

Ordinary truth – Ursula Fausset

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to all the teachers who have inspired me, both intimate and famous, and to all the people I have worked with over 25 years, who have honoured me with their truth. And I also thank the Dyad School of Enlightenment for some of the ideas in this process.

PREFACE

In this insightful and practical book Ursula Fausset reminds us of the value of keeping in touch with our inner life. It is not intended for the seeker of philosophical or religious claims over Truth, but for those who have the courage to face their own truth as it unfolds, moment by moment.

This little book concludes with useful exercises to help us become conscious of our own inner experience and to connect meaningfully with others. By cultivating these practices we provide a service, not only to ourselves but to those who matter to us, whether partner, family member, friend or work colleague.

As we learn how and when to communicate and to do so with integrity, every conversation can be an opportunity, a contribution towards the satisfaction of mutual understanding.

Christopher Titmuss

International Insight Meditation Teacher

Ordinary truth – Ursula Fausset

It is twelve years now since I became interested in the impact of deception and truth-telling upon our lives. At that time my three eldest daughters had just left home. We had weathered the storms of their adolescence and as four adults, we were able to lick our wounds and forgive one another. That left me with one more daughter, an exceptionally perceptive thirteen year old, who from her child eyes had witnessed our struggles. She and I agreed that we would do our utmost to find a harmonious way in which to grow together. We decided that we would no longer swallow the psychological myth that this time of transition between childhood and adulthood is doomed to be painful, worrying and alienating. After much pondering, we became intent upon never letting any discord stand between us, however small it might seem to be. We knew that this would require telling the truth unflinchingly. This intention in itself made a healthy adult bond between us which cut through our roles, giving a creative core to our relationship. As the years passed, we became confident that at the end of each day we would be able to truthfully say, "There is nothing I am holding against you." Our enquiry into what telling the truth actually meant continued and with it came an ability to laugh at ourselves, to make the quest both serious and a light-hearted game. Sometimes it took courage to challenge one

another and it was often humbling to disclose our vulnerability, but the trust we have built thus is priceless.

My interest is primarily in telling the truth in relationships, especially intimate ones. I am dedicated to learning how to listen and how to tell the whole truth, as a method of awakening. Telling the whole truth does not mean divulging all the contents of our minds – God forbid! We need to tell *that truth which is alive and connected with the whole of who we are and is relevant to our relationship at this point in time*. When we tell our truth there is no safety, no consistency; we are in the process of acknowledging the shifting unknown. In the end our relative truths are stepping-stones to inner freedom and a unifying state of consciousness.

A spiritual philosopher addresses the issue at the beginning of the century: Gurdjieff (in Ouspensky's *In search of the Miraculous*) says,

You do not realise that one has to learn to speak the truth ... people rarely tell a deliberate lie ... (and yet) ... they lie all the time both to themselves and others. Therefore nobody understands either himself or anyone else ... To speak the truth is the most difficult thing in the world, to speak the truth one must know what truth is and what a lie is, and first of all in oneself. And this nobody wants to know.

Besides the actual content of our speech are the behavioural pretences. There is for example, being funny to avoid an issue, being outgoing to deflect real contact or the compulsion to fill up the space with talk; so much meaningless social interaction.

There is for example, being funny to avoid an issue, being outgoing to deflect real contact or the compulsion to fill up the space with talk; so much meaningless social interaction.

Is any of this familiar to you? You may like to reflect on the ways in which you relate to others and consider whether you have false habits of communicating which no longer serve your highest needs.

Alas, while we are ignorantly living inauthentic lives, we also become familiar with the constant fear of being found out.

Do you think you tell the truth? In order to know what is true, you have to face up to what is not true, not only in your words, but in your manner of delivery. Is your body language congruent with your words? (It is hard to take someone seriously who says they feel desperate, while presenting a broad grin.) What about withholding bits of information to avoid making a fuss? (The most insidious form of: deception is omission.) Or the exaggerations that make you more interesting? Or selected truths that boost your importance or put you in the right? So many little-white—lies, cover stories, excuses; apparently protecting you or somebody else from some uncomfortable fact, all so common and human and reasonable... Yet it is these character traits which separate us from others and from the truth of who we are.

The habits of deception, whether in gross lies, omissions or deflections, are first motivated by fear; fear of punishment, fear of not being liked, fear of missing out; legitimate fears. In so far as we are misleading for personal gain at someone else's expense, it is a tool of the selfish aspect of our personality and will spread fear and avarice in the world.

