



# TOUCHSTONES

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

March 2019

## Truth



### Introduction to Theme

Our fourth principle affirms: "A free and responsible search for truth and meaning." Truth is the philosopher's passion, the scientist's North Star, and the poet's muse. Rev. Kenneth Patton wrote of a UU meeting house as, "...a house of truth-seeking, where scientists can encourage devotion to their quest, where mystics can abide in a community of seekers." Science and religion are valuable tools for truth-seeking; complementary, not contradictory.

Yet truth is now under attack in unprecedented ways: Alternate facts. Fake news. If truth is rendered valueless, how can we have a society that coheres?

Truth is a complex subject that has given rise to a number of different theo-

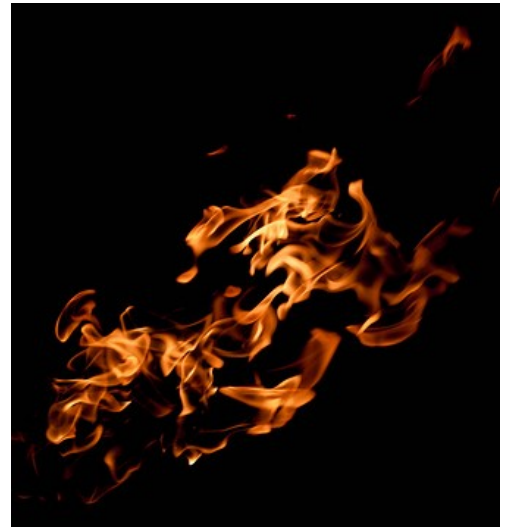
ries. The best known is the correspondence theory. It proposes that truth (i.e., true beliefs and true statements) corresponds to reality, to the actual state of affairs. This theory raises, in turn, questions about the nature of reality. As contemporary author and astrophysicist, Neil deGrasse Tyson, proposes, Newton was "the smartest person ever to walk the face of this earth. The man was connected to the universe in spooky ways. He discovered the laws of motion, the laws of gravity, the laws of optics. Then he turned 26." (Old age came earlier then.)

Coherence theories of truth require that elements fit together within a whole system. Yet consider this observation by Danish physicist Niels Bohr who said, "The opposite of a correct statement is a false statement. But the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth." Ambiguity and paradox abound and make truth more malleable than we would perhaps like.

(Continued on page 6)

## Wisdom Story

### Fire, Water, Truth, and Falsehood



*Adapted from an Ethiopian tale, retold by Heather Forest in "Wisdom Tales from around the World" (Little Rock, AK: August House, Inc., 1996). A different version can be found in "The Fire on the Mountain and Other Ethiopian Stories" by Harold Courlander and Wolf Leslau (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1950).*

Long ago, Fire, Water, Truth, and Falsehood lived together in one large house. Although all were polite toward each other, they kept their distance. Truth and Falsehood sat on opposite sides of the room. Fire constantly leapt out of Water's path.

One day they went hunting together. Late in the day, after traveling many, many miles, they found a large number of wild cattle and began driving them back home to their village. "Let us share these cattle equally," said Truth as they traveled across the grasslands. "This is

(Continued on page 2)

### Truth & Letting Your Life Speak

In a speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Trump said, "What you're seeing and what you're reading is not what's happening." In an interview with ABC News he said, "When I can, I tell the truth." Really? In reporting by PolitiFact in December 2018, President Trump had made 7,645 false or misleading claims during 710 days for an average of 10.8 a day. In the same month, 62% of those polled in a national NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll, "said ... Trump has been untruthful about the investigation into Russia's interference in the 2016 presidential campaign..." Although wrongly attributed to George Orwell, the following captures the moment: "In an age of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act." Indeed! How does your life tell the truth?

*Touchstones is committed to exploring liberal theology. This journal is supported by subscriptions from Unitarian Universalist congregations. For daily meditations, photos, and more visit/like Touchstones at <https://www.facebook.com/Touchpossibility/>*

# Let Your Life Speak

# Truth Ever Struggling to be Heard

(Continued from page 1) **Fire, Water...**



the fair way to divide our captives."

No one disagreed with Truth except Falsehood. Falsehood wanted more than an equal share, but kept quiet about it for the moment.

They stopped for the night, because the going was slow, and Fire kept guard by providing both warmth and light.

