

Deserve and worth are the same thing, right?

Or are they?

Do we see others differently when we say they “deserve?” Are others “worth” it? How does *deserve* differ from *worth*? If you *deserve*, why don’t you have? If you are *worth*, why might you choose not to have? Does “deserve” or “worth” affect our sense of fairness, blame, rights, justice, punishment? Here are a few things I’ve heard that have stuck with me:

You are too young to have to call 911 for your dad, you shouldn’t have had to do that.

You deserve to live in a house.

We’ve lived here for a long time and we have always gotten our paper by 5:30 AM.

You deserve to celebrate.

We moved across town and our other paper carrier always brought our paper by 5:00 AM.

You deserve to get a better grade than that.

You deserve to celebrate more than that.

You deserve to get paid more than that.

I remember a time when there was pie. I was able to listen to myself wanting that pie “because I should want pie - it tastes good. Besides, if you are good, you can have pie. (Right?) If I have pie I am good.” Yet when I was able to listen to my body, it was happy and comfortable without pie. I didn’t want that pie. I thought I *should* want that pie.

What does it mean to deserve? Or not deserve? Is deserve what is “right?” Is deserve the way it *should* be?

If I deserve yet don’t have, where does that leave me? Clearly it’s not my responsibility, since I deserve it. So, why don’t I have it? Did someone take it away from me? Why do you have it? Who should I blame? Maybe you should give it to me! You should be punished for taking it from me. ‘I deserve’ can become ‘I am entitled.’

Or maybe, with a punishment or a situation, If I deserve it, then I should do nothing to change it, even if I can, even if it is hurting others as well as me, even if I could give more of my “glow of ripeness” if I changed, grew. I deserve to be punished.

Maybe I don’t deserve it. I didn’t earn it. I shouldn’t have it. I shouldn’t try to have it, because if I worked and got it, and don’t deserve it, that would be bad. I shouldn’t try. I shouldn’t hope.

If I deserve, or don’t deserve, maybe it is the way it is. Fate. Can’t be changed. I am powerless. Why should I even try to do anything?

Who deserves? Why? Why do some NOT deserve? How can we tell? How should we treat those who deserve and those who don’t? What about those who deserve to be punished? Who gets to choose *who deserves what*?

With deserve, it seems that the world should be the way it should be, not the way it is. M. Scott Peck wrote (M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*, Simon & Schuster, 1978, p 15): “Most...voice their belief, noisily or subtly, that their difficulties represent a unique kind of affliction that should not be and that has somehow been especially visited upon them, or else upon their families, their tribe, their class, their nation, their race or even their species, and not upon others. I know about this moaning because I have done my share.”

Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks wrote (Conscious Loving: the Journey to Co-Commitment, Bantam Books, 1990, pg 147)

“One of the most destructive beliefs is: This experience is not the one I’m supposed to be having. ...Many people tie up enormous amounts of their energy in thinking that the events of their lives are not the ones that ought to have happened.”

I am beginning to think that “deserve” does not help us to use ourselves or things **“So that they stand in the glow of ripeness.”** In fact, I am beginning to think that “deserve” interferes with our ability to live the best, most wonderful, most real lives we can. Deserve just doesn’t work for me anymore.

But I have been living deserve and should since, well, Since before I was born. “Deserve” is more than a habit, it is the way I live, the way I am. How do I change from this way of looking at the world? I can’t just throw it out - that leaves a great big gaping hole. But what to put in it’s place?

And, what about our first principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person?

I am worth it. I am worth a house and celebrations and more money and good food. I am worth an infinite amount.

What if having or doing one thing keeps me from another? I am worth both. Does this mean that each situation, each event, is different, and must be considered separately?

What if I have diabetes? Then I may be damaging myself, I of much worth, if I have ice cream. I am worth ice cream - does that mean I “should” have it? But if I have it, I am not treating myself as *worth* it. What is worth more?

What about you? You are worth it too. How does what I am doing affect you? I am worth an excellent hot meal after a long day of hard work. You are worth an excellent hot meal after a long day of hard work. Who, then, should fix this meal?

I am worth food grown far away and gorgeous furs and green lawns with shade and beautiful flowers and plenty of water and a wonderful vehicle to get around in. What if this harms people in other parts of the world, or this earth we live on? Those other people are also worth all of those things. This earth is worth it. What should I do?

I think it is a lot easier to just think “deserve” or “don’t deserve” or “should” or “should not.” I don’t have to think as much. I know what to do. It is clearly spelled out. There are two choices: should, or should not. Two states: deserve, or don’t deserve.

When I consider “worth”, there is a lot to consider. I can’t just make assumptions - I have to look at what is happening, now, and the consequences for the future too. I have to consider what I feel would be best to do, in this time and place and situation. This is beginning to sound a lot like “A free and responsible search for truth and meaning” and perhaps even “justice, equity, and compassion in human relations”.

