



TOUCHSTONES

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

May 2021

Acceptance

Wisdom Story



Deconstructing the Third Principle:
Our third principle, “acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations” appears to be two principles: “acceptance of one another” and “encouragement to spiritual growth.” Further, the principle is limited by the phrase “in our congregations?” It is doubtful that we are being counseled to only accept those within our congregations. That would be the worst kind of tribalism. And spiritual growth is an urgent necessity for all humanity.

Introduction to the Theme

A Continuum of Response: The word “accept” comes from the Old French and means to “take what is offered.” The Latin root *acceptare* means to “take or receive willingly.” Acceptance involves give and take, both literally (e.g., I offer acceptance and you receive it) and symbolically (i.e., there must be flexibility in the interaction). Acceptance is a transactional virtue along a relational continuum that moves from hostility/rejection/intolerance, and ignoring to tolerance, acceptance, respect/esteem, love, and unconditional love.



“Acceptance of one another” is a corollary to our first principle: “the inherent worth and dignity of every person,” and a natural extension of our historical commitment to tolerance. By contrast, “encouragement to spiritual growth” was a riskier proposition within Unitarian Universalism in the mid-1980s

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Accepting Change?

compiled by Margaret Silf, from an unknown source, adapted and expanded

There once was an old Chinese farmer who had one son and a horse. His wife had died many years ago when his son was a baby. The farm was quite small, but they grew enough food to get by. The farm was located in a valley north of the famous Yellow Mountain in Anhui (anway) Province in southern China.



One day, the farmer’s horse broke through the small corral on the farm and went galloping off in the direction of the nearby hills that led toward the Yellow Mountain.

The farmer’s neighbors felt sorry for the farmer, for a horse was very valuable to every farmer. “What very bad luck to have lost your horse,” they said. “Why do you say that?” asked the old farmer. “Who knows if it is bad luck?”

And sure enough, the very next night the horse returned, and behind him came twelve wild horses, which he had led back home with him. The farmer’s son quickly closed the gate of the small corral, and instead of one horse, they now had thirteen.

The neighbors stared into the corral the next morning and said, “What extraordinary good luck—to have thirteen

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Acceptance & Deepening Connections

Acceptance is a prerequisite for deepening connections. Without it, relationships are superficial, occasionally antagonistic, and sometimes pointless. A lack of acceptance creates distance, stress, less cooperation, impaired communication, and misunderstandings. Yet acceptance is not easy. Part of the challenge is accepting others as they are, and not as we want them to be. Another element is accepting differences that can challenge understanding, like race and culture. Acceptance, however, can be enriching and synergistic. Often, it is through accepting others and their differences that we come to better know ourselves. The opposite of acceptance is fear: fear of the other, of difference, of change, of loss of control, and so much more. Accepting others and life, allows us to engage and go deeper.

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Deepening Connections

Bad Luck/Good Luck

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horses!"

"Why do you say that?" the old farmer replied. "Who is to say whether it is good luck?"

The farmer and his son went to the village and purchased enough wooden

posts and rails to enlarge the corral because the horses did not have enough room. They also had to buy more hay to keep all of the horses well-fed. It took a full week of hard



work to make the corral larger.

Once this was done, the old farmer's son went out riding on one of the new horses. But the horse was still wild, and it threw him off its back. He fell to the ground and broke his leg. The farmer took his son to the doctor who lived in the nearby village. The doctor put a splint on the young man's leg and gave him a pair of crutches so he could get around.

The neighbors visited the old farmer to commiserate. "What very bad luck," they said, "that your son has broken his leg."

"Why do you say that?" the old farmer asked them. "Who is to say whether it is bad luck?"

And indeed, a short while later, the Emperor's militia came, forcing all of the able-bodied young men in the village and the surrounding farms to go to fight in the war, where many of them would probably lose their lives. But when they saw the old farmer's son bent over on his crutches with a broken leg, they passed him by and went on their way.

"How lucky you are," the neighbors said.

Given so many changes, all the old farmer could do was smile, and accept once again what had happened.

Source: Silf, Margaret, compiler. *One Hundred Wisdom Stories*. England: Lion Publishing plc, Oxford, 2003.

It Might Have Been Otherwise

Otherwise

Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland

I "met" Donald Hall long ago when I purchased the second edition of his book, *To Read a Poem*. A primer on poetry with a diverse anthology, it has occupied a place on one of my bookshelves for more than 20 years. I don't think I "met" his wife, Jane Kenyon, until I read her poem, *Otherwise*, some years later.



