

UNHEALTHY INDEPENDENCE

Healthy independence is essential. For a good life, you need to be yourself, take responsibility, and stand up for your beliefs. But, what's commonly *called* "independence" is terribly unhealthy, and so are the ways people try to achieve it.

Independence seekers, hoping to become totally self-sufficient, become self-obsessed and anti-social. Trying not to care what anybody thinks, fighting their desire to please others, people lose social functionality. For lack of social practice, they become alienated, inflexible, and too fearful to get along with anyone. And how does that kind of "independence" work *within* a relationship? It doesn't. Never compromising? Insisting on doing your own thing? Giving the minimum? No relationship can thrive that way!

The unhealthy search for independence

The most common way to seek "healthy independence" is to try to gain strength by living on your own, till you're strong enough not to need close relationship. But that will never be. We can't be strong when our social needs are unmet, and we're starving emotionally. The popular idea of independence is as absurd as expecting a flower to grow without roots. When we try to go it alone, we wither like a rose cut from its stem. That ain't how it works!

The fact is, we *do* need close relationship. Loving intimacy delivers what solo self-work never can: fulfillment, spiritual/emotional fitness. To be hale and hearty, and *truly* independent, we need both the challenges and the nourishment we can only get up close and personal—in relationship.

How relationship supports healthy independence

How can anyone hope to get strong by avoiding healthy challenges and running away from things they "can't handle"? We need to face our demons where they rear their ugly heads: in relationship. We need the social context to build our muscles of compassion, self-transcendence, flexibility, etc. A person who runs away from the natural challenges and temptations in relationship is only exercising cowardice and neurosis. Nothing strong or strengthening about *that!* In their fearful isolation, they only grow weaker.

Sure, it takes courage to open up, be vulnerable, and let your needs be met. But since that's what it takes to be wholesome, positive, and strong, why not take it like a real man or woman? Let yourself be loved—and love *back*. Then, like the child who is well-loved and happily independent, you can sally forth boldly into the world, live an adventurous life, without having to call home every minute—yet having a home to call.

Love is the basis for healthy independence

Love inspires us to be independent. We cultivate strength, integrity, and responsibility because our loved ones need that from us. We learn to stand up for what's right in the face of opposition because we care. For love's sake, we take emotional risks and grow stronger and bolder. Love is the best reason for independence and dependence, because life and love depend on both.