

While on a road trip not long ago, I listened to a ted talk that I found incredibly powerful. I admit, I may have been predisposed to hearing its particular message. Because for a number of weeks I had been thinking about this year's Theme: Radical Acceptance....how do I talk about it, what does it mean, how does it get manifested, how does it play out in our everyday lives? Had I made a mistake in naming it as our theme?

I listened to Linda Cliatt-Wayman talk about how she turned around a failing school in North Philly. The high-school "was a low-performing school classified as "persistently dangerous," where she was the fourth principal in four years. There were chains on the doors, and the classrooms were empty. Worst of all, the teachers were scared, defeated, and unaware of their own roles in creating a school that was not a school. So, she says, she began a massive transformation" ...

Three of her favorite slogans guided her in her massive undertaking:

1. **If you're going to lead, lead.** "she assembled a top-notch staff...And working together with the students, the school developed a discipline program aptly titled: "Non-negotiable."

## **2. So what? Now what?**

Cliatt-Wayman says that when she arrived at Strawberry Mansion, the school had more than enough excuses to go around. With poverty ubiquitous and learning disabilities rampant throughout the school, plus many absent parents (and students who were themselves parents), and a history of low scores all around, the school had so many reasons for being the way that it was. But so what, Cliatt-Wayman asked her staff, what did they plan to do about that? Eliminating excuses at every turn became her primary responsibility. And it worked: One year later, literature scores had grown by 107 percent, and algebra scores had grown by 171 percent — no excuses needed.

### 3. If nobody told you they love you today, remember I do.

“If someone asks me my real secret,” says Cliatt-Wayman, “it’s that I love my students, and I believe in their possibilities unconditionally. I see only what they can become.” Deep down, she knows that this is because she is one of them. She knows what it feels like...” She explained her upbringing. “...We should always provide them with hope, unwavering belief in their potential, and tell them often to remember — we love them.” (blog.ted.com)

As I said, I was mightily impressed. She had articulated so much of what I believe...so of course I knew she must be right! The slogan, “so what, now what”, particularly stood out. It was a renaming of a powerful lesson I learned three years ago. My marriage ended and six months later my daughter died.

My energy teacher helped me to “get” the power of acceptance. He helped me recognize that wrestling with the truth had no positive outcomes. He helped me internalize a concept I had taught Sr. Mangers years ago when I consulted on issues of “managing differences”.

I told them, “You can’t go around it, you can’t go over it, you have to go through it’. After I had learned the need for acceptance in my own life, I came to think of it as “Ok, so now what?” Ok, this is what’s real, so now what?

Author Brendon Burchard wrote: “Avoidance is the best short-term strategy to escape conflict, and the best long-term strategy to ensure suffering.” In other words, pain is inevitable, suffering is optional.

“So what, now what?” is the verbalization of what I’ve come to call Radical Acceptance. It’s ***not only acceptance of what is, but an active engagement with the truth, with life.*** You can accept that it’s raining out and stay in the closet or you can decide how best to use this rainy day?

They are not the same! One is totally reactive. It gives your power away. The other requires that you be in charge of your own life. It calls for you to be proactive rather than reactive...despite external circumstances.

Radical acceptance is a very simple notion: but like most things that are simple, it ain't easy. It requires that we NOT DO what comes so easily to most of us. It means not wrestling with stuff, not putting "should" around things, not judging or evaluating the "IS" of the truth.

***Radical acceptance means accepting what is, as it is.***

You don't have to like it, you don't have to agree with it, it doesn't need to smell nice...what is, simply is. It's not about but, but, but; or "what if?" It's not about "how awful" ...it's not even about "how wonderful!!"

Because in the final analysis, we make it all up---"this is good, that's bad"; "that hurts or I'm uncomfortable, and therefore..." Hurt can simply hurt; it can simply be pain. It's the "therefore" that we make up...it's the therefore that causes anguish.

Radical Acceptance has the ability to lessen, even eliminate, the anguish of life. We create the anguish; we apply an interpretation that creates anguish...it's not the event or occurrence that inherently causes anguish.

**The salient question is "Ok, so now what?" Or, So what, now what?**

We so often put ourselves/ or someone else into a box of our creation---that labels our behavior or someone else's. We then treat our label, our interpretations as "truth" "fact", "reality".

That person is a liar---ergo---this is how I "have to" deal with that person. The cement is set. How can a liar get out of that box?? "They are a liar" is fundamentally different from the person lied. Even if they have lied 17 times...it doesn't turn them into a liar...it may well mean however, "I choose not to put my trust in that person---that transforms the interaction---it's no longer about them...it's about you and you always have a choice!

That transformation empowers you---you are no longer at the mercy of what someone else says or does. It puts you in charge of your own life!!!

AND THAT CAN BE SCARY---because YOU CHOOSE--- YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE.

Life is often easier when we can blame someone else; it's often easier when it's someone else's "fault".

Taking responsibility for our lives can take work...it can be scary...it can intimidate-----BUT ONLY IF YOU LET IT.

You see, we are always making choices, even when we think we have no choice—we have chosen the interpretation that disempowers us, causes us anguish, makes us feel "less than", put upon.

Shame, is an unwanted gift we foist upon ourselves. It's much more healthy to say..."boy, i screwed that up" or whow, that was ugly/disappointing/wrong/indefensible" ... "Ok, so now what?"

You see, we can't find our authentic selves in all the hoopla, all the mess, all the judgment, the embarrassment, the pain that we create for ourselves. We become blind to the fact that we are not what we have done/thought/believe. Our deepest sense of self, our soul, Spirit, is not about beliefs and mental conceptions---of whatever nature.

This is where a belief in God is a tremendous benefit... we are told that God loves us...even in our darkest days. We're told that Jesus died for our sins...what may not be said, but is implied...:"so relax". Be cool. Take it down a notch. Even the far right Christians say, "we hate the sin, but love the sinner"!

I like the idea that God loves me. I like the Buddhist notion that it's all an illusion. I like the Universalist concept that we all can be saved. I like the belief that we all have inherent worth and dignity. The idea of reincarnation soothes me---it implies we're here on earth to learn, to develop, to take another step in a long arch to nirvana...and if we don't get it right this time, we'll get another go at it.

**Perhaps simple...but not easy.** Radical acceptance takes courage. It's sometimes a fearless act to believe in life, in the face of pain and death; to allow joy in the presence of ugliness. It's takes courage to love again after we've been hurt, lied to, or abused. It's easy to stay down when we've been knocked down; it takes courage and strength to get up again.

Radical acceptance is about living life with integrity, with ease, with a sense of self; it's about allowing joy into our lives---every day, every minute, even in the face of disappointment---for deep down, we are whole, and not dependent on circumstances to define or control us.

Radical acceptance can be a spiritual practice well worth the effort. If you love and embrace you, what else could truly matter? Radical acceptance is a particularly valuable practice during these tumultuous days.

Some news is real, some is fake. Ok, so now what? Climate change is upon us. Ok, so now what? We have a president that frightens many of us. So what, now what? There are racist, Nazis and KKK marchers in the street. So what, now what?

The UUA has committed to undoing white supremacy. Ok, so now what? Black lives matter. Ok, so now what? People say things and do things that I don't like. So what, now what? There are people in this community I don't like. SO WHAT!

It's the **now what** that matters. It's always the "now what" that makes the difference in our lives and the lives of others. So, be intentional in what you choose! Take responsibility for your choices---even when you don't like what you've chosen.

That's Radical Acceptance. Help diminish the anguish in your lives, the anguish in the world. Practice Radical Acceptance. And may it be contagious!

Amen