



## Rebellion Dogs Farewell September

*Musings on “Love and Tolerance of Others  
is our Code”*

### **TOLERATE:**

***allow the existence, occurrence, or practice of (something that one does not necessarily like or agree with) without interference. accept or endure (someone or something unpleasant or disliked) with forbearance.***

[The truth, according to Google.com]

Unless I am kidding myself, I actively exercise my capacity for tolerance; it’s a value that I hold dear.

It’s a funny thing; I also crave connection (community), but I have these natural attractions and aversions. Other people—the objects of my *noble* tolerance—can be problematic when I’m driven (consciously or subconsciously) by what I want and what I don’t want.



Others, the very people I need for connection and community differ from me. While I practice my “meeting people where they are,” I am still list-making about their *they-ness*. They have differences and part of me, like it or not, focuses on keeping a tally of these differences. While I may be attracted to some of the difference—I may even envy them—there are irritants, differences that agitate me and awake within me, my grievances.

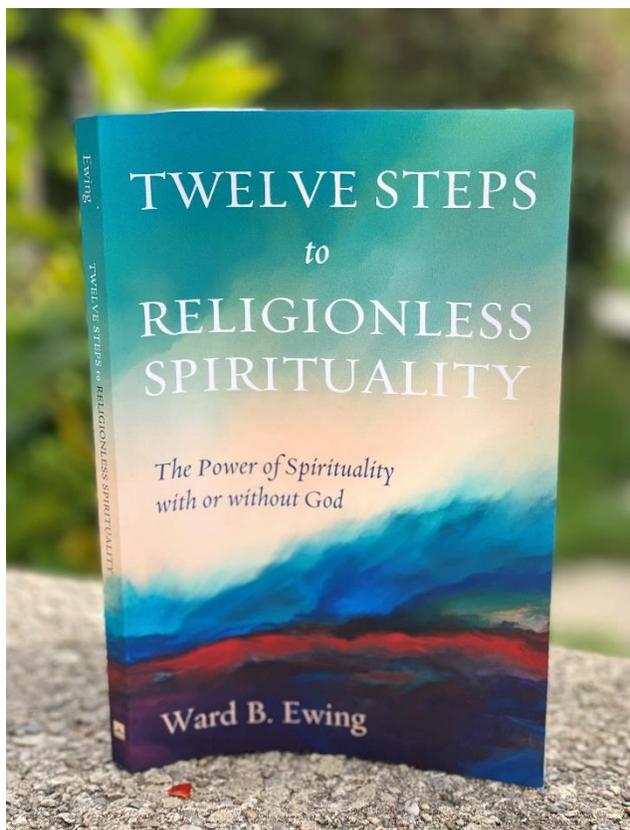
They want to talk about X. I am tired of X; “Why won’t you talk about Y or Z?” And why are they going on so long about it? So, how can I, “accept or endure with forbearance?” How do any of us? I want to expand my awareness of others, the world, and my role in life. Intellectually, I

understand that to expand my view, I need to empathize with divergent views and styles. But at a deep level, I'm guarded and critical.

For me, to tolerate you, or for you to tolerate me, this is not a dynamic of equals. The *tolerator*, that being me or you, has built a power dynamic between us. By the way, it is a very unenforceable and imaginary power dynamic. Who am I to judge; who am I to lay claim to this higher status with the entitlement of casting my thumb up, or thumb down, to seal the fate of another? Maybe we both view each other through the lens of an imaginary, unenforceable class-system. I am the empowered who tolerates or does not. You are the subject of my tolerance/intolerance.

In this sense intolerance is controlling, but tolerating is, also. In our relationship, I'm the one setting, what Dr. Allen Berger calls, unenforceable rules. I rule on what's tolerable.

For several days I have been musing on something I read in a book I'm reviewing ahead of an upcoming Rebellion Dogs Radio show. This shines a different hue of light on the idea what tolerance is. Rev. Ward B. Ewing is an AA General Service Board chair emeritus. He served as a non-alcoholic trustee earlier this century. Based, in part on talks he gave and conversations he had with AA or about AA to the public, he was asked to write a book that articulates his unconventional views of spirituality—at least for a reverend, perhaps. The book is: *Twelve Steps to Religionless Spirituality: The Power of Spirituality with or without God*. He credits a friend for a different look at what it means to tolerate others:



"The culture of the A.A. groups I have experienced are remarkably consistent: a primary concern for the still-suffering alcoholic, an expectation that all be as honest and truthful as they are able, and love and tolerance for one another. A friend once said, 'Tolerance is the art of seeing yourself as others see you - and not getting mad about it.' The culture of tolerance and truthfulness is a powerful force that allows members to see themselves and their situation more clearly." (p. 67)

That's something isn't it? If I deem someone else, or someone else's view to be intolerable, if I unpack this, their worldview holds me and/or my worldview in a dimmer light that how I view myself. When I react to them, in large part, am I not reacting to their unfavorable view of me? And can I not see me as they do - empathize - and accept their equal right to a view or position as I hold? I'm not conceding they're right and I'm wrong.

