

Living and Loving Panfaithfully

Creating a Life Full of Integrity, Passion, and Sustainable Loving Relationships

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This essay addresses three basic needs and challenges of modern-day living:

- 1) How to live a truly authentic, fully self-expressed life.**
- 2) Experiencing love that is mutually satisfying, mutually empowering, and deepening over time.**
- 3) Our yearning to create a greater sense of community among our family and friends.**

Introduction

Those of us who understand honesty as a fundamental spiritual practice know that simply being honest, like meditation, helps us to experience life more fully.

— Brad Blanton

The beginning of love is to let those we love be perfectly themselves, and not twist them to fit our own image. Otherwise we love only the reflection of ourselves we find in them. — Thomas Merton

We are all longing to go home to some place we have never been - a place, half-remembered and half-envisioned. Community. Somewhere, there are people to whom we can speak with passion without having the words catch in our throats. Somewhere a circle of hands will open to receive us, eyes will light up as we enter, voices will celebrate with us whenever we come into our own power. Community means strength that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done. Arms to hold us when we falter. A circle of healing. A circle of friends. Somewhere where we can be free. — Starhawk

Faithfulness is not simply a matter of faithfulness to others, but first of all a matter of faithfulness to oneself - a power to define oneself from within and to remain constant to that self-definition. In the last analysis, faithfulness is the power of personhood. — Herbert Richardson

The Eightfold Path of Panfaithfulness

Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother and even such a small creature as I finds an intimate place in their midst. That which extends throughout the Universe, I regard as my body, and that which directs the Universe, I regard as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters and all things are my companions.

— Chang Tsai

To relate “panfaithfully” is to be “faithful to all.” (The prefix “pan” is defined as meaning “all; the whole; entirely; altogether; by all; of all”.) In order to understand what it means to be “faithful to all”, however, we first need to understand the meaning of the faithfulness. Webster defines “faithful” as: 1) steadfast in affection or allegiance; constant; loyal; true [*faithful* friends] 2) conscientious; thorough in fulfillment of duties or responsibility [*faithful* attendance] 3) true to one's word or belief; firm in adherence to a covenant or promise; [*faithful* to one's vows] 4) given with strong assurance; binding [*faithful* promise] 5) accurate; trustworthy; reliable; exact [*a faithful* witness] 6) full of or characterized by faith, esp. religious faith [*the faithful*].

Being faithful, then, involves being honest, trustworthy, and “real.” A faithful person is a man or woman of integrity. Being faithful *to all* means being faithful to Life - all life, human and nonhuman - and faithful to the divine source and energy of life. Panfidelity is biofidelity and geofidelity. The panfaithful person's primary allegiance, or loyalty, is not to herself, nor to another, nor to any group, nation, religious creed, holy book, or philosophy. His or her primary allegiance is to the whole of nature and, more specifically, to the life, air, water, and soil of home, the bioregion. From a theological perspective, to be panfaithful is to be loyal to God, to be faithful to Life and Love; to be true to the Holy Mystery revealed in us, around us, and in the irreversible flow of time.

Being faithful to anything less than this is what is traditionally meant by “idolatry”. As I'm using the term, “idolatry” is placing your ultimate allegiance or loyalty in anything less than the universe as a whole, or “God” as the mysterious source, spirit and life of the universe. And as the following examples illustrate, the natural consequences of idolatry are almost always tragic.

Countless people and animals have suffered, lives have been lost, and ecosystems ravaged, all because of idolatry, or misplaced allegiance. Millions of Jews were exterminated because many Nazis were loyal to Hitler but not faithful to anything larger than the Third Reich. Millions of women were tortured and killed

during the Inquisition because of those who were loyal to the institutional Church but not faithful to the feminine experience of life. Whenever two groups go to war, each loyal to its own leader, patriotic ideals, or perception of the divine will, we witness the logical conclusion of idolatry. When two individuals are devoted to each other without also being faithful to their community and their world, the results are equally, if not as dramatically, tragic. Few things place stress on the environment and our health more than trying to survive in the modern world without the emotional and physical support of real community, and without the spiritual support of the body of Life which gave us birth and continues to nurture and sustain us. Multiply this image: (mom, dad and the kids living alone in their house, with two or more cars, a nice lawn to keep up, and all the consumer items "needed" to maintain such a lifestyle) millions of times, over a period of decades, and you will understand one of the reasons why we are inadvertently destroying our world and destroying our sense of peace and happiness in the process. Sanity, health, and sustainability all lie in the direction of panfaithfulness.

