

Satya

by Carolyn Reynolds

You know those lists of pithy, bright and humorous sayings that show up in your email box? A list was sent to me this morning. One of the lines of wisdom said, "If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything!" Now, this is indeed a great benefit for those of us who are aware of the diminishing memory-bank capability of aging. Another by-product of avoiding the web of prevarication is having more energy for the flow of living life. We all know that flow experiences are peak experiences. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi wrote in Flow: The Optimal Experience, "We have all experienced times when, instead of being buffeted by anonymous forces, we do feel in control of our actions, masters of our own fate. On the rare occasions that it happens, we feel a sense of exhilaration; a deep sense of enjoyment that is long cherished and that becomes a landmark in memory for what life should be like. This is what we mean by *optimal experience*."

Lying, fabricating, and not maintaining integrity are interruptions to the creative flow of life. This is not news. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali teaches us about Satya, one of the Yamas, or ways of being in the world, that supports our path to self-realization. Practicing satya is practicing right communication through speech, writing, gesture and action.

Ironically, living in the state of truthfulness and integrity would take us full circle. Lying and deceit are learned abilities and even by the age of three we have not yet acquired the ability to lie. Maybe that "living in the truthfulness of the moment" is what we adore so much in our little ones. They are in the flow of life, whether it be tumultuous or serene. However, by age four, the ability to lie is beginning to kick in. It's as if we know that the power to manipulate can get us "off the hook" for behaviors we had to take our knocks for previously. Here is where we begin to abdicate responsibility for our actions through fabrication. However, at age 4, sometimes the difference between fact and fiction is not yet clearly delineated. By ages 5 and 6, the difference between fact and fiction is now understood and children will use their newfound skill to be sticklers for the truth. Until age 7, it is best to be a cognizant of these developmental milestones and respond accordingly. When a child is 7 years of age, he is considered to have arrived at the Age of Reason. Considerable moral development can occur and will continue given opportunities to observe exemplary behaviors in society. Mentoring young humans to be truthful is an honorable endeavor and a wonderful opportunity for us to review our own belief systems. There is, unfortunately, ample opportunity for our impressionable youth to pick up maladaptive behaviors from society, the media, and from ourselves.

Walking your talk, doing the honorable thing when no one is watching, refusing to pass rumors, returning money when the clerk accidentally gave you too much, and even refusing to speak a truth when harm or violence could be the result, are excellent modeling behaviors. The first and foundation yama is ahimsa, or nonviolence. Truth is

not served if violence is the result. It, instead, becomes a weapon and this is not right action, as the sutra teaches.

There are levels and levels of Satya. Sat is the ultimate truth. And satya also means that one's inside and outside match with one another so that whatever is expressed would automatically come in the spirit of ahimsa, without the need to modify actions, speech, or thoughts. When we notice that we are not doing this, it is a wonderful opportunity to learn to be a witness to our inner process. Watch how the mind works. Laugh at it. Learn from it. And remember that we have minds but we are not our minds. You can train your mind much as you do a puppy. Keep bringing it back to the paper, uh, the truth. In the Book of Wisdom, Swami Rama writes: "Humanism means filling this human world with divine values. We have only to become human; we already are God." The contemplation and integration of satya into our life experience greatly enhances our humanness as well as the enjoyment of the flow of life. Isn't it amazing that the learning to become human is the challenge part?