When we are the one who has been deceived, it is not useful to blame. Effectively pointing out behaviour in others that is unacceptable to us is a fine art. If we accuse them of lying they will feel attacked and thus more frightened and are likely to attack back. They will be defensive with dubious explanations, or deny the charge, thus adding more lies. Our automatic inclination might be to say "You cunning, selfish, two-faced worm". You would need a certain intimacy for such a statement to be a helpful first step. Although we might need a place for our anger when we have been wronged, if our intention is to invite the hidden truth and dissolve the barriers between oneself and another, we need to allow our reactivity and righteousness to subside before we speak.

Every conflict or issue in a relationship can be seen as an opportunity to enrich that relationship or grow in understanding and acceptance. I have a working hypothesis that behind our personalities, and even in the most horrible behaviours, there hides a wish to give and receive trustingly and a longing to love and be loved. One of my tasks in life has been to go towards and then live my life from that place, until it pervades all other considerations. Others are naturally influenced by this state and encouraged to be kind themselves, which always includes being honest.

We have all avoided the truth at some time in our lives; most of us blindly and habitually. Acknowledging those times could help us to understand the deceiver's predicament. What then is the most effective way to respond to deceit? The only thing we can be sure of is our own subjective truth; our own perceptions, feelings and thoughts. If it is appropriate to share these, communication works best when we make statements about ourselves; "I feel...", "I want...", "I am...". *Not* "You think...", "You should...", "You are..." these are fantasies and points of view. Defining others is seldom useful. Responsible language and a calm voice will make a big difference to the response we elicit. It may be best to wait, to say nothing at all; not as a cop—out, but because silence is the wisest next step. Ultimately we need to shift away from being victims of other's behaviour. "If *only* you were different, *then I* would be happy". Is that familiar? When people are unkind, if they are liars and betray us that is *their* problem. We are free to avoid their company. Observing our expectations of others and how we behave in response to them, is our work on ourselves.

From the position of the deceiver, the one who has been caught out or who decides to confess, oh, what great humble courage it takes to acknowledge our weakness. The risks may be too great. We lose face and our egos ache to deflect the shame, to wrap it all up with justifications. It may be too difficult, too much of a threat to our desires or our image to speak up. In which case "I'm not ready to talk about it" could be the best thing

we are able to say. If the stakes are high we may value an independent listener as an intermediary, a priest or therapist or a stranger with whom we can first disclose the truth without dire consequences. Something needs to be done. Hiding and distorting the truth will play havoc with our minds and our bodies, blocking the flow of life, and will keep our hearts trapped in webs of fear.

The truth is necessary in order to keep our inner records straight and to communicate in a satisfying way to others. In telling our truth we encourage others to do the same and thus we spread understanding and the ability to make real contact. As we grow to spontaneously acknowledge what is so, we become freer of inner conflicts. Undivided we can give our attention to the present moment. Becoming more truthful does not only create more trust between individuals; that trust ripples into the community bringing a drop more co-operation and harmony to the world. In summary, deception contributes to paranoia and conflict; truth to trust and peace.

One of the joys of being with a young child is that they tell the truth naturally. Very soon their innocent responses are an embarrassment to the adults, who then train them to be socially acceptable. In growing up we unquestioningly maintain our conditioned responses, seeking confirmation of our attitudes each step of the way. We might rebel against our parents, but while we are in reaction we still cannot discover what we truly value and thus be the author of our lives. If we do not become more conscious, we may well go to the grave with our masks on. We can die without meeting ourselves: the tragedy of never having discovered the truth of our own being.

As a little child I remember the injunction to “tell the truth”, along with “say thank you” and “smile at aunty”. Whether I was being phoney or truthful, I would say what I was supposed to in order to get approval. When I got bigger (at about the age of eight I suppose), I lied: “No, I didn’t eat a chocolate biscuit.” The results were overwhelming: my brothers were gathered together and a long inquisition followed, with the threat of punishment in the background. How often during that afternoon I wished I had confessed...nothing could be worse than this fear...how terrible I’d feel if my favourite brother got the blame. But the more time passed, the more adamantly I declared my virtue. The judgment was suspended.

