

The Power of Acceptance



Jim Carruth

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Jim Carruth

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“Peace...it does not mean to be in a place
where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work...
It means to be in the midst of those things
and still be calm in your heart.”

Unknown

“Success is getting what you want.
Happiness is wanting what you get.”

Unknown

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Introduction

The Power of Acceptance is something I discovered while trying to practice being present at all times. I noticed whenever I was not present, there was a basic non-acceptance of the moment. I wanted to be somewhere else, doing something else, or simply wanted whatever was going on to stop.

When I looked at this and tried to become more accepting of the moment, I discovered I could stay present longer and more often. I also noticed I ended the day with more energy, instead of my usual stressed-out condition. I hadn't used up all my energy fighting the moment, so I had plenty left over for the things I love.

This doesn't mean I had to like what's going on. Often I didn't, and admitted this to myself. But, this opened up a wonderful opportunity - how to learn to stay present while something was going on I didn't particularly like.

Instead of feeling I had no control over the situation, I had a new sense of control, which gave me confidence. I felt more relaxed, less anxious, and able to handle whatever came my way. I actually looked forward to those things that normally threw me, just to see if I could handle them. Was this truly a "new me" I was beginning to see, or merely a fluke?

It was not a fluke. This way of acceptance led to a deeper spiritual understanding of myself and those around me, a greater sense of being present, and a lack of the fear-based anxiety that seemed to always be lurking in the background of our minds. I felt this simple idea was worth sharing.

Jim Carruth
Pasadena, 2002

Knowing you are not in control is the first step to gaining control.

Have you ever tried to control your job? Your significant other? Your employer? The number of times you are interrupted at work? The car ahead of you? How about the car behind you?

Life presents us with many examples of when we are not in control. Do we accept this? No, we generally spend our precious energy fighting against it with something called resistance. We resist with negative feelings, a swear word or two, and flipping off the other driver. This is what causes the anxiety that leads to stress, which can eventually kill us if allowed to build up enough over time.

What can you do? You simply can't give in and begin tolerating those things that truly bother you, can you? That wouldn't be being honest with yourself, would it?

Blaming outside circumstances is equal to admitting that nothing is your fault. Taking responsibility for

your own reaction begins by noticing what is happening to you without coloring it in any way. This allows you to see the situation clearly before drawing a conclusion.

Once you see the situation for what it is, you can decide what you wish to do about it. This does not mean you tolerate something you can't stand. It means rearranging your reaction to it so it doesn't harm you in any way. You find a way to accept yourself in the situation first, before reacting to it.

A car is coming toward you at 90 miles an hour. You have but a few seconds to observe the situation for what it is - a life-threatening one - and react. If you decided at that moment to begin complaining about how the car coming at you is not your fault, the next minute you would be dead. It would be better to use that time to jump out of the way.

When life overwhelms you and you feel no control, it is a good first step to admit that. You might say, "I feel totally out of control. I have no idea what to do next." This statement opens you up to the truth and helps you turn your energy away from resisting and cursing the situation, to allowing a solution to come your way.

You cannot become enlightened while hating parts of yourself.

You may not like all parts of yourself, and wish to change those things you don't like. This change begins with acceptance. This means accepting all of yourself, not just the parts you like. You will undoubtedly change over the years anyway. Do you think you are the same person now that you were 10 years ago? 5 years ago? Last year? Last month?

You can always go back later and improve certain areas of your life that you are still not happy with. For now, however, not liking parts of yourself sets up a subtle resistance within you that you may not be aware of. Try to become aware of this. Look within, and ask yourself, "Where am I not liking the way things are?" Find acceptance for yourself there, right now. It doesn't have to be perfect. This may be hard to do at first, but it can be done with practice. Start with the intention of wanting to do so. The benefits of this practice can be great.