When I hear ‘Deserve’ or ‘shouldn’t have to’ I think of things like: It’s not my fault. It’s not our responsibility. Resentment. That’s unfair. I have no power. Others are responsible, they should solve it.

Deserve points out “reasonable” actions. It gives me permission to give up, not resolve the situation, or fail to take into account the current situation and the others involved. When I think “deserve” I create an ideal reality, and expect it to be just that way.

Deserve, and the lack of responsibility I express when I use that term, reminds me of victimhood.

(M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*, Simon & Schuster, 1978, p 42):

“Whenever we seek to avoid the responsibility for our own behavior, we do so by attempting to give that responsibility to some other individual or organization or entity. But this means we then give away our power to that entity, be it “fate” or “society” or the government or the corporation or our boss.”

(Hendricks, Gay and Kathlyn, *Conscious Loving*, Bantam Books, 1992, pp 147, 148, 110 & 87):

“One of the most destructive beliefs is: This experience is not the one I’m supposed to be having. ...Many people tie up enormous amounts of their energy in thinking that the events of their lives are not the ones that ought to have happened. They get into a victim position with life itself, so that they perceive that they are completely at the effect of a hostile universe. There is no positive payoff for seeing the world this way.”

“Accept it the way it is, and you are in a much better position to do something about it. Argue with the way it is and you squander your potential productivity.”

“Acknowledging responsibility is a risk, because responsibility carries power. Power belongs to the people who take responsibility. It flows to those who claim creation. There is no power in victimhood.” “When you persist in being a victim you settle for being right instead of being a winner.while there are cases in which someone is clearly a victim, nobody ever got free and happy by viewing it that way.”

When I say that I deserve, or don’t deserve, I take my attention away from useful questions such as: What is happening right now? What actions can I take? What does each individual need right now? How can we meet our collective and individual needs in the best way? What can I learn from what is happening right now?

When I use the word ‘worth’ it implies responsibility and making choices - seeking solutions, asking useful questions: How can I deal with this? What is important? What do I need to do? Worth seems like taking responsibility - and power.

I think *deserve* encourages attributions of blame, or hopelessness, or inevitability. I think *deserve* gets in the way of actions based on worth and dignity. With *deserve* or *should*, I have noted that I and people often feel angry or frustrated, because things are not “as they should be” and it is not my fault. Someone else should change it. Or else I deserve it, and I cannot change that. I deserve to be hurt, or to be in jail, and I keep creating that in my life, because I deserve it. I can not consider how to use myself or things **“So that they stand in the glow of ripeness.”** I don’t deserve it.

With *deserve*, It seems that it is easy to overlook real needs, because they do not fit with the way things should be, or they get overshadowed by other “deserves”.

I deserve to celebrate. What if what I long for is some quiet and rest? Is what I *deserve* more important than what I *desire*? What would feed my soul? What if the foods we often consume when celebrating are harmful to my body, and interfere with my ability to function - or have fun?

I may deserve a house, where I have a yard and a place to store bikes, but if I have not done what it takes to earn that, or if I was not born into a family with extra money, or if I have chosen to use my money elsewhere, I will not have a house. That does not mean I am not worth a house. I am worth it. I do not deserve it. And it may not be the most important thing that I need.

If we are going to consider worth, we will be faced with difficult decisions. Setting priorities, and accepting responsibility for setting those priorities. Is my health more important, or is it more important to have ice cream with my friends? Decisions about the way we live, about whether to speak up or not,

Decisions without a right or wrong. Decisions where there are no "better" answers. Very difficult decisions.

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Or are they?

Could they lead to different ways of thinking? Acting? Is it possible that we see others differently when we "deserve?" What happens when we are "worth" it? Could our behavior towards others change when they "deserve" rather than have "worth?"

I think using *worth* or *deserve* changes our image of the way things *should* be. I think the ideas of *deserve* and *don't deserve*, *should* and *shouldn't*, separate us from reality. Separate us from responsibility.

Worth encourages me to take responsibility. Gay and Kathleen Hendricks wrote (Conscious Loving Bantam Books, 1992, p 105) "*Many people do not realize that in a relationship between two people there is 200 percent responsibility to be divided between them.*" They also wrote (The Conscious Heart Bantam, 1999, p 31) "*In our relationship we have learned that true responsibility is not about finding fault or accepting blame. It is about a genuine insight into the causes of an action or event.*"

I say, **learning and action.**

Isn't that what we are about, we Unitarian Universalists? Gaining insights? Thinking about our actions and our relationships? Taking action? Taking responsibility for our own thoughts, beliefs and actions? Trying to live our principles?

We have worth and dignity. Others have worth and dignity. I believe it takes consideration with both our heart *and* our head in order to live that worth.

AND, I think that as we consider *worth*, we may find ourselves grateful for what we do have.