

[It is No Longer Acceptable](#)

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It is No Longer Acceptable

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It is summer at our monastery in Hawaii, and we have a wonderful band of boys here on our remote Garden Island. Ages 10 to 16, they are serving God selflessly, learning the challenges of sitting perfectly still during morning meditation and to their own amazement discovering the fulfillment of karma yoga. They are all good souls, more spiritually astute than most adults, and yet they are not perfect. They taunt and tease each other, say unkind things they regret later, and fret when they can only consume 11 chapatis and their friends are still smiling at 18.

They bring us much pleasure. They also provoke interesting questions like, "Which of you knows why my 185-megabyte hard disc won't work this morning?" or "Sure it's fun to explore the river pond, but is it absolutely necessary to hug a 40-pound stone to get to the bottom faster?"

They have reminded us that somewhere between fourteen and eighteen, puerile boyishness vanishes and in its place is revealed a newfound maturity, an eagerness to contribute, to be useful, to accomplish things. Suddenly, it is no longer acceptable to leave your room a total mess, to fear night-dwelling hobgoblins or to pull your sister's braids.

No longer acceptable - a deceptively simple phrase which applies profoundly to us not only as emerging adolescents but more broadly as a social species. Like these teenage youths, mankind is growing up, leaving behind an awkward stage of confusion, egoity and combativeness (which Carl Sagan once described to us as "testosterone poisoning.")

Let me explain with a few examples. Not so many decades ago slavery was a thriving business on the planet. Otherwise compassionate men, highly learned men, even spiritual men, bought and owned other men, women and children. It was a venerable and perfectly acceptable practice, professed by its defenders to be the natural, divinely ordained order of things.

Then one day the possession of human chattel was no longer acceptable. Something happened inside of us, a silent switch toggled, and suddenly we, the human race, could no longer permit this particular inequity. Slavery, in a few agonizing years, was abolished. It's amazing, if we think of it, that actions so common for thousands of years can suddenly and completely vanish.

In similar ways, a number of our childhood ways have been left behind - monarchies and feudalism, torture, child labor, punishment without trial, eating on our haunches and spitting tobacco on public sidewalks are a few that come to mind. You smile, but these were all once the accepted norm for us.

It is more difficult to smile about the things we have not outgrown (somewhat akin to asking a teenager to laugh about acne). Though we still do many things which in a few hundred years we will be able to smile about, the good news is that the switch has already clicked in recent times on a whole set of values, attitudes and behavioral patterns. Not everyone is aware of it, and it will certainly be years before the last of us changes, but it is no longer acceptable for us to destroy nature. It is no longer acceptable to kill creatures for mere sport and vanity. It is no longer acceptable to abuse women and children - no longer acceptable to deny people basic rights of education, travel, voting, having families or owning property.

It is important to distinguish here the individual from the group. Such revelations happen all the time in the microcosm. A Mahatma Gandhi will realize that it is no longer acceptable to be violent or a yoga student will intuit that it is no longer acceptable to lie and deceive.

But thousands of such individual changes, even millions, do not constitute the kind of macrocosmic, pan-species transformation we are speaking of. There is an uncanny immediacy to that kind of change, like the instant a school of fish "decide" to change direction - swift, synchronized and unquestioned. In speaking with the

boys about this idea, they offered a good analogy, "It's like a lot of people going around in the dark, and only a few have a flashlight. Suddenly, the lights go on and everyone can see the same thing."

Perhaps the most fascinating such change coming to light these days revolves around the preservation of diversity. The same creature that once hated difference and invested seriously in its general eradication, now comprehends its value. In many spheres of human activity, the importance of diversity is being acknowledged. One example our readers are familiar with is in the world of plants. Nations have been destroying forests for centuries. It was progress, it was the victory of civilization over raw wilderness. Now we realize the folly and know this cannot go on much longer. In the diversity of plants, pharmacologists tell us, lie the remedies of diseases known and unknown. Just last week the most promising cure for cancer was released, a drug extracted from the bark of a little-known tree.

After centuries of clearing away other plants so we could establish nation-sized fields of wheat and corn, agriculturalists are speaking out against mono-culture farming and uttering new mantras about polyculture and permaculture. Giant factory farms, once touted as the wave of the future, are going bankrupt, and in their place community and family farms are regaining lost ground. Biologists who once foisted their newest hybrids upon farmers eager for increased crops now say such thinking is short-sighted. In the long run, they now preach, we have to preserve germplasm diversity. We see this trend in business where small, community-based companies are outperforming multi-national corporations too far removed from the consumer's needs.

The injunction is this: it is no longer acceptable to destroy diversity. This basic principle applies no less to how we approach cultures. Not long ago the world was lead by men who saw it as their ordained mission in life to destroy the beliefs of others, to destroy the traditions of others, to destroy the very life of others. These men, heroes in their own time, would be tried as criminals a hundred years from now.

Change is all around us. In science we are no longer content to see the universe as a clock-like mechanism or the earth as an inert rock. In the new consciousness the universe is organic process and the Earth a sentient organism interacting with the life it supports.

No longer do we see the taming or conquest of nature as our goal, but understand we are of the nature of nature, that our relationship is one of symbiosis with the whole. Our interests, even our self-interest, have expanded from adolescent anthropocentric concerns to mature biocentric ones in which we protect and respect other life forms. Suddenly, we appreciate the diversity. Startlingly, we find we exist because of it.

In the world of religion, there are parallel shifts taking place. Monotheism and atheism are quietly being displaced by pantheism and panentheism - in seminaries and coffee table discussions. Whereas the material cosmos has long been decreed corrupt, impure and even demonic, now it is discussed reverently, as imbued with inherent sacredness. Whereas the God of the last few centuries was remote, jealous, fear-evoking and transcendent, now Divinity is intimate and immanent. That change makes it no longer acceptable to hurt others in the name of God.

The idea of things being unacceptable comes first from the outside world. Mom puts up a sign on the door to your room, announcing a new reign at home. Or peers laugh at you in the schoolyard, sending painful signals of inacceptability designed to compel conformity. Or nations rewrite their laws, defining the new order.

Later, these messages of the need to change arise from within us, from the depths of being, from silent and certain knowingness. However they come, from inside or out, each it-is-no-longer-acceptable message is a seed of our next metamorphosis on the Great Path. The wise would have us listen to these internal switches. For them, it is no longer acceptable not to.

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