The next morning, as the four hunters continued their journey back to the village, Falsehood went secretly to Water and whispered, "You are more powerful than Fire. Destroy Fire and then

there will be more cattle for each of us!"

Water, who was also rather greedy, suddenly flowed over Fire, bubbling and steaming until all of Fire was gone. Water was delighted, cheerfully thinking about having more cattle for itself.

Then Falsehood whispered to Truth. "Look! See for yourself! Water has killed Fire! Let us leave Water, who has cruelly destroyed our warm-hearted friend. We must take the cattle

high in the mountains to graze."

Truth and Falsehood traveled north to the mountain and began herding the cattle up the side of the mountain. Water tried to follow. But the mountain was too steep, and Water could not flow

upwards. Again and again Water washed down upon itself, splashing and swirling around rocks as it tumbled down the slope. Look and see for yourself! You know that what I say is true because Water is still tumbling down the mountainside to this very day.

After many hours of climbing, Truth and Falsehood finally arrived at the mountaintop. Truth was exhausted and so were the cattle. It was then that Falsehood turned to Truth and said in a loud and frightening voice, "I am more powerful than you! From now on you will be my servant and I will be your master. You must obey because I am more powerful than Fire and Water, and I am more powerful than you. All these cattle belong to me!"

Truth rose up and spoke out, "I will not be your servant!"

They battled and battled. First Truth seemed to be winning, and then Falsehood. This is how it went for the rest of the day and throughout the night. Finally, with both weakened by the battle, they brought their argument to Wind to decide who was to be the master.

Wind didn't know. Wind blew all over the world to ask people whether Truth or Falsehood was more powerful. Some people said, "A single word of Falsehood can completely destroy Truth." Others insisted, "Like a small candle in the dark, Truth can change every situation."

Wind finally returned to the mountain and said to them both, "I have seen that Falsehood is very powerful. But it can rule only where Truth has stopped struggling to be heard."

And it has been that way ever since.

(Source: <http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/toolbox/session3/sessionplan/stories/109499.shtml>)



# Down the Curve

## Withering Into the Truth

Parker Palmer

"Though leaves are many, the root is one; / Through all the lying days of my youth / I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun, / Now may I wither into the truth." William Butler Yeats

...The Yeats poem ...names something I don't want to forget. Actively embracing aging gives me a chance to move beyond "the lying days of my youth" and "wither into the truth"....

...My youthful "lies" weren't intentional. I just didn't know enough about myself, the world, and the relation of the two to tell the truth. So what I said ... came from my ego, a notorious liar. Coming to terms with the soul-truth of who I am ...has required my ego to shrivel up.

...Whatever truthfulness I've achieved on this score comes not from a spiritual practice, but from having my ego so broken down and composted by life that eventually I had to yield and say, "OK, I get it. I'm way less than perfect."

...A couple of years ago, I met with a group of young adults... [who] talked about the emerging world as it looks from where they stand. ...I said ... "I feel like I'm standing somewhere down the curvature of the earth, while you're close to the top of that curve looking at a horizon I can't see."



...Hint to my age-mates: Next time you think, "I'm over the hill!" say to yourself, "Nah, I'm just standing farther down the curvature of the earth!"

Source: <https://onbeing.org/blog/withering-into-the-truth/>



# Readings from the Common Bowl

**Day 1:** "The opposite of a correct statement is a false statement. But the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth." Niels Bohr



**Day 2:** "There's a world of difference between truth and facts. Facts can obscure truth." Maya Angelou

**Day 3:** "The truth." Dumbledore sighed. "It is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution." J.K. Rowling

**Day 4:** "The most common form of despair is not being who you are." Søren Kierkegaard

**Day 5:** "Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing ever happened." Winston Churchill

**Day 6:** "There's more beauty in truth, even if it is dreadful beauty." John Steinbeck

**Day 7:** "In a time of ...deceit telling the truth is a revolutionary act." Unknown

**Day 8:** "The most fundamental aggression to ourselves, the most fundamental harm we can do to ourselves, is to remain ignorant by not having the courage and the respect to look at ourselves honestly and gently." Pema Chödrön

**Day 9:** "If you do not tell the truth about yourself you cannot tell it about other people." Virginia Woolf

**Day 10:** "Knowing can be a curse on a person's life. I'd traded in a pack of lies for a pack of truth, and I didn't know which one was heavier. Which one took the most strength to carry around? It was a ridiculous question, though, because once you know the truth, you can't ever go back and pick up your suitcase of lies. Heavier or not, the truth is yours now." Sue Monk Kidd

