



EXPLORATION

Acceptance

Readings



1. *Some Considerations Regarding Accepting Others*

by Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland

- ◆ Assume goodwill. Little is possible without this.
- ◆ Refrain from making premature judgments, especially those regarding physical attributes. It is reported that “55% of first impressions are made by what we see (visual); 38% based on a person’s voice (vocal); and 7% on the actual words said (verbal). It takes less than 1/10th of a second to form an assessment of someone’s face, and just seven seconds to assemble a first impression based upon a simplistic initial assessment. “A first impression could be misleading,” says professor Alexander Todorov, author of *Face Value: The Irresistible Influence of First Impressions* and an academic at Princeton University. “Trying to figure out what a person is like from a simple exposure is basically ridiculous. We only make first impressions about strangers. So, naturally, they are superficial.” See his video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_vbCzWnpEk (7:49)
- ◆ Pay attention to thoughts that arise. Implicit biases, prejudices, and hidden assumptions, while difficult to recognize, are revealing because they are more about you and not about the other person.
- ◆ Engage him/her as a unique individual rather than a member of a

group with all of the misleading generalities/stereotypes that are attached to a group.

- ◆ Seek to learn her/his story because it will reveal the complexity of the person as it reveals similarities and differences. The story humanizes a person and discloses who a person is and why. As M. Scott Peck suggested, look at the person with the soft eyes of respect rather than the hard eyes of judgement.
- ◆ Be open to how the other person is different from you without judging those differences as good or bad. Ironically, when we view someone as being similar to us, that may be a conclusion based on information which is superficial and/or grounded in cognitive biases. An example is the “false consensus effect” which is the “tendency for individuals to overestimate the level at which other people share their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.”
- ◆ As Steven Covey said, “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” He taught that this requires empathetic listening. According to John Hester, “Stephen Covey described empathic listening as, ‘Reflecting what a person feels and says in your own words to their satisfaction so they feel listened to and understood.’ It means listening with your whole being—ears, eyes and heart.” For an explanation of emphatic listening, see the first 2:28 minutes of this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i98FAsHydIE> (4:28) Emphatic listening is a skill since our listening is often driven by agendas of which we are not aware. As Covey noted, there are four typical responses when we listen to someone: probing, evaluating, advising, and interpreting. Covey wrote, “The essence of empathic listening is not that you agree with

someone; it’s that you fully, deeply, understand that person, emotionally as well as intellectually.”

- ◆ Replace the tendency to agree or disagree with the goal of seeking to understand. To seek understanding, ask thoughtful, open-ended questions. Then attempt, as Covey counsels, to respond by paraphrasing what you “heard” a person said to make sure your understanding is correct.
- ◆ Acceptance of a person does not mean acceptance of the entire person. Fundamentally, it means acceptance of the essence of the person, which is acknowledgement of their inherent worth and dignity. This is the basis for civility, and not an uncritical acceptance of their beliefs and behavior. To place this in context, read the poem, *A Word on Statistics*, by Wislawa Szymborska at <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/149909/a-word-on-statistics>, which provides one accounting of human nature.
- ◆ Become fluent in the skills of difficult conversations. There are many resources about these. See, as an example, <https://www.judyringer.com/resources/articles/we-have-to-talk-a-stepbystep-checklist-for-difficult-conversations.php>.
- ◆ Agreeing to Disagree: Consider whether you need to state that you disagree, or to remain silent. Disagreeing is really Covey’s second part of the equation: to be understood. Then, rather than disagreeing, simply share your truths affirmatively, untethered to the other person’s truths. The other person can decide whether you are disagreeing or offering another perspective worthy of their consideration.
- ◆ Explore the Aspen Hypothesis: we are all part of the same root system. Seek similarities as you seek to understand differences. If we are



connected, what connection can you find?

Source: Touchstones

2. *Skillful Acceptance*

by Jill Suttie

A new study suggests that practicing acceptance helps reduce our stress more than simple mindful awareness.

...Why might acceptance be important? Emily Lindsay argues that when people accept difficult experiences (like stress), it allows the experiences to “run their course and dissipate,” while resisting them only makes them stronger. And, she adds, accepting stress helps people to stop focusing only on what’s wrong and to notice *other* feelings, sensations, and thoughts occurring at the same time, enabling them to see the “bigger picture.”

“Stress diminishes as you take in more of your experience,” she says. “That’s the transformative part.”

