

## **It's Hard To Be A Martyr** **by Lisa Marie Lindenschmidt**

Does this ring a bell for you? You're unloading your groceries onto the conveyor belt at your local grocery store. You're throwing organic, grain-fed chicken (for your raw dog, of course) up there, some local apples, maybe a couple of boxes of shee-shee organic tea harvested specially from some little town in the Andes where the only source of income for the indigenous peoples are from the farming of this tea... As you're piling up your well-thought-out purchases, you happen to glance at the customer's cart behind you. You notice the Ho-Hos, the frozen Hungry Man dinners, the drums of Sunny D, and can after can of meat chili. Your eyes nonchalantly travel up to the customer himself. You see a man with someone you presume is his son. Both are heavy, looking disheveled, and generally conveying an air of grump. You mentally shake your head and start connecting the dots from their diet to their appearance. After you pay for your groceries, you walk out of the store praising yourself for having the intelligence to rise above the muck and mire of the SAD diet.

Or what about this one? You make a beautiful dinner for your family of baked delicata squash, brown rice with local, raw, organic butter, and a hearty kale salad. When it's time to serve up everyone's plate, you cram your plate with kale salad, taking only minuscule amounts of the rice and squash. You serve everyone else's plate to their liking, making sure they've seen the portion ratio on your plate. Once their plates are clean, they head back up to the stove for a second helping... of rice and butter. You say, "There's plenty of kale salad left, if you want some of that, too," but they decline. You mentally shake your head and start connecting the dots from their diet to any malady they may currently be experiencing. As you're cleaning up, you eye the rice and butter, wanting another serving. Of course, you can't because that would send the wrong message to the other family members that look up to you for guidance on their health quest.

It's hard to be the martyr. I know. I've been one for years. I think I am coming to the realization that others may not be perceiving me as a martyr though. This is shocking. I have invested a lot of time researching nutrition, a lot of money trying out different recipes, and a lot of energy being the example for others. How dare they not understand all I am doing to sacrifice myself for their health?!?! ... OK. So, of course, I am saying all this tongue-in-cheek, but this is a real issue – for me and for other women I know. I've been doing a lot of thinking about this recently because I've found myself exhausted, exhausted from always having to be “on,” always having to make the “right” decision. I've been living my life for other people's reactions. But in mulling this over, another thought came to the fore: Is judging wrong? And where does compassion fit into all this?

This compassion thing is new to me. I was never taught this concept outright as a child. Therefore, my understanding of it has gotten all screwed up. My husband says compassion literally means “to suffer with.” What if you could break everything down to suffering – meaning, somehow or another our needs are not being met on some level? Could we be better equipped to relate to others? I believe we could because then the emotional baggage that we create around judging would be a moot point.

Many of us get mired in defining judging as something bad. But it is not the judging that is bad; it is what you do with this judging that defines the quality of the judgement. The literal definition of judgement is “the cognitive process of reaching a decision or drawing conclusions; the mental ability to understand and discriminate between relations.” So, if we see someone in a grocery store with a buggy loaded down with processed food, we can make a judgement or draw a conclusion about that particular person. But, and herein lies the rub: listen to yourself as you are judging. What conclusions have you drawn? How are you characterizing that person? Are your conclusions helpful or compassionate? What is your investment in judging this person in a certain way? Does your judgement validate you in any way?

These are hard questions. It takes a heck of a person to be able to go through this process and respond honestly and, most importantly, to act compassionately. But the first place to start is with yourself: how are you judging yourself? And, more importantly, are you able to respond to that judgement compassionately? Can you respect the path you are on as a process?

That's your homework assignment. Let me know how you do. As for myself, I think I've got a special place for that Martyr Award... in the closet.

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