This experience taught me some very important things which I can put into words: for one thing I learnt that lying has results...the consequences may ripple into many of my relationships and continue into the future in unforeseeable ways. I also learnt that I may have to go on adding lie upon lie, and that lying gives me a secret power (I could sneak more goodies for myself without being caught); and I learnt that lying isolated me and left me in a state of lonely guilt. Facts are simple; I *had* eaten the chocolate biscuit. But the whole of my truth was not simple. It was subjective and multifaceted and included beliefs about myself and my family. By the end of that day I had woven so many convincing stories around the chocolate biscuit that I hardly knew what the truth was. I was learning to lie to myself. How different it all would have been if my parents had been able and willing to tell *their* truth, at least to one another. But they were each doing their best

in the light of their own tragic conditioning. They were frightened of things getting out of their control: they felt bad that they kept us in such a state of poverty, they were anxious about my father's health and about our future. They could have shared some of this with us, not in a way that weighed us down, but in such a way that we could all understand what was happening and so feel included. Instead of a household of guilty, isolated individuals we could *have* become closer as a family.

Avoiding conflict by being nice, pretending that behaviour is acceptable with a victim's sweetness, is a common way of stacking up trouble. Let me give an example of telling the truth over a minor upset in a close relationship where suppressed resentments distort the issue. My friend drops my best mug and it breaks: simple, objective reality. He says, "I'm sorry. I will buy you another" - a natural response to having made a mistake. That *would* be the end of the issue, but because I have been withholding grievances from my friend, to me the broken mug is the last straw. I sling all my accumulated irritations in his direction: "You think you can buy your way out of everything; this is the first time you've made tea in a month and you make a complete mess of it.. ." and so on. Is that telling the truth? Anger carries vital energy for transformation, the energy that can destroy and make space for re-creation. When righteousness and blame are expressed however, it will carry a very relative, dense truth, the one that is most easily available and also the most separating. If we want to be in harmony with others, we have to get beyond attack and defence. We can speak up clearly for what we want and for how we think people should behave, but we also need to include the others as equally valid individuals. The results are not in our hands. The more we give up expecting, the less disappointments we suffer. With practice, the apparent cause of an upset can be seen as a trigger that sets off a reflective learning process and leads directly to some resolution.

Let us consider being honest about sexual betrayals. Although suffering is part of any relationship where normal human attachment exists, the organic and mysterious communion in sexuality can make telling the truth or withholding it a most heart-rending dilemma.

Have you ever been in a close relationship and felt betrayed, lied to, deeply hurt, confused and convinced that you'd never trust anyone again? Or have you been the accused one, the one who chose not to tell the truth? — or perhaps even now you are living burdened by a secret? I could pull out dozens of examples from my work with people. Saying goodbye to illusions can be painful, even when, as is often the case, the deceived one says that somewhere in them they "knew" that something was wrong: "To think that all the time he was telling me he loved me, he was sleeping with my best friend" .. "She'd accuse me of jealousy if I asked, but I knew in my bones she was being unfaithful" "I've been living a lie, I thought she'd never find out and now I've lost both of them"... "Twenty years ago I came across my girlfriend with another boy and I've never trusted women since" ... "This is the first time I have told anyone, it's been haunting me for years"...

In our society the tradition of romantic love gives us the false notion that after finding "the one", intimacy follows easily. But to make our relationship work we need to tell the truth,

and that is not always easy. Everything we withhold, every little secret and every attempt we make to manipulate the other person by only sharing certain selected things with them acts as a barrier to a potent relationship. The happy-ever-after comes only when we move away from the melodramas and intrigues and realize that we are part of a dance in which love has to be continually recreated.

If lovers wish to keep their relationship alive, the promise to "always be true" is of dubious value compared with an agreement to tell the truth - for truth is the gateway to trust and love.

Can you admit to yourself that you have wronged someone? Could telling the truth be worse than living with guilt? In the Bhagavad-Gita, Krishna says, "Were thou the worst of wrong-doers, this ship of truth should bear thee safe and dry across the sea of thy transgressions".

No one wants to live with a liar, so we can never regret being true to ourselves. After all, in the end it is ourselves that we live with and die with.

Ram Dass's guru, Neem Karoli Baba, says: "Total truth is necessary" "Truth is the most difficult Tapasva" (spiritual practice) "Men will hate you for telling the truth." He also says, "If you live in truth, God will always stand with you."

Paradoxically, to be able to act-as-if, to act into new behaviours, and to be *able* to lie are life skills that it limits us to be without. Even when obviously guilty, a lawyer for the defence pretends their client is innocent. If they are not identified with the role or attached to the results, it is just another job that needs doing. Choosing different roles is part of the game of life, part of our flexibility. We may like to play Father Christmas. Once we become conscious, telling or not telling the truth becomes an ongoing responsibility, and there are never any absolute rules. In all the fuzzy zones, we need to wait until we are free of our conditioned reactivity before we act. It sometimes takes a long time to get clear. If in doubt, ask yourself what response (including silence) would ultimately be the kindest, both to yourself and to others. Only our own conscience can guide us.

