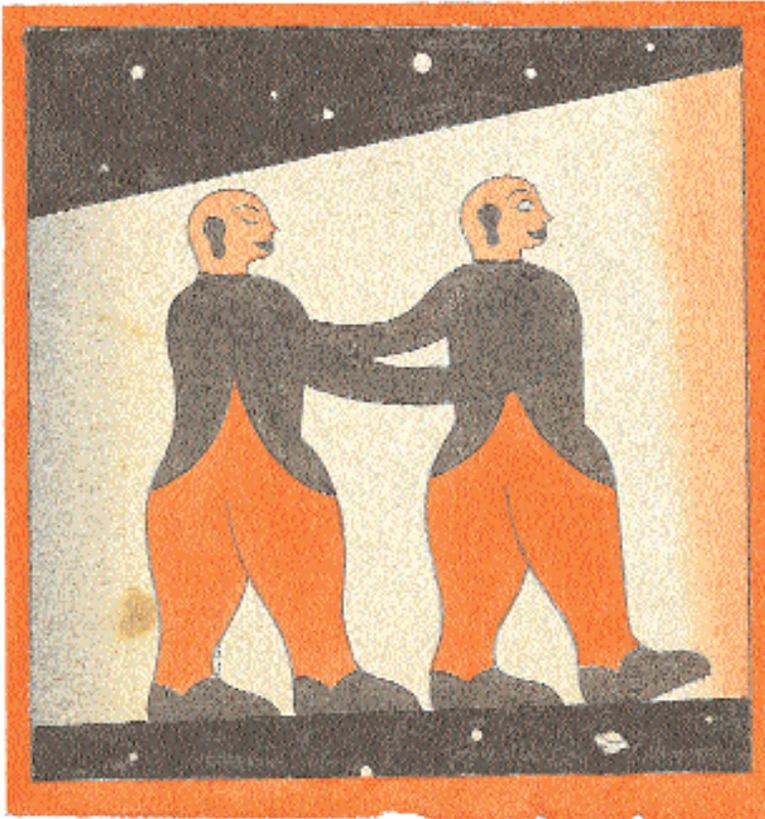


In Trust We Trust

There are three kinds of trust. Not understanding the difference can lead to fear and disappointment.



I HAD JUST ENDED OUR Sunday *sangha*, and people were coming up to ask me questions they were not comfortable voicing in front of the whole group, when I noticed one yogi who was hanging back patiently waiting for everyone else to finish. She was a serious student of the dharma with lots of retreat experience but was new to the sangha. When we were finally alone, she explained that she had recently been betrayed in a relationship and kept getting upset with her lover about what had happened. She was also feeling distrustful of her boss who had a pattern of acting unfairly and was worried about her job. It was making her miserable.

“I place a lot of importance on being able to trust someone,” she said, “but from a spiritual perspective isn’t trust just a disguised form of clinging?”

She frowned, shook her head, and continued, “Aren’t I really just wanting people to behave in a certain way and using trust to hide how much I am clinging to future outcomes? Shouldn’t I stop caring so much if someone is trustworthy, if I truly want to learn nonattachment?” Her voice broke as she stood there waiting for an answer to her questions.

The yogi was asking herself an important dharma question, but she was jumbling together two separate perspectives on trust without realizing it. Her pain and confusion were the inevitable result. If you stop and reflect, you may discover you too lack clarity around issues of trust. You may have trouble trusting others in particular situations because of past disappointments, or you may not trust yourself in certain ways. Worse still, you may experience others not trusting you at times and may even recognize justification for this lack of trust. If you are like many people, you may go to great lengths to avoid facing your issues of trust because they are simply too unpleasant. Yet having a healthy, balanced sense of trust is a bedrock for being truly alive, and when it is lacking, the ground of your existence is shaky.

This is what was so heartening about the yogi and her question—she was willing to face up to her uncertainty about trust, no matter how painful. In doing so she was embodying the first quality necessary for strengthening trust: courage—courage to be with your feelings just as they are without self-judgment or rationalization.

Finding Freedom in Trust

IN COMMON USAGE, the word “trust” refers to relying on someone or something for a future action. The dictionary defines trust as having a confident dependence on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something. From this perspective trust is a contingent emotional feeling, highly conditional in nature and subject to reappraisal. While the Buddha and other spiritual teachers did not reject this conditional

view of trust, they also understood trust as a means for finding freedom from the endless cycle of fear and wanting. The Buddha taught that the only way “not to be assailed by past and future” was to be mindfully present moment-to-moment in your life, without attachment to the outcome of your actions. Living in this manner is to trust in the eternal now, and that is the one trust that matters most.

How this spiritual understanding of trust intersects with the issues of daily life is what was confusing the yogi. She trusted the dharma and wanted to apply the principle of nonattachment, but she had feelings about her lover and her boss to be reconciled. Were these feelings just illusions? Furthermore, how was she to act around each of these people? The same questions apply in your personal and professional relationships.

