



# Self-Love Journey

Dr. Pinkie Feinstein

## Step 20: Courage to Express Your Heart

In this chapter, I address one of the greatest challenges of self-love, perhaps the greatest of all. This point rarely receives the attention it deserves because of a fundamental misunderstanding about the influence of the environment on a person's development, growth, and destiny. A deep understanding of this subject, together with the right kind of work to address its accompanying phenomena, can lead a person to realize self-love correctly and apply it in the channels of self-actualization, success, and the fulfillment of dreams.

Whether we like it or not, whether we admit it or deny it, we are strongly influenced by our environment, by the messages it sends, by the feedback we receive, by the grades it assigns us, by its indifference or its attention, by its recognition of us or its lack thereof, by the sense of being understood or the sense of being unseen. All of this greatly affects our modes of expression, our range of daring, our relationship with ourselves, and our ability to bring forth what is uniquely ours.

We would prefer to believe the environment does not influence us so much. We would prefer to think that everything depends only on us, and if we are sufficiently determined, brave, consistent, and strong, no one will be able to delay the realization of our dreams. We would like to live in a world where unnecessary criticism passes our ear and does not penetrate our heart, where every comment from the environment cannot meaningfully shake our self-confidence or our faith in our authentic path.

This is not how things are. We are always held in an invisible web connecting us with the world around us. That web cannot be torn or erased. We cannot escape it, and we cannot choose to ignore it, even if we tell ourselves a story of unprecedented individuality and mental fortitude. When the world changes, we change, and when we change, the world around us changes. These phenomena are not always immediately visible, and often cannot be detected at first glance. We are influenced because we are part of a complex in which, as modern physics has already shown, everything is connected with everything, everything touches everything, and everything responds to everything.

The human mind, in its ordinary mode, struggles to grasp such concepts that may sound esoteric or overly spiritual. Even if the matter is becoming clearer scientifically,

it is hard for us to bridge between the felt separateness of person from person and person from world, and the accumulating evidence that we are connected to each other and to everything around us to a degree far beyond what ordinary thinking can grasp.

Why is this essential to our discussion, and how does self-love enter the equation?

Simply, the people around us, their messages, reactions, choices, opinions, habits, problems, successes, distorted thoughts, courage, and love, none of these stay only with them. They migrate outward, seeding negative or positive influence according to what they emit, and they shape, to a meaningful extent, what will happen in others, and vice versa.

Therefore, we map out many of our statements and fateful choices according to the responses we expect from the environment. It is an illusion to imagine that this influence is marginal. It is a self-deception to think we can do whatever we want without considering what others will say, think, or assume about us. We are part of a larger body composed of expressions from all its parts, like an organism comprised of all its organs, where each part significantly affects the whole.

So, what remains for us to do? If we agree that this is how things work, is there any point in striving to find our authentic voice if we are always influenced and subject to the state of the whole? How can we deal with the enormous mass of people similar to us and streams of people unlike us, perhaps even, so it seems to us, lower than us? If society radiates its energy toward us, what is the point in trying to improve ourselves?

Self-love offers many of the answers to these important questions. Self-love can improve a person, their positive expression, their optimism, their creativity, and their connection to what is good, special, and original inside. Self-love reconnects a person to their compassion, hope, grace, and empathy, first inward, then outward. Self-love reminds us, and this is the central message here, that if we are both influenced and influential, it is wise to choose to influence our surroundings positively by being more friendly and calm within.

Self-love reminds us to connect to our natural desire and to trust it, even if the environment, with its outdated habits, exerts its usual pressure and tries to suppress our path toward something new and refreshing within us. Self-love whispers that there is meaning in our being different, and sometimes even odd, because the more we look inward and express outward what we see, the more people will be positively influenced, even if not immediately, because they, too, have no choice but to absorb what we express. Influence flows in every direction, and we can and should do our part to contribute to a positive change that begins in our small inner plot and, without our knowing how, percolates everywhere.

Imagine that you leave your home hurried and preoccupied, on your way to the car for a day of work, errands, responsibilities, and pressures. On the way, you see a street cleaner sweeping, he looks at you with smiling eyes and says, "Good morning." Although you are rushing to an important meeting, you pause for a moment, smile, exhale, and answer, "Good morning." Suppose this tiny exchange made both of your days better. You bless each other and continue on your way. Is there a chance that

meaningful changes will unfold for both of you, and for others, because of this brief encounter? Clearly yes. That is how it works.

There will always be people who do not like something we bring or express. You might say they are part of the whole system, a somewhat annoying part. They are there to reflect the state of the environment. They are there, in a sense, to oblige us to love ourselves enough not to give up, to recruit self-love and courage that help us, despite the influence, to bring what we have without delay.

That vast, endless complex that connects everything with everything is not only a network that keeps us constantly influencing and influenced. It is also a flexible, dynamic space with limitless possibilities for development, positive change, growth, and healing.

When we cultivate self-love and bring ourselves forward from a cleaner, braver place, despite some people's unpleasant reactions, we contribute to the ecosystem we belong to, helping it advance. When others like us walk around with the smile of self-love, courage, and the desire to share what is unique in them, a group forms, one we belong to without realizing it, a group that helps create a healthier, friendlier space for all of us. Does it feel good to belong to this special and select group? Do you have the courage to smile at yourself to strengthen your bond with the group that is changing the environment for the better? Do you have the courage to speak your words with love, even if someone frowns or rolls their eyes?

What does your self-love answer to these questions?

**Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):**

1. How do you feel about the task of **loving yourself even when others do not respond to you in ways that feel right for you?**
2. How do you see the conflict that sometimes exists between **self love** and the tendency to **please others**?
3. Many times we give others the privilege of granting us **“approval” that we are “okay” or “desirable”**. How does your **self love** respond to this human tendency?
4. Complete the following sentence six times:  
**“I now give myself full approval even when...”**
5. Can you see the **inspiration you may become** when people learn that you **support yourself even when your environment does not fully support your choices**?
6. Any other thoughts, feelings, insights or questions you would like to share about this step in the journey?