Acceptance is not about acquiescing to your fate, though, says Lindsay—like getting a diagnosis of a terminal illness and just accepting that you’re going to die. That kind of “acceptance” leads to worse outcomes, she says. Nor is it about accepting poor treatment from other people. It’s more about accepting your *internal* experience—your thoughts and feelings—which informs you about how to respond to your *external* circumstances in a wiser way. For example, if you feel angry and accept your anger in the moment, it may prevent you from lashing out at someone and help you see that your feelings aren’t their fault.

Source: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_mindfulness_skill_that_is_crucial_for_stress

3. *Accepting Aging*

by Kathleen Dowling Singh

Opening deeply to the truth of our own aging is wise. Opening deeply to the truth of our own impermanence is wise. Although such opening may not

come easily at first....

The time horizon has shifted. From this new perspective of all of our years, the future looms foreshortened in our minds. ...From the vantage point of six or more decades, we can clearly see that we have much more ‘was’ to look back on than ‘will be’ to look forward to.

It’s tricky terrain. ...The field of hope is suddenly seen to diminish. There’s far less time to choreograph a new outcome.

There is a great deal of searingly honest self-reflection and sometimes emotionally difficult growth work involved in letting go of the unfulfilled dreams of our childhood and youth and midlife. It is a piercing rite of passage for all of us to compare our Photoshopped hopes and dreams with the mug shot of our reality.

Coming to a place of acceptance, of ease and peace, with the way it is and the way we are in our oldest decades is demanding work, to be sure. It is, though, necessary, if we wish to rest and live and die in a peaceful mind, free from the limitations we’ve endured for so long.

There are important questions to ask ourselves if we wish not to waste these last years of ours. Where have my past habits of body and mind, enacted throughout the decades of my life, led me in terms of peace and happiness? What really matters at this point in my life?

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/27358>

4. *Radical Acceptance*

by Tara Brach, PhD

One of the reasons I was so drawn to writing about radical acceptance is because we spend so many moments at war, and we do it in the ways we judge ourselves, we do it in the ways we blame others, we do it in the ways we feel it’s our country against that country. There is so much division in this world.

So, what is really the path of healing? It can begin in this moment, by embracing the life that’s here. Because if we can begin to bring a sense of peace and care to the life inside us, naturally the circles widen to include other people. It’s the way of the heart—if we can be kind

towards ourselves, we’ll be kind towards others.

The biggest fear we have is that somewhere, we are failing or are going to fail. You can almost say that our personalities are in a large part a way of compensating for fear. We want to show to the world what would be acceptable and loveable. In doing so, we in some way disconnect from the aliveness and authenticity of who we are.

One of the great psychologists, Carl Rogers, put it this way, “It wasn’t until I accepted myself just as I was in this moment, that I was free to change.” So, a pre-condition to true transformation, is to accept ourselves in the moment.

Source: <https://www.beliefnet.com/wellness/health/2005/05/just-say-yes-to-the-moment.aspx>

5. *Difficulty Accepting Differences*

by Meerabelle Dey

Globally, our inability to accept our differences is destroying our world. Religion is a good thing, until we insist that our religion is “right” and everyone else’s is “wrong.” Political discourse is a good thing, until we stop talking about issues and just engage in school yard name calling. Our inability to accept different beliefs and points of view makes our world a very sad place indeed.

Accepting our differences is hard. We naturally are inclined to think that everyone experiences the world in the same way that we do, but that simply isn’t the case. My husband always jokes that if I am cold, I assume that I and everyone else in the room should get a sweater. I think that everyone is experiencing the world in the same way that I do. But they don’t.

It takes maturity to realize that if someone is different from you, that doesn’t make them wrong. This week, consider your attitudes toward others, whether they be your spouse, your children, or your colleagues. Do you want them to change aspects of themselves that are different from you? Or do you accept them for who they are, differences and all.

Source: <https://www.beliefnet.com/columnists/yourmorningcupofinspiration/2016/07/accepting-others.html>



6. *It's Hard Work*

by Rev. Rosemary Bray McNatt

Why are we still talking about inclusivity and diversity when we have done so little to make them real? Why are we still looking pained about the lack of diversity in the denomination? Because diversity, inclusivity, is terribly hard, terribly uncomfortable, definitely unsettling, and often quite frustrating.

What I know about being inclusive—crossing from culture to culture, learning the language of diversity—is that it's the work of a lifetime. It's hard to accept people who are not like you, who don't talk the way you do, or believe the things you believe, or dress or vote as you do. It's even harder to appreciate them for the things about them that are not like you, to find them interesting and fun, to enjoy the learning that's part of the experience, and to acknowledge, finally, that you may have to agree to disagree.