You, like everyone else, have to navigate through the exchanges of life. For instance, if you go to a mechanic to have the brakes in your car repaired, how does trust fit in? You need to trust the mechanic to be reliable; otherwise, you and others could be injured or killed. And what about price? Do you pay whatever the mechanic asks, trusting him to be fair? To resolve such questions, it is helpful to make distinctions in the kind of “trusting” you are doing in any situation.

Building Transactional Trust

TRUST USUALLY REFERS to what might be termed “transactional trust,” in which you are counting on a future result to occur. Transactional trust is a time-centric, emotional view of the past and future. It is largely performance based, involves an agreed-upon exchange, and is measured by outcome.

When you take your car to the garage to have the brakes repaired, you are relying on the mechanic to genuinely fix them. If for some reason he does not, you are justifiably upset, and if he did not do so because of negligence, you have a valid reason for taking action to rectify the situation. It is also appropriate to be mindful of whether the price seems fair, and if not, to go elsewhere.

In engaging in transactional trust, you

are participating in the building of community, which only works if there is a general feeling of trust, although such feelings need not be perfect. Transactional trust is based on mutual self-interest and involves acting according to common agreement. Life would be literally impossible without such trust, and it must come from the people in the community, as no government is strong enough to enforce it. You count on this trust for food, medicine, safety, and all the material necessities of life.

You also engage in transactional trust in personal relationships. I will do the dishes if you will put the baby to bed. We will share the checking account, but neither will abuse it. I will treat you with respect; you will treat me with respect. I can trust you with my secrets; you can trust me with yours. Transactional trust is the underpinning of personal life. The same is true in the workplace. Every company is dependent on trusting its employees, and employees need to be able to trust management.

Imagine that life at its core is a web formed of trust that we each rely upon for support and that each of us creates new strands of trust for the web throughout the day. When we fail to do so, the web that supports us weakens. Viewed this way, transactional trust itself becomes a spiritual practice, one of character building through intention and discipline, which refines our very being while joining us with others. However, the web of trust is delicate and easily torn. When this happens in a business or personal relationship, a community or a country, transactional trust is replaced by adversarial advantage seeking—the-dog-eat-dog, only-the-fittest-survive mind-set. When trust falls into shadow, there is little generosity, and the only restraint is that which is imposed by law.

Surrendering to Innate Trust

EVEN WHEN UNDERSTOOD in its profoundest sense as character and community building, transactional trust itself does not lead to liberation. It does not bring ultimate clarity of mind and peacefulness of heart, although it is a necessary

foundation for an inner sense of freedom. True transformation is only found in committing yourself to what may be termed “innate trust.”

Innate trust is based on the understanding that if you live mindfully moment-to-moment and have the intention to act according to your values even in difficult or confusing situations, your life will unfold in the most harmonious manner possible. When the yogi asked her difficult questions, she was intuitively grappling with the possibility of this deeper understanding of trust. Innate trust is not based on the future performance of another. It is not measured in clock time, but in the eternal now that is referenced in many spiritual traditions. You surrender measuring your life by future outcomes, concentrating instead on how well you are able to be present in this moment.

Implicit in innate trust is the understanding that external conditions are in the end not a reliable source of happiness or meaning because they are always changing. You don’t get what you want, or you get it and then it goes away or you no longer want it, or else something happens to you and you can no longer enjoy it. Innate trusts accepts the hard facts of life that things are always changing in this manner, the future is uncertain, and wants and fears are endless.

With innate trust you have the strength to stay with the experiences of your life whether or not you have a strong feeling of transactional trust. Take the previous example of the car mechanic scenario. Let’s suppose he intimidates you, or you feel that he may have overcharged you. With innate trust you have the strength to stay present despite feeling intimidated or uncertain. You speak and act appropriately, not out of fear of being cheated, but in seeking clarity and honesty.

If in fact you were cheated, it does not ruin your day; rather, it is just a moment of unpleasantness you have to deal with. You have confidence in the “beingness” of your existence, even when the “doingness” of your existence is not going well.

This sense of being is the real basis for freedom in life. It is not that transactional trust is to be abandoned; you continue

to function in this manner. But as your inner life matures, what matters more and more is how you are being with whatever life brings you. While you certainly don't want to be betrayed by a lover or a friend or let down by a boss, what really matters is how you are inside. This is the distinction the yogi was grappling with in her examination of trust. She had realized that the manner in which she was approaching trust was somehow limiting her, choking her sense of aliveness and freedom. In her confusion she thought she might have to abandon trust, when in fact what she needed was more trust but of a different kind.

The poet T.S. Eliot captured the essence of innate trust in these lines from *Four Quartets*: "Love is most nearly itself when here and now ceases to matter." He is not talking about indifference to the here and now but rather the willingness to be with life without attachment to outcome. It is important to understand that this does not mean caring less. You can afford to care more, to be vulnerable, and to meet difficulty in life directly because it is your ability to care, to love, and to manifest your values that matters to you, not the outcome. You want to show up for what matters in your life and do your best to bring happiness. These intentions are the underpinnings of your life, what you place your trust in. You acknowledge outcomes to be ultimately beyond your control and at times they seem even beyond your comprehension.

