



Courage to Risk Telling the Truth, by Angeles Arrien

Something definitely changes when we finally summon the courage to risk telling the truth about who we are and are not. The primary questions become: how and why do we avoid being who we truly are? What gets in the way of trusting our self completely? Under what circumstances do we deceive or delude ourselves?

When we are phony, pretentious, or cynical in order to achieve interpersonal or material gain, we diminish ourselves and disrespect others. The extent to which we have positive regard and respect for ourselves and others determines how successfully we achieve congruity among all aspects of our character. It becomes necessary in this process of congruity, to demonstrate the self-regard that is true to who we are, and as we do this, we are unwilling to compromise our integrity in order to satisfy the expectations of others or win their approval. We know our behavior is authentic when we can consistently say what we mean, do what we say, and say what is so when it is so. We can check ourselves by asking whether our motivation, speech, appearance, and actions match our true character in all the varied aspects of our lives -- relationships, work, and community. When our words, actions, and behaviors are in harmony, wisdom and authenticity emerge.

Authenticity is the expression of what is genuine and natural. It commands great respect because, unfortunately, it is so rare. The desire to be accepted, or to engage in competition and comparison, drives us to limit our behavior to what falls within narrowly prescribed, predictable norms. Ridding ourselves of old patterns and accessing the authentic self are entry ways to freedom and the domain of wisdom. In fact, as we discover how to befriend these processes, ageing and renewing our character can be what Carl Jung called, "A winter grace." Jung believed that if we do not develop inner strength as we age, we will become defensive, dogmatic, depressed, resentful, and cynical. Our homeland of authenticity is within, and there we are sovereign. Until we rediscover this ancient truth in a way that is unique for each of us, we are condemned to wander, seeking solace in the outer world where it cannot be found.

--Angeles Arrien, from "The Second Half of Life"