There are many good methods of awakening: going to psychotherapists and teachers, reading books, meditating... But if we do not make it a priority to practice in our day to day living, all methods can become an indulgence, ways in which we avoid taking responsibility for our lives. *Now* is the key. Practice pausing. We do not have to answer every question. Is this a moment to contain myself, or would silence be an avoidance? Telling the truth may follow naturally as we become more conscious, but it is well worth focusing intentionally on it to help make our lives work.

What objections or misunderstandings might we hold about telling the truth? The main reason that we recoil from apparent truth-tellers is because the idea is misused.

I had a friend who would say, "I'll give you a piece of my mind," but a piece of her mind was not much of a gift! Blowing off feelings cleared out her system, but it pushed me away and left her feeling guilty.

Another person I know would avoid facing up to his feelings by compulsively talking, and would try to use me as a confessional so that he could avoid taking responsibility for his repetitive behaviour. Both of these examples are distortions and near-enemies of wholesome truth-telling.

And what about gossip? Talking to one person about another is a very delicate matter: of course we can tell the news, but to prattle about the details of other people's lives is a waste of time. Stories which judge others and make us look better than them are an indulgence that toil both the speaker, the listener and the one being talked about. However, if I am confused and upset about someone, I may share my distress with a trusted friend and it may be *useful, provided that my intention is to clarify my relationship and to take responsibility for what I do regarding the person in question.*

The motivation that lies behind disclosing or not disclosing ourselves determines the subsequent meaning that we impart. We may use one truth to hide another. Partial truth-telling is usually learnt early in life and provides socially-approved barriers and a seemingly rational way of living. "I'm a private sort of person," does not usually refer to a natural need for solitude, but to an habitual withholding. Truth exists. Lies are invented. Habits go deep. Some people are irrevocably conditioned by a lying family. The con man goes on inventing lies with his "little lawyer" mind, until he only knows the false world of illusions he has created. The person he cons most is himself.

Quite often only half the truth is told, leaving the other person feeling suspicious. For example, a man sometimes pops in for a glass of ale on his way home. "Sorry I'm late dear, I got held up in the office" is wearing rather thin. (He reassures himself with... well, I did work a *little* late). His wife puts their children to bed with disappointment. Resentments, that she does not understand, are building up. He works hard to provide for them, so how can she complain? When he arrives home she is irritable. So he stays out longer. They both avoid talking about their experience and maintain a facade of togetherness. What is the truth? Perhaps he has difficulties at work and feels he has failed. He is stressed and needs time to himself before plunging into life with his family. However, his growing pub habit and the deceit that goes with it, leaves him with guilt; guilt he avoids by blaming his wife for her "demands". Beneath all that he is sad that he is missing this precious time with his children, especially as he missed his own father in a similar way. He keeps it all to himself and grows lonely. If he continues withholding he may be tempted to an "affair" for comfort. Especially as his wife has been cold towards him at bedtime lately. Alternatively, making it a priority to talk it all through with her could give him the support he needs and pave the way to changes within the family that make everyone happier.

An obvious misuse of telling-the-truth is when the prime intention is revenge: to gain power over someone by making them suffer. We know blackmail and revenge thrive in the media, but not so obviously they also insidiously undermine many ordinary relationships.

*A truth that's told with bud intent
Beats all the lies you can invent*
William Blake

The urge to punish is one of our common human responses to fear and disappointment. To act out that urge in revenge however, is emotional violence and like most violence, it comes from a sense of impotence. We can gain power over another person and make them suffer, but with this will come guilt and alienation... a shoddy result for which we pay a high price. A misuse related to revenge is that of false protection: "I won't tell him, he just couldn't take it." Hiding the truth from someone to protect them is like saying, "you are too weak" and can be insulting to the person who apparently needs protection. I can honour you and tell you the truth, knowing that it may disturb you, especially if I can stay present and receive your feelings afterwards. Actually, "I didn't want to upset you" usually means, "Your response might upset me." Children are often kept in ignorance and taught to be dishonest by being falsely protected in this way.

If you receive false protection, or are lied to over and over again so that you find you cannot trust anybody, notice if there are ways in which you have encouraged those lies. You may have tried to trap your friends into making promises that they did not want to make. You may behave in a way that suggests that you are too vulnerable to be able to hear the truth. You may prefer to live in your illusions.