**Day 11:** "The truth will set you free. But not until it is finished with you." David Foster Wallace

**Day 12:** "Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth." Henry David Thoreau

**Day 13:** "Believe those who are seeking the truth. Doubt those who find it." André Gide

**Day 14:** "If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end; if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin, and, in the end, despair." C.S. Lewis

**Day 15:** "Transformation is my favorite game and in my experience, anger and frustration are the result of you not being authentic somewhere in your life or with someone in your life. Being fake about anything creates a block inside of you. Life can't work for you if you don't show up as you." Jason Mraz

**Day 16:** "I found power in accepting the truth of who I am. It may not be a truth that others can accept, but I cannot live any other way. How would it be to live a lie every minute of your life?" Alison Goodman



**Day 17:** "There are very few human beings who receive the truth, complete and staggering, by instant illumination. Most of them acquire it fragment by fragment, on a small scale, by successive developments, cellularly, like a laborious mosaic." Anaïs Nin

**Day 18:** "Metaphors have a way of holding the most truth in the least space." Orson Scott Card

**Day 19:** "The truth may be puzzling. It may take some work to grapple with. It may be counterintuitive. It may contradict deeply held prejudices. It may not be consonant with what we desperately want to be true. But our preferences do not determine what's true." Carl Sagan

**Day 20:** "...when two opposite points of view are expressed with equal intensity, the truth does not necessarily lie exactly halfway between them. It is possible for one side to be simply wrong." Richard Dawkins

**Day 21:** "I lie to myself all the time. But I never believe me." S.E. Hinton

**Day 22:** "We don't get to choose what is true. We only get to choose what we do about it." Kami Garcia

**Day 23:** "Truth without love is brutality, and love without truth is hypocrisy." Warren W. Wiersbe

**Day 24:** "Truth is a matter of the imagination." Ursula K. Le Guin

**Day 25:** "Who is more humble? The scientist who looks at the universe with an open mind and accepts whatever the universe has to teach us, or somebody who says everything in this book must be considered the literal truth and never mind the fallibility of all the human beings involved?" Carl Sagan

**Day 26:** "Truth is not something outside to be discovered, it is something inside to be realized." Osho

**Day 27:** "When truth is replaced by silence, the silence is a lie." Yevgeny Yevtushenko

**Day 28:** "When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time, they can seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall. Think of it—always." Mahatma Gandhi

**Day 29:** "A lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes." Mark Twain

**Day 30:** "Wisdom is a destination. Truth, the journey." Terry Goodkind

**Day 31:** "So you're always honest," I said. "Aren't you?" "No," I told him. "I'm not." "Well, that's good to know, I guess." "I'm not saying I'm a liar," I told him. He raised his eyebrows. "That's not how I meant it, anyways." "How'd you mean it, then?" "I just...I don't always say what I feel." "Why not?" "Because the truth sometimes hurts," I said. "Yeah," he said. "So do lies, though." Sarah Dessen

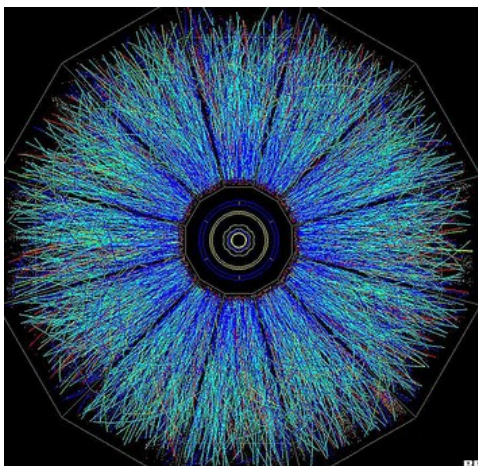


## Telling the Truth — Poetry and Religion

Rev. Mark Belletini

My father and I once had an interesting exchange. I was, as I remember, out of college, but I still read books and articles as if a test was coming around the next day.

