



IN DEFENCE OF TOLERANCE

by WILSON McCASKILL

In two conferences, separated by just a few weeks, I heard presenters encourage attendees to seriously question the benefits of tolerance and to consider abandoning the belief that it's a virtue of any value.

It appears there is a trend afoot to see tolerance as a failing of human nature.

Both presenters used similar examples to sell their point-of-view. They both energetically pointed out that there are many things in the world that are simply intolerable and that tolerating them was tantamount to supporting them.

Child slavery, repression of women, terrorism, genocide, racism, sexism and a host of other 'isms are all intolerable, and the sooner our intolerance brings these abhorrent practices to an end the better. Powerful stuff, and such examples are certainly moving enough to stop any defence of tolerance as a virtue.

Both presenters also pointed out how demeaning and insulting it is to be simply tolerated by another. To know that someone merely tolerates you is hardly uplifting, they suggested. Their point of view was that by tolerating someone you reduce them to being of little or no importance or significance; far better to be accepting of them.

There can be no denying that many things are intolerable and that to merely tolerate someone can be an act of overt arrogance and condescension. However, it seems to me that defining tolerance is important and separating tolerance from the act of approval is critical.

Personally, I think tolerance is necessary if only because it is, in a significant way, linked to patience. You may want to stop child slavery and indeed be on the ground working tirelessly to bring it to an end. However, no matter how intolerant you are of the crime, you will have to tolerate the infuriating amount of time it will take to spur the various government agencies, the police and the general population into action.

Fail to tolerate cultural differences, contrasting priorities, opposing points of view, religious frameworks and intolerable acts will continue; aided by your inability to tolerate the fact that nothing ever moves fast or efficiently enough for those consumed by a cause and the time altering passions it generates.

Tolerance does not mean approval. Nor does it mean that the tolerant do not seek change. On the contrary, tolerance allows those who seek change the time, space and understanding to find the best way to achieve it.



If I am tolerant of another's abusive or offensive behaviour it does not mean I approve or condone it. What tolerance affords me is the space to see the other as a human being and the control to address their behaviour with due regard for their dignity and rights.

Play Is The Way® defines tolerance as follows:

- ***The habit of accepting and respecting difference***
- ***The habit of accepting things you cannot change***
- ***The habit of avoiding judgement***
- ***The habit of forgiving faults and the patience to work with them***

Our definition of tolerance permits children to see it as a habit of action. It's a virtue that is both achievable and worthy.

By accepting and respecting difference, children firstly acknowledge that difference exists. They are, of course, at liberty to question those differences and can even attempt to change them, provided they do not violate the dignity and rights of others while doing so.

The habit of, accepting things you cannot change, spares children from beating their heads against a brick wall. It also helps them channel their energy into dealing with "what is," by making the most of any given circumstance. Too many are caught in wasteful and frustrating denial.

Of course, it can be convenient to assume that something is unchangeable. Johnny might declare that he is useless at maths but adult guidance will help him to accept that maths will, for the foreseeable future, be hard. However, improvement is possible and being useless is both an inaccurate and unhelpful judgement that may, all too easily, assist him to escape from the unpleasantness of hard work and close his mind to the possibilities of change.

In the understanding that we are all flawed and no matter what our commitment to personal perfection may be, we will fail to attain it, we can only hope that our flaws will not be held against us. I have, on far too many occasions to count, been helped by people with the patience and tolerance to work with my numerous (often annoying) flaws. I in-turn, have exercised tolerance many times to maintain productive relationships with people who were, *in my opinion*, flawed in either their values, thinking, attitude or behaviour. I'm sure that had I the habit of avoiding judgement, my tolerance levels would not have been as stretched as they so often were, and I would have been more creative, flexible and effective in the way I worked with people whom I found difficult or frustrating.



I fear for a world that casts aside tolerance. I want a world that is intolerant of the intolerable. I want a world where there is the tolerance to treat others as you want to be treated and one that overcomes all injustice by just means.

I object to the notion that because I am tolerant I am approving and that my tolerance of another devalues them. I desperately hope that we never lose the tolerance, the breathing space that helps us to avoid our all too prevalent tendency, to beat each other up.