

Defending Yourself Vs. Acceptance

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Q: How does acceptance apply when you can make a decision to act against something that could harm you? For example, if a person tries to attack me with a knife, should I accept or love this attack and not defend myself against it? After thinking this through, I think maybe I should accept it, meaning not argue internally against it, but also fight or defend against it and then accept whatever the result may be. I would love to hear your thoughts on this.

A: Your question highlights the fact that there are different levels of truth, and your conclusion is a good one. On the practical human level, you need to respond to an attack in some way, which may include defending yourself. On a more subtle and yet more profound level, you can also accept the whole experience.

These levels are not separate and they do affect each other. After an inner attitude of acceptance becomes more established in you, you may respond to an attack differently than you would have before. Instead of fighting back, you might turn the other cheek (especially if no knife is involved!) or simply run away or even find a way to connect with your attacker so that he or she no longer feels moved to attack you. This inner acceptance and equanimity allows for a wider range of responses.

I'd like to add that acceptance isn't actually something you do but an inherent quality of what you are. You are empty, aware space, and nothing is more accepting than space. So practicing acceptance is kind of like practicing having shoulders. Just as practicing having shoulders doesn't make you have shoulders, so practicing acceptance doesn't make acceptance happen. It just allows you to be more aware of the enormous amount of acceptance that is always here. This acceptance, which belongs to your Being, even accepts all your resistance and judgment.

Often the easiest way to notice and experience the acceptance that Being has for everything is to first notice that even when you are rejecting something about your experience, you are also accepting your thoughts about rejecting it. Being, or space, allows everything you like and everything you don't like, and it also allows all of your liking and not liking.