

Polishing the Diamond: *The Embodied Life*[™] as a Path Toward Love and Freedom

“Polishing the Diamond” Russell Delman

*Yesterday,
in a time out of time,
sitting on my meditation cushion:
moments come and go effortlessly
breathing comes and goes yet no one is breathing
noticing occurs without anyone noticing
awareness functions by itself
only spaciousness and the light of perception remain
Diamond-like luminosity is the “I” without content*

*Today,
In and out of time
Thoughts come and go
There is going away and coming back
Returning over and over with a warm heart
Polishing the Diamond*

I find the phrase “polishing the diamond”, can help us to recall the diamond-like clarity of our nature. We also are acknowledging that while this pure, natural quality of Being can never be destroyed or defiled by our confusion, fears and egotism, it can become obscured by certain conditioned patterns of thoughts and feelings. “Polishing” implies the need to have practices that help us to remember our true nature as we work to listen to, learn from and neutralize any unhelpful patterns. **Freedom** requires that we are not lost in old habitual states.

From the Embodied Life point of view, *everything*, even our most compulsive, painful habits are a doorway for learning and awakening. As Zen master Dogen said, “*We become enlightened through our delusion*”. An important aspect of **unconditional love** is learning to bring our care to these unhelpful patterns. This warm-hearted kindness toward our own difficult inner states is an essential part of learning to love.

Those of us who are privileged enough to be on a path of awakening and to experience authentic, reliable teachings often ask, “with all the possibilities,

what is the most important thing to focus on”. Zen Master Shunryu Suzuki said, in a typically Zen way: “*the most important thing is to find the most important thing*”.

What is most important? There are many excellent answers to this question, for me the focus is on **Love and Freedom** as the center of my life.

By **Love** in this context, I am speaking very inclusively of the profoundly positive impulse for all of life to flourish, to blossom, to thrive. This basic warmth toward life includes, but goes much further than, personal needs or wants. I believe this caring impulse is spontaneous and natural for human beings when not confused by our own suffering. Contrary to the frequent image that suggests we are fundamentally egocentric, I agree with the Buddhist picture of “Basic Goodness”, as a more accurate depiction of our true nature.

Even further, as we are made from the same elements as the earth and from stardust itself, our oneness with the essence of life is indisputable. It is said in the Christian tradition, as I have learned from my wife, that we are made in both the image and likeness of God. As I understand it, the image means that we are ONE with God, we are a ray of the sun. This is our diamond-like nature whereas the likeness suggests our need to work daily to realize our potential, this is polishing the diamond. Seeing in this light uplifts our humanity into the sacred.

Freedom to me means not being bound to the unhelpful or life defeating conditioning from the past. The ability to choose new responses in our life situations implies freedom and is a fundamental requirement for freedom. Suffering is connected to our habitual reactivity, based in fear and aggression. By definition, freedom means that we can have new choices in our behavior. Without this possibility, we are bound to repeat the past.

Awareness is the key to freedom, without awareness, our brains will recreate our conditioned patterns. The great gift of the human brain is our capacity for learning. Most animals, even intelligent ones, have a limited capacity for uniquely creative responses to life. Humans have a seemingly unlimited capacity for new learning and novel behavior. Freedom is at our core.

From my view, our True nature, the core of our Being, is both **loving** and **free**. I hope that we can see with humility and some humor, rather than self-incrimination, how far we stray from this truth every day! On this path, we are constantly realigning our patterns of thinking, feeling, speaking and acting with our essential nature. Over and over and over, we get lost in old stories about ourselves and life and then, thankfully through grace and practice, we remember to return to the practice of polishing the diamond. This is the thrilling and harrowing path of awakening.

For me it is enormously helpful and encouraging to remember that we do not need to find the jewel, it is already here! Remembering this invites hopefulness as well as the courage to persist on the path. Having validated, through practice, the ever-present nature of the diamond, we feel less desperate when in a challenging life moment. Difficult situations still feel unpleasant but not threatening. They begin to feel “workable”.

Our closest personal relationships are often “graduate school” for this learning. After 43 years of relationship with my wife I can attest to both the naturalness and ease that unfolds as well as the continuous process of sometimes-arduous learning. It seems that the only thing stronger than the strength of our conditioning is the potency of this love-filled awareness. Returning to the diamond-like clarity of our Being in our relationships is essential for freedom from the entanglements that can ensnare us.

Remembering the true nature living inside of everyone, even our apparent enemies, is essential for our collective liberation. I cannot imagine how the social situations around the world that we have created together will change without awareness of the diamond-like core of Being that we share. I believe that those of us with the privilege to learn practices for “polishing the diamond” have a great responsibility at this time.

Looking at our current cultural challenges, I feel a kind of delicate shame for our collective level of discourse and behavior, while at the same time writing about these glorious core qualities. We seem so far from them as a society. Since we are all in this boat together, I have a deep sense of responsibility for our hateful and compulsive rhetoric and actions. To see the rudiments of these in myself is painful. To see all of us as having a shared core that is essentially good, that has the capacity for loving action, and the capacity for learning new behavior gives me hope. Having practices that guide others and me gently and reliably in these directions brings great gratitude.

A Story

*A beggar had been sitting by the side of the road for thirty years.
One day a stranger walked by.*

"Spare some change?" mumbled the beggar.

"I have nothing to give you," said the stranger. Then he asked: "What's that you're sitting on?"

"Nothing, " replied the beggar. "Just an old box my father gave me, he sat on it, as did my grandfather so we can sit more comfortably. I have been sitting on it for as long as I can remember.

"Ever look inside?" asked the stranger.

"No," said the beggar. "What's the point, there's nothing in there."

"Have a look inside," insisted the stranger. The beggar, reluctantly, managed to pry open the lid. With astonishment, disbelief, and elation, he saw a bright, large, radiant diamond in the old box.

Ancient Hindu Story

Anonymous