

## What is Acceptance?

By Don Oakley, 2018

When we say the term “acceptance,” it really implies that we're trying to be okay with something that doesn't feel okay, and we're trying to be accepting of it. Often when we use this term in our spiritual search, it's about things that we feel are almost built into who we are. But things that are built into who we are, are learned behaviours. They're not things that we were born with. So, one of the first things to recognize is that things that we're trying to accept about ourselves are things that we've picked up along the way, and normally in childhood, innocently. There's no blame or shame here. There's just the recognition: “Yes, along the way I was conditioned in a way that I am no longer comfortable with and I'm trying to be accepting of that fact.”

There's a couple of other things to recognize about acceptance. (1) Being able to notice things about ourselves that we're not comfortable with is a huge advantage. There are a lot of people that go through life that never recognize their shortcomings. Recognition is actually the first step. So, rather than regretting what we see, we can be grateful for seeing at all. That part of us which sees our behaviour is not the behaviour. (2) Acceptance doesn't mean that we must like what we see. You may have read self-help books advising “loving yourself.” That's fine, but what we're talking about here are particular modes of behaviour and conditioning and we don't have to like them. In fact, the reason that they're problematic in the first place is because we don't like them and that's fine. It's okay to recognize what's working and what's not.

Rather than labelling our behaviour in dualistic terms like, “good and bad,” or, “right and wrong,” we can just see that it's not a skilful behaviour. That takes the charge out of it. It's not a behaviour that works well for what we want to be, how we want to relate to others, how we want to be in the world. It's just having the simple recognition that a behaviour, which may have been created in our childhood as a reaction, or as a safety mechanism, and that may have been necessary, or we thought it to be at that time, doesn't work well anymore.

Again, it's not having to like the behaviour; it's not having to love it. That's not really what acceptance means. Acceptance is really the willingness to look at the behaviour, the willingness to allow it to be, to allow it to arise in our consciousness and see the light of day. And that's really the transformative effect of consciousness: allowing things to be seen clearly, without judgment, guilt, or shame. That's what acceptance is: to allow things about ourselves, or events in our lives, to arise into consciousness without judgment or blame, without making it right or wrong; allowing it to be and seeing it clearly as it is.

This simple *allowing* of these types of behaviours that no longer serve what we want – that simple awareness, consciousness – is transformative. This does not mean, of course, that we should wallow in dis-functional behaviours. We just have to *allow* them to be and be seen by our own consciousness. That's the transformative quality of acceptance.