

## **7. Fully True-ness**

August 10, 2017

"I am not sure that I exist, actually. I am all the writers that I have read, all the people that I have met, all the women that I have loved; all the cities I have visited."

I can't find a context for this quote by the famous Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges, so I don't know if he meant what I take from it. My apologies to his memory if I am taking him out of context, but this is a beautiful verbalization of what the seventh of the 10 Most Excellent Practices is about. I'll read it again.

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Borges seems to have grasped the truth of Fully Truth-ness.

The seventh practice is typically translated as "Truthfulness." I think this is an accurate translation, but we English speakers are likely to miss out on most of the concept because of our common use of that word to mean simply *not lying*. Of course not lying is a good thing, (we discussed this when looking at the second of the Most Excellent Practices, Decency). But truthful speech is just a sliver at a minor edge of the iceberg.

The Pali word we're talking about is *sacca* (*satya* in Sanskrit). If you plug this into a Pali-English dictionary (which, to my great joy, exists online), you get a list of words which does include, amongst others, words like *fact*, *truth*, *veracity*, and so on. But there's more to it than this, as the long list of translations suggests. *Sacca* is the same word that is used in the phrase *The Four Noble Truths* which is the foundation of the buddha taught. The etymology of the words which come to us as *noble* and *truths* is quite fascinating (and curiously connected to the roots of the English word *noble*), but I'll try to stick to what's important here: the noun *noble* as the Buddha used it referred to the type of person that the Buddha hoped his teaching would bring forth; that is, people who could see things as they really are, or people who knew from experience the reality of being. These were people who were no longer deluded by distorted perception. People who "knew the truth" for themselves, from personal

experience. As an adjective, this describes the characteristic of something which is known by those who see things as they really are.

The word translated as *truths* meant that reality which those people knew. That reality is that there is no *self*, no thing-ness to anything, no separate anything that is fixed and independent. There is only a constantly re-emerging consequence of all that came before, a wave of being, a flow of manifestation. As Borges said, “I” do not really exist. “I” am all the writers I have read... In other words, I do not exist independently or separately. I am the constantly re-emerging consequence of all that comes before. It is the ignorance of this reality that results in every kind of suffering. Knowing this truth, Those Who Knew were able to become free from suffering. This is what the Buddha wanted people to discover.

So the four noble truths are the statement of the reality that Those Who Know knew.

*Sacca*, the seventh most excellent practice, then, is the practice of the reality that sets you free. It is he practice the truth that Those Who Know knew. It is the practice of existing as a not-self flow of being. It is the practice of being one of those Nobles who experience undistorted existence. When understood this way, it’s not actually an activity that we can engage in, because the reality is that we do not exist as separate things which can engage in an activity. *We are* the activity of existing. The seventh practice is essentially asking us to be enlightened beings.

The word *truthfulness* works as a translation if we understand it to mean that we are to be fully true to what is, which is to say, we are manifesting liberated existence. If we are being fully-true, then of course we won’t speak lies. But you can see how misleading it would be to take this practice as nothing more than telling the truth.

To summarize, this seventh of the Most Excellent Practices is the manifestation of full enlightenment. It seems a bit of a jump from last month’s practice of shutting your mouth when you are frustrated at someone, to being a fully awakened buddha. Well, let me remind you that every one of the practices that we’ve looked at so has had a perfect ideal, and a practical application. Remember that usually the list is called the Ten Perfections, not the Ten Practices. I changed the wording to avoid our inevitable reaction of expectation and comparison. If we call it the Ten Perfections, we will think that the goal is to get perfect, and until we are, we are inadequate, hopeless failures. But the point of having

these practices is for the very reason that we are not perfect; none of us are. So we aspire to freedom by practicing more doable versions of the ideal.