To be panfaithful means to be faithful to all; to be loyal to life; to be true to the divine life force of the universe. For many people, when they think of "fidelity" they think of marital faithfulness, or sexual exclusivity. I'm using the term much more broadly than that here. To live panfaithfully is to operate with deep and consistent integrity in *all* your relationships, sexual or not.

The important issues for panfaithful living are: trust and honesty, love and delight, touch and tenderness, responsibility and commitment, playfulness and creativity, respectful communication, green faith and ritual, and synergy and service.

What follows is an elaboration on these eight characteristics of the panfaithful way of life, what I have called the eightfold path of living panfaithfully. While no one can expect to live consistent with these principles 100% of the time, they nonetheless can serve as a compass, guiding anyone who aligns with them toward ever more sustainable levels of intimacy and community.

Community is another name for what believers have called "salvation." We may reject the dream, belittle the ideal, and turn away from the challenge, but the yearning for community does not go away. It remains at our center as a painful testimony, a reminder of the fact that we have taken the wrong path.... Community is not an elective; it is our destiny. — Dick Westley

I. Trust and Honesty

Whether you are monogamous or polygamous is not the most critical factor in having a successful couple. Whether or not you tell the truth is! — Brad Blanton

Trust, love, and the spirit of community are all interdependent. They feed on each other and help each other grow stronger. But one thing they all need is honesty. Without honesty, trust is lost, love withers and dies, and community is unattainable.

One of the first things my family, friends and I discovered as we journeyed down the path of "radical honesty," as best selling author Brad Blanton calls it, was that truth telling did not exactly come easy to any of us. We were forced to admit that we were all habitual liars, whether consciously or unconsciously. We each had spent a lifetime editing our thoughts, speech, and actions, putting our best face forward and denying our shadow, for fear of being judged and rejected. Since fear of the consequences seemed to be the greatest barrier to telling the truth, we created rituals - sacred talking circles - where each person could share his or her unedited truth and be heard, without being interrupted, criticized, or judged in any way. By sharing our deep and minute truth with each other (i.e., the embarrassing and painful stuff, as well as the "silly little things" that are usually neither silly nor little), we slowly began retraining ourselves to be truth tellers instead of subtle liars. Just as the U.V. Family expressed in their essay, "The Possible Relationship," "We learned, at a visceral level, the sickening results of letting half-truths, white lies, or major withholds persist and the thrilling results of plunging into cold truth and having the coursing energy of love flow back into our relationship." The practice of radical honesty makes it difficult *not* to love.

Trust may be the most important attitude of the heart to cultivate in the growing of community. With it, most other positive attributes follow naturally. Without it, community is impossible. But what does it mean to trust? From an evolutionary, or time-developmental, perspective, we can speak of trusting with respect to the past, present, and future. From a spatial perspective, we refer to trusting what is inside us and outside us.

Real life is full of pain and disappointment. To trust with regards to the past is to refuse to play the blame game. It means letting go of resentments and judgments of self and others, forgiving from the heart, and accepting life's struggles and difficulties as a necessary part of being alive. To trust in the present

is to be mindful of the fact that this moment, and every moment, is a one-time gift. It means being aware of the sacredness of this time and place, and of the breath you are breathing right now. (Pause) To trust in the future is to have faith, not that things will necessarily go well for you, but that whatever happens will be perfect for your growth and learning. Trusting time means experiencing the flow of real life with an open heart and a deep-seated attitude of acceptance and curiosity.

Thinking spatially, we reflect on the importance of trusting what is inside us - our inner nature: our dreams, intuitions, failings, and our life and love energy - as well as what is outside us - our outer nature: the natural and social contexts within which we are embedded. To trust what is inside you is to listen and respond to the soft, subtle voice of the divine spirit within; to refuse to follow any external authority that does not line up with your heart; and to accept that even your faults and shortcomings serve a purpose. To trust what is outside you is to appreciate the natural world for what it has always been - teacher, healer, provider; revealer of divine mystery, majesty, and power - and to accept your condition as an earthling, a human expression of this living planet. It also means having faith that the faults and shortcomings of modern society serve a purpose; that our industrial, technological world is not a mistake, but rather is a necessary, though immature, stage in the evolution of consciousness and culture.

