



THE POWER OF ACCEPTANCE

The Power of Acceptance: Opening to the Love of Others

By Catherine Dowling

If you want to see how we close ourselves down to the love of others, just watch a group of children interacting in a playground. Some are the center of every game while others stay closer to small sub-sets of friends circling the leaders. And then there's that one little boy or girl who hovers alone on the edge of the group, longing to participate but holding back.

Love is ours for the taking yet at some point in our life, many of us have felt that love is rationed, like a trickle of water in a desert arroyo, sometimes a little fuller, sometimes completely dried up.

I've watched children hanging back and longed to tell them all they have to do to be accepted is come forward, join in, run and jump and squeal with joy like the other children. In other words, be their authentic, spontaneous selves. But of course that strategy rarely works, for children or for our adult selves. It's like telling someone with a broken leg to just get up and run a marathon.

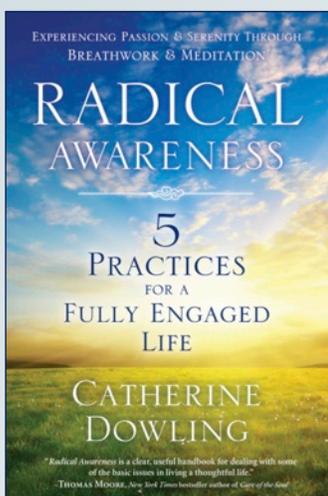
All we really need to do is make eye contact, say hello, ask questions and reveal a little of ourselves. In my experience, most people--not all but most people--are remarkably receptive and willing to like others. A little self-revelation, if it is authentic and open, is generally met with warmth and interest. From there new relationships and love flows. But shyness, low self-regard, fear and past experience make that coming forward painful, and for some impossible.

I've been working on coming forward for years. First to go was my self-criticism about not coming forward. If I hang back on the edge of the playground, so be it. There's always a next time. But below the self-criticism lie deeper beliefs – about not being wanted, not being likeable, not being interesting enough. When we shut ourselves off from love, we generally have some variation on these or other beliefs.

I recently gave a talk on Awareness in a bookshop. It was an ok crowd for the location but still small. Yet the experience was, for me, an unforgettable lesson in the power of “coming forward.” I've found the hardest job of opening to the love of others is not drumming up the courage to insinuate myself into groups. The hardest part is self-acceptance, the medicine that dissolves those deeper beliefs. When we reach a level of self-acceptance, the act of coming forward is surprisingly easy. From that one act of “coming forward” authentically in the bookshop, have come a radio interview, two other speaking invitations and a welcome into two delightful support circles. The outpouring of acceptance when we open to the love of others can be truly astonishing.

www.catherinedowling.com

catherinedowling@yahoo.ie



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“There is no coming to consciousness without pain. People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own Soul. One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.”

— C.G. Jung