You may have already noticed how much resistance drains you. Have you ever had the experience of talking to someone who tires you out because you must always take a defensive position? How about doing a task that you hate doing? Imagine if you didn't feel this way, and could learn to actually enjoy talking to the person, or doing the task with no resistance whatsoever. You would feel freer than you have ever felt before in that situation. The difference would be noticeable.

You would also enjoy a new kind of mental freedom. This would allow you to be more present in the moment, taking in more of what's going on, and observing things you didn't notice before because you were too busy resisting.

Try watching yourself the next time you are doing an unpleasant task, or talking to someone who drains you. Observe what you are doing without judging or reacting, as if you hadn't yet decided that it was unpleasant. Watch the conversation progress, see details in the person's face, how they're dressed, or anything else you didn't notice before because you were thinking about what you were going to say next.

Try not knowing what you are going to say next, and concentrate instead on what they're saying. See how you feel afterwards. Did the experience change for you?

You cannot be profoundly accepting and angry at the same time.

What does it mean to be profoundly accepting? It means you know at a very deep level that everything is going to be all right, no matter how things may look on the surface. How do you know that things will be all right? You don't, actually, but there's a special kind of power that comes into play when you decide that it's going to be all right anyway.

The bottom line is no matter what happens, you still have the choice of how to react and what you will do. If you know this ahead of time, then you know it's going to be all right no matter what, because you know what your final choice will be.

Knowing this in advance, you become aware that being angry or upset are choices, when you could just as easily choose to remain calm. You choose peacefulness over anger simply because it feels better. Repeatedly choosing calmness creates a desire and a familiarity

with it. It establishes a level of comfort with peacefulness. It becomes your new habit.

Rather than choosing to be angry, you begin to see how anger is unnecessary, and not your favorite state to be in. No matter what happens, you simply know what your choice will be because it is your favorite choice. Who forgets what their favorite things are in life?

Once you've made that choice, you can't go back to anger without a great effort. Being profoundly accepting is like being relaxed after Thanksgiving dinner. Do you think you might suddenly get up and run a few miles? It's more likely you will pick another time for this, perhaps before you've eaten so much food.

Right now, however, you are full and satisfied, and you want to enjoy the relaxation you are experiencing. So, you make a choice. If you choose to be profoundly accepting of whatever comes your way, it will be extremely difficult to have feelings of anger at the same time you are feeling acceptance.

If you remain calm no matter what, you have attained a level of self-mastery.

Everyone would like to think they have mastered something in life. People look up to masters. To master yourself is part of what this book is about. I have defined it as the ability to remain perfectly calm in the middle of any storm. Think about it; if you could remain calm, no matter what the circumstances, wouldn't you say you have attained some level of self-mastery?

This does not mean you are unfeeling or unemotional. It means you can be counted on during the worst stress imaginable. You may feel the turmoil more strongly than others because you are being present in every moment. This means you are paying very close attention to what is happening around you.

However, because you already know the outcome of the situation and what your choice will be, you do not fall apart or even feel stressed. You know that in calmness, your answers will come - what to do, how to act.

You also know what your favorite state of mind is and choose it in the middle of the upheaval.

If you do not remain calm, at least you know you are not calm and your capacity for acceptance allows for this. You know you are not calm but wish to be, so you try to reach an island of calmness as soon as possible. Can you accept yourself here, even though you are not calm? With practice, you can learn to accept yourself in any state of mind, even though you may prefer one state over another.

Some people put themselves in harm's way, or in the path of pain, to learn how to be calm in the midst of upheaval. I do not recommend intentionally doing this, but the concept is understandable. What you can do instead is welcome those times when you are in pain, or not in control, and use them as opportunities to practice acceptance. Be grateful for the learning opportunities they provide, and see if you become better at being calm in the middle of the storm. Look at them as steps on your way toward self-mastery.

The secret to being present.

Being profoundly present in each moment of life is my definition of enlightenment. This subject was covered beautifully in *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle. It was by trying to practice the information I found in that book that I came upon the concepts in this one.

