

The Magic State of Acceptance

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This is the paradox of acceptance. What we accept, we defuse and release. What we do not accept, but fight against and resist, we give energy to so that it grows. It becomes increasingly unmanageable, and controls us. The opposite of just accepting ourselves, life, the world, others, the constraints that we face everyday, the cards life has dealt us, is the first step to true mastery and empowerment. It is the first step, not the last.

The lack of acceptance leaves us unable to face reality. It undermines our ability to cope with the basic facts of what is. When we don't accept something, we are rejecting, denying, repressing, and fighting. We pump our brains full of thoughts about non- acceptance. We do so with unrealistic expectations, impossible desires, and erroneous understandings that set us up for refusing to face things.

Acceptance is not resignation. Resignation refers to giving up or giving in. In resignation a person lies down and takes it. That's not acceptance. Acceptance welcomes into mind and life with the purpose of effectively responding to it. In this, acceptance is not complacency or passivity, and it does not indicate the lack of high standards. Again, Dr. Joseph Dunn on this subject:

“Acceptance is usually the initial step and a critical one, in any psychological condition or symptom. Dealing effectively with depression, anxiety, conflict, or destructive habits begins with acceptance. Often the most difficult part of therapy is struggling with resistance to face reality.”

The lack of acceptance drives perfectionism. Conversely, acceptance of what is conquers perfectionism and other forms of mental and emotional intolerance. In the real world we find all kinds of ambiguities. We don't have neat categories of black-or-white compartments.

Acceptance is critical for relationships because without it, we go about trying to change the other. And that interferes with allowing each person to take responsibility for changing. Acceptance enables us to suspend our defenses and judgments that interfere with accurate perceptions. Relationally, the ability to live with differences depends upon acceptance.

Forgiveness is an acceptance grace. It enables us to come to terms with major hurts that we cannot just dismiss. Acceptance enables humor and laughter. Humorist Woody Allen illustrates the power of humor in acceptance, “I wasn't born a good looking kid, I didn't acquire these looks until later in life.” As part of the art of acceptance, humor, as a way to gain psychological distance, enables us to laugh things off.

We can accept without endorsing. We can accept a person without approving of everything that person thinks, feels, or says. Acceptance is part of contentment. Learning to accept life circumstances while fixing our eyes on values that have true meaning is essential for living a contented and peaceful life. Releasing what we cannot control makes for acceptance.