I had just read an article in *Scientific*



*American* about subatomic physics. Now pardon me, but this was a long time ago, and I cannot retrieve the exact names of the particles in question. Suffice it to say that physicists were completely baffled by their discovery. Seems that there are two particles that move as if they were looking in mirror. If one particle curved to the left, the other curved to the right. If one particle zigzagged up, the other one zigzagged down, with the exact same zigs and zags, but as if in a mirror. The scientists were baffled to find something so unexpected and strange, and could not imagine what invisible, unnamed force was behind this peculiar symmetry, (although they clearly claimed

as their joy the research that would one day pull back the veil from the mystery.)

My father responded in a way that surprised me. He became furious. "What baloney!" he said. "I can't believe *Scientific American* has fallen for all that nonsense. The world is not a mist of strange particles. The world is solid, like this."

He knocked a book on the floor. It thudded.

"See. Gravity is a knowable, real force we can all test. It's obvious at once. No one has to spend two billion dollars to research it to figure it out. I just don't understand all this new science stuff. For me, what's important is that two plus two always equals four until the end of time. No one can change that, deny it, fight against it, or interpret it. It just is. Forever. You can build a bridge with the knowledge that two plus two equals four. You can't do anything with two particles that never touch, only dance in the air.

"I like my bridges strong and secure, not built of the flimsy conjectures of screwball science."

Well, this was not the reaction I expected. I thought the knowledge of the particles was fun and playful. It filled me with wonderment. My father did not feel the same about these particles. For some reason, they made him mad. I left the

room in huff, suddenly mad myself that my joy was not as contagious or even as obvious as I had hoped.

After I thought about it for a while, I realized that for the most part, I am a lot like my father. I like my world solid, predictable, reliable. And I want my bridges built by people well acquainted with the solid, the predictable, the reliable.

But, all of my experience tells me that the world is not solid, predictable, or very reliable.

Mayhem and death, bad luck and whimsy come when they will. No predictable patterns despite those who believe in the influence of the stars. No solid evidence for automatic justice despite our wish that we could know such convenience. No reliable formulas for calculating tomorrow.

Two-plus-two works in the world of commerce and engineering, but the arithmetic of the human heart is not so easy to memorize. Anyone who has ever experienced the death of a loved one knows that one minus one does not leave zero, but 100...a hundred confusing feelings and inner struggles. Anyone who has ever been married knows that one and one hardly equal two, for great numbers of family members and unrealistic expectations make any relationship as complex as an algebraic equation, with the x often left unsolved forever.

Thus good religion, which cradles the human heart as much as the intellect, relies on poetry, not calculus, for its expressions. The poetry of prayer and promises. The poetry of image and imagination. The poetry of psalms and solace.

...Poetry is a condensed and concise and economical way of telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. For truth is rarely in this world "either this" or "that." Truth is complex, involving not just facts but the interpretation of fact, not just brains but heart, not just moments but lifetimes.

...Poetry can excavate into the rubble of our days past the severed pipelines and gas-mains torn by falling buildings and place our



(Continued on page 7)



## Got truth? Cultivate wonder!

Dale McGowan

How does white milk come from a red cow? Why doesn't the sun fall down? How is it that all the rivers flow into the ocean without ever filling it up? These questions, which could have come from any child today, are from the *Rig Veda*, a 3,000 year-old Hindu text—and wondering and questioning are surely much older....

It's the human impulse to wonder and ask questions that eventually gave birth to both religion and science, two different ways of responding to the same challenge: and overdeveloped neo-cortex hungry for answers.

...Wonder and curiosity [are] the incentives that drive questioning. ... Developing and keeping a sense of wonder requires time, opportunity, and practice. Some tips:

1. **Allow unstructured time.** ...That's time with no instructions, no screen of any kind (except maybe sun-screen), and no script
2. **Choose wonder-inducing family activities.** The occasional trip to the zoo, the aquarium, the science museum, the planetarium, or even a simple walk in the woods can provide an unparalleled opportunity to ponder things.
3. **Shake up the familiar.** ...Zoom in on the everyday with a microscope, turning salt into boulders, and a drop of water into an aquarium. Zoom out from the roof of your own house and into space with Google Earth....
4. **Point out the wonder in the everyday.** ...Everyday things get more wonderfully strange the more you look at them.

...Once kids get a taste of the wonder that's just below the surface of the everyday world, ...they'll lead the way.

(Both of these articles are from *Raising Freethinkers: a practical guide for parenting beyond belief*, Dale McGowan, et.al., 2009, AMACOM, New York)

## An Inquiring Mind

Dale McGowan

...There are three main requirements for an inquiring mind: (1) self-confidence, (2) curiosity, and (3) an unconditional love of reality.

