

## Unappreciateditis by Rich Norman

Unappreciateditis is a word I coined a few decades back, meaning quite literally: A pathological condition characterized by a swollen and inflamed sense of being unappreciated. As a jazz musician in this day and age I was the exemplar of the condition par excellence. I had it bad, and that was not in any way good. As a musician, I quelled and quenched my thirst for appreciation with applause and the sheer adulation of the crowd. A straight fix of the strong stuff for a bad case of the disease.

Today, unappreciateditis is about as common as debt. No one is immune. In truth, to appreciate, to give praise for good work is a sign of superior strength, and indeed, this behavior is rare. Few give praise, and in fact, the better the work the more likely it will receive naught. How threatening! The very act of appreciation is a sign of strength, and few possess enough inner courage to pull it off. Most fear providing appreciation as if the compliment, however well deserved, was not praise for another, but an insult addressed to themselves. To praise, requires self-security, and we are all so very insecure ourselves that we who praise the least, require it the most! There is a reason for this conundrum, this runaway epidemic of unappreciateditis, and it is not from the causes you may suspect. It seems to be a disease sprung from the empty fount of one's fellow man, the empty well-spring of praise, this essential essence, this human kindness which is true appreciation for labor rightly spent seems but an impossible fruit perched upon an unkind branch, the olive held from reach, the gift, but an empty wind, a burnt wind where no voice but heat and reproach, emptiness and arid sun find but parched earth—the sky finds noontime heat and our cracked heart of leather and pain unquenched—for rain we look to the sky... we look without for rain, to our broken comrades, as if their broken empty strength might understand and fill us, as if those too tender to fill their own cup might yet fill our own. So foolish are we in our guilt, and the emptiness that it brings.

You see, the idea is a fake—the idea it all revolves around... *conditional regard*—this idea, so horrid a crippling, is a guilty fake. There are specific brain circuits, certain sympathetic and parasympathetic limbic circuits and others which enact the eventual physiological manifestation of the proposition at the heart of this curse—guilt. We have consigned in no uncertain terms, consigned and resigned our very happiness over to this guilty condition: if we are to feel good, if we are to engage the pleasure circuitry and tap the energetic stores of the mind and be healthy and happy, we must have the approval of another, and meet an external standard. Our very pleasure centers, the energy of thought and sublimation, the happiness and height we all deserve are not in our hands, but are a fact based upon external approval! And look at how refusing, weak, and simply unable to meet these demands those unhappy chosen few are, who we have so childishly placed in charge of our conditional happiness! Who could possibly be less well equipped? No wonder we are all sick with unappreciation!

So perhaps you can see the answer? If one can remove the guilt, then, all the world is changed. Know it: Conditional regard means pleasing one, and only one person: Yourself. Then, the pleasure centers and energetic stores of our mind might be accessed at will, anytime *you* wish, not as a matter of conditional regard, and all the world might

be made bright again. I have done it, found out how, but I will not burden you with that here...go to my journal or write if you need this revealed—no I will not put the weight of this thing upon you, for that would be unfair. I will show you the result instead—for all know and have the "true world" within them—a world unsullied and unspoiled by the empty need and scratching hunger of wishes forever unmet, and pains forever unsolved. The answer is more simple than the question, for we were all free once, and only late learned to sicken ourselves, make ourselves empty before hope...and wait—for another to allow it—allow our happiness. It can be otherwise... again. Here—look:

Awake at dawn's first whisper, her red and white pulse a fever yet unbroken, the time fresh before knowing, I crept up toward the sunken sky, now filling and glowing, a promise wet, ripe with dew unspent, a golden bead stretches its round silver skin and sips in the new light...hungry then filled, swollen and jeweled is the liquid heart, once cooled in dawn's silent promise—now round and warm, a drop of dew as the day itself, an empty place into which light might fall. So gentle is the footfall, the silent sun poured up, across her tender back, within the cup of her arch, the day receiving and welcoming itself, a jewel spread open before and into itself, again alight with silent song, light as song, pouring melody over the rocks below, sweeping the tender heart of the day aloft, the river below, the upturned sky painted as fresh glass, ice soaked damp with rose blood—so warm and frigid is the day! Pure and becoming, ever reaching and filling, the cold ink above and the first warm golden drops of honey, poured light as soft glass spreading, stretching and clear is her heart of sun and hope, pouring upward, spilling herself carelessly, sweet and unafraid, unhurried and unaware, as a bashful child spills milk and laughs, as laughter rises to fill silence, so does she pour herself into the heavens, and sweep ever downward, as light fills all hollow cold places and finds them painted bright—a new whisper, familiar and aged, a new name traced in silhouette, a shadow twice warm with melody, so has light cast the true world within this place, within and so, without is our world—a world now and forever perfect—an old prayer of childish happiness spent from new lips, uncreased, unknowing of the fact, and so, we are all as children, dreaming and dreamt again and anew, forever right and laughing, as a child wrapped in light, innocent and warm, a new name which gathers all the world before each day, and spills itself out—unafraid and laughing. This is my prayer for you—an atheist prayer from a childish man, who wishes you lightness, and the guiltless laughter—of an aged child.

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