Instead I am affirming they see me, and/or my position, as inferior or threatening. So they are responding naturally, in accordance with their conditioning. Their response to a perceived threat isn't so different than my own knee-jerk reactions.

Example: I'm an atheist in an AA program where theism has primacy. Most people, not only believe in a prayer-answering, sobriety-granting supernatural power, but they believe said belief is responsible for their recovery and foundational to AA culture. So, I will hear, "If you're sober without god(s) you're not a real alcoholic; you're a problem drinker." Or they'll look at my AA group's artistic liberty or reading/interpreting the 12-steps in a godless, humanist language and they may say, "That's not AA; you can't call yourself an AA group," or the ever-popular, "Why don't you just leave AA and start your own fellowship if you don't like the god-stuff!?"

So, this sort of criticism puts me in a light of having a half-measures approach or being combative. Or they extrapolate further and see me or my group as confusing newcomers about what the "real" AA is, watering down Alcoholics Anonymous, fixing what ain't broke, causing dis-harmony and threatening the longevity of AA as a whole. Well that's a lot. And if I can see myself as they see me, I have a degree of compassion. I don't want dis-harmony or threats to AA longevity; I want AA to be here for my grandchildren; they do also. So, this identification puts me on equal ground: two stewards of AA concerned for our future. In fairness, I have to deal with the fact I also see their reification of the AA message, literalism and insistence on uniformity over unity between divergent rituals and approaches, I see them as a threat to AA longevity and appeal to the next generation of newcomers to our fellowship.

So I have an opinion (not a truth) and so do they. We view each other with suspicion. But if I can channel empathy for how they see me, and that should be easy if I see them the same way, I can't hold contempt and empathy for them in the same moment. So can I focus on the empathy? Can I express my heart-felt empathy? And will that make discussion between us go better?

If I want this love and tolerance of others code to work, can I find success with less internal struggle? How about just love the other? I think love defuses barriers and facilitates connection between us. If I love you, I am at your service, I hold no power over you, only limited power over my choices and my reactions. If I love, I want to hear what you have to say. I want you to feel heard by me. How could I be irritated that you're talking about "this," even though I want to talk about "that"? You are beautiful just the way you are.

Love evokes curiosity—in a way that tolerance merely suspends my judgement. One focus is energetic and engaging; the other is constrained. Being open, the beginner's mind is not judgmental. Certainly when I'm in love, I am not irritated with your choice of topics or your tone. Conversely if I'm trying to cultivate tolerance, I am starting with a hierarchy and I'm being judgy to boot. This imaginary barrier I've built between you and I is neither agreed upon nor am I entitled. It's something I've constructed to—I don't know—protect myself? Protection ostensibly is geared to get me what I want: safety. My safe space is a barrier, as well. I want connection. This barrier, protects but also circumvents my ability to enjoy the connection I also crave. Oh, and by the way, I may even be blaming you for my deprivation, because if only you talked about what I need/want to talk about, I wouldn't be starved for connection. "What's wrong with you?!?"

It's laughable, maybe embarrassing, when I hold this reflex reaction up to the light for investigation. My tolerance mindset, protects me, yet it also keeps everyone else out. Alone instead of connected, I perpetually remain a hungry ghost.

I like the expression, "Why fight the darkness? Just shine your light."

The construct of tolerance (trying to make myself more tolerant) is a form of fighting my own darkness. While freeing the love inside me is shining the light. Fighting causes friction, resistance, a need to win, a fear of loss. Love is vulnerable, agreed. But how many of the threats I fear are just imagined anyway? Love is also contagious. I am motivated when I love; maybe others around me get the same buzz and they open up, too.

Maybe tolerance is a fated word to start with; doomed to fail. Remember, I can change the word or phrase... the words won't mind. Maybe, "Love of others is our code" can be less effort and more effective.

We've all seen the chain-reaction, a shift in the tone in the room: We're in our Zoom room, waiting for the meeting to start, airing our grievances, or whatever. Someone comes in and says, in an obviously trepidatious voice. "Excuse me, is this AA; have I found the AA meeting?"