1. **Self-confidence.** The best way to instill confidence is to encourage autonomy. ...Inquiry is the act of a confident, autonomous mind. It's the act of someone who believes she *can* break through the walls between ignorance and knowledge. If you want inquiring kids, work on confidence—and confidence starts with autonomy.
2. **Curiosity.** ...No one asks questions if he isn't curious about the answers. The parent of a ravenously curious little boy once told me that the boy's grandmother, exasperated at the child's endless questions, once said, "You don't have to know *everything*!" Yes, it's sometimes hard to stay patient and engaged.... Indifference overtakes us soon enough. Nurture curiosity while it's natural and wild.
3. **The unconditional love of reality.** ...I want my kids to see the universe as an astonishing, thrilling place to be *no matter what*.... I want them to feel unconditional love and joy at being alive, conscious, and wondering. Like the passionate love of anything, an unconditional love of reality breeds a voracious hunger to experience it directly, to embrace it, whatever form it might take. Children with that exciting combination of love and hunger will not stand for anything that gets in the way of clarity. Their minds become thirsty for genuine understanding, and the best that we can do is stand back.

## Family Activity:

### Two Truths and a Lie

This game can be played within a family or with several families participating. On a personal level, each everyone creates three statements about themselves: two are true and one is a lie. Sometimes

children will need help creating the three statements. Once selected, each person introduces their three statements and the rest try to guess which are true and

which is the lie. A variation of this involves science by creating two things that are true from the world of science and one things that is untrue. Lucy of *Peanuts* fame was notorious in this regard. She would take Linus on walks and teach him about the natural world. In one comic strip she asked, "Do you see those clouds? They are what make the wind blow." She then explained, "These are little known facts of science. They are little known because I make them up."



## Family Activity:

### Six Blind Men and an Elephant

Read this story together (there are many versions online) and discuss how each had part of the truth, but not all of it, which is why none of them knew that it was an elephant that they were touching.

# Four Imperatives of Truth

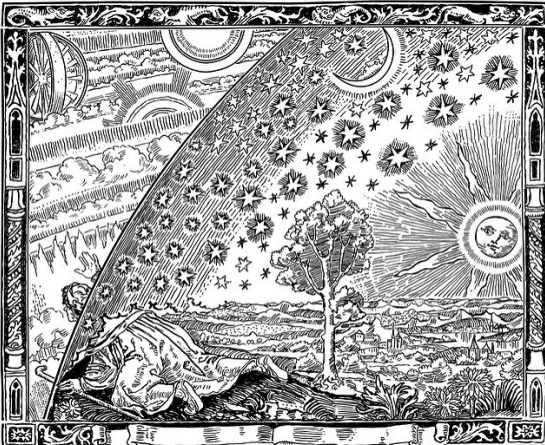
(Continued from page 1) **Intro to Theme**

The constructivist theory asserts that truth is always a human and social construction. Closely related to this is the consensus theory in which truth is whatever is agreed upon by a group of people. Both of these influence history's attempt to describe "What really happened?" and "What is true?" In this regard, the persistence of the belief that people in the Middle Ages and later believed that the earth was flat is illuminating. This Myth of the Flat Earth became prevalent from 1870 to 1920 as part of ideological struggles over evolution. In 1945 the Historical Association of Britain stated, "The idea that educated men at the time of Columbus believed that the earth was flat, and that this be-

lief was one of the obstacles to be overcome by Columbus before he could get his project sanctioned, remains one of the hardest errors in teaching." The idea that the Earth was spherical was developed by Greek astronomers beginning with Pythagoras in the 6th century BCE. Stephen Jay Gould wrote, "There never was a period of 'flat earth darkness' among scholars (regardless of how the public at large may have conceptualized our planet both then and now). Greek knowledge of sphericity never faded, and all major medieval scholars accepted the earth's roundness as an established fact of cosmology." The truth of this scientific fact, however, is not true metaphorically for the character Juliette in Tahereh Mafi's first novel, *Shatter Me*. Juliette laments, "I only know now that the scientists are wrong. The world is flat. I know because I was tossed right off the edge and I've been trying to hold on for 17 years. I've been trying to climb back up for 17 years but it's nearly impossible to beat gravity

when no one is willing to give you a hand."