Non-acceptance of life creates a situation where you cannot possibly be present. For me, learning acceptance made being present possible. In my book, it's the secret to being present.

By attempting to practice being present, you become aware of how often you are not present. This is another way of learning to become present. Each time you catch yourself drifting into thoughts of the past or future, you realize you are not present, and that awareness brings you back into the moment.

Even though the goal is to be present, catching yourself in the act of not being present and accepting yourself

there is equal to the same thing. As you learn to accept yourself in a non-present state, you are able to create a state of being present more often. Like “knowing you are not in control is the first step to gaining control,” realizing you are not present is the first step toward becoming present.

There will be plenty of times when you observe your mind wandering from the present, dreaming about the past or the future, or about anything other than this moment. The goal is to remain present in every moment. The trick is to accept yourself when you are not.

Struggling to get you there doesn't.

It's perfectly all right to have goals and work hard for what you want in life. If you don't do it, who will? It's absolutely necessary to have goals and work for them, if you want something from life. The problem is attachment to certain results.

Becoming attached to a certain outcome, where nothing else will do, is a form of non-acceptance. Why not have a goal, work hard for it, and then see what happens? It's much more fun not to know the outcome and let life surprise you.

This is where the concept of struggle comes in. If you find you are struggling, you will also find a certain expectation is not being met. You are turning it into a struggle. You will keep struggling with it and making it into a problem until you obtain the results you want. You have become attached to one outcome as being the only one capable of pleasing you.

Why not try working toward your goal and not worrying about the results? It takes all the struggle out of it. Accept the outcome, just as you learned to accept yourself in whatever situation you were in, in the lesson on self-mastery. If you don't like the outcome, you can try it again with a new purpose. Make the necessary adjustments, and then see if you can get closer to your ideal. Putting energy into struggling is like throwing money down the drain.

There is no struggle in this approach because you are not busy being upset with the results. You've accepted them, decided you wanted something different, and have moved on. There is no energy wasted complaining, and at the same time, you did not feel obligated to accept something you really didn't want. Where's the problem if you are not creating it anymore?

Why rush?

Rushing is more than another form of non-acceptance. Rushing is a statement of fear. It says, “If I don’t do this on time, something really bad will happen to me.” Let it happen! Chances are, you will still be alive if the bad thing happens to you, and there’s probably an even greater chance that the bad thing won’t happen to you in the first place. In rushing, you can be sure that a bad thing is already happening to you.

Rushing destroys your ability to remain present. It stresses you out, and as we all know, stress is a killer. Rushing is a killer as well, since it is pure stress. Rushing keeps you in a state of anxiety, which is another name for fear.

Observe yourself the next time you are rushing. Accept yourself fully in that moment, without judging, saying something like, “Gee, I’m rushing here.” See if a little more presence creeps into your awareness. Then,

try slowing down a little, and see what happens.

When I catch myself rushing, I like to slow down my walking speed just a tad, but not so much that anyone else would notice. It makes a difference because I immediately become aware that I am rushing, and switch in that moment from rushing to “present” mode. I find this to be a useful technique because my entire body is involved. It goes beyond just being a mental exercise.

For most people, rushing is a habit. After observing this in yourself, see what introducing a little presence into the mix does for you. You may find this approach easier and more effective than simply trying not to rush.

Doing something positive is easier than trying not to do something negative.

I suffer from a fear of flying, which is another name for loss of control. I noticed one time when I was flying that I could make myself feel better by looking out the airplane window and trying to see the ground. For some reason, this made me feel better because I was not concentrating on the turbulence. My mind was elsewhere, away from the fear. Instead of trying to stop being afraid, I put my concentration elsewhere and the results were the same. The fear was gone when I stopped giving it my full attention.

In meditation books, they tell you to try to stop your thoughts. Have you ever tried to stop thinking? It's impossible! I like to put my concentration elsewhere instead, such as on my feelings. If you concentrate on how you are feeling, you will immediately notice that your mind becomes quiet without even trying.