If you have an important disclosure which is bad news for the listener, then *when to tell* and *how to tell* are very important and you should allow plenty of time. Wise telling and good listening can transform bad news into a heart-opening experience. My own guideline for speaking when I know that the other person may be upset is: will this communication lead to a better understanding. If not, then I need to reflect upon my own motives before I speak.

I am not suggesting for one moment that we should have no boundaries, no private life. Nor do I recommend telling people things which they do not wish to know. When someone is in real need of protection, perhaps because they are very old or very young, then telling them the truth may just frighten them and be a damaging imposition.

There are other times when it is insensitive to divulge the truth. Obviously, if we have been willing to listen to a secret, then we must keep it to ourselves. Also, if we go through some initiation in which we are sworn to secrecy so that the power of the particular knowledge is not dissipated, then we respect this and do not reveal it to others.

Similarly just after we have had a precious sacred experience, or in the early flowerings of love, our truth needs to be held delicately. These experiences are like tender shoots which cannot risk exposure to the harsh winds of ridicule and misunderstanding.

We have to learn with whom it is safe to reveal ourselves. If I know from my past experience with a certain person that I will be misunderstood or that what I have disclosed may be used against me, then to put myself at risk with that person could be self-destructive. If I am the one who encourages disclosures, if I demand the truth from someone, what do I want it *for*? – if I want it so that I can punish them, make them feel guilty, or walk out of their life, then it is hardly surprising if they do not tell me the truth.

"People always tell me their secrets" does not necessarily mean that you are a creative listener. It could mean that you relish gossip and that you and your friends repeatedly get together to complain about the world and blame others, thus encouraging one another's helplessness, instead of supporting one another in making changes. Or do people avoid listening to you? Perhaps they do not want the burden of your secrets, or perhaps they do not want to hear any more stories of how others have made you their victim? One of the most common reasons for people turning away is that what they hear is so predictably limited and negative. When the habitual patterns of our minds are negative then all our truths will be negative, and we need help in refraining and shifting our fundamental attitudes and responses to life.

It usually takes two to find the truth, one to speak and one to listen. People who can truly listen with a compassionate heart create a safe atmosphere in which other people feel free to be themselves. Being open to receive, without judgement or answers, provides a climate in which we can unfold, discovering ourselves in the presence of another person. For most of my life I was so out of touch with my feelings, especially if I was unhappy, that I could not tell anyone what was going on until hours later. As I became more aware I naturally found a clear language in which to speak, and I could not have done this without supportive listeners.

Telling the truth about my self was the beginning of opening my heart to others. When I dared to disclose the shameful negative states and learnt that the other person was unperturbed. Perhaps I was not bad or weak after all, but just human, I could see all the feelings and thoughts for what they were: feelings and thoughts, they came and they went and I did not have to act upon them, or even talk about them. I could drop some of my idealism and appreciate myself as I was and, in doing so, appreciate others the way they were. Without believing in the solidity of neither my persona of virtue, nor the fear—ridden mind, I felt more at ease. Seeing myself mirrored by the presence of another also enabled me to look at my habits, my needs and my situation in life and find what I really treasured and thus what I needed to change. Speaking to me was a part of discovering me: the listener was included in the telling. The simple, open presence of another person allowed my truth to flow ever deeper and more freely and allowed my heart to open.

How sad the cry: “no one ever had the time to listen to me”. If anything of importance is to be revealed then we need the presence of a willing other, someone who is offering their time. As an experienced listener, I am quickly aware of what rings true, that which is potent and relevant. When I fully receive whatever is being expressed, whether it is horrific or beautiful, it is a gift, because the connection that it gives me with another human being is a gift. I learn to listen with all of myself to the whole of the other person, including our silences: not just out of kindness, but because we are growing together. When we are open we can meet, through suffering or through joy and together we can get beyond them both.

Ideas do not have to separate us. All points of view are only facets of the whole. When we watch everything changing (both what we perceive out in the world and our own thoughts and feelings) and fully accept the nature of impermanence, then we see the folly of denying or struggling with what *is*.

We stop wasting energy trying to get rid of the negative and clutching at the positive. People are the way they are, false or true, and life is the way it is. We may as well acknowledge and appreciate it all and not try to push the river. We become more like an experienced listener, I am quickly aware of what rings true, that which is potent and relevant. When I fully receive whatever is being expressed, whether it is horrific or beautiful, it is a gift, because the connection that it gives me with another human being is a gift. I learn to listen with all of myself to the whole of the other person, including our silences: not just out of kindness, but because we are growing together. When we are open we can meet, through suffering or through joy and together we can get beyond them both.