Following are four imperatives about truth. **The First Imperative** is to know what is true about the nature of reality. This is easier said than done as scientists have endlessly discovered. Carl Sagan reminded us, "In science it often happens that scientists say, 'You know that's a really good argument; my position is mistaken,' and then they would actually change their minds.... They really do it. ...I cannot recall the last time something like that happened in politics or religion."



Flammurion School of Art by Joseph Francis - digitalartworks.com - this is not the original version

Though we humans may in fact "construct" truth or allow it to arise by "consensus" as two theories about truth assert, there is a level of subjectivity in this process that is inherently problematic. Absent "objective" truth, we would do well to regard what is true for us with great humility as well as an open mind and an open heart as we engage what is true for others. Anthony de Mello wrote, "To a visitor who described himself as a seeker after Truth, the Master said, 'If what you seek is Truth, there is one thing you must have above all else.' 'I know,' answered the student, 'an overwhelming passion for it.' 'No,' said the teacher, 'an unrelenting readiness to admit you may be wrong.'"

**The Second Imperative** is to know what is true for us in terms of our values and our beliefs. The fact of gravity holds us fast to the earth, but it doesn't keep us grounded in the way that the truth of our experience, the truth of our desire, or the truth of our passion does. What are the truths of your life that give meaning, that keep you rooted, that allow you to grow, and that enable you to fly? And how do your truths help you understand those whose truths differ from yours?

**The Third Imperative** is the never-ending quest, as our fourth principle affirms, for truth and meaning. Carl Jung

wrote, "The serious problems in life...are never fully solved. If ever they should appear to be so it is a sure sign that something has been lost. The meaning and purpose of a problem seems to lie not in its solution but in our working at it incessantly." The truths of our childhood are not adequate to negotiate the challenges of being an adult. Because of change, what is true, especially subjectively, will evolve. Some of what was "true" for us when we were 20 will not be true when we are 70 as we continue to engage the blessings and challenges of living. Even gravity changes across the surface of the Earth and throughout its atmosphere, due to a variety of effects. (Sorry Isaac!)

**The Fourth Imperative** is to tell the truth to others and to ourselves. Truth is a challenge, in part, suggests Pamela Meyer, author of *Liespotting: proven techniques to detect deception*, because, she writes, "Lying has evolutionary value to us as a species. Researchers have long known that the more intelligent the species, the larger the neocortex, the more likely it is to be deceptive. ...It starts really, really early. How early? Well babies will fake a cry, pause, wait to see who's coming and then go right back to crying. One-year-olds learn concealment. Two-year-olds bluff. Five-year-olds lie outright. They manipulate via flattery. Nine-year-olds, masters of the cover up. By the time you enter college, you're going to lie to your mom in one out of every five interactions. By the time we enter this work world and we're breadwinners, we enter a world that is just cluttered with spam, fake digital friends, partisan media, ingenious identity thieves, world-class Ponzi schemers, a deception epidemic—in short, what one author calls a post-truth society." (You can test your Lie-Q at her website: <http://liespotting.com/liespotting-basics/quiz/>) Beyond this is the pervasive reality of self-deception that Daniel Goleman thoughtfully explores in his book, *Vital Lies, Simple Truths: the psychology of self-deception*. And sometimes we realize that the emperor (i.e., us) has no clothes. Because of this, truth-telling is a spiritual practice and a "revolutionary act in times of universal deceit" like now.



## The Power of Poets

(Continued from page 4) **Faith & Theology**

bare feet right on the foundations deeper than the ones that hold it all up.

I long for that too. And the poet helps me to long for it, to remember the bottom line, to not get caught up in foolish and painfully icy abstractions like good and evil, them and us. The poet tells me the truth. Not many other people bother. "We have lost our innocence," the pundits on TV told us, wishing they could have it back.

The poet however, tells the truth; in all the world, we were the last to lose our innocence. It's been gone for a long time everywhere else.

...I go to poetry because poetry gets me to wrestle with truth faster than anything. And poetry helps truth to win more often than not.

...No one knows the final truth about ultimate reality...we each have our own views, prejudices and styles, and not one of these are ultimate. No single person's story is the whole story. No single culture's way is the only way. There is no one and final sacred text, site, land, word, ritual or story. Fighting over or fearing or ridiculing cultural styles is just plain foolish. Defending them to the death is foolish too.