It's the same with being present. Instead of concen-

trating on your inability to remain present, look at whatever is around you and notice more details. Observing your surroundings or checking into how you are feeling at the moment will immediately bring you back into the present.

The same goes for learning acceptance. If you are not being very accepting of something, move your mind to something you like and you will immediately feel acceptance, rather than trying to accept something you are unable to at the moment.

Needing the universe to be a certain way.

People who need the universe to be a certain way are concerned with control. They need people around them to act a certain way, or their jobs to go the way they want, or their computers to work perfectly without ever breaking down. When they don't get exactly what they want, they become upset. They tighten their grip on the things around them, becoming even more demanding. This person is often referred to as a control freak.

This situation of being at odds with the universe is another form of non-acceptance. It sets up an adversary relationship with your environment. Ask yourself, "Do I want to live in the evil forest all my life?" If you need the universe to be a certain way, that's exactly what you're doing. You are living in the evil forest of your own making.

The universe, however, will go on being the way it is, no matter what we want. It is we who need to adjust to

it, and not the other way around. We need to become more accepting of the way things are. Why? It's simple, really; the universe is bigger than we are.

Learning to be more accepting of the way things are does not mean that you cannot have what you want in life, or must accept something that you don't feel you can live with. The energy you would normally spend being upset because you aren't getting what you want has been freed up, and is now at your disposal to change things to your liking.

Once you've retreated from the game of making your environment into an enemy, you may begin to see it more neutrally. Life is what you make it if you have the energy to do so and you're not already throwing it away on complaining, controlling, or other energy-wasting activities. These activities come from non-acceptance. You will find them very draining and support the false idea that we are totally impotent against our environment.

It is true that on the surface we may seem to have very little control over things, but we do have some control. We can control ourselves, the way we feel, and the way we act. It may not seem like much to someone who wants to control the universe, but it is really quite a lot when you think about it.

Imagine being at peace with your environment. Imagine not needing things to be certain way, but being okay with life just the way it is. How's that for control?

See things the way they are.

Before reacting to a situation you don't like, try observing it first. See how much you can notice about it. Be present with it for a while, and don't entertain any thoughts other than what you can observe. It is almost as if you are an outside observer looking at the situation for the first time. Try accepting the situation before reaching any conclusion or deciding what you're going to do about it.

If the situation makes you angry or upset, say to yourself as part of the observation, "This really upsets me." Include everything that occurs to you to say and accept it as part of the entire experience rather than reacting first and moving to shut down those parts you don't like.

What this does is create a little space around the situation. As you gather information through observation, you might see something you didn't see before. New

information may come to you, leading you to a different conclusion or another way to handle the situation that hadn't occurred to you at first. This sense of space around the situation will also give you a feeling of calmness you didn't have before.

Totally overwhelmed.

Sometimes life overwhelms us, and it is hard to get going again. We shut down, become depressed, eat some ice cream, and go to bed. Suffering from periodic bouts of depression, I have observed this phenomenon of being totally overwhelmed in myself from time to time.

The state of being overwhelmed prevents you from being able to break something down into smaller pieces. Life builds up, and appears to come at you like a solid wall. If you see it this way and react, you may see it as one contiguous whole, about to smash into you. If you have the presence of mind to observe the situation a little more closely, you may notice little parts of the wall that aren't so solid where you may be able to slip through.

Take what is overwhelming you, and break it down into smaller pieces. Then, take one of the pieces and deal with it. In this way, you will prevail over the feeling of

being overwhelmed, no matter how large or menacing it may have appeared to you at first.

Take one little piece of it at a time and deal with it. After that, take a rest. Observe your level of resistance as you deal with the small piece you have chosen. If you are still resisting, take an even smaller part and don't worry about when the job will be done. It will be done when it is supposed to be done. Just concentrate on the part you are dealing with now.

If a large, overwhelming thing can be broken down and dealt with this way, you will eventually see that nothing in life can overwhelm you anymore. Name one task, large or small, that can't be broken down into smaller pieces.