The truth is this: If there is no justice, there will be no peace. We can read Thoreau and Emerson to one another, quote Rilke and Alice Walker and Howard Thurman, and think good and noble thoughts about ourselves. But if we cannot bring justice into the small circle of our own individual lives, we cannot hope to bring justice to the world. And if we do not bring justice to the world, none of us is safe and none of us will survive. Nothing that Unitarian Universalists need to do is more important than making justice real—here, where we are. Hard as diversity is, it is our most important task.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/its-hard-work>

7. *The Circus Bow*

by Patricia Ryan Madson

Matt Smith, a wonderful Seattle improv teacher and solo performer, taught me a liberating game that can be used as a response to a personal screwup. He

calls it “the Circus Bow.” Matt claims this is how circus clowns deal with a slip in their routines. Instead of shrinking and berating himself silently with “Oh, no, I really blew it!” the clown turns to the crowd on one side and takes a magnificent bow with his hands extended and his arms high in the air, proclaiming “Ta-dahl!” as if he had just pulled off a master stunt. He then turns to face the other side of the audience and repeats the bow, “Ta-dahl!” Doing it in both directions allows him a 360-degree view of where he is.

The virtue of this is that it pulls his attention out into the world again, looking around and standing tall. This engaged and forward-looking vantage point is an excellent place to be after a blooper. It is more common to focus inward when a blunder occurs. “How could I have done that?” The body shrinks and withdraws. Instead, a mistake should wake us up. Become more alert, more alive. Ta-dah! New territory. Now, what can I make of this? What comes next?

...Observe the currents of life, accept what is happening, including mistakes, and continue working to create the best outcome. The key here is a flexible mind.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/quotes/quotations/view/27222/spiritual-quotations>

Wisdom Story

This Must Be Sufficient by Elie Wiesel from *The Gates of the Forest*.

When the great Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem-Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews, it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light the fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted.

Years later when a disciple of the Ba'al Shem-Tov, the celebrated Magid of Mezritch, had occasion for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: “Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer,” and again the miracle would be accom-

plished.

Still later, another rabbi, Rabbi Moshe-leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say, “I do not know how to light the fire. I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient.” It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished.

The years passed. And it fell to Rabbi Israel of Ryzhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: “I am unable to light the fire, and I do not know the prayer, and I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is tell the story, and this must be sufficient.” And it was sufficient.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/life/workshop2/159144.shtml>

Snippets

“This crusade to fix herself was ending right now. She wasn't broken. She saw and interacted with the world in a different way, but that was her. She could change her actions, change her words, change her appearance, but she couldn't change the root of herself. At her core, she would always be autistic. People called it a disorder, but it didn't feel like one. To her, it was simply the way she was.” *Helen Hoang*

“No tree tries to become a certain kind of tree. No flower tries to become a certain kind of flower. The tree and the flower open up to the sun and soak up water. Thus, they grow into themselves. No judgment. No expectations. No commentary. Your task is the same. If you can stop trying so hard to become who you think you should be, and instead commit to understanding and nourishing yourself, you will bloom into whatever kind of person you are.”

Vironika Tugaleva

(See Mary Oliver's poem *The Journey* at <http://thepracticelondon.org/poetry/poems-of-transformation-the-journey-by-mary-oliver/>)

“The acceptance of oneself is the essence of the whole moral problem and the epitome of a whole outlook on life. That I feed the hungry, that I forgive an insult, that I love my enemy ...are un-



doubtedly great virtues. ...But what if I ...discover that the least among them all, the poorest of all the beggars, the most impudent of all the offenders, the very enemy himself—that these are within me, and that I myself stand in need of the alms of my own kindness—that I myself am the enemy who must be loved—what then?” *Carl Jung*

“Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines. It is not to lead our neighbor into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment. It is not an educated intimidation with good books, good stories, and good works, but the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find roots and bear ample fruit.... The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free ...not a subtle invitation to adopt the life style of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his own.” *Henri J.M. Nouwen*

“See if you can catch yourself complaining, in either speech or thought, about a situation you find yourself in, what other people do or say, your surroundings, your life situation, even the weather. To complain is always nonacceptance of what is. It invariably carries an unconscious negative charge. When you complain, you make yourself into a victim. When you speak out, you are in your power. So, change the situation by taking action or by speaking out if necessary or possible; leave the situation or accept it. All else is madness.” *Eckhart Tolle*

“Our culture has accepted two huge lies. The first is that if you disagree with

someone’s lifestyle, you must fear or hate them. The second is that to love someone means you agree with everything they believe or do. Both are nonsense. You don’t have to compromise convictions to be compassionate.”

