

Do You Really Want To Be Tolerant?

It seems to me that just when I think I'm pretty enlightened, someone wiser, and generally much younger, proves I've got a way to go.

Last night I had a long conversation with my 15 year old nephew, Joe. Over the years we've had many discussions and shared our feelings about life. Recently, Joe's school spent a day with speakers and instructors on the importance of accepting other people and cultures. One of the speakers gave a talk on the importance of being tolerant of others and their way of life. Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? Well, I thought so, too, until Joe said he didn't buy it. Fascinated as always with his way of thinking, I asked him why. "I agree with Gandhi," Joe said, "when he said we should not tolerate others, but rather we should respect them."

Hmmm. That got me thinking.

When we tolerate someone or a culture, we are merely "putting up" with them and don't go beyond the invisible – yet solid – wall we put up between us. We aren't looking at who they are and what they are about, we are simply doing what we need to do to tolerate them. But if we *respect* other people and cultures that differ from ours, we are not allowing that wall of separation between us, we are treating them with the acceptance and honor we ourselves expect. That doesn't mean we put up with abuse or always agree with everyone around us, and they do not have to agree with us, but we do need to give each other the freedom to live our lives without harm to one another.

And so I pose this challenge: Next time you're involved in a situation with someone who looks or thinks differently than you, which path will you choose, the one of tolerance...or the one of respect?