You want to put up a building? Start with a sketch. You want to go to Europe for six weeks? Put away your first \$100 toward it today. You want to overcome depression and being overwhelmed? Look for the tiny hole in the wall where you may slip through to the quiet on the other side. There, you can start making plans for your return.

Can I accept myself here?

This is a good question to ask yourself when you're in an intolerable situation. The idea is to find one place within where you can accept yourself, even though no place feels good to you at the moment.

I had such an experience when I was job hunting. My unemployment benefits had almost run out and I wasn't having any luck getting interviews, much less job offers. I felt extremely pressured to find a job, even though I had tried very hard in the past six months to do just that. "There must be something wrong with me, which is preventing me from getting a job," I thought at the time.

I became very depressed about it, and I remember crawling into bed, feeling there was no place where I could accept myself at that moment.

When I examined the situation a little more closely, I realized it was a little different than I had first imag-

ined in my depressed state of mind. First of all, companies were in the process of laying people off, not hiring. Secondly, I realized no matter how well my interview went, I simply could not force an employer to hire me. I had to admit that these two things were completely out of my control.

Once I accepted that, I started thinking about what I could control. I began to find acceptance for myself in the places where I could affect the situation. Now there was something constructive to do, and I totally lost interest in wasting time where I had no control, and therefore, no effect.

If an employer wasn't interested, I quickly moved on to the next, until I found one that was interested in interviewing me. The faster I could let go of the uninterested employers (and the places of non-acceptance within myself), the sooner I would find one interested in hiring me.

This turned it into a simple numbers game, removing all the emotional baggage of non-acceptance. The harder I worked, the better my chances became. In this way I finally prevailed, and was able to find a job before my unemployment benefits ran out.

Sleep seems to be the one place where we can always find self-acceptance. I am a big believer in naps. When I am feeling low, I take a short nap, from 10 to 30 minutes. It is amazing how different I feel afterward. I believe this is not only because of the restorative effects

sleep has on the body, but because when we are lying safely in our beds, we are in a place where we will always find acceptance.

Sometimes you just have to let it kill you.

What's at the bottom of every fear, every anxiety? What's the worst that can happen? If the worst you fear actually happens, how bad is that? The worst I can imagine is death. The things we fear, however, are rarely so extreme. So I say, let it kill you. After that, you can get up and start over.

Sometimes things hurt us and continue to do so every time we think about them and relive the situation. But there is a breaking point where it cannot possibly get any worse. This has also been referred to as hitting rock bottom.

If your sense of loss, being overwhelmed, or anger grows so much that it can't possibly get any worse, then from a certain point of view, it has already killed you. Let it! Let it wash over you and do its worst. Let it kill you as hard as it can, until the energy it carries is completely spent. Try to fully accept the little death it

brings. It is only killing some false part of you that you have identified with, even though at the time it may feel very real to you. It helps to understand that a part of you is dying.

Then, when it can't possibly hurt you anymore, get up and make dinner. Decide what movie you'd like to see tonight, or take a walk. It's over. The thing you feared most has actually happened, and now you rise again from the dead. Life goes on. Maybe something new and exciting is waiting outside your door.

Shall we go see about it?

Practicing meditation is practicing acceptance.

In the chapter on self-mastery, I mentioned people who put themselves in harm's way in order to learn calmness in the face of upheaval. Although I don't recommend doing anything to harm yourself, I do believe in the idea of creating challenges for yourself in order to grow.

When exercising, you work your muscles against resistance to get stronger. You don't simply do things that are easy for you. If that were the case, your muscles would never be exerted and would never grow stronger. Instead of putting yourself in harm's way, you can challenge yourself, just as physical exercise challenges the muscles of the body.

When learning acceptance, one of the tools we can use is meditation. Imagine sitting for a period of time, being as quiet as you can. Right there, you have created a situation that is generally intolerable to the mind. If you keep at it, eventually the mind will grow strong enough

so it can tolerate a complete hour of silence. You have to work up to that level in small steps.

