

ACCEPTANCE

Two men were on a long hike through the jungles of Africa. They'd long day so decided to take a short cut across a large field. When they were half way across one of them noticed a large Rhino galloping straight at them. "My god, Mick, quick say a prayer to save us from this beast," shouts Dick. "I don't know any prayers for goodness sake" replies Mick. "Look any prayer at all will do" says Dick. "Ok, I remember one my father used to say. Dear lord please make us truly thankful for what we are about to receive." THAT'S THE SPIRIT

We all have aspects of ourselves that we are uncomfortable with. We may experience anger, fear, jealousy, sadness, we may have nasty thoughts about others or even about ourselves. As well as having these painful experiences we can make it worse by feeling bad about having them at all. In this scenario we are creating more and more unnecessary suffering for ourselves, it doesn't have to be like this. we don't need to feel bad about feeling anything, all these aspects of ourselves are fine, they're not bad, they may in some cases lead us to cause pain to our self and others, but they're not bad.

If we think they're bad, if we think that we're a bad person for having these thoughts and feelings we can so easily repress them. And repression leads to illness, a lack of vitality and prevents us from living a full and happy life.

What I'm suggesting is that we accept all these aspects of ourselves, we say yes to everything about our self. There is absolutely nothing about us that is not worthy of acceptance.

Say yes to the anger, say yes to sadness, to resentment, to the nasty thoughts about somebody, say yes to the joy we feel with a friend, say yes to our present experience no matter what it is. This does not mean expressing our experience necessarily but it means experiencing it. If we can experience it we are less likely to act it out anyway.

When we have a painful experience it's very easy to fight it, or resist it, or to pretend it's not there. We will do anything but face up to our present felt experience. But if we want to be free and happy we need to do just this. So instead of running from experience we can become intimate with it. We can become intimate with it by turning toward experience and feeling whatever our present experience is. What does the fear feel like? What does anger feel like? What does joy feel like? Where do we feel sadness? Whatever it is we can become intimate with it. we can learn to stay with the felt experience and allow it to show its face to us.

When we watch and experience in this way we begin to see something quite remarkable, that we are not the anger, the fear or whatever. If the fear can be watched objectively then it cannot be who we are. If the anger can be watched

then that too is not who we are. Normally we may assume that “I'm angry,” or “I'm afraid,” but that isn't how it is. The anger isn't who we are. This experiencing and watching helps us to wake up from identification with the various states of mind that are experienced. We then begin to discover something quite wonderful, that we are the awareness that is doing the watching. We see that we are something much more vast and wonderful than our usual small and constricted self.

What we are doing here is learning to experience and to open up who we are. We are learning to accept our life as it is, to accept our experience as it is, not to change it, not to get rid of our experience but to understand our experience. This brings about a great transformation, and we no longer see fear, anger etc as the hidden enemy to be avoided. It's similar to being intimate with a person. Once we become familiar with them, once we become intimate with them we are much more comfortable around them. We don't see them through our own fears but see them more as they really are.

We can be free, we can be free and accept our self as we are, we can be free and accept all our funny and quirky little ways. We don't need to try and change them but to simply be aware of them. When we allow the light and wisdom of awareness into our lives change happens quite naturally. The things that need changing will change, the things that don't, won't. We can leave ourselves alone and just watch.

When I first started to practice Buddhism I found it difficult to accept myself. I had the idea that Buddhists were very spiritual and very saintly people, which was very convenient for me. So what I did was I tried to be saintly, I tried to be spiritual, whatever that means. I gave up a lot of my little ways of enjoyments...music, football, dancing, a social drink occasionally and so on, all this just to fit into an idea of how I thought I should be as a Buddhist. I squeezed the joy out of my life trying to be spiritual. Like the man who walked into the doctor's office and said, “I have this awful headache doctor, can you help me?” the doctor says, “of course, but I want to ask you a few questions. First of all do you go dancing at all?”

“Dancing?” replied the man indignantly, “of course not doctor, I wouldn't engage in such a vulgar activity.”

“Do you have the odd tippie occasionally?” asked the Doctor. “Drink, I've never touched the filthy stuff for years, I'm living a spiritual life,” cried the man slightly offended.

“Look, I'm a bit embarrassed to ask you this but are you one of those men who slopes about of a night time, doing a bit of this and that?”

“Of course not doctor, what do we take me for? I'm in bed every night by ten o'clock and up at every morning at six to meditate and pray.”

"Okay, tell me," said the doctor, "this pain is it at the back of the head or at the front?" "That's it doctor, it's a dull pain right here at the front."

"Simple, my dear fellow, your trouble is you've got your halo on a little too tight. All we need to do is slacken it a little."

Like the man above we need to watch out for living our life to conform to ideas of how we think we should be. We don't need to be a saint, don't need to be "good," don't need to be special, don't need to be any other than our experience right now.

If we have an image of our self as a nice person, or a kind person, or a spiritual person, or if we think we should be any nice, kind or even worse spiritual, then watch out. What can happen is that if we experience anything that goes against this image it can be repressed, it can be denied because it doesn't fit in with how we think we should be. Ideals too, however noble and "good" can in my opinion be quite unhelpful. Again it's saying I'm not good enough and I need to be better, the goal being always out there in the future.

Acceptance is simple, there is nothing difficult or complicated about it at all. What is difficult is living a life of resistance, which is the opposite of acceptance. To accept we simply bring awareness to where we are resisting. If we are resisting anything at all a feeling of tension or constriction in the body will reflect it. We don't need to try and relax the tension, but to accept and feel it. Allow it to be there exactly as it is. There is no need to change it or try to get rid of it. In fact if we can let it be it may even open up and reveal its little treasure, it's telling us something about ourselves.

How many times a day do we think or feel "I don't want to feel like this?" "I don't want to be here?" "I don't want this to be happening?" If we're in this state then we are resisting life. We are creating more pain for ourselves by wishing things to be different. If we can change something then do so, if we can't then accept it fully. If we can accept life, if we can accept ourselves this is the end of conflict. We can rest, we can give up the struggle of trying to be different. Happiness and freedom are present right now if only we can learn to accept the unacceptable.

There is much more to acceptance than merely accepting our present experience however. What we need do is to accept that we are more than the self-centred little self that may be our usual experience. We can accept that we are indeed Pure Awareness itself. We can accept that we are the space or consciousness in which everything appears. We can accept that we are everything and at the same time we are nothing. This is freedom.

Written by Suryacitta