

Ask Your Therapist

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Blessing Our Ancestors

In many of the cultures on this planet people actively appreciate and celebrate their ancestors as a way to acknowledge their own personal history and heritage. In the US we celebrate Mother's Day, Father's Day (and to some extent, Grandparent's Day). While people keep photos of deceased relatives on their alters, bureaus or mantles, it is easy for photos to become objects to be dusted rather than tools to maintain connections with the past.

For many people, Mother's Day means standing in front of a rack of cards desperately trying to find one that isn't too much of a lie: "You are the World's Best Mother" and yet one that does not just blow off the day with insensitive humor. The card is often followed by either an obligatory phone call or early dinner at Mom's favorite restaurant.

Why is this holiday so awkward and painful? Perhaps it is because we forget to express gratitude to our mothers and other ancestors on a daily basis and try to do all the yearly appreciation in one small day! Perhaps it is also because we allow ourselves to focus more on the faults of our ancestors and less on giving thanks for the very lives that were given to us by these imperfect people of the past. Perhaps we are missing pieces of their stories of triumph and failure that would make them more human to us. Perhaps we have an inflated sense of our own value and have not yet gained the humility of aging. Or perhaps we have not yet learned one of the secrets of Life - Forgive others and your burden will be made lighter.

Just as each day of our lives has brought us to today, each relative has made us who we genetically are today. Much of who are and what we are is "hard wired" by our genetics. So much of our likes and dislikes, interests, talents and skills, hope and dreams are in our DNA. Studies of twins separated at birth have proven over and over again that much of what we experience as our unique self is actually a unique composite handed down to us from our ancestors. Ask someone who was adopted and does not know their history and they will tell you how difficult it is to have a strong sense of self without this information.

In some cultures the birthday of the child is celebrated by honoring the mother. This makes sense for Mothers are the vehicle of Life for us all.

So when Mother's Day arrives, why not say something direct and true and grateful to your mother who gave you birth or who raised you? There may very well be other sides to your relationship with your mother but just for this one day, practice focusing on the positive and see what happens!

To read all the prior Ask Your Therapist columns go to www.krishnabai.com where you can also send Krishnabai a general question for her column.

Krishnabai, MSW is a therapist in Ashby and Wellesley Hills where she sees adults, older teens and couples. The core of her work is the discovery and expression of the Authentic Self. She focuses on the identification, expression, and resolution of emotions, commitment to honesty and the use of remedial education and information. The Ashby Center for Counseling 978-827-1181.