The mind is constantly busy. We have been conditioned to avoid long periods of silence and introspection. During meditation, absolutely nothing happens. Meditation provides an experience that is the opposite of the way the mind usually works, so it doesn't always feel right at first.

You will want to get up. You will probably want to make a list of things to do. Telling your mind to be quiet for an hour is intolerable. That's why people avoid meditation, because there is a level of discomfort associated with it.

The idea is to gently introduce that discomfort into your system on a regular basis and then train yourself to remain absolutely calm in the face of it. Staying perfectly still in the midst of your mind's burning desire to do otherwise strengthens a whole new set of muscles. This mental strength is one of the benefits of meditation.

Here's where the practice of acceptance comes in. Absolutely nothing happens for an entire hour. The practice of meditation is training yourself to fully accept that.

I find my daily meditations to be quite pleasurable. I also find the acceptance I learn while meditating helps me throughout the rest of the day. Some of the stillness I've experienced while meditating stays with me even during times when I am not meditating.

Are you ready for the inner room?

The "inner room" is a concept that comes into play after you've been practicing acceptance for a while. By inner room, I am referring to a wealth of information and experiences that one does not normally come across, usually because our minds are elsewhere. Think of the inner room as your spiritual life and the "outer room" as your physical life.

Our lives are normally so busy with the outer room that we are overwhelmed by it. There's more here to keep us occupied than we can handle, so someone telling us about the inner room isn't going to impress us very much. We're too busy. The things of the outer room will keep us occupied just fine, thank you. Why lump more information on us now, when we're not ready to hear about it?

Sometimes, however, introducing a concept when you're not ready for it can help you recognize it later

when you are ready. Things change. Not being ready now does not preclude what might happen in the future.

Have you ever had the experience of going to a place over and over, say a favorite vacation spot, and think you know everything about it? Then, you discover a street that you didn't know was there before, or a person who lived in the town all along, but you'd never had occasion to meet.

Suddenly, a whole new world opens up to you with the advent of this seemingly small event. Discovering the inner room is very much like this. It is the overlooked dimension that's been there all along, but we've been too busy looking elsewhere to notice. Then, suddenly, it's right there in front of us.

A day will come when you find you are tired of fighting, resisting, and dealing with the issues of the outer room. Interest fades, because physical life is temporary. Any effort you put into it will eventually go away, because one day, your physical life will go away.

The ups and downs of the outer room are too limiting. It often repeats itself, like television reruns. We've seen it before. We begin to get the idea that there's more out there but don't know how to retrieve it. Something has changed in us. What? We've become more open to the spiritual life and would like to see what's in the inner room.

A door appears to us that we've never seen before.

We venture into the inner room and turn on the light. Something from the outer room gets our attention again, but eventually we begin to stray more often into the inner room, and find excuses to stay. There's more here to explore than in the outer room and it's much more interesting, less limiting.

Eventually, we find ourselves spending more time here than in the outer room. Although there are many ways to find it, one of the ways I have found is to simply give up struggling with the things of the outer room. It can hold our interest and engage us forever if we let it, but knowing there's more to life than struggle and repetition might make us open to it sooner. Practicing acceptance can make us ready for the inner room.

Once you've thoroughly become acquainted with the inner room, you may find yet another door, another room to explore. Jesus said, "In my father's house are many mansions." Do you think this is what he was referring to?

Anytime you're feeling bad.

When you're feeling bad, stop and take a look. Try to bring the feeling up to conscious awareness where you can look at it more closely. You do this by asking yourself a few questions: "Why am I feeling bad? What, exactly, am I feeling? Am I not accepting myself here for some reason? What is the reason?"