We become more like a mirror, rejecting, but holding nothing. We discover that our thoughts do not mean anything. They are like the passing flotsam on the river. The mirror loses its smudges and distortions. We are left with all the inconsistencies and paradoxes of existence and nowhere fixed to stand. Nothing is secure. We hold all the dualities in our two hands, without answers. We are left with the intuitive wisdom of each moment.

Truth is the currency of relationships, and the more easily it flows, the better the relationship. But you may still doubt whether the results of truth-telling are actually worth all the risks involved. In my experience telling the truth leads far beyond the fruits of improved personal relationship. It leads to feeling easier and lighter and more at peace within ourselves. Then we awaken to those same qualities of ease and light and peace in the whole world.

There is an Eastern story about the creation of the universe: after the gods had made the stars, the sea, the mountains and the flowers, they created animals and human beings. Last of all they created truth; but they wanted to prolong the search for it and they could not decide where to hide it. In the end the oldest and wisest god had an idea: he would hide it in the human heart. And that is where we can always find it.

When we listen to our hearts we can speak gently for the truth has great power. And deep in our hearts there is a constant truth that it is important to express: the truth of our gratitude. Through appreciation we bring forth the qualities that we are acknowledging in others, thus enriching both them and ourselves. Let us not wait until it is too late, wait until the hour of death or separation to tell the truth from our hearts. Let us be diligent in giving thanks for all the treasured moments of life, for all the people who have travelled with us, for those that we love.

A lot of what I have talked about is learning to tell the truth in the face of all temptations to do otherwise, against those inner voices that tell us to protect our vested-interests. By being honest with ourselves we accept our full humanity, including the most shameful parts, and there is nothing left to hide. As our egos dissolve we are sweetly humbled. Then the game changes. Life is no longer like chess, always having to plan several moves ahead, holding your breath, scared that you might have missed a move, scared that you'll be wiped off the board... The game moves beyond who is going to win and who is going to lose. The reality that is simple and present is seen, undistorted by memory or desire. Our barriers of fear crumble, a veil drops, we become transparent, left spacious and free, guided by an intuitive knowing. We rest in Truth. We have returned home.

THE PROCESSES

COMMUNICATING YOUR TRUTH

"If you bring forth what is within you,
What you bring forth will save you.
If you do not bring forth what is within you
What you do not bring forth will destroy you."

Gnostic Gospels.

The freedom and peace which can come about through responsible truth telling is just a good idea unless we put it into practice. On the following pages are a series of structures, designed to be utilised with a partner to support you both in discovering your present truth and in receiving that of others.

INTRODUCTION

What are the processes for?

They are a resource to help you keep your relationships clear and to assist you on your inner journey.

They are not a substitute for telling the truth in your daily life. They are not conversations. And they are definitely not exercises to find out who is right.

They are practices. Recognising that others' lives are as important as our own and being fully honest, first with ourselves, takes work. When sharing this work with another, you may need to draw on uncharted levels of restraint, humility and courage.

Should your mind say, "These processes are unnatural," bear with it. Just another thought. This is an opportunity to break through your mind's familiar ways.

If, on the other hand, you are already practiced in the art of creative listening without the need to enter into dialogue, then just having regular listening times with a friend can be invaluable.

Who might benefit?

Opening to truth in this way is not right for everyone. Demanding others to join us is unlikely to be fruitful. Invite them in good will, accept their response and if at this time no one wishes to participate, you can go diligently through the questions on your own, writing down your replies. You are likely to grow in understanding. A shift in any one person can bring about unforeseen positive changes in all those with whom they are in contact.

GUIDELINES

First choose the appropriate process. All processes can be repeated. They will be most productive if:—

- Both of you read through the introductions and follow the instructions carefully.
- You allow a generous amount of uninterrupted time.

- You sit comfortably opposite one another, to encourage genuine engagement.
- You may wish to have with you a symbol for your commitment to truth, such as a lighted candle.

