6. VALUES AND SELF-ESTEEM

These roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are...there is no time for them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

A psychologically and spiritually conscious person acts from a consistent—though always evolving—sense of values. To value is to esteem the worth of something, to declare that it has meaning for us.

Characteristics of Values

1. Values are organismic, i.e., they arise from within you in a natural way. A set of values is not imposed from without. It is a province of your inner world. A sense of values is really a sense of your own identity. You are thus esteeming and trusting yourself.

2. Your values have been consciously chosen from a variety of alternatives. To know your values is to know yourself, since your choices reveal you.

3. Your values are revealed to others by your words and actions. Your behavior is the final determinant of your values. This is how people come to trust you: they can see your consistency. You act on your inner choices.

4. As your values become more and more conscious, you are more and more apt to proclaim them—even at great cost to your own comfort and ambitions. People may respect this integrity and admire or appreciate you. This gratifies you though it does not motivate you.

5. Those deep-seated, usually long-held, inflexible beliefs (holdouts) about how the world or you or others should be are based on rigid judgments and archaic fears, not on values. Such ulterior inflexibility keeps you unfree and prevents your full self-emergence. It kills spontaneity, permeability, and finally compassion. "Non-ambiguity and non-contradiction are too one-sided to express the incomprehensible," Jung observes.

Our aliveness is our capacity to give and receive. Intransigence and sanctimony slam the door in the face of such a generous guest. "Judgment and closure are the greatest dangers to one who wants to retain the psychic mobility of an explorer," John Lilly once wrote.

Personal Values and Identity

Our personal values identify us to ourselves and others. In a very real way, we are the values we cherish and demonstrate.

To act out of the fear of guilt or of looking bad or of punishment means that our values have not had the chance to achieve their full primacy in our lives. We consequently feel "*unworthy*." Our self-esteem diminishes because our actions emanate from guilt or from fear of how others may estimate us.

Having values, however, does not mean that our actions and motives are pure. The conscious adult has the ability to contain apparently contradictory motivations. It is unrealistic to expect that an altruistic decision will not contain some selfish motivation or that a generous decision will not contain some element of sanctimony or of a sense of obligation. The negative element in no way vitiates the positive element. They coexist as shadows coexist with light. The adult concern is only with the ratio. "This time I bring one more moment of pure care about you than I had last time."

Awakening Values

To awaken values that are undeveloped or have become dormant, we can follow these guidelines:

1. Trust intuitions, the inner messages that tell us what is to be honored and what is to be avoided.

2. Notice how many choices you make to feel good and make more choices to feel good about yourself.

3. Check out motivations and choices with a person or community or program whose integrity you trust. Then make your own decisions, now more objectively informed.

4. Notice which values you admire stongly in others. Act in accord with the values you admire while acknowledging that guilt may also partially motivate you.

5. Gradually, a shift occurs and the guilt-motivation decreases as the value-motivation increases. Acting on values becomes easeful and you love yourself more. Then self-esteem flourishes and self-deprecation dies away.

> *Not to be attached to something is to be aware of its infinite value,*
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> —Shunryu Suzuki