



A Newly Rich Life With Yourself, by Martha Nussbaum

Do not despise your inner world. That is the first and most general piece of advice I would offer. Our society is very outward-looking, very taken up with the latest new object, the latest piece of gossip, the latest opportunity for self-assertion and status. But we all begin our lives as helpless babies, dependent on others for comfort, food, and survival itself. And even though we develop a degree of mastery and independence, we always remain alarmingly weak and incomplete, dependent on others and on an uncertain world for whatever we are able to achieve.

As we grow, we all develop a wide range of emotions responding to this predicament: fear that bad things will happen and that we will be powerless to ward them off; love for those who help and support us; grief when a loved one is lost; hope for good things in the future; anger when someone else damages something we care about. Our emotional

life maps our incompleteness: A creature without any needs would never have reasons for fear, or grief, or hope, or anger. But for that very reason we are often ashamed of our emotions, and of the relations of need and dependency bound up with them. [...] People don't know how

to deal with their own emotions, or to communicate them to others. When they are frightened, they don't know how to say it, or even to become fully aware of it. Often they turn their own fear into aggression. Often, too, this lack of a rich inner life catapults them into depression in later life. We are all going to encounter illness, loss, and aging, and we're not well prepared for these inevitable events by a culture that directs us to think of externals only, and to measure ourselves in terms of our possessions of externals.

What is the remedy of these ills? A kind of self-love that does not shrink from the needy and incomplete parts of the self, but accepts those with interest and curiosity, and tries to develop a language with which to talk about needs and feelings. Storytelling plays a big role in the process of development. As we tell stories about the lives of others, we learn how to imagine what another creature might feel in response to various events. At the same time, we identify with the other creature and learn something about ourselves. As we grow older, we encounter more and more complex stories "in literature, film, visual art, music" that give us a richer and more subtle grasp of human emotions and of our own inner world.

So my second piece of advice, closely related to the first, is: Read a lot of stories, listen to a lot of music, and think about what the stories you encounter mean for your own life and lives of those you

love. In that way, you will not be alone with an empty self; you will have a newly rich life with yourself, and enhanced possibilities of real communication with others.

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