Questioner's Instructions

- Do not add to, subtract from, or alter the given instructions or questions.
- Be watchful of your reactions to your partner's response. Even a smile or a frown registers and can affect the level of trust.
- Should you as listener be distracted by inner reactivity, focus on your breath to help you to be tranquil and give your full attention.
- Have paper and pen at hand so that you can, if necessary, note things down and ask for clarification when the process is complete.
- Simply LISTEN with the intention of fully appreciating what is being said.
- You may, when your partner indicates that they are complete with their question, say an unembroidered "Thank you" as an acknowledgement that you have received their communication. Do not enter into dialogue.
- When you have agreed on which process to use, read aloud any extra information that precedes it.

Responder's Instructions

- Each question is designed to point to the place in you where you know the answer. Sometimes the very first thought is revelation enough. At other times much pondering may be required. Perhaps the whole multifaceted truth needs to be told.
- Do not assume too quickly that a particular question does not apply to you.

- Do not label or blame others, especially your listener.
- Remember this is about YOU: your experience, thoughts and feelings.

THE LANGUAGE OF RESPONSIBILITY

In telling the truth about ourselves, conventional speech can be disguising, distorting and distancing. While using these structures, avoid generalisations and speak ONLY for yourself. Use "I" rather than "one," "you," "it" or "we." for example not "What one does" but "What I do;" not "You feel sad when" but "I feel sad;" not "We get angry" but "I get angry;" not "We make mistakes" but "I make mistakes."

With familiarity I have found that this more honest way of talking empowers me. It clarifies my communication, reduces judgements and stops me presuming I can speak for everyone else. In acknowledging my own unique experience or belief, I become the authority of my own life. I am in clearer and deeper contact with myself and others connect with myself and others connect with me trustingly.

MONITOR - the presence of a third person as a witness

The depth and value of these processes will depend upon both people's level of trust. Trust grows from listening and understanding and from your ability to contain reactivity. Reactivity (as opposed to response-ability) is conditioned, automatic and often righteous and separating.

If you are working with a partner on a vital issue and the emotional charge is high, the discipline required for the exercise may be beyond your shared ability. This applies especially for the first process, which can be used for conflict resolution. In this case the presence of an unbiased third person, who has no investment in the outcome, can be invaluable.

The witness or monitor's containing presence is what is most important. Beyond that their job is to hold the two people to the instructions. The greater the hostility, misunderstanding or pain, the more vital it is to use the language of responsibility. Should you be a group facilitator, all the processes can be used in this triad form in any size of group.

PROCESS ONE

FOR CLARIFYING ISSUES

These questions can help you further your projects and also assist with your current difficulties and decision making. They have been successful in the resolution of conflicts both within multi-national companies and with partners and friends.

You can agree to question each other about your own separate unresolved issues or use the list to explore a concern you share.

First the responder finds the right words to describe the issue.

Then the questioner begins: “*Regarding... (states responder’s issue)...*” continuing with the question.

1. Tell me what your attitude is to this matter?
2. What is behind this attitude?
3. Tell me what you fear about this?
4. Tell me one thing you like about this?
5. Tell me something you are not taking responsibility for?
6. What is it you pretend about this?
7. Tell me how you created this as an issue?
8. Is there something that you are not saying?
9. What are you willing to take responsibility for?
10. Tell me one thing you are NOT willing to do?
11. Tell me one thing you ARE willing to do?
12. If you let go of pride, would it make a difference?
13. Tell me a quality you have which will help you?
14. What support do you need from others regarding this issue?
15. What is it you most want?
16. Behind that want, is there a familiar feeling?
17. What do you need to communicate to others regarding this issue?
18. Tell me what you would do if you had more courage?
19. What can you learn from having this issue?
20. What is the meaning or purpose of this issue in your life

PROCESS TWO

FOR PARTNERS, FAMILY AND FRIENDS

These questions are for people who are close and they can be used as often as you wish. They address hidden resentments, encourage appreciative and responsible feedback and help keep your relationship clear and your heart open.

If a different relationship is concerning you, your partner can ask you these same questions to help you identify what needs to be said or done regarding others. Use the name of the other person in place of the word "me" or "I."

1. Tell me something you are holding against me?
2. Is there anything you are willing to confess to me?
3. What doubts or fears do you have about me?
4. Are you pretending anything when with me?
5. How do I disappoint you?
6. Is there anything you would like forgiveness for?
7. What would you like to hear me say?
8. What do you think we agree on?
9. Tell me something I have not acknowledged you for?
10. Tell me something about yourself you think I should know?
11. What do you appreciate about me?
12. Give me a message from your heart?

PROCESS THREE

LETTING GO OF THE PAST

Our unique personalities have evolved through our responses to all the pain and joy that life has given us. We cannot change the past, nor its residual influence on our body and mind. That needs to be accepted. Dwelling on the past, however, especially if it is with guilt and blame can distort and burden our days endlessly.