Hall wrote in 2005,

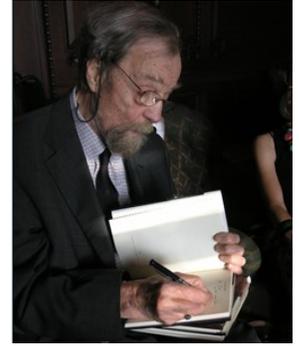
"Jane Kenyon and I were married for twenty-three years. For two decades we inhabited the double solitude of my family farmhouse [called Eagle Pond Farm] in New Hampshire, writing poems, loving the countryside. She was forty-seven when she died." In reflecting on their life together, Hall wrote, "...we lived in the house of poetry, which was also the house of love and grief; the house of solitude and art; the house of Jane's depression and my cancers and Jane's leukemia."

While Hall was much better known and more widely published, Kenyon continued to develop her craft. During her bout with leukemia for the last fifteen months of her life, Kenyon continued to write poetry and assembled her last anthology, entitled *Otherwise*. It included 20 of her more recent poems and a selection of older poems from her first four books. She was quite discerning about what she considered good enough to be included.

A portion of her poetry dealt with her battle with depression through much of her adult life. Other common themes were domestic and rural life. Gary Roberts noted that her poetry was "acutely faithful to the familiarities and mysteries of home life, and it is distinguished by intense calmness in the face of routine disappointments and tragedies."

In 1995, Kenyon was named poet laureate of New Hampshire; she died later that year from leukemia, on April 22. Near the end of her life, Hall struggled

to write a poem to capture the whirlwind of emotions that Kenton and he faced. Hall wrote, "Poetry embodies the complexities of feeling at their most intense and entangled, and therefore offers (over centuries, or over no time at all) the company of tears. As I sat



beside Jane in her pain and weakness, I wrote about pain and weakness. Once in a hospital, I noticed that the leaves were turning. I realized that I had not noticed that they had come to the trees. It was a year without seasons, a year without punctuation. I began to write *Without* to embody the sensations of lives under dreary, monotonous assault. After I had drafted it many times, I read it aloud to Jane. 'That's it, Perkins,' she said. 'You've got it. That's it.' Even in this poem written at her mortal bedside there was companionship." Following are a few lines from his poem.

*we live in a small island stone nation
without color under gray clouds and wind
distant the unlimited ocean acute
lymphoblastic leukemia without seagulls
...
hours days weeks months weeks days hours
the year endures without punctuation
...
no spring no summer no autumn no winter
...
the body is a nation a tribe dug into stone
assaulted white blood broken to fragments
...
pain vomit neuropathy morphine nightmare
confusion terror the rack the screw
...
loss of memory loss of language losses
...
and how are you doing today....*

Kenyon's anthology, *Otherwise: New and Selected Poems*, was published a year

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Readings from the Common Bowl



Day 1: "Listening is a form of accepting."
Stella Terrill Mann

Day 2: "It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it." Aristotle

Day 3: "No person is your friend who demands your silence, or denies your right to grow." Alice Walker

Day 4: "It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."
Audre Lorde

Day 5: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."
Reinhold Niebuhr

Day 6: "For after all, the best thing one can do when it is raining is let it rain."
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Day 7: "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope."
Martin Luther King Jr.

Day 8: "I have accepted fear as part of life – specifically the fear of change... I have gone ahead despite the pounding in the heart that says: turn back...." Erica Jong

Day 9: "A friend is one to whom one may pour out the contents of one's heart, chaff and grain together, knowing that gentle hands will take and sift it, keep what is worth keeping, and with a breath of kindness, blow the rest away." George Eliot

Day 10: "People have a habit of inventing fictions they will believe wholeheartedly in order to ignore the truth they cannot accept." Libba Bray

Day 11: "I learned that accepting others and accepting myself are two sides of the same coin; you can't love and accept yourself without doing the same for others."
Steve Pavlina

Day 12: "Beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world." bell hooks

Day 13: "You are imperfect, permanently and inevitably flawed. And you are beautiful." Amy Bloom

Day 14: "The trance of unworthiness keeps the sweetness of belonging out of reach. The path to 'the sweetness of belonging,' is acceptance—acceptance of ourselves and acceptance of others without judgment." Tara Brach

