

Acceptance of OneSelf

Self-acceptance is a potent idea and is central to most of my therapy work. In fact, as I have reflected upon my life I have realized that it has been a central theme. Like the oyster that grows the pearl in response to grains of sand that cause irritation, in my childhood I had two major irritants, esotropia (an eye turned inwards) and bedwetting. The estropia was 85% corrected by surgery when I was 4 years old but my bedwetting continued until I was 18. In primary school I was not at all perturbed by either of these, but in adolescence I self-consciously hid these “afflictions” from others. There were only a few incidents in high school where I felt embarrassment or shame. Nevertheless I developed a love hate relationship with school, as I did with my father. It was a difficult period for my parents and I.

Fortunately in my fourth year of high school I discovered yoga and began doing asanas and meditating. In my first year out of school I became interested in Zen Buddhism and psychotherapy. At aged 21 I sought and entered into therapy - to rid myself of my guilt-shame, to make sense of and move beyond my adolescence dramas and pains. I did not know what to expect of therapy or my therapist, who was also a Christian priest. It turned out to be one of the best decisions of my life. A deep healing occurred as a result of the unconditional acceptance of (my) self (UAS) invoked in me by my therapist's UA of me. It opened a new horizon, a path of growth and self-transformation that I continued to explore in group psychotherapy and co-counselling over the next 15 years. A central tenet of co-counselling was UAS or “complete appreciation of oneself”.

In 2000 Psychology Today published an interview with Albert Ellis, originator of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy, which later gave birth to Cognitive Behaviour Therapy. In the interview he was asked how UAS would affect relationships. He said that people with UAS would “always accept themselves no matter who disliked them or what they did badly. They'd also have unconditional other acceptance. They'd always accept other people, although not necessarily what other people do, which means they would be less prejudiced or combative. They'd also have high frustration tolerance in the face of adversity.” He also points out that acceptance is not love. “You love a person because he or she has lovable traits, but you accept everybody just because they're alive and human.”

Yoga and Buddhism also had much to say about the Self and acceptance. Part of the self-transformation that was occurring for me in my twenties was about questioning the very nature of “self” as a separate entity. I found myself simultaneously travelling down two paths – the rational (scientific) and the mystical (transpersonal). Central to both was the quest for “truth” or reality, a quest for identity, an answer to the question “who am I?” and “where am I?” (or “what is?” or as they say nowadays: “what the bleep?”). I had an appetite for truth that I fed by reading Alan Watts, Timothy Leary, Krishnamurti, Hazrat Inayat Khan, Rajneesh, Ramana Maharshi and various other “perennial philosophers”.

Ramana increasingly became my greatest inspiration. More recently I have taken an interest in the works of some of Ramana's successors, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj (died aged 83 in 2000) and the new generation of advaitist teachers: Ramesh S. Balsekar, Dr. Gregory Goode, Wayne Liquorman, etal. Wayne Liquorman has authored many books one of which is entitled “Acceptance of What is”. Ramesh says, "If you do not accept, you will suffer" and that "To be enlightened is to be able to accept with equanimity anything in life at any moment as God's will." Resistance to what is only prolongs and perhaps worsens our suffering.

At this point Albert Ellis's work converges with that of the advaitist mystics. Ellis believed that we unnecessary suffer because of our unreasonable demands that something should be or must be other than what is, and our blaming others for this. A deeper understanding of what is broadens our perspective – we see that everything is interconnected and that all is an echo, a reverberating force field derived from the original no-thing or void. In essence all is and ever shall be void, a void in process, which is evolving. All that is evolving (toward the omega) is predetermined (by the alpha). “I Am” both the Alpha and Omega.

As Jesus said “when you make the two one, and you make the inside as the outside and the outside as the inside and the above as the below, and if you establish the male with the female as a single unity so that the man will not be masculine and the woman not be feminine, then shall you enter the Sovereignty” [the Kingdom of God] or in advaitan terms the non-dual consciousness, or the “enlightened” state.

Accepting this, because we deeply understand it, enables us to realize that there is no-one else to blame, not even ourselves – the end of guilt, shame, blame – and the dawn of truly enlightened “self” acceptance. Ultimately it is beyond even acceptance, for in acceptance lies the seed of the idea of non-acceptance, and who is the self that accepts or rejects the Self, being the non-dual existence, consciousness, bliss? To be or not to be oneSelf – is there really any choice? In complete Self-acceptance there is no choice, only being and the illusion of non-being.

All our struggles with self-acceptance are simply movement of the caterpillar larvae within its cocoon, part of the process of metamorphosis into the beautiful butterfly latent within the self. Unless you are thus reborn or born again how can one enter the Sovereignty of the non-dual state? The Kingdom of non-dual consciousness is within, knock and the door will open or “look within, thou art Buddha”. The ‘looking’ requires self-enquiry and the ‘within’ implies looking into your self-conception and the way you see things. Who is it that sees and who is it that looks? To be or not to be, is that a question, and if so who asks?

For some, this is too big an ask, and the quantum jump too high. When the fruit is ripe it will fall into the abyss effortlessly, so why use force? To return to the caterpillar metaphor, one can learn to accept one’s caterpillar-ness, even to love and embrace it. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy makes the important distinction between acceptance and resignation. “What dignifies acceptance is that it is done in the service of valued change in the client’s external world.” The caterpillar continues spinning its cocoon trusting the process, difficult as it may be, at times.

In Zen it is said “before enlightenment - chop wood, carry water, after enlightenment - chop wood, carry water”, the difference is a change in perspective, a new way of seeing, a new way of being. Thus enlightenment is not an end, just the end of an outmoded way of seeing and being, and the awakening into the ever-present OneSelf.

“When your real, effortless, joyful nature is realized, it will not be inconsistent with the ordinary activities of life.” ... “Forgetfulness of your real nature is true death; remembrance of it is rebirth” – Ramana Maharshi.

Remember. Be Here Now. So Be It (Amen).

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