



When you look in the mirror, what do you see?

Do you see the vibrant being that you are, or are you looking for flaws? Do you see the divine light in your heart, or an expanding waistline? Do you recognize your intrinsic goodness?

To be healthy and happy, we need to develop a positive body image. This is vital for children, teens and adults. A healthy and positive body image is a challenge in our celebrity-obsessed, media-driven world. Like so many parts of our culture, yoga has been commercialized and all dolled up so that the image that many people have of a perfect yoga practitioner is a size 2 waif with bleached white teeth and professional hair and makeup. Even the yoga world adds to the dynamic with these *Cosmopolitan* like photos and images on the pages of *Yoga Journal*, an otherwise useful and meaningful publication.

So many of us are at war with our bodies, or more precisely, our body images. Often, we build walls of defenses around our hearts with judgment and criticism. These defenses often lead to unwanted behaviors, such as binge eating, or making an excuse not to exercise. We justify the behavior by adding to the armor. “I’m not good enough, strong enough, disciplined enough.”

Harsh self-judgment is your worst enemy. It is important to remain healthy: we need to eat right, exercise and maintain a healthy body weight, but we are all okay just the way we are. Whether we are happy with our weight or feel we have work to do, we have to live inside of our bodies. We have to live in each moment IN those bodies.

Developing a healthy body image is based in satya, in truth. When we are honest with ourselves, we can start to change. Change does not come with a diet, causing our weight to yo-yo, but with healthy and responsible choices. We have to look in the mirror and evaluate what we see without judgment. You may need to work on losing weight in order to be healthier, but being skinny will never make you a better person, just as standing on your head doesn’t make you smarter. Thinness doesn’t equate with happiness, and excess weight does not devalue you. The truth is that inside the armor of our body image is a valuable and vibrant soul.

When we make peace with ourselves, accepting some flaws and working to make some improvements without judgment, we start to break down the walls obscuring our inner light, and our true beauty shines through. The beauty inside is always greater than the beauty outside.

The next time you look in the mirror through the distorting lens of judgment, remember what Anais Nin famously said: “We don’t see things as they are, we see them as we are.” Put that in your body image pipe and smoke it.

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