Day 15: "The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change." Carl Rogers

Day 16: "I want there to be a place in the world where people can engage in one another's differences in a way that is redemptive, full of hope and possibility."
bell hooks

Day 17: "It was strange how your brain could know what your heart refused to accept." J.K. Rowling

Day 18: "Thank you for accepting me as I am, with my virtues and defects."
Jenni Rivera

Day 19: "Art teaches something we all need to learn, especially about people who are different from ourselves: 'To see things the way they truly are, sometimes you have to look more deeply.'" Ron Hall

Day 20: "When we look at things differently, things look different."
Toni Sorenson

Day 21: "All blame is a waste of time. No matter how much fault you find with another, it will not change you." Wayne Dyer

Day 22: "Accepting others' life choices is something most people only learn with age." Neil Strauss

Day 23: "May I befriend the unwanted parts of myself and continually learn wisdom from them." Joyce Rupp

Day 24: "To go through life wanting to be

someone else must be a terrible burden. It is hard enough just learning to be myself."
Joan Chittister

Day 25: "What is essential is invisible to the eye. It is only with the heart that one sees rightly." Antoine de St Exupéry

Day 26: "If you travel far enough, one day you will recognize yourself coming down the road to meet yourself. And you will say—YES." Marion Woodman

Day 27: "So long as you are still worried about what others think of you, you are

owned by them. Only when you require no approval from outside yourself can you own yourself."
Neale Donald Walsch

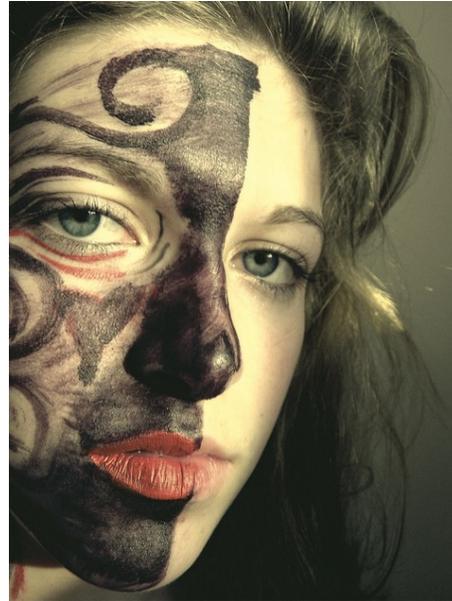
Day 28: "If you are going to judge others it is wisest to do so individually not collectively and on your own direct experience of them personally. But first—and throughout—examine yourself closely. Blurred vision can often occur due to the lens, perspective, and perceptions of the

viewer projected onto the object that it sees. Be wary of taking to the judge's seat. Above all, treat yourself and everyone else mindfully, compassionately with humanity." Rasheed Ogunlaru

Day 29: "Solitude is essentially the discovery and acceptance of our uniqueness."
Lawrence Freeman

Day 30: "Most advice regarding acceptance involves accepting oneself. This ignores the reality that our ability to accept others, especially those who are very different from us, makes it possible to accept what we previously rejected within ourselves." Kirk Loadman-Copeland

Day 31: "Our job on earth isn't to criticize, reject, or judge. Our purpose is to offer a helping hand, compassion, and mercy. We are to do unto others as we hope they would do unto us." Dana Arcuri





Faith and Theology

Radical Acceptance

Rev. David Morris

...The Buddhist idea of Radical Acceptance in Tara Brach's words, ...means "accepting absolutely everything about ourselves and our lives, by embracing with wakefulness and care our moment-to-moment experience." She goes on to say: "It means feeling sorrow and pain without resisting. It means feeling desire or dislike for someone or something without judging ourselves for the feeling or being driven to act on it."

In Buddhist practice, Radical Acceptance has two components: First, mindfulness that allows us to become fully aware of what is happening around us and within us in any given moment; second, compassion that holds the present-moment experience in a tender and caring embrace.

The beginning of this practice is inward. The promise of it is that it frees us to act—whether in our own life or on the larger stage of the world—in a way that is not driven by anger, bitterness, or the desire to punish, but rather by compassion, by insight, and from our wisest self.