If you can find a way to accept yourself, you will immediately start to feel better. If you can't accept yourself at the moment, admit it to yourself. Say something like, "I am really feeling bad about myself, and I can't do anything about it right now." It will at least get the acceptance juices going in the right direction by bringing the problem up to the surface where you may see it more clearly. This doesn't seem like much, but it's a very good first step. Once you can see things more clearly, you can figure out what you need to do about it and where to go from there.

Life is made up of many learning curves. How can you be expected to know them all? An approach of acceptance gives you room and allows you time to learn what you need to know. Trust the rate at which you are learning. It is your own speed. How can you go at someone else's speed? It wouldn't be yours; it would be theirs. I have never really been comfortable trying to go at someone else's speed - have you?

Someday you will look back at the lessons learned that seemed so hard at the time. They are only as hard as your resistance against them. Why not look back at them now?

Look back in time, at this moment. See it from a perspective of your own future, when the problem has already been solved. See yourself being calm about it. Go right now, to the end result you would like to have. Doesn't that feel better than struggling, and beating yourself up with non-acceptance? All you need to do is realize there's a choice in the matter.

If you know the ultimate outcome is yourself at peace with the situation, any situation, no matter what, why not go there right now and save yourself some time? Why not go there now and save yourself some grief? Put yourself in the position of already having solved the problem and simply retrace your steps forward in time to be there. Your subconscious mind knows how to do this.

Anytime you are feeling bad about anything, try to

go to some place of acceptance within yourself, even if it is simply to admit that you fear you did something wrong, and would now like to fix it. This is an honest beginning where you can generate some self-acceptance. Then leave it alone for a while. When you come back to it, you will know what to do. The next step will be laid out for you.

Trust yourself and take it.

One day away from death.

If you had only one day left to live, how would you live it? Doing something you don't like to do? Regretting the moments of your life? At odds with everything around you? If you are living this way now, how do you know you don't only have one day left to live?

There will come a day when we only have one day left on earth. It could be today; we don't really know this in advance. Is it worth living your last day in a state of war with yourself?

Search within yourself to see all the warring factions, the parts that are fighting with each other. Decide now that it is not worth living this way. Make peace with yourself by deciding to accept everything that is going on, and this means all parts, both inside and outside of you, not just the parts you like.

Then, in the time that remains, you can do something about the things you don't like. Profound acceptance does not mean tolerating something you don't like. It

means acknowledging it, being aware of it, not being in denial about it, whatever it happens to be or however frightening it may appear to you. This acknowledgement is your first step on the road to profound acceptance.

Why not learn to accept yourself now at a profound level, instead of waiting until you are on your deathbed to find out that all your anxieties were simply not worth all the fuss and energy you put into them?

Imagine you are on your deathbed now. You have already reached this conclusion. You have decided to accept all of life as it is. You are at peace. Okay, you're not on your deathbed anymore. You can get up now. Wasn't that feeling of peacefulness nice? Wouldn't you want to feel that way all the time? Go do it in your life now and don't wait until you're on your deathbed!

We are all only one day away from death. By this, I mean we don't really know. You could have many years ahead of you, or be gone by this time tomorrow afternoon. There is still enough time to decide how you want to live the rest of your life.

Try to remember that the next time you see yourself getting upset because the guy in front of you just swerved to cut you off in traffic. Whatever the offense, is it worth getting upset about? Is anything worth getting upset about in light of the relatively short amount of time we have here? Think about how you would prefer to spend it. It's your choice.

Notes and rests.

There are times in life when you will be fully present and in the moment. You will be profoundly accepting of yourself and others. You will be completely calm in the midst of any storm. You will feel how wonderful these moments are for yourself, and you won't need to take my word for it.

You will love these moments for their natural, unforced, liberating qualities. You will love them so much that you will want more; you will want things to always be this way.

Then there will be moments that are just awful, full of fear, thoughts of the past or future, being non-present and non-accepting. Expect them and welcome them when they come. Accept these times in advance. It will make it easier for you when they come. It also helps to know that they are temporary, and won't last.