...I could go on forever of course about poetry and read a hundred more poems that hold the mirror of truth up to my face. Time and taste and exhaustion reign me in from going on and on.

But it's possible that I may have been hasty while reflecting on the odd event between me and my father. I said that I too want my bridges built by those who want things reliable, solid and predictable. Well, yes, maybe bridges over waters or canyons. But bridges between human heart and human heart in these days are far more important than anything that connects one county to another. And I believe that it's the poets who have the power to lead the way in this regard, for like birds, they have the power to cross every single frontier that exists.

Source: <http://www.firstuucolumbus.org/images/sermons/2002/2001-10-07%20Telling%20the%20Truth%20-%20Poetry%20and%20Religion,%20Rev.%20Mark%20Belletini.htm>

## Enlightenment

### Truth in the Balance

Jane Brunette

The Buddha was a prince who had it all: power, prestige, money, sensual pleasure, but all of these coveted things of the world seemed insignificant when he finally faced the reality of suffering, death, and impermanence. So he threw away his fabulous clothes and wandered off into the forest in search of deeper meaning.

I'm sure there were those in his kingdom who judged him, who thought his dropping out was selfish. ...But the Buddha ...wanted to end suffering.

...He tried all kinds of things to discover the truth. He was so passionate in his search, he even tried extreme austerities, fasting until he was skeletal, hoping it would push him to realization. Finally, when he was nearly starved and delirious, a milkmaid came by and said the obvious: "You're making yourself sick. Have some porridge."

I wonder if the milkmaid knew that her simple offer of comfort food provided the means to the Buddha's key insight.

...But lucky for us, the Buddha had some self-doubt. He listened deeply when she spoke, open to the possibility that she might know something he didn't. And then he ate the porridge. In doing so, he had a deep insight on which he based his philosophy of The Middle Way: it doesn't help to go to extremes. Better to cultivate balance. [...]

I don't enjoy self-doubt, but I think it's probably a good thing because it keeps the inquiry alive: I know that I might be wrong. That alone is an achievement....

Source: <http://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=2295>

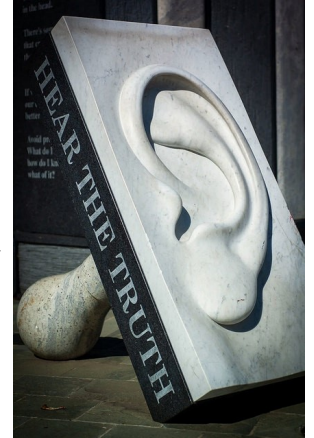


## The Truth Is

### The Search for Truth

Noah Levine

Serving the truth comes down simply to living life from the place of positive intentions. This may be counterintuitive; in fact, it may be the most radical stance one can take. It means rigorous honesty to self and others. It means doing the right thing even when everything and everyone in society is telling you to ignore, suppress, or abandon the path of nonviolence, understanding, and care.



The truth is that violence is *never* the answer. There is no winner in violent conflict, only harm caused to both sides.

...The truth is that selfishness and greed never lead to happiness or contentment. Greed feeds discontent

...The truth is that ignoring or denying the oppression and confusion in the world is part of the problem. If we're not part of the solution, we are the problem.

...The truth is that we are all grieving the losses of the past. ...There is sorrow for the loss of all things

The truth is that pleasure is addictive. ...we crave for life to be always pleasant and never painful.

The truth is that our suffering is optional. In life, pain and pleasure are a given, but we create suffering for ourselves....

The truth is that much ...difficulty and confusion in life is impersonal.

...The truth is that freedom is possible in each moment and in this very life.

We have the ability to let go, to let be, and to respond with care and understanding to what is happening....