It can be a challenging thought for a practically-minded people. What does radical acceptance look like when you're lying in bed next to the cold empty space where your beloved lay before the illness took her? What does it look like when there's suddenly no job to go to, or when the storm has flooded your house? What does it mean to radically accept that I may not be able to live as I choose much longer, as my health or the changes that come with age rob me of the strength to care for myself independently? What does radical acceptance look like when I or someone I love has sustained some catastrophic hurt? What about when someone has harmed me—or when I have hurt someone I love? What does radical acceptance look like when I turn to the wider world and I'm confronted by the immense injustices of racism, of homophobia, of massive inequalities of wealth? What good does it do?

These everyday situations of

suffering test the idea that simply "accepting what is" will somehow bring an end to the suffering that seems so real and present. We

want something powerful, something practical, something that will *change* the situation. Yet outrage and rejection are not empowering; refusing to accept that things are what they are tends to induce paralysis—or lead to actions that make the situation worse. When we remain in the experience of the situation just as it is, Tara Brach says, "something begins to happen—we feel freer, options open before us, we see with more clarity how we want to proceed. Radical Acceptance helps us to heal and move on.... [It] acknowledges our own experience in this moment as the first step in wise action."

What would it be like, then, in any moment of struggle, to accept this moment as it is? It would mean taking a deeper look: What is really going on, right now? What chain of circumstance and choices led to this moment? What desire, or pain, or fear, or longing is driving my own feelings? What desire or pain, fear or longing is driving others in this situation? What part have I played in bringing this moment about? Where is my true agency, my capacity to affect this situation? Can I hold all of this with loving care? And now, only now, what might I do next?

It's useful at this point to remind ourselves that Radical Acceptance is a *practice*, not a tool that can be picked up and used successfully in any situation without effort or experience. ...Try out the practice on some modest, relatively neutral situations before turning to some traumatic, life-altering event.

...What might your practice moments be? Whatever they are, may we each and all grow in our capacity to hold ourselves and our world in compassionate awareness, as we seek the loving actions that will bring healing and joy to ourselves and to our world.

Everything that happens in your life is a gift. Some of them, we might prefer to give back—yet this is our one and precious life, every single moment of it, in joy and in sorrow, in hope and in loss, in celebration and in mourning. Source:

Everything Is a Gift, Rev. David A. Morris

Radical Acceptance

The Sacred Art of Pausing

Tara Brach

Learning to pause is the first step in the practice of Radical Acceptance. A pause is a suspension of activity, a time of temporary disengagement when we are no longer moving towards any goal.

...In a pause, we simply discontinue whatever we are doing—thinking, talking, walking, writing, planning, worrying, eating—and become wholeheartedly present, attentive and, often, physically still.

A pause is, by nature, time limited. We resume our activities, but we do so with increased presence and more ability to make choices. ...By disrupting our habitual behaviors, we open to the possibility of new and creative ways of responding to our wants and fears.

Of course, here are times when it is not appropriate to pause. ...But much of our driven pace and habitual controlling in daily life does not serve surviving, and certainly not thriving.

...We can continue our futile attempts at managing our experience, or we can meet our vulnerability with the wisdom of Radical Acceptance.

Often the moment when we most need to pause is exactly when it feels most intolerable to do so. ...We fear we might be engulfed by the rawness of our rage or grief or desire. Yet without opening to the actual experience of the moment, Radical Acceptance is not possible.



Through the sacred art of pausing, we develop the capacity to stop hiding, to stop running away from our experience. We begin to trust in our natural intelligence, in our naturally wise heart, in our capacity to open to whatever arises. Like awakening from a dream, in the moment of pausing, our trance recedes and Radical Acceptance becomes possible.

Source: <https://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=2231>

Family Matters

Jane Kenyon's Husband

Becoming Real

Margery Williams Bianco

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

Source: Williams, Margery. *The Velveteen Rabbit: or how toys become real*. Doubleday, New York, 1958.



expansive environment. But it was too late. The tiger immediately sought refuge in a corner of the compound,



where she lived for the remainder of her life. Mohini paced and paced in that corner until an area twelve by twelve feet was worn bare of grass. [She couldn't accept the possibility of greater freedom.]

Source: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tara-brach/acceptance_b_1852641.html

Family Activity:

Walk in These Shoes

Go to a second-hand clothing store and buy some interesting-looking shoes. The more interesting the better. It may also be helpful to make sure that you give a boy a woman's pair of shoes, and a girl a man's pair of shoes. One pair for everyone in the family.

