciation.

Whether we have created a conscious "morning ritual" or not, we all create habit patterns that shape and mold our perceptions and behavior throughout the day. Without conscious intervention, many times these habits may start our days with feelings of hopelessness or

despair, and after a while, this may lead to depression. After all, the diagnosis of “depression” is invoked, in part, by depressed feelings that recur day after day over a long period of time. In other words... because it has become our “habit” to be depressed.

Since habits are something we have control over, I suggest taking control over your morning ritual. For me, the ideas of “courage, hope, compassion and thanks” gets my blood pumping and puts a smile on my face, though we all have our own motivations. By starting each day with a positive frame of mind, we may just find the quality of our lives improving. You’ll notice, for example, that my “spirit of thankfulness” doesn’t require “something to be thankful for.” That’s because I’ve found that, when you’re thankful first, the reason to be thankful always follows.

Love and peace, Troy
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