

I Want You To Change

Written by Mrs. Fila Qasabian, from Sydney, Australia

"I want you to change!" "It's really for your own good!"

Who? Me?

You want me to change?

How do I change?

Why should I change?

Change from what?

Change into what?

Is there something wrong with me?

Am I not good enough as I am?

I'm sure most of us have heard the above request to change sometime in our lives, and have had the above inner conversation reflecting our bewilderment and incredulousness!

In my present post, I have had many students walk through my door for one reason or another. I have had many groups of students come in to resolve some issues that have been niggling at their friendships for quite some time. Each time when I asked group members to tell "their" story, I found some reluctance and some fear to be open and honest. The fear was of losing friends, fear of not being accepted, fear of not fitting in, fear of not being good enough, fear of being alone. Therefore they bore their story, sense of self, and inner doubts and wants silently, hoping that things will work out, things will get sorted out, "I must not rock the boat, I must fit in at all costs".

As the stories unfolded, the thing that attracted my attention most was the fact that some friends, in groups, told each other what were some of the ways in which they needed to change to "become better people". Was it any wonder then that no one felt comfortable to be totally open and honest about the real issues that were facing them? Not one person felt "good enough" to speak up!

I suspect that these children, for that's exactly what they are, are repeating what they heard said to them in a thousand different ways as they were growing up. They chose their friends for the beautiful qualities they possessed, and promptly started to ask them to change! How confusing can things get? And of course because children do so desperately want to fit in with everyone else, especially the "in" group, they will sacrifice their true self, accept what is being said, feel sad, confused, inferior, and say absolutely nothing about it, suffering alone and in silence.

Why? Why does this happen? Indeed, why should this happen to healthy growing young people who are in the process of discovering themselves? How can anyone expect these youngsters to develop their full potential if they do not even have an idea of who they really are? How can we as parents, educators, helpers and those who care, help to dissipate the confusion and allow them to really be, really grow, discover their gifts and talents, realize the marvelous miracles that they are, to really reach their potential? For, like it or not, it starts with us, especially us as parents; for we are our children's first mirrors as they start life. If the mirror is faulty then the children don't see their true selves but a distorted image, and they believe what they see in the mirror for they have nothing else to compare themselves with; hence the confusion.

Well then, how can us parents help our children reach their true potential? A big question indeed. The answer is very simple, but very difficult to implement. The answer is acceptance, unconditional acceptance!

Heard it before? Yes! Heard it many times I'm sure. But you say, "*How can it be that I cannot accept my children, (my students, my partner, etc.)? Of course I accept them. Don't I show it? I certainly do enough for them! They go to good schools, I don't expect any money from them, whatever they ask for they get, even if I go without. They are getting what all the other children have, and more. We don't put pressure on them, we make no demands of them. They sure have it a lot easier than when I was growing up! Well what more can people expect from me? Don't I work hard enough already? What more can I be expected to do?*"

A legitimate response! We are already doing all we know how to, all that is within our power to give our children a better start than the one we had. Therefore the following is simply an opportunity for reflection, just to see how we, as parents, in charge of the future generations, can improve on the very best of what we already offer. How we can give them the very best of who we really are, so they can in turn see the very best of who they are, and who they can become, instead of some secondhand version of what someone else thinks they should be!

Let's first look at some definitions. According to the 1995 edition of the Webster dictionary, to accept means: to receive willingly, to agree to. Acceptable means: capable or worthy of being accepted. Acceptance means the act of accepting, the state of being accepted or acceptable, favorable reception. Unconditional means: not limited in any way; something that has no conditions attached to it.

When we apply the concept of unconditional acceptance to our children (or anybody else for that matter), we are saying to them: "You are all right just the way you are"; "I like you just the way you are"; "I think you are a marvel and I want to discover that marvel in you"; "I want to watch you and learn from you and hope that you'll learn from me"; "I want to keep you safe until you are old enough to discover your own marvel and your own worth". "I'd like to see you learn to think for yourself, so no one can tell you what to be, so you can discover your own depths, and the miracle that you are!"

When we apply this very formula to our relationships with our children (and anyone else for that matter), something happens; something that's pure magic. It actually transforms them and changes them in ways we could not begin to imagine.

Let's look at the way we see our children. When was the last time your children did something they wanted and it went contrary to your wishes and beliefs? Think back, what did you do? What were you thinking? Did you panic and yell at them? Were you cool, calm and collected, asking them for an explanation of their behavior, really stopping to hear what they had to say? Did your children feel safe enough to tell you the truth? Did your children feel comfortable enough to come to you with the truth, to come to you for advice? For help? For a listening ear? For a shoulder to cry on? Or did your children have to invent a thousand stories and excuses to cover up what happened? To minimize the effect? To fabricate lies not to get into trouble, not to

get punished; because, yet again, they were doing something contrary to what us, as parents, wanted/expected from them?

When your children have a problem, or have done something wrong, or get into trouble and come to you and tell it to you as it is, then your children feel accepted as they are, and are very lucky, for they are well on the way to reaching their full potential in a safe, loving and accepting environment, where no matter what happens, all the members of the family will work it out together. For when children come to parents with a problem at issue, it presents them with a great opportunity to learn and discover themselves and gain from the experience of the parents.

Bringing up children with unconditional acceptance does not mean we create angels. Far from it. It means that, we accept the fact that our children are not perfect, and provide the safety in which they will discover and explore their true self, and maybe even modify some behaviors that are not conducive to their growth and development, through example and gentle guidance.

We start this in the cradle. We actually study our children, their temperament, habits, inclinations, moods and behaviors. We take careful note. We clarify our values by which we want our children to grow. We formulate rules that are going to make it possible for us to impart these values to our children. We set limitations for our children so they know how far to stretch without getting hurt. We create safe boundaries for them within which they can explore their abilities. Our children will always push those boundaries to see how serious we are, but it is important to know that the rules are there to protect them and they need us to be stronger than they are.

Ponder the words of the *Prophet* by Gibran:

***Your children are not your children,
They are sons and daughters of life's longing for itself,
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.
You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the Archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves the bow that is stable.***