Think of these differing times of presence and non-

presence as the notes and rests in music. When the orchestra plays, there are notes. When they stop playing, there are rests. Without the notes, there is no sound. Without the rests, the notes all blur together. You need both the notes and the rests to be able to hear the music as the composer intended.

When you are being present and accepting, that's good. Enjoy it! When you are being fearful and non-accepting, that's also good - enjoy that as well. Like the notes and rests in the music, you can't have one without the other. However, learning to accept yourself at these fearful and non-accepting times turns one into the other.

And that's the other little secret of my book.

Awareness is all you have.

Most of us carry something with us at all times, such as a briefcase, wallet, purse, portable computer, PDA, pen, cell phone, note pad, 3x5 cards, paperback novel, chewing gum, etc. If you were to leave or misplace any of these items, what would you still have left? What is the one thing that you take with you wherever you go, and can't forget no matter how hard you try, or absent-minded you are?

Awareness is the only answer to this question. You are either aware or not aware. You are either on or off. If you are off, it means that you are asleep or unconscious. If you are awake, your awareness has different levels of quality to it, depending on how present you are.

Being fully present is taking your awareness as far as it can go. You are giving 100% of yourself to this moment. If you have had moments like these, you know what kind of quality of life is possible. Being fully pres-

ent is an amazing experience, but a rare one. There is usually something going on somewhere in our minds that takes our attention away from being completely in the moment.

If awareness is all you have, and the quality of that awareness can change so much, wouldn't you want to think about what you can do to improve it? If something leaves your awareness - you forget about something - it no longer exists for you until you remember it again. Being fully present is like having all your awareness with you and active at the same time. In other words, you are able to enjoy more of the only thing you really have.

One of the ways I have found to become more present is through profound acceptance. I define profound acceptance as deeply accepting whatever is going on at the moment, looking at it fully, and being as aware of it as I possibly can without judgement. I become fully present and am enjoying the moment to its fullest.

Quality of mind is quality of life.

Presence leads to acceptance, acceptance leads to love.

Through trying to practice being present, I learned about acceptance. Through learning acceptance, I learned about love. Acceptance is a form of love. In trying to be more present in each moment, I was trying to get somewhere. After arriving at a place of acceptance, I wasn't trying to get anywhere. I had arrived.

One approach is a mental technique, and the other is a feeling. It might appear that these two approaches contradict each other, but they don't. One prepares the way for the other.

"Why didn't you just start with love?" you ask. Well, that's a very good question. Some people do, and it works quite well for them. It has to do with the conditioning of the mind. If you know how your mind works, you give it what it needs to grow in the way that feels best.

So many of us are conditioned to going out and get-

The Secret to Being Present



Jim Carruth

ting something, working for it, and striving. For these people, myself included, simply opening your heart and feeling acceptance doesn't seem as if it would work. Also, at the time I began this practice, I didn't know that acceptance was the issue.

A technique gives your mind something to chew on, to be busy with. The mind loves to be busy. It was by practicing the technique of trying to remain present at all times that I noticed what was preventing my progress.

Through learning to accept more and more, I began to be able to remain present for longer periods of time. In this respect, the technique paved the way for the understanding, the feelings of acceptance and love to come. It brought to light what was needed.

There is no right or wrong way to do this. You know what kind of person you are, and what works for you. Start with that and see where it takes you. Ultimately, all techniques will be disposed of once you've arrived at your destination. They can, however, definitely be of value along the way.

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Becoming profoundly present in each moment of life is my definition of enlightenment. This subject was covered beautifully in *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle. It was by trying to practice the information I found in that book, that I discovered the concepts in this one.

Non-acceptance of life creates a situation where you cannot possibly be present. For me, learning acceptance made being present possible. In my book, it's the secret to being present.

There will be plenty of times when you observe your mind wandering away from the present, dreaming about the past or the future, or about anything other than what's going on right now, in this very moment.

The goal is to remain present in every moment. The trick is to accept yourself when you discover that you are not.