Being doable means that we have some influence over what it is we are trying to do. We have very little control over what goes on inside our heads. We have a little more influence over our external responses to the maelstrom of thoughts and emotions and sensations that arise within us by no will of our own; that is, our actions. For example, with Generosity, we looked at deciding to do generous things, regardless of how generous we were feeling. Decency encouraged us to “fake it until we make it,” to consciously act decently even if it doesn’t come naturally in every situation. Last week we talked about holding your tongue, *especially* when your inclination is to speak unkindly. But often we don’t even have control over our actions. So we start with our intentions. Intention leads to action, sooner or later.

This week’s perfection is about living in accordance with truth, as far as we are able to comprehend it at this time, and as much as we are able to intentionally act based on that. When we talked about Wisdom, we talked about learning about our truth through mental activity: reading or listening to talks and so on. I’m not here to tell you what your reality is; I’ve encouraged you to explore your reality and learn more about it. Now is the time to put that learning to use. But start small, with manageable slivers of ice instead of the whole iceberg.

A good place to start is with looking at your values and beliefs and comparing that with your intended behavior. For me, for example, I think that when I purposely lie (or stretch the truth, or fail to speak when something false is understood), it usually is a reaction to my own unpleasant experience or unclear thinking. If I am living from a place of non-suffering or from clear-seeing, I am probably not going to be lying. So even when I may not be able see clearly, I know that if I feel like lying, I am probably not acting from the reality of undistorted understanding of truth. Therefore I can choose to tell the truth, even if I am not internally manifesting full enlightenment. Or at least I can choose to intend to tell the truth. I look at my behavior to see whether the choices that I am actually making coincide with my beliefs.

Another example: I think that doing things that result in harm to people or the earth is based in a distorted understanding of cause-and-effect, (karma). If I really understood how driving as much as I

do affects the health of this planet and of the people in this city, I would walk a lot more. I know intellectually that it is unhealthy, but I am not yet undistorted enough in my perception to know it in my gut. So when I look at my transportation habits I can choose to act as if I really understand this, even if I'm not fully convinced deep down in my experience. I can walk more, based purely on an intellectual ethic. (Or, again, I can set an intention of walking more). One day it will be painful for me to drive a car at all, because I will know that I and the earth are one, and I will feel the pain when I burn fossil fuels. Until then, I make my choices based on my limited understanding, and based on what is realistically doable for me.

What I am NOT doing is creating a list of rules for myself and a deep pit of guilt that I can jump into every time I drive my car. I'm talking about what is practical, possible, and within my own understanding (nor, by the way, the understanding or expectations of others). I don't feel guilty about driving, even though I know that one day I will drive less because of the reality from which I manifest. This practice is to start where you are, look at what you know, and see how your behavior meshes with that. Don't create a new ethic for yourself. Look at what your ethics currently are. Be honest with yourself (there's another aspect of Truthfulness) about what you believe, (not what you wish you believed), and how you behave (not how you think you should behave), and what your intentions are (whether or not you manage to follow through with them).

This sounds sort of complicated to think through, but you don't need to analyze your values in the detail I have. I explained where my values come from in order to illustrate how behaving according to my values is in fact manifesting the truth of no-self. It is sufficient to simply consider what your values are and to observe how your behavior and intentions compare.

To use a new age phrase, Are you living your truth? That is what the Practice of Fully True-ness entails.

## **Fully True-ness Exercises**

1. List (write it down, if you can) some of your most basic values or beliefs about reality. Take some time with this, and be honest with yourself about what you actually believe to be true. Keep these in mind for the next few days to allow any insight or new wisdom to emerge that might modify or clarify your core values and beliefs about reality. This is not about “should.” This is just about clarifying what you currently think to be true.
2. Consider what behavior would be appropriate to these values and beliefs in an ideal situation (“What would the Buddha do?”) Remember that you are *not* doing this to create a set of rules that you have to follow, or to create criteria by which you can judge yourself. You are not perfect, and are not expected to act perfectly.
3. Compare your actual intended behavior with this ideal behavior (even if you don’t always follow the intention). If there are places where the intention doesn’t match the ideal, consider why this is. Are you unclear about your values and beliefs? Or about how these would manifest ideally? Or have you simply not thought about this area of behavior before? What would you change to be more honest with yourself, and to live more honestly?