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## The Honesty Test

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## The Honesty Test

How do I know whether or not I am kidding myself? How can I tell the difference between believing that the words of an author or a speaker are true because I would like them to be true, and believing another's words because they match reality? We have a great capacity for truth, but we also have within us the ability to ignore the signs of falsity when we perceive them. Most of us would not deliberately lie to ourselves, but we might be misled when we are attracted to something or to someone. Finally, even if we do sincerely want to know the truth, can we still be fooled by some habits of thought that warp our judgment?

"Don't kid me," we might say to someone else, or, "Are you serious?" Both are requests that someone tell us what they understand as true to the best of their knowledge and in accord with their experience. We want others to avoid selfish manipulation or misguided kindness. "Please tell me what you mean, not what you think I want to hear." "Speak from your heart, not just your head." Honesty in others is dear to us.

Our own honesty is a very important quality that we exercise when we want our thinking to be as unclouded as possible by patterns of selfishness, selective ignorance, or latent prejudices. We want to know with clarity not only what we think, but also what we believe.

The Honesty Test is both simple and spiritual. Our desire for personal authenticity leads us to test our beliefs as an exercise of our spirituality. The occasions of our need for clarity arise when others ask us a question, or we read an article, or we hear a statement. What do we believe?

In practice, we use The Honesty Test when we state the opposite of a belief we are questioning, and attend closely to our inner response. For example, if I wonder whether I really believe that God loves me, I can try saying to myself "God does not love me." How does that sound? Can I tell another person, with conviction and certainty, that God does not love me? If I cannot, the test reveals that I do believe that God loves me. I might not have an emotional experience of God loving me at this particular time, but I know that I cannot honestly declare the opposite to be true. Belief is not a feeling. Belief is a personal commitment based on what we know from both external evidence and from the experience of consulting our personal, built-in, "lie detector."

An experiment might be helpful if we wish to observe our sense of honesty as applied to a belief. Recall a moment when we were confronted with a personal question for which we wanted to honor our own judgment rather than to please others, but at a time when emotions made it difficult to acknowledge our truth. Perhaps a long-held belief might have been challenged. A news report could have stated many reasons for repudiating what we have believed as true. The experiment involves taking the opposite of that challenged belief, and making it into a statement. What do we notice when we imagine ourselves relating the statement to someone who is fair and just? If we experience confusion, disturbance, perhaps revulsion at owning the statement, then our personal scales of just judgment have given us a "no" to changing our belief, and a "yes" to acknowledging it as fitting for us to keep. Honesty is experienced when our hearts acknowledge a statement with a sense of peaceful conviction.

Our sense of honesty might not be infallible, but this spiritual gift resident in our hearts is of great power and efficacy. The exercise of honesty is not limited to a mere weighing of evidence, but includes an immediate consulting of our past experiences, our values, and our deepest human qualities of faith, hope, and love. We are perhaps at our best when we use our own variation of The Honesty Test.