Hand out the shoes and then ask, "If these were your shoes, who would you be?" Invite everyone to make up a story and then share it. How would each person be different if they liked these shoes? Would it be easy or hard to accept the person they became because of the shoes?

This photo of shoes is from the Heidelberg Project, an outdoor art project in Detroit created in 1986 by Tyree Guyton and his



grandfather, Sam Mackey, near the city's historically African-American Black Bottom area to protest the aftermath of the 1967 riots.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heidelberg_Project

(Continued from page 2) **Otherwise**

after her death, and by 2005 it had sold 70,000 copies.

Hall writes, "Two years after her death, a review of Jane began with a sentence I had been expecting. It was uttered in respect, without a sneer, and said that for years we had known of Jane Kenyon as Donald Hall's wife but from now on we will know of Donald Hall as Jane Kenyon's husband."



I don't know exactly when Kenyon wrote her poem, *Otherwise*. Was it before the diagnosis of leukemia or sometime after it? What I do know is that she understood the necessity of acceptance. Kenyon wrote,

*I got out of bed
on two strong legs.
It might have been
otherwise. I ate
cereal, sweet
milk, ripe, flawless
peach. It might
have been otherwise.
I took the dog uphill
to the birch wood.
All morning I did
the work I love.*

*At noon I lay down
with my mate. It might
have been otherwise.
We ate dinner together
at a table with silver
candlesticks. It might
have been otherwise.*

*I slept in a bed
in a room with paintings
on the walls, and
planned another day
just like this day.
But one day, I know,
it will be otherwise.*

Although denial is often easier, it does not serve us well. Accepting what is allows us to meet each moment with courage and hope.

Source: *Touchstones*

Unable to Accept Freedom

Tara Brach

Mohini was a regal white tiger who lived for many years at the Washington, D.C. National Zoo. For most of those years her home was in the old lion house—a typical 12-by-12-foot cage with iron bars and a cement floor. Mohini spent her days pacing restlessly back and forth in her cramped quarters. Eventually, biologists and staff worked together to create a natural habitat for her. Covering several acres, it had hills, trees, a pond and a variety of vegetation. With excitement and anticipation they released Mohini into her new and

Come as You Are & Expect to Grow

(Continued from page 1) Introduction

when the *Principles and Purposes* were being developed. By the early 1950s, we were deeply immersed in religious humanism, and its commitment to a rational approach to religion, one that did not value intuition or spirituality. The word “spirituality” did not appear in the original principles adopted in 1961, but neither did the word “reason.” “Reason” now appears in the sixth source. For some people, reason is incompatible with spirituality. For others, they are considered complementary and are both highly valued.

Come As You Are: Unitarian Universalist G. Peter Fleck published a book of reflections in 1993 entitled, *Come as You Are*. The inspiration for the title came from the sign outside the Universalist Meeting House in Provincetown on Cape Cod that listed the upcoming sermon. At the top of the sign were the words, “Come as you are.” In keeping with life on Cape Cod, the words meant that one did not have to dress up to attend the worship service. For Fleck, the words could “be given a deeper meaning, a cosmic meaning; We do not live in a judging universe, in which we may ultimately be weighed and found wanting, but in an accepting universe, a universe that welcomes us as we are....” He called it good Universalist theology.

And Expect to Grow: Actually, the Unitarian Universalist invitation is to “come as you are” and “expect to grow.” It is in this understanding that the two parts of the third principle unite. While newcomers find the freedom of belief offered by Unitarian Universalism to be liberating, many tend to focus on the “freedom from” that they have discovered, rather than the “freedom for,” which is necessary for spiritual growth. As one person observed, “Acceptance affirms people as they are, and encouragement to spiritual growth propels them toward who they might become.”

A Negative Bias: Our societal focus on self-acceptance is a terrible judgment on

the ways in which have been collectively raised. Too often, negative messages far outweigh positive messages, sometimes by a factor of five to one. This should not be surprising given Western culture’s roots in the Christian concept of original sin and the message that humanity is terribly flawed. Developmental psychologist Marilyn Price-Mitchell observes, “... children’s inner voices are particularly negative, usually driven by doubt, fear, and shame.” These inner voices from childhood are alive and well in adults, which is why interactions can be undermined by negative messages. Psychologist Daniel Kahneman, a leader in the field of judgment, notes the each day we experience approximately 20,000 moments. The quality of our days and our life depends on the accumulation of positive moments.