Innate trust is a crucial ingredient in feeling related to others, be it a lover, friends, or family members. It is innate trust that allows you to love unselfishly. It is not that you trust your loved ones never to hurt you, for hurt and disappointment are part of the human experience. Rather, you trust their core goodness. In fact, you celebrate it by extending your trust. This trust is not based on a transactional outcome. You simply trust that however the relationship unfolds, your vulnerability to the other is a worthy act. The occasional disappointment is the cost of having a healthy sense of trust. When you meet someone who extends innate trust to you, you feel deep uncon-

ditional acceptance. You in turn can learn to do this for others. Keep in mind that this does not mean you're supposed to abandon common sense or in any way become a victim of another's abuses.

When you first start to examine your relationship to transactional and innate trust, you may question, "What is there about life that can be trusted?" I submit that the nature of life itself is reliable and can be trusted. For instance, you can be certain humans will be true to the nature of their species, which is unpredictable, ever changing, both generous and self-centered. You may like the positive aspects of human beings and hate the negative, but they exist together in all of us. Accepting that all people are like this relieves the pressure of looking for perfection in others or measuring your own.

You can also trust that life in general is ever changing and that the mixture of what is pleasant and unpleasant constantly shifts. Again, this provides relief from the pressure of getting your life just right or feeling like a failure when bad things happen.

I also submit that you can trust relying on your intentions to orient you in life, even in those moments when you are feeling confused. Intentions have to do with how you want to be in the journey of life; goals have to do with what you would like to accomplish. Goals are great for organizing how you spend your time, but they are not nearly as reliable a source for innate trust as your intentions are. Your intention is how you live in your own heart and mind right now. Goals are conceptual, a hypothetical future.

Imagine you are walking to the top of a mountain: You can affect how you take the next step, but you cannot affect the mountaintop. Not understanding the difference between intentions and goals is one of the key problems in maturing your relationship to trust. It may seem like a simple distinction, but in the course of your daily life you may well be repeatedly confusing the two and having many trust issues as a result.

Falling Prey to False Trust

THERE IS ANOTHER kind of trust, which is often a major hindrance to developing

innate trust. It is what I call "false" or "demand" trust. You already know false trust through your life experiences. I trust you to meet my needs. I trust you not to change. I trust you to be some other way than you are. You may laugh as you read these statements, but they are not funny for either person in a relationship. Demand trust is a form of aggression. When this emotional state is predominant in a personality, it can come from excessive fear or neediness, or it can be the trickery of a manipulative personality.

Demand trust is trying to force what can only be freely given. Ironically, it is actually distrust disguised as trust. The yogi described her boss as a person whose insecurities were so strong that he pulled others into the whirlpool of his fears. He constantly second-guessed his staff while telling them how much confidence he had in them.

What makes demand trust so damaging is that it can undermine the possibility of innate trust. If you can recognize false trust for what it is when you first encounter it, then it is not so debilitating, and you can either remove yourself from the situation or insist on a transactional discussion.

If you become paralyzed with the inability to trust yourself, either you may be falling prey to your own demand trust to be perfect or else you have not developed the strength of innate trust that enables you to tolerate being present when your own fears and insecurities are strong. If others feel as though they cannot trust you, you might ask yourself if it is because you make false promises out of fear, which indicates a lack of innate trust. Or are you untrustworthy because of insufficient inner discipline, which signifies a problem with transactional trust, as does the lack of commitment to honor your agreements. The third possibility is that you repeatedly succumb to demand trust such that you make agreements to be other than who you are. To find peace in life, both transactional and innate trust must be reconciled in your behavior.

While it is easy to know the pain of being subjected to demand trust, it is not so easy to recognize when you have un-

consciously become the perpetrator and used trust as a weapon because of your own vulnerability. This is something most of us do on occasion. During my conversation with the yogi about her trust issue, she came to see that she was being almost deliberately naive in regard to her lover who had disappointed her in a manner that was totally consistent with his personality.

She hadn't trusted herself to stay present in the moment; therefore, she had missed all the signs indicating who he was. It was her lack of innate trust that had led her astray. Likewise with her boss — she was not trusting herself to be okay in those moments when he was manifesting his fears. Part of her unease with him stemmed from a hidden demand that his character be other than it is, which is like insisting that a mosquito not bite or a fly not buzz.

Each of these insights was a delight to the yogi. She began to taste freedom from the circumstances of her life and became very interested in cultivating innate trust, making it her meditation and practice for the year. The clarity she achieved did not come all at once but over a period of months in which she actively observed and reflected on what was true about herself. Her hard work is an example of how intention unfolds in daily life. You identify the values with which you want to experience life, then when a challenging situation arises, you apply those values through the practice of intention. In doing so, you are trusting life, trusting yourself, and trusting in trust. ■

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