

## Truthspeaking

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Teacher and writer Tamarack Song introduced me to the term “Truthspeaking” which in his words “is to state clearly and simply what one thinks and feels. When we truthspeak,” explains Song, “we let go of our fears about how the other might interpret or react to our words. We simply speak our thoughts and feelings with utter honesty, absent any filtering, and, in so doing, experience freedom.”

Reading Song, I am inclined to conclude that Truthspeaking is a rarity these days. Indeed, we are surrounded by leaders who seem to regard lying as a legitimate political practice, and we are inundated by advertisements designed to manipulate and delude us. It is almost as if speaking the truth is not in any way the purpose of modern speech; instead, communication is a practice to cajole, manipulate, confuse, misrepresent, bamboozle.

Song contends that all of us know truthspeak. We simply have forgotten it. He suggests that if you would like a clinic in truthspeak, talk with a child on a regular basis. A child speaks his feelings with full integrity. He laughs, he cries, he speaks. . . living his truth moment by moment without needing to edit, filter, justify, or rationalize.

In this vein, consider this story told to me by a student about her family Thanksgiving dinner. Among the many beloved family members at the table was the student’s aunt who had recently been diagnosed with a lethal form of cancer. Everyone knew that this would probably be the last Thanksgiving they would share with this dear soul but no one spoke this. Rather than acknowledge the aunt’s cancer and the love they all felt for this woman, the family members made small talk. That is until the aunt’s five-year-old niece looked over and saw how pale and frail her auntie appeared and asked, “Auntie, are you going to die?” With that many around the table broke down in sobs. It took the child to speak of the pain that permeated the room in that moment of thanksgiving.

Politeness—a form of social conditioning—can be a barrier to truthspeak. Take a situation where you are bored in the company of an acquaintance. The conversation is putting you to sleep and you want to escape—that’s “what is true for you,” but you don’t speak your truth. Instead you lie, first by remaining too long in a conversation that is boring you silly and, second, when you can stand it no longer, by telling a lie to escape.

You might be thinking, “You mean when I am bored in a conversation, I am supposed to speak this?” My answer is “Yes.” Of course, you would not say, “You are a boring person.” Such a universal statement is not true. What is true is that you, the listener, are experiencing boredom. Truthspeaking is about YOUR deepest truth—what is most true for you in the moment. To truthspeak in this instance requires that you look under your feeling of boredom to find the cause. You seek the truth—the reason—for your boredom. Maybe you don’t know enough about the topic to contribute to the conversation or maybe you judge it to be trivial and want to be talking about something that, in your view, is more substantive? Perhaps, upon full

reflection, you realize that you are one who is boring. After all, you are the one sitting there like a bump-on-a-log feeling like a victim.

Once you excavate what is below your boredom, you might, indeed, say that the conversation is boring to you, but you would go further, first, by taking a measure of responsibility for the failed conversation and, second, by expressing what you need for an enlivened conversation. In doing this, you would be saying, in effect, that you care enough about yourself and your relationship with the other person to entrust them with your truth.

In sum, if you want to learn to speak the truth, ask yourself repeatedly throughout the day, “What is true for me right now?” Ask it and then go inside for the answer: What is true in my head? What is true in my body? What is true in my heart? Can you do it? Are you ready to know the truth? Are you ready to experience the freedom that comes by living in full integrity with your truth?