

Acceptance & Vulnerability

Instructions:

1. **Set aside at least 20-30 minutes to journal** around the “**Pre-Reading Questions.**” As you write, don’t censor yourself. Put everything that comes to mind down on the page, even if it seems unrelated.
2. **Read the content below** slowly and thoughtfully. Pay attention to your internal responses - the thoughts and feelings that are triggered as you read. Try not to judge yourself for these responses, simply notice them.
3. **Journal around the “Post-Reading Questions.”** Write as much as you can.

Pre-Reading Questions:

1. Have you ever shared something about yourself with someone and been hurt by their response? Describe the experience and what it was about their response that was hurtful.
2. Do you have any relationships where you feel completely safe to be yourself and to disclose anything about yourself? Describe those relationships and what about them leads you to feel safe.

The Gift of Acceptance

Most people long to be deeply known. And yet, the thought of being truly *seen* by another can be scary. What if I reveal a fear or a weakness and, instead of love and acceptance, I’m met with rejection? Many of us have had that experience, which is why we’re hesitant to reveal too much.

The opposite of rejection is acceptance. Instead of thinking about how we can *get* acceptance, let’s start by thinking about how to extend it. Acceptance is a key component of love. To accept someone is to say, “I see you, exactly as you are in the present moment, and I’m not looking away.”

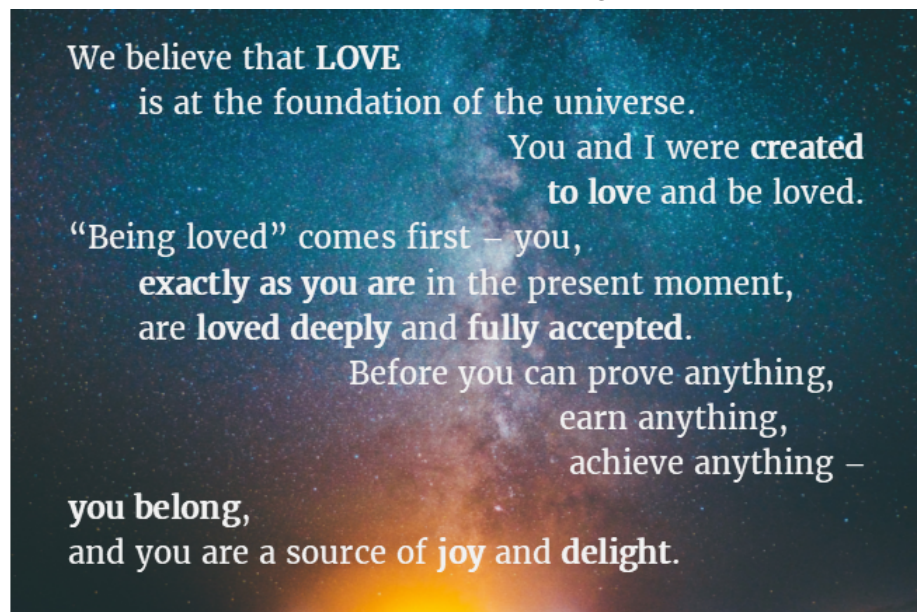
Accepting someone doesn’t mean you agree with all their choices, but it does mean laying down your need to *fix* or *change* them. When we try to *fix* someone, we’re communicating that the other person is *broken*. When we try to change them, we’re saying we’re not ok with them as they are. Even if we’re not intending to communicate those things, that is often how it feels to the other person. *There’s something wrong with me*, they think. *I won’t be accepted until I change who I am*. If you’ve ever been on the other side of this kind of relationship, you know how damaging it can be.

No, acceptance must come first, before any change or even intention of change has come about. It may seem strange, but this is actually how real transformation happens - by accepting someone as they are with no agenda to change them. This is because a

person who is accepted feels safe, and it's only when we're safe that we're able to take the risks necessary to change. If you withhold your acceptance of me, I'm going to have a harder time accepting myself. And as long as I feel like there's something wrong with me, I will remain stuck.

This is why, in any group that wants to allow for transformation, it's of utmost importance to simply sit with someone in their pain. Often in those situations we want to offer advice about what they could do differently, or we feel uncomfortable and change the subject. Sometimes we tell them why they shouldn't feel what they're feeling (e.g. "You seem angry, but you should really be grateful because...") But all of these responses create an unsafe environment where people begin to shut down. Instead, when someone shares something vulnerable about themselves or their situation, look them in the eye and let them know that you see them. As you extend this gift of acceptance to others, you will start to notice a change in yourself and the group. You and those around you will begin to experience real healing and transformation.

Take a moment to meditate on the image and words below.



Post-Reading Questions:

1. What do these ideas stir up in you? What resonates with your experience? Where do you feel resistance?
2. What sort of people do you have a hard time accepting exactly as they are? Why do you think this is?