

Manifesting Authentic Positivity: A MAP for a Happy Thanksgiving
Russell Delman November 2016

Do I contradict myself?
Very well, then I contradict myself,
I am large, I contain multitudes
Walt Whitman

We are a multitude, our inner world is vast. Consciousness is not flat, it is deep. This is important to know because it means we are capable of numerous states, feelings, emotions and attitudes, all at the same time. One can feel upset and grateful, joyful and fearful, angry and loving, all simultaneously and authentically. During challenging personal and social times, remembering this can allow us to experience positive inner states even as we are also experiencing other, gnawing feelings.

The complexity of a human being also means we are not reducible to singular qualities or unitary identities. Often, when in conflict with another, we narrow our focus to certain traits that we find intolerable or unacceptable. We then can not see the intricate human being in front of us. Labeling people according to their worst or best qualities dehumanizes both people. “You ARE a racist! I AM open-minded!” These might be attitudes that a person has much of the time and they are not complete definitions of their personhood. One key to harmonious relationships is consciously choosing not to reduce people to singular qualities. This does not require ignoring or denying the behaviors, attitudes and words that disturb you. We are a multitude!

FIVE HELPFUL REMINDERS

Looking for the Good

Focusing on the qualities you can appreciate in others is especially life-giving during these times. Again, this does not require ignoring your values or opinions. It means that out of the multitude of qualities living in each person, you can, as a free human being, choose to bring into the foreground the best in other people.

Don't Be Mean- Fight Fair

Sometimes it feels essential to our dignity to stand-up for our opinions and values. When expressing our views turns into dehumanizing the other through labels or devaluing their humanity, we all lose. Meeting anger with anger or meanness with meanness, solidifies the divisions. Temporarily winning an argument rarely brings lasting positivity. When we can speak from our hearts, from our genuine feelings and needs, without focusing on the other, our comments have a better chance of being heard.

Breathing in the Beautiful

The quality of our experience in a given moment is largely dependent on how we pay attention. Again, this is human freedom - the moment is complex and by shifting our attention, a new and more satisfying experience can unfold. Is it true that there is always something beautiful in the world at any moment? It might be as simple as a color, a flavor, a flower or the look on someone's face. We can choose beauty. Then, if we linger briefly, breathing in the beauty for five - ten seconds something will deepen and touch our heart. Human beings have a deep resonance for the beautiful and, remarkably, there is always something of the beautiful in each moment.

Choosing Joy

As I have written before, I am indebted to the Congolese woman I met from City of Joy. This place was created by women who were severely abused by the military during the Rwandan genocide. She said, "they have the power to dominate my body but they can not have my joy or dignity unless I give it to them". She is a hero and role model, reminding me that we are deep, and vast, capable of many feelings at the same time. To choose joy, when possible, is extremely life-giving. This is sacred joy - a joy that is living in the fabric of our being.

Being Grateful

On this Thanks-giving Day, I encourage all of us to orient toward the many aspects of our lives that we appreciate. I think of three very simple categories:

1) Taking in and valuing the little gifts that appear today is one ever present doorway to gratitude. Just as with beauty, there are ALWAYS small blessings coming to us everyday. Giving more attention to these “little” gifts, grows their impact on our inner life. Warm water in the shower, the first sip of coffee, the warmth of home on a cold day - we are showered with blessings, when we remember to take them in.

2) Bringing attention to the larger blessings in our world is a second doorway. Simply thinking about the people or life circumstances and situations that we would deeply miss if they were no longer present opens the heart to a deep feeling of gratitude.

3) Gratitude for life itself is the most poignant and hardest to describe doorway. This is the inverse of our desire not to die - life seeks life. To feel gratitude for “just being alive” is a most fundamental gift.

Reminding ourselves of our depth, our capacity for many feelings simultaneously, is liberating. Taking responsibility for our attention, as well as our words and actions, will create more and more positivity in our inner and outer world. Seeking the good, the beautiful, choosing joy and cultivating gratitude each day is a significant part of changing our world for the better. Of course, there is much more work to do in transforming our social systems so that there is justice and opportunity for all AND during this Thanksgiving, I encourage us all to grow life-giving experiences.

I wish you a joyful, fulfilling and authentically fulfilling holiday season.

*i thank You God most for this amazing day:
for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is Yes....*

~ ee Cummings