Rick Warren

“Happiness is not dependent on circumstances being exactly as we want them to be, or on ourselves being exactly as we’d like to be. Rather, happiness stems from loving ourselves and our lives exactly as they are, knowing that joy and pain, strength and weakness, glory and failure are all essential to the full human experience.” *Kristin Neff*

“I drop on my back on the bed, panting and sweating. How will I survive this missing? How do others do it? People die all the time. Every day. Every hour. There are families all over the world staring at beds that are no longer slept in, shoes that are no longer worn. Families that no longer have to buy a particular cereal, a kind of shampoo. There are people everywhere standing in line at the movies, buying curtains, walking dogs, while inside, their hearts are ripping to shreds. For years. For their whole lives. I don’t believe time heals. I don’t want it to. If I heal, doesn’t that mean I’ve accepted the world without her?” *Jandy Nelson*

“Life isn’t fair.” I said. “It’s taken me a while to get that. It’s always going to disappoint you in some way or another. You’ll make plans, and it’ll push you in another direction. You will love people, and they’ll be taken away no matter how hard you fight to keep them. You’ll try for something and won’t get it. You don’t have to find meaning in it; you don’t have to try to change things. You just have to accept the things that are out of your hands and try to take care of yourself. That’s your job.”

Alexandra Bracken

“Finally, I am coming to the conclusion that my highest ambition is to be what I already am. That I will never fulfill my obligation to surpass myself unless I first accept myself, and if I accept my-

self fully in the right way, I will already have surpassed myself.”

Thomas Merton

Questions

1. Reading #1, *Some Considerations Regarding Accepting Others*, suggests that really accepting others, especially those that we don’t know or who are adversaries, can be quite complex. If we look at the political landscape in America and some other countries, it becomes painfully obvious that the inability or refusal to accept (and respect) political adversaries has all but destroyed bipartisanship. How can acceptance be promoted in this political environment? What do you think is important in the work of accepting others on the other side of the aisle?
2. In reading #2, Jill Suttie suggests, according to Emily Lindsay, that skillful acceptance involves, “accepting your *internal* experience—your thoughts and feelings—which informs you about how to respond to your *external* circumstances in a wiser way.” What gets in the way of accepting our internal experience? Lindsay’s study, according to Suttie, “suggests that practicing acceptance helps reduce our stress more than simple mindful awareness.” Why might this be so? What do you find most helpful in dealing with stress?
3. In reading #3, Kathleen Dowling Singh suggests that the challenges of aging can be met through acceptance as we negotiate a diminished field of hope and time. Her questions for seniors are worth consideration: “Where have my past habits of body and mind, enacted throughout the decades of my life, led me in terms of peace and happiness? What really matters at this point in my life?”
4. In reading #4, Tara Brach, an American psychologist, author, and Buddhist teacher of Insight Meditation, is the author of many books including *Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life with the Heart of a Buddha*. She quotes Carl Rogers, “It

Once you've accepted your flaws, no one can use them against you. George R.R. Martin



wasn't until I accepted myself just as I was in this moment, that I was free to change." And adds, "So, a pre-condition to true transformation, is to accept ourselves in the moment." Why do some people struggle with self-acceptance? What does self-acceptance make possible? How does self-acceptance support acceptance of others?

5. In reading #5, Meerabelle Dey reminds us of the difficulty that many have in accepting people who are different. She writes, "It takes maturity to realize that if someone is different from you, that doesn't make them wrong." Has your capacity to accept difference increased as you have gotten older? How? How does acceptance become harder as the degree of difference increases? (Consider that the Bennett Scale describes six "stages" of increasing sensitivity to difference: (1) Denial of Difference; (2) Defense against Difference; (3) Minimization of Difference; (4) Acceptance of Difference; (5) Adaptation to Difference and (6) Integration of Difference. The first three stages do not accept difference.) How does the failure to accept difference undermine social cohesion?
6. In reading #6, the Rev. Rosemary Bray McNatt laments the fact that there is still not enough inclusivity and diversity in the UUA. This work began in 1992 with the adoption at GA of the *Racial and Cultural Diversity in Unitarian Universalism Resolution of Immediate Witness*. Her concerns are in support of Black Lives Matter, the cry for acceptance, and opposed to white supremacy, which rejects people of color. She concludes, "Hard as diversity is, it is our most important task." What value do you place on diversity? How have you worked/can you

work to engage and embrace diversity? What role does acceptance play in this work?

