**Put the One Plain, Green M&M with the Plain, Red M&Ms**

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How would you like to be a plain, Green M&M mixed into a bag filled with plain, Red M&M’s? You probably wouldn’t appreciate being in this situation. Why? Maybe it’s because of the anticipatory anxiety you’d experience in the presence of the plain, Red M&M’s. Certainly you’d feel like a minority in the majority population. Actually, you’d also probably experience social marginality. How do you like that fancy term? Yes, you’d be socially marginalized.

Now, I realize we’re talking about plain M&M’s and not human beings. But, indulge me and allow me to use this metaphor to illustrate important concepts about tolerance. Everyone desires to be treated with fairness, respect and dignity. These core values can be virtues. If we’re able to honor these core values then all human beings are valuable and no one is personally or culturally superior to anyone. We have a term for this phenomenon of people asserting they are personally and culturally superior to others. It’s called ethnocentrism. All human beings deserve respect and to be treated with dignity, regardless of what country in the world they’re from, how they worship and how they behave. You see, for other human beings to be happy and feel secure they need you, and you need to treat other human beings they way you want to be treated. The last thing is you are responsible for your behavior. But don’t worry, everyone behaves irresponsibly at times because we all make poor choices and it isn’t a perfect world with perfect people.

Alright, so can we agree that being a tolerant individual means you have to allow others to behave in their own unique ways? You see, it begins with you being comfortable and accepting of others being what they want to be. As you know, we have a tendency to expect other people to behave like us because as human beings we prefer familiarity over unfamiliarity. We like our familiar attitudes. Know what I mean? Think about why the one, plain, green M&M was being socially marginalized/ It’s because the other plain, red M&M’s treated him/her differently based on his/her green color. The plain, green M&M looked different on the exterior, and the plain, red M&M’s preferred to interact with a more familiar looking plain, red M&M. This situation illustrates how we prefer to be around others who look, talk and dress like us. The important thing to realize is that we need to accept that others will not always behave like us, look or talk like us and we shouldn’t ignore this reality. We need to let others behave in their own ways.

To accept and not resent the reality that other people have a right to act their way requires that we show an interest in the ideas, thoughts and behaviors of others who are not like us in appearance, dress and language. We need to develop the capacity for tolerance to be interested in other ways of living. Remember, everyone has the capacity for tolerance because we’re born with it. Children are not born bigoted. And no you don’t need psychotherapy to develop tolerance. It’s got very little to do with uncovering and working through unresolved conflicts or dependency needs from early childhood. Developing tolerance means having to change how you think and feel about others. It’s a conscious thing. You do however need to have the courage to perceive things differently, to redefine or modify our perceptions of others. Doing so will move you outside of your comfort zone—push your cultural boundaries. It means withholding judgment, working with new information about others and sitting with some uncertainty until we have enough evidence to remove the uncertainty.

So, if you’re interested in becoming more tolerant, start with doing your own cultural self-assessment. It’s just a fancy way of saying you need to explore within yourself your biases and assumptions about other people who look and behave differently than you. Think of times you made a pre-judgments, jumped to conclusions without sufficient information or evidence, and what you based your conclusions on. If you don’t identify your cultural assumptions you’re at risk for converting your biases or stereotypes into more harmful prejudicial behavior and discrimination. Well, I hope this article helps you to become more aware of how you can practice tolerance and be more culturally competent.