

# Honesty Is the Best Policy

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**Dale Goldstein**

*Honesty is such a lonely word.  
Everyone is so untrue.  
Honesty is hardly ever heard,  
and mostly what I need from you.*

— Billy Joel, “Honesty”

In the workshops I facilitate, I ask all the participants to commit to two primary ground rules – confidentiality and honesty. Confidentiality means that no one will share with anyone other than the person who shared their story anything about that story in a way that anyone could ever identify the person who shared it. This ground rule makes it reasonably safe for participants to openly share what they need to share in order to do the work they came to do. Honesty means knowing what you’re thinking and feeling and not holding back from another person anything you see about him or her that might help that person end the cycle of suffering that she or he is creating for him/herself and/or others. These two principal ground rules create a safe environment where people can be real, open, honest, and free with themselves and others.

When I talk about honesty, I say I’m talking about impeccable honesty – not something we’re used to by any means in our culture. To impress upon the participants how difficult it is to practice impeccable honesty, I tell them what a friend of mine, Tah-Weh-Dah-Qui – a Native American medicine man – said to me about honesty. Tah-Weh-Dah-Qui has done some very austere and difficult spiritual practices that I’m aware of, and probably many more I’m not aware of. He has completed four traditional sun dances, where participants dance for four days and nights straight, at the end of which, two hooks are put through their chest or back, with a buffalo skull attached to leather straps attached to the hooks, and they continue to dance, dragging around the buffalo skull until the hooks rip loose from their skin. He has done a 21-day vision quest, where he went up on the top of a hill in the Onondaga Reservation naked, with only a blanket – no food or water – in the middle of the winter and “cried for a vision” for his people. And numerous other practices that are quite severe. Tah-Weh-Dah-Qui told me that of all the practices he has undertaken, and of all the practices his teachers – medicine men and elders of tribes all over the world – have undertaken, the most difficult practice, by far, is honesty! He talked about the little ways in which we are dishonest – things like

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monitoring our answering machines to see who is calling before we decide whether or not to pick up the phone. The impeccably honest thing to do would be to answer the phone and, if we didn't want to talk with the caller, to tell him or her why we didn't want to talk with him or her. Little dishonesties like that fill our lives, if only we are willing to see them for what they are.

*Because we are only accepting of pleasure in our lives, an immense amount of fear is created as we spend our lives dodging pain.*

*We live our lives fearfully to such an extent that we live dishonestly.*

*There is dishonesty in any mind which demands that reality occur in a specific way.*

from *Beginning to See*, by A. Sujata

Why would one want to live a life of impeccable honesty, anyway? Let's look at the consequences of living honestly vs. dishonestly. Honesty creates trust. Without trust, there can be no real intimacy in relationship. Since being dishonest requires lying to oneself, as well, there is a split in the fabric of our being that causes ongoing anxiety, distress, and, ultimately, dis-ease. We feel sick in our entire self – body, mind and spirit. When we're honest, something simply feels right and whole in our being; when we're dishonest, we don't feel right inside. And when we don't feel right, we don't act right, and this affects everyone we come into contact with, especially those we're closest to. When we're honest, others also sense this rightness about us, and want to be around us and hear what we have to say. Without honesty, there can be no wisdom, because wisdom comes from living in the Truth. Obviously, there is much more to say here, but space is limited, so I'll leave it at this....

*The genius of communication is the ability to be both totally honest and totally kind at the same time.*

— John Powell

Another friend of mine once said, *"When someone tells me they're going to be brutally honest with me, I expect them to be 90% brutal and 10% honest!"* The teacher and author, George Leonard, in an interview regarding his book, *The End of Sex: Towards Greater Intimacy in Relationships*, when asked if we have to share everything with our partners, replied, *"We don't have to share everything – just the things that are difficult to share."* Why is it that we have such a hard time sharing our difficult truths with another person in a kind and gentle way, caring as much about the other person's feelings as our own? Perhaps it is because we've held onto a particular anger or resentment much too long, letting it build in intensity to a point where it can no longer be contained, so that it explodes out instead of being given as a gift to the other. Perhaps it is because

we're afraid of the response we might get; our difficult-to-share truth might be rejected, belittled, negated or even reacted to with hostility. Perhaps we're so afraid that we attack out of the fear of being attacked. Perhaps it's because we don't want to feel with them the hurt or disappointment we see in their eyes when we tell them. So, is it possible to share the difficult truths with compassion (lit. "To have passion with") for self and other?

### The Gift

Sometimes when you're honest with me  
unbidden tears rush to my eyes in my defense,  
and through them  
it's difficult to see you clearly.

As I pick about  
in the pile of the I that seemed to shatter  
with the impact of your words,

I find,  
to my delight,  
...my wholeness  
intact. ...  
...and even enhanced.

It seems as if you have added a piece;  
And I feel loved.

Such irony  
that such a gift  
should be found  
in such a wrapping.

— Pamela Ahrens

In one Heartwork Basic Intensive a number of years ago, all the participants simultaneously turned their back on a woman who was doing a piece of work on herself. She was quite taken aback, to say the least. Months later, I ran into her on the street, and she was truly a different person than the one I had experienced in the Intensive. I told her how great she looked, and asked her what she had been doing that had made the change in her. She said that it had been that moment in the Intensive when everyone had turned their backs on her that she realized, for the first time in her life, how she affected people. She had been unconsciously pushing people away, and she

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saw how, and she didn't want to do that anymore. She was the happiest she had ever been since that event.

What would it be like to live a life of impeccable honesty? How would you be/feel different? How would it affect your relationships with other people in your life? Might it help you know and get for yourself what you really want in your life? Might it even be a large piece of what you really want?

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