We all stop talking. The silence is broken by someone saying, "You are in the right place; we are all addicts and alcoholics here. Welcome; what brings you here?"

Doesn't that change the mood for everyone? The vulnerability of one reaching out, the love of another extending a hand... this is the contagion of love, the contagion of hope. We know about contagion; we're in a fucking pandemic. But bad things aren't the only things that spread. Goodness is infectious, also.

Say in a meeting, "Love and tolerance of others is our code."

Deacons' heads will bob with a reinforcing, "Yes, that's true, as it is written in the *Big Book*."

If less is more, how about "Love is my code"?

Why wasn't that our AA code—four words instead of eight? Love doesn't have to be "try to be more" tolerant because it's fucking love for goodness' sake. All love does is shine the light. All a loving heart does is see the light in others.

I don't know the hows or whys. I imagine, based on my own pasty white male programming through life, standing up and saying, "Love is my code" (or "our code") would make me feel naked, vulnerable to criticism and judgement. Adding "tolerance" makes me sound more cerebral.

"See, Joe's not a flaky hippy; he used a word with three syllables; he's so smart... and so well dressed."

My word for the year 2021 is “relationships.” I’m thinking about my relationships, intimate relations, past, present, and future, my relationship with self, with ideas, thoughts, work, play, recovery. I have found, nine months in, that it’s not my relationship with you so much as my relationship with my relationship with you. What I mean by that is I have a perception, real, false or a bit of both. I don’t have intimacy with you, until I unpack my perception to my relationship with you. To borrow from Allen Berger who I spoke with on Rebellion Dogs Radio #63 this month:

“We call such an unspoken demand an unenforceable rule. This is a rule we make regarding how other people are supposed to act or feel, or how the world is supposed to work. We make this rule to make ourselves feel safe, and we make it regardless of whether we have any viable or honest way to enforce it.” *12 Essential Insights for Emotional Sobriety: Getting Your Recovery Unstuck*, p 24

So, this is what I mean by “my relationship with my relationship with you.” What are my unspoken demands, expectations, or my unenforceable rules with you? These things create a barrier and, as Allen talks about on our radio chit-chat, from a Gestalt Therapy perspective, I have to first take ownership of the unspoken rules about relationship (how I think it should be) before I can get to the true nature of our relationship. I have all these assumptions about how you feel, what you want and need and even the nature of our relationship.

Sure it’s my word for the year, I pay attention to and meditate on relationships when I’m mountain climbing, when I’m riding my bike, right now, as a matter of fact. But “relationships” are a life-long journey of trial and correction. Coming to terms with my incompleteness helps me let go of my grievances about your incompleteness.

So, today I am thinking about my relationship with a long-held assumption, “Love and tolerance of others is our code.” Like everything in life I’m adjusting—for me—to make my life work better.

I know I’m not alone. I hear (or read) what you’re saying about what other people are saying on Facebook and in meetings. While aiming higher, I find myself irritated and intolerant of others’ posts, others’ reactions, others’ opinions. I want to “enlighten” the dummies. “Save time, see it my way; namaste!” I read some of this into you and your “Facebooking at others,” too. I recognize myself in you’re sick-and-tiredness of the preoccupations of others. I do it; I’ll do it again. I will forget to shine the light and I will feel burdened to fight the darkness. I aim myself for improvement and wellness, not for perfection.

Tolerance is hard work; I have limited tolerance for the discomfort of mustering the energy to tolerate. And what about tolerating the intolerable? Are there things that should never be tolerated, where empathy is not appropriate? So who gets to judge? Because if I’m thinking it of someone else; someone is thinking it of me, too. That’s why I’m going to focus on love. The positive energy of feeling love makes changing my relationship to love and tolerance of others (or myself) easier than white-knuckle tolerance.

Leaving the last words to The Beatles:



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There's nothing you can do that can't be done  
Nothing you can sing that can't be sung  
Nothing you can say, but you can learn how to play the game  
It's easy

All you need is love. All you need is love.  
All you need is love, not love and tolerance  
All you need is love.

Okay, so maybe I re-shaped The Beatles for my mantra; you can to or have it your way.

With love from Rebellion Dogs

**[Dr. Allen B and Joe C talk about Emotional Sobriety on Rebellion Dogs Radio #63](#)**

Take a look inside **[12 Essential Insights for Emotional Sobriety](#)** from **[Amazon](#)**

**[Twelve Steps to Religionless Spirituality: The Power of Spirituality with or without God.](#)** By Rev. Ward B. Ewing