Reclaiming Self: Carl Jung spoke of the shadow side of our personality. He believed that this is where we “hid” all of the negative perceptions about our self, even though most of these are not objectively negative. The task of integration was to incorporate the shadow side into the self, which led to wholeness.

Parker Palmer, author of *A Hidden Wholeness*, wrote, “live behind a wall long enough, and the true self you tried to hide from the world disappears from your own view! The wall itself and the world outside it become all that you know. Eventually, you even forget that the wall is there—and that hidden behind it is someone called ‘you.’” Self-acceptance cultivates the self-awareness necessary to take acceptance beyond the self.

From Self to Other: Self-acceptance is significant, but not sufficient. Acceptance of others is the other part of the equation. A fact of the modern world is diversity. Many flee diversity by dwelling in homogenous bubbles (i.e., family, race, culture, class, religion, political affiliation, tribe, and more) that appear to provide a defense against the “other.” Often the perceived similarities are superficial. Scratch the surface and differences ap-

pear. A Unitarian Universalist congregation can be such a bubble, but a rich diversity exists beneath the surface. We will not find it unless we choose to uncover it through authentic dialogue and the sharing of the stories that reveal our life experiences with rich similarities and striking and enlightening differences with others. The challenge is that acceptance, even if it is provisional, precedes effective engagement. While we may think that an open mind will foster acceptance, the truth is that it is far more a matter of an open heart.

Exclusion, Assimilation & Pluralism: From a historical perspective, exclusion, assimilation, and pluralism have been ways of engaging diversity. Through exclusion, Native Americans were confined to reservations, slaves on plantation, and immigrants in ghettos with rules that controlled engagement and maintained social barricades. Assimilation could be barbaric as symbolized by the Indian Boarding Schools in America in the 19th and 20th centuries. Softer assimilation was symbolized by the American concept of the melting pot, which required “melting/melding” into the dominant Anglo-Saxon identity.

Diana Eck writes, “All of America’s diversity, old and new, does not add up to pluralism. ‘Pluralism’ and ‘diversity’ are sometimes used as if they were synonymous, but diversity—splendid, colorful, and perhaps threatening—is not pluralism. Pluralism is the engagement that creates a common society from all that diversity.” Eck identifies the four pillars of pluralism. She writes,

“First, pluralism is ...*the energetic engagement with diversity*. ... Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies.

“Second, pluralism is not just tolerance, but *the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference*. Tolerance ... does nothing to remove our ignorance of one another, and leaves in place the stereotype, the half-truth, the fears that underlie old patterns of division and violence.

“Third, pluralism is not relativism, but *the encounter of commitments*. The new par-

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A Healing Presence

Things Just as They Are

Ellen Birx

As you practice acceptance, you grow in your ability to face and fully accept people, circumstances, and things just as they are. Acceptance is not a passive resignation to circumstances and situations. Acceptance is not just making the best of a bad situation. It is an active presence to life just as it is. Acceptance means not pushing away, denying, or excluding things or circumstances that you do not like. It is the process of continually dropping expectations and judgments and accepting what is. Acceptance expands your vision, acknowledging all aspects of yourself and the world. Nothing is walled off. Total acceptance connects you with everything and helps you experience wholeness.



Acceptance takes place in the present moment. You remain right here and now dealing with what is. Your energy is not going into thinking about what might have been or wishing things were different. Your energy is available to respond most effectively to the situation at hand. We generally don't have a problem accepting good

things. It is the bad things that challenge our ability to accept things as they are. Acceptance is the process of transcending good and bad, of transcending duality.

Acceptance is transformative and frees us to be a healing presence in the world.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/14013>



Namasté

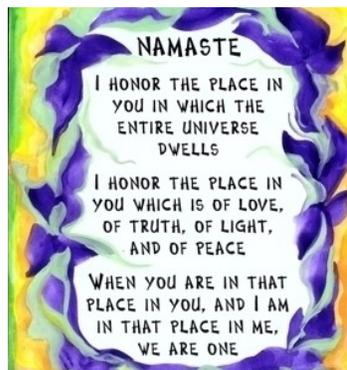
Acceptance versus Tolerance

Rev. Fred Hammond

Martin Buber wrote *I and Thou*. He describes the person who declares I as having two basic word forms, I-It and I-You or I-Thou. We experience it. Whatever that something is, it is experienced by the I. He writes, "I perceive something. I feel something. I imagine something. I think something. ...The world as experience belongs to the basic word I-It."

We do not experience You, instead I-You is in the realm of relationship. There are no boundaries, no borders to the I-You basic word form. There is a border with the I-It experience. The I-It has shape, it has definition, and it may also have a past tense. However, the I in the I-You dyad impacts upon the You only in the present, in the here and now, likewise the You impacts on the I. The I-You relationship must be dealt with; the relationship cannot be ignored or placed into the background like an I-It experience.

There is a Hindi word that also expresses this I-You relationship, *Namasté*. It has been translated in many ways from the simple "The god in me recognizes the god in you." To "I honor the place in you in which the entire Universe dwells, I honor the place in you which is of Love, of Integrity, of Wisdom, and of Peace. When you are in that place in you, and I am in that place in me, we are One." Saying *Namasté*, the person is acknowledging the I-You relationship. ...Live with an attitude of acceptance, of welcoming in people where they are instead of an atti-



tude of tolerance.

Beyond Acceptance

Any Other Questions?

Rev. Victoria Safford

People ask me sometimes, "Is this a gay church?"

It is a privilege to answer: Ours is absolutely, gladly, hopefully and humbly, gaily, a gay church, a gay tradition, where everyone, including heterosexual members and friends, is welcome, where everyone is needed, where everyone's experience is cherished as a sacred text, because no one's experience of living or loving can be comprehensive, because each of us holds clues the others need about how to live with dignity and joy as a human person, and none of us knows enough about that yet to be considered whole.

It is absolutely a gay church, even as ours is a gay world, if you would look around. Gay church, straight church, peoples' church, a human congregation made holy by the holy hopes and fears and dreams of all who wish to come. Come in, we say. Come out, come in. We're all in this together.

I will not speak of "tolerance," with its courteous clenched teeth and bitter resignation. I will not speak about "acceptance," of "other" people and some "other" kind of "lifestyle." I can only look in laughing wonder at human life in all its incarnations. I can taste only in passing the breath of the spirit of life on my mouth and understand our common longing to breathe in deep, deep gulps of it. I cannot think of being anybody else's "ally," even, because even that implies some degree of separation—some degree of safety for some of us, not all. We are "allied" with no one and with nothing but love—the larger Love transcending all our understanding, within which all the different, differing, gorgeously various, variant, beautifully deviant aspects of ourselves are bound in elegant unity.

...To answer this question, and some others, is a privilege, a prophetic imperative, a joy, a duty, and a holy sacrament.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/any-other-questions>

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion

Acceptance

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: "In trying to express only those aspects of ourselves that we believe will guarantee us the acceptance of others, we suppress some of our most valuable and interesting features and sentence ourselves to a life of reenacting the same outworn scripts. Reclaiming the parts of ourselves that we have relegated to the shadow is the most reliable path to actualizing all of our human potential. Once befriended, our shadow becomes a divine map that—when properly read and followed—reconnects us to the life we were meant to live and the people we were meant to be."
Debbie Ford

Chalice Lighting: (James Vila Blake) adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page one.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: "The first step to empathy and compassion is realizing the similarities between yourself and those that are suffering; the first step to forgiveness is realizing that we're all human and we all share the same capacity for fallibility and foible; the first step to growth is to recognize the value of things that are outside your current mental frameworks so that you can grow into them." *Oli Anderson*

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. As a child, were you valued/accepted more for who you were or for what you did? How did this impact you? How does it influence your self-acceptance today?
2. Do you feel that you are enough? If yes, how did that sense grow in you? If not, how can you reframe your sense of yourself to finally be enough and accept who you are?
3. In terms of being accepted by another person, whose acceptance has meant the most to you?
4. In terms of someone else, have you moved from a negative reaction to one of acceptance? What was the process that brought about that change?
5. What gets in the way of self-acceptance? What gets in the way of accepting others?
6. How can the practice of pluralism facilitate acceptance?

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice: (Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

Closing Words:

Rev. Philip R. Giles
(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*



Dialogue Thru Difference

(Continued from page 6) **Introduction**

adigm of pluralism ... means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another.

"Fourth, pluralism is *based on dialogue*. The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dialogue means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue does not mean everyone at the 'table' will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table—with one's commitments."

Pluralism is the practice of acceptance, which fosters spiritual growth. Let this practice begin within our congregations and ripple in circles outward into the world.

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