*So serve the truth.*

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/17260>

## Small Group Discussion Guide

### Theme for Discussion: Truth

**Preparation prior to Gathering:** (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

**Business:** Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

**Opening Words:** There is not much truth being told in the world. There never was. This has proven to be a major disappointment to some of us. When I was a child, I thought grown-ups and teachers knew the truth, because they told me they did. It took years for me to discover that the first step in finding out the truth is to begin unlearning almost everything adults had taught me, and to start doing all the things they'd told me not to do.... *Anne Lamott*

**Chalice Lighting:** (James Vila Blake) (adapted) (In unison)

*Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

**Check-In:** How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

**Claim Time for Deeper Listening:** This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

**Read the Wisdom Story:** Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

**Readings from the Common Bowl:** Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

**Sitting In Silence:** Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

**Reading:** People think that a liar gains a victory over his [or her] victim. What I've learned is that a lie is an act of self-abdication, because one surrenders one's reality to the person to whom one lies, making that person one's master, condemning oneself from then on to faking the sort of

reality that person's view requires to be faked...The...[person] who lies to the world, is the world's slave from then on...There are no white lies, there is only the blackest of destruction, and a white lie is the blackest of all. *Ayn Rand*

**Living the Questions:** Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. The words "know thyself" were inscribed on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. How do you "know" yourself? What things have you learned about yourself that you did not know and that surprised you when you learned them?
2. Shakespeare wrote, "To thine own self be true?" Have you been untrue to yourself? What were the circumstances and the result? What did you learn?
3. Some people say that denial can be vital at times as a coping mechanism. Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. Otto Rank wrote, "With the truth, one cannot live. To be able to live, one needs illusions." Do you agree? Have you cultivated illusions? Why? How?
5. Examples of the mechanism of self-deception are things like hidden assumptions and blind spots. Have you seen these mechanisms in others or yourself? What was the reward for self-deception? What was the cost?
6. To what extent does our society value the truth and truth telling? How do groups/organizations respond to truth-tellers and whistle-blowers?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

**Deeper Listening:** If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

**Checking-Out:** One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

**Extinguishing the Chalice:**

(Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison)

*We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

**Closing Words:** Rev. Philip R. Giles (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

## Opposite Truths?

### A World of Dreams

*Unitarian Universalist singer Peter Mayer wrote a lovely song entitled World of Dreams contrasting Isaac Newton's & Albert Einstein's views of reality. Listen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=feSvUWtqof8>*

Newton wrote, "I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me." Einstein said, "The right to search for truth implies also a duty; one must not conceal any part of what one has recognized to be true."

#### Attribution for Images

**Page 1:** Fire Ball 4, photo by Bert Cash, November 10, 2011, (CC BY 2.0), [http://www.flickr.com/photos/bsc\\_photography/6461700509/in/photostream/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/bsc_photography/6461700509/in/photostream/)

**Page 2:** Mouth of Truth, photo by Abir Anwar, June 16, 2009, (CC BY-SA 2.0), <http://www.flickr.com/photos/abir82/3958317677/>

**Page 2:** Still waters, photo by Peter Mulligan, April 17, 2009, (CC BY-SA 2.0), <http://www.flickr.com/photos/nagillum/3507543427/>

**Page 2:** World's Biggest Liar, photo by Alan Cleaver, July 10, 2011, (CC BY-SA 2.0), <http://www.flickr.com/photos/alanclavier/5922684641/>

**Page 2:** Earth, by Kevin Gill, March 29, 2016, (CC BY 2.0), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/kevinmgill/25517095923>

**Page 3:** Round Melon Shape Bowl with Triangular Pattern, by Wicker Paradise, August 25, 2013, (CC BY 2.0), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/wicker-furniture/9592646138>

**Page 3:** 'Eternal Truths' by Lisa Fedon, photo by Ron Gogswell, April 6, 2013, (CC BY 2.0), <http://www.flickr.com/photos/22711505@N05/8697433718/>

**Page 4:** Gold Beam Collision Recorded at STAR, photo by Image Editor, January 31, 2012, (CC BY 2.0), <http://www.flickr.com/photos/11304375@N07/6799740261/>

**Page 4:** Photo by Joseph Barrientos on Unsplash

**Page 5:** Pinocchio, by Douglas F. Henrique, June 27, 2007, (CC BY 2.0), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/gestalteando/604554990>

**Page 5:** Elephant #15—Norma, photo by Norm Albion, August 5, 2008, (CC BY 2.0), <http://www.flickr.com/photos/nornalbion/2740835967/in/photostream/>

**Page 6:** Redrawn Flammarion Woodcut - not original, by Joseph Francis, April 26, 2009, (CC BY-SA 2.0), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/digitalartform/3475158943>

**Page 7:** Buddha, photo by Mattia Faloretti on Unsplash

**Page 7:** Never hear the evidence, by Kreg Steppe, July 30, 2018, (CC BY-SA 2.0), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/spyndle/43743389861>