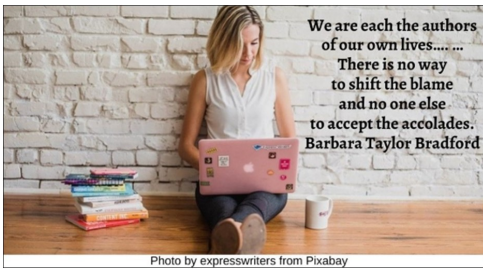
7. In reading #7, Patricia Ryan Madson writes about the "Circus Bow," per improv teacher Matt Smith, as the way to admit, accept, and even celebrate our mistakes. She writes, "a mistake should wake us up." Do you agree? Why or why not? Mistakes are inevitable, what we do with them makes all the difference. What gets in the way of you accepting mistakes, even failures? How can they become your teacher?

The following questions are related to the Snippets

8. At age 34, Helen Hoang, a successful Romance novelist, learned that she had Asperger's syndrome, a high-functioning type of autism. She began incorporating characters with autism in her novels, as she does in her quote. If people who are differently abled can accept who they are, why do we struggle to accept them? Does our lack of acceptance make their self-acceptance more difficult? Why or why not? Why do we keep forgetting that there are so many ways of being human, including that way I am and you are? How does remembering this promote acceptance and self-acceptance?
9. Vironika Tugaleva (aka Vironika Wilde) is a poet, feminist, award-winning author, nomad, queer, cat fanatic, immigrant, survivor, tree hugger, activist, and much more. She was born in Donetsk, Ukraine and lives in Canada. In her quote she writes, "If you can stop trying so hard to become who you think you should be, and instead commit to understanding and nourishing yourself, you will bloom into whatever kind of person you are." How do "shoulds" cause people to travel in the wrong direction? What makes it so hard to withstand the tyranny of "should?" What does it take and mean to finally become yourself?
10. Carl Jung stresses the importance of self-acceptance writing, "The acceptance of oneself is the essence of the whole moral problem." He sug-

gests that it is important to be virtuous in the way that you treat what Jesus called, "the least of these." He then turns the table, suggesting that "the least of these" may be within us. What could this realization do to our capacity for self-acceptance? To the acceptance of others? Why is empathy, as he infers, central to the acceptance of others? In terms of accepting yourself, what did you find most difficult?

11. Henri J.M. Nouwen was a Dutch Catholic priest, professor, writer and theologian who focused on pastoral ministry, spirituality, social justice, and community. Nouwen writes about hospitality which is rooted in acceptance of friend and stranger, and, in some circumstances, even the enemy. The way he approached hospitality was to offer both acceptance and space to a person in order to ensure that the hospitality could be accepted freely. When have you experienced hospitality? What was the nature of that hospitality? What did you value? What did you struggle with?
12. Eckhart Tolle is an author who focuses on spirituality and the importance of the present moment. In his quote about complaining he writes. "When you complain, you make yourself into a victim." Others suggest that complaining is related to a feeling of being powerless. Tolle suggests that we are empowered when we accept a situation, or walk away. Do you agree? Why or why not? How have you experienced complaining by yourself? By others? What is the value of complaining? The downside? The resolution of complaining?
13. Rick Warren, an evangelical Christian pastor and author, writes that fearing or hating a person who is different is spurred by a cultural lie. Do you agree? Why or why not? He suggests that acceptance does not mean you agree with everything a person believes or does. Do you agree? Why or why not? What is the rationale for promulgating these cultural lies? How can these lies be opposed?



14. Psychologist Kristin Neff is a self-compassion researcher. She writes that “happiness stems from loving ourselves and our lives exactly as they are.” In what ways is this true? In what ways is this false? In terms of what she suggests, what are the limits of acceptance since there are things that are not acceptable?
15. A character in Jandy Nelson’s book, *The Sky Is Everywhere*, struggles with grief. Seventeen-year-old Lennie is distraught by the death of her older and amazing sister, Bailey. Lennie makes it clear that acceptance of the death of a loved one is very difficult. Have you struggled with grief? What helped? What did you find that was not helpful? Did you reach acceptance in the grieving process? How?
16. In *Never Fade* by Alexandra Bracken, the second volume in her *The Darkest Minds* series, a character says, “Life isn’t fair,” and “(1) You just have to accept the things that are out of your hands and (2) try to take care of yourself.” In the quote, is it best when you do both (1) and (2)? Why or why not? The words are reminiscent of Reinhold Niebuhr’s *Serenity Prayer*. In what ways does acceptance lead to serenity? In a similar vein, M. Scott Peck said, “Life is difficult,” and “Once we truly know that life is difficult—once we truly understand and accept it—then life is no longer difficult.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
17. Thomas Merton suggests that acceptance of oneself as we are is the key to making it possible to go beyond oneself. Could this be true? Why or why not?