In religious terms, trusting time and space means having faith in God. It is choosing to stay open to the possibility that we are being allured by the same mysterious Reality that has drawn and empowered the process of evolution for billions of years. It is also choosing to believe that nothing in our lives or in the world is a mistake.

Trusting and truth-telling go hand in hand. Some people seem to think that trusting means passivity or inaction. Nothing could be further from the truth. I trust that our Western consumer culture is not a cosmic mistake; but I am also doing all that I can to help it recover from its addictive patterns and mature beyond its present self-destructive and Earth-destructive habits. Looking within, I trust that my shadow - my arrogant, selfish side - serves a purpose, but I am also trying to become a more humble and compassionate person. We can trust that those who oppress others are less evil than they are ignorant or unenlightened, and at the same time do everything within our power to ensure that freedom and justice prevail. Trusting the universe means trusting that everything is "right on schedule." But it also means trusting that the anguish and anger that we sometimes feel over what is happening to the oppressed and to our world, and the

yearnings we have for a more just and sustainable society, are part of the universe too, and right on schedule as well.

Hope for humanity lies in the direction of raising children who can trust themselves, trust each other, and celebrate their place in the universe. In order for this to happen, children must be able to tell their truth without fear, and they must be able to see this modeled by the adults around them. Living panfaithfully educates children in the life skills they will need to survive and thrive in the coming millennium.

II. Love and Delight

Love is the most universal, the most tremendous and the most mysterious of the cosmic forces. — Teilhard de Chardin

The panfaithful path is blessed every step of the way by the shining sun of love and delight. Dark nights of the soul still come, rains fall, and seasons change, yet the life-giving and sustaining furnace of love that warms both body and soul keeps burning faithfully behind it all, year after year.

English is a relatively poor language when it comes to talking about love. Because we have only one word to describe a wide range of feelings and experiences, we lack the precision that some other tongues and cultures have when discussing this heartfelt emotional space.

The Greek language is rich in words for love. There is *storgé*, family love, or natural affection and tenderness; *philia*, the love of close friendships; *eros*, romantic and sexual love; *epithymia*, strong desire, or passionate love; *philadelphia*, brotherly and sisterly love; *eunoia*, dedicated devotion; *charis*, loving kindness; and *agapé*, unconditional and self-giving love. The panfaithful way of life includes all these forms of love.

Several years ago I discovered the aforementioned article, "The Possible Relationship", by the U.V. Family (a.k.a, the New Road Map Foundation), an intentional family who have been living panfaithfully for over 25 years. In it, they described love as a space of openness and vulnerability; a room that we enter simply by letting go of our protective games.

"Each one of us had our own door to the room of love, one uniquely shaped in the image and likeness of our naked selves. We had to leave our masks and armor and baggage outside the room of

love and could only retrieve them by leaving love. Judgment, taking offense, blame, and guilt are a few of the components of that baggage - they exist only outside the room of love.

"We found that when any one of us was in the space of love and when another person, through his or her relinquishing of ego, entered that room of love, then we were 'in love with each other' - not as a reaction to that person's looks or personality (these qualities are outside the door), but simply by ending up in the space of love together. All people in love are in the same space. Some are so transient that one moment they're in and the next they're out. They have not established residence there. Others, commonly known as saints, live there full time. From this standpoint, to say, 'I love you' means that there is nothing - no personal 'stuff,' distortions, agendas, or needs - in the way of being with you totally.

"We found consistently that when we based our relationship on shared residency in the room of love, every aspect of the relationship, from the sexual to the intellectual, was easy to work out. But every time we'd run out to play with some of the baggage outside - be it sexual attraction, or anger, or a desire to rescue somebody - suddenly there would loom insurmountable problems. Solution: stay in love. Absurdly simple - and not always easy to live."

This matches my own experience. When my circle of friends and I have told the truth and listened to each other without judgment, we've found ourselves quite naturally "in love with each other." In that place, gender, age, personality, and looks don't really matter. The only thing that matters is our shared humanity. Like the U.V. Family, we learned that, while profound feelings often accompany it, love itself is more of a choice than it is a feeling. Love is a space. It can't be given or received, only entered. We don't even need another person to be "in love." We only need to Be. We fall in love with ourselves, with others, and with all of life simply by listening from the heart, telling our truