

Acceptance

As I have become more aware of the significance of intolerance in perpetuating disharmony in the world, I have grown more deliberate in my attempts to be more accepting in my own life. From my comfortable living room I see images of abuse, violence and injustice. To me, the perpetrators appear to be misguided in their concept of human interactions. They either cannot or will not accept others as they are and for what they believe. The results are very tragic.

Many times I have wondered why two adversaries would choose such strong measures to suppress each other. Their motives seem to always be control. In a desperate attempt to enforce their "rules" they use sickening and cruel behaviours. While women suffer some of the harshest treatment I cannot say that men are left unharmed.

Distance has allowed me to shake my head and pray for the victims of conflicts around the world. In the past, I felt that this kind of abuse occurred primarily in far away lands. I am now aware how limiting that viewpoint has been. The problem is in my country, my community and even in my own home. While behaviours may not be as outrageous, the intolerance of others, which produces violence, is very evident. It is here, in our own consciousness that the seeds of intolerance germinate and grow. Given different circumstances, perhaps my inability to accept others as they are could manifest into the horrific behaviours I quickly judge. Perhaps too, within me, lies the potential to be all that I find so intolerable.

"Tolerant" can be construed as meaning "putting up with". Putting up with something or someone can cause resentment and contempt, which are suppressed in order to "get through" a situation. My interpretation of tolerance is acceptance. It means I'm not always right and others may have a differing opinion. It means that when I see behaviours that disturb me I can ask, "What happened in their life that taught them to act this way?" For me, tolerance means compassion, love and understanding.

If I think of myself as an inconsequential speck of time and space in a vast universe then I can dismiss any feelings of shame or guilt over my intolerance of others. If I see myself as a meaningful entity here on the earth plane, then I cannot ignore the importance of my every thought, word and deed.

So how much difference does it make if I am accepting or intolerant? I do not live in a place where political or religious factions wage war on each other. I do not live in a place where thousands of women are beaten, abused or mutilated in accordance with ancient traditions. I do not live in a place where being male or female determines whether you will live or die. Or do I?

I live on earth and as long as something is happening on this planet - no matter where that is - it is happening to me. It will affect me in some way or another whether I am willing to acknowledge it or not. The fact that I am so aware of the harmful effects of intolerance has made me more curious as to what difference I can make.

In each moment of my life is there a place that I can be more tolerant, more accepting, more open-minded? Of course there is. I can stop myself from sighing heavily when a family member

begins repeating a worn out tale of unhappiness. I can catch my breath instead of being irritated when someone in front of me takes a little longer to count out their small change. I can be patient when my partner becomes frustrated over a job that isn't progressing smoothly. When a neighbour drops in unexpectedly I can choose to be appreciative of their friendship instead of annoyed by the intrusion.

Most of all, I can be tolerant of myself. And yes it does make a difference. If I can learn to accept myself as I am then I will be more accepting of others. When we are not tolerant of others it shows our dissatisfaction with ourselves. I may not be able to change the world and all the travesties of justice that occur far too often. I do believe I can make a difference by demonstrating loving compassion and acceptance of myself and others on a daily, hourly and moment by moment basis.

What a difference it would make if more people approached interactions, whether they are casual or intimate, with the foundation of knowing that within each of us lies all the perfection of the universe. We may disagree on the surface and have to negotiate new parameters but what matters is that we create harmony which ultimately brings peace.

I take this business of living seriously. When it's over, it's really over so I want to make conscious choices. One of those choices is to be grateful for every breath that keeps me alive and the subsequent benefits that come with living. Gratitude and acceptance are partners for me. Being grateful for every person, place and thing in my life makes being accepting and tolerant very natural.

So, I will try, in my own little corner of the world, to step to the rhythm of the loving universe, conscious of myself and others through the empowering act of acceptance.

Biography:

Daryl Wood has expressed herself creatively since birth through music, art and words. From her home, Healing Rock Retreat on the shores of Lake Huron in Tobermory, Ontario, she leads Women's Wisdom Retreats for women in mid-life on the edge of change.