

FAITHFULNESS

Russell Delman January 2016

What are you faithful to?

What might it mean to have faith in our truest and deepest Self?

What might it mean to our loved one's to have faith in *their* truth, beauty and goodness?

Zen master Shunryu Suzuki often talked about having confidence in our Buddha nature. For me this confidence implies a kind of faithfulness to who we truly are. Beyond and before our personal neurosis (wounds, blind spots etc.), there is the unconditioned, "Original Self" that cannot be sullied by everyday life. It is like clouds leaving no trace on the vast blue sky. To have direct experience of this larger sense of Self changes everything. With renewed confidence, we can work with our personal limitations and rough spots without so much desperation. Life feels "workable", even with our problems. To be clear- it still does not feel wonderful or positive when our historical limitations arise yet, through this kind of Self remembering, we do not feel overwhelmed.

My wife Linda recently showed me how Austrian philosopher and visionary Rudolf Steiner used the term Faithfulness to point to this kind of seeing in our relationships (see quote at the end). We can sincerely ask the question, "what am I faithful to?" Do I live in a perceptual field that keeps confirming my insecurities, limitations and sins (the original meaning of sin is "off the mark", as in making a mistake). Do I choose to emphasize these aspects of my loved ones? How often am I faithful to the highest and deepest in myself and in others?

Our experience of life is shaped by our patterns of attention and perception. Human freedom is possible mainly because of our capacity to change our ways of attending, intending, perceiving, thinking, and moving. The great gift of the human being is the freedom to re-create a world through our neutrally plastic brains. Emphasizing the deepest and truest does NOT mean we must ignore the painful patterns that we also enact. We can honestly assess ourselves and others while being faithful to the goodness that is always there also.

Perceiving the essential goodness of Life is not difficult. We have all had many experiences of this goodness as children, even those of us born into challenging conditions. We all have experienced moments of deep connectedness or oneness with life, which creates the pre-verbal sense that "life is good". Many descriptions that we read in spiritual literature make this state sound so big and rare that we do not honor the ways in which our sense of wholeness, connectedness and at-one-ment actually arise in our everyday experience. It takes some guidance and practice in our attention to recognize the simple, ordinary and frequent ways these moments happen. A practice of sitting meditation is very helpful to attune to these states. Momentary states repeated often enough become traits; it becomes natural to have confidence in the true "I". We can then be faithful to the loving, connected, whole Being that we are.

In our close relationships we need other people, or at least one other person, who sees our essence. When someone can attest to, what Buddha called our "basic goodness", our social, relational brain can embody this knowing. Neural patterns of worthiness and lovability then deepen. One of the great gifts we give to our partners, children and friends is to be faithful to the uniquely exquisite person living behind those eyes. This is one of the highest, most significant expressions of love.

To repeat, this Faithfulness is not a denial of our confusion or our negative habits. In fact, we can now have the confidence to face our “distressing disguises”, as Mother Teresa called these errors of identity. The negative bias of our nervous systems often results in the habit of looking for what is wrong in ourselves or in our partners. How different it is when we can accept, acknowledge and work with our painful habits yet know, deeply, undeniably in our core, that this personality trait is not the essence of who we are!

This Faithfulness is an act of attention, intention and love.
May we all freely choose and commit to this direction of consciousness.

Faithfulness

“Let your loyalty to another human being come about in this way: there will be moments — quickly passing by — when he will seem to you filled and illumined by the true, primal image of his spirit.

Then can come, yes, will come, long stretches of time when your fellow-being seems clouded, even darkened. But learn at these times to say to yourself: The spirit will strengthen me; I will remember the true, unchanging image that I once saw. Nothing at all — neither deception nor disguise — can take it away from me.

Struggle again and again for the true picture that you saw. The struggle itself is your faithfulness.

And in those efforts to be faithful and to trust, a human being will come close to another as if with an angel’s power of protection.”

Rudolf Steiner