Facing up to the facts about ourselves and others and letting go of disappointments and regrets is not easy. It can take years sometimes, particularly after great losses; the journey is harrowing and cannot be hurried.

We look back in order to understand ourselves and others and thus complete old relationships and come to live responsibly in the present. If our goal is inner freedom, then our intention must be forgiveness.

The following rejections on your life are designed to encourage you to learn through the process of letting go. Be specific in your responses. For example, when the question says "others," use the name of a significant other, alive or dead

1. How has life wounded you?
2. What has resulted from this wounding?
3. Who do you need to forgive?
4. In what ways are you like your original family?
5. What did your parents give you that you are grateful for?
6. What have you done to others that has left you with guilt?
7. Regarding others, what have you omitted doing that leaves you with regret?
8. In what ways have you been untrustworthy?
9. What memory gives you a feeling of shame?
10. What have you avoided taking responsibility for?
11. What do you appear to gain by making others wrong?
12. What is it that others did not understand about you?
13. What did you not understand about others?
14. What might happen if you let go of the past?
15. What facts about yourself are you reluctant to face?
16. What beliefs have motivated you in your life?
17. What action do you need to take to *See yourself for the past*?
18. In what ways have you been kind to others?
19. What words from someone in your past could help heal your heart?
20. In what ways has your suffering been a gift?

PROCESS FOUR

SELF KNOWLEDGE

This structure is intended to bring into consciousness some of the effects of your conditioned mind on your present experience of life.

It encourages you to identify habits and attitudes which are holding you up and to clarify your own inner standards.

Bear in mind that you cannot make others change, but you can change the way you respond to them.

You may come across painful or difficult facts which take time to integrate. Be gentle with yourself. Fully disclosing and accepting new aspects of yourself can be disturbing before it is freeing. From acceptance and resolute intention, new life is born.

With your trusted partner negotiate clear equal time agreements. You could have an hour each to run through the questions, or choose a chunk of time to ponder just one question in depth. The words “other” and “life” can be replaced by the names of appropriate others.

1. What are your essential goals in life?
2. What are your most valuable personal assets?
3. What qualities need to develop?
4. How do you deal with disappointments?
5. How do you handle conflict?
6. How do you work with envy and resentments?
7. How do you use your power with others?
8. How do you cause yourself suffering?
9. How do you treat yourself when you fail?
10. What are your abiding beliefs about people?
11. What life enhancing attitudes support you?
12. What is in life that you have been wrong about?
13. What are you in illusion about?
14. In what ways could you be more creative in your life?
15. How do you work with outworn habits and addictions?
16. What do you most fear?
17. In what ways do you neglect your body?
18. How do your emotions support your relationship to others and to life?
19. If your death was now imminent what would your priorities be?
20. What can you do to bring your life into greater balance?

PROCESS FIVE

FOR SPIRITUAL FRIENDS

These questions are for those who have practices which help them become conscious of the mind's fear and desires and are discovering a dimension beyond them.

They will help you see how you cause yourself and others suffering through living an unethical life and through your illusions and fixed beliefs about yourself and the world around you.

For "God" read "That which touches the profoundest chords of eternal love, wisdom and peace in you ..." perhaps a word or a symbol – perhaps "Christ" or "Buddha" or the name of a Beloved Teacher.

If you do this exercise alone, writing down or speaking aloud your responses will help to bring your truth to life.

After responding to each question, reflect on the consequences.

1. Are you living ethically regarding money?
2. Regarding sex, do you cause yourself or others suffering?
3. Tell me how you deal with greed?
4. In what ways do you neglect or harm the planet?
5. How does your work help you to give of your best in life?
6. What aspect of your spiritual life do you neglect?
7. In what ways are you not fully honest?
8. Tell me what surrender means to you?
9. Who have you placed outside of your heart?
10. What about life do you most treasure?
11. What is cluttering your life?
12. When do you need to practice patience?
13. In what ways do your beliefs separate you from others?
14. In what ways do you see the funny side of your predicaments?
15. In what ways are you uncomfortable with your generosity?
16. What are you learning to accept about yourself?
17. To whom do you give your authority?
18. Who supports and inspires you on your path?
19. What does God want you to do?
20. What is your heart's abiding prayer?
21. Tell me how your life would be if you were enlightened?

22. What would you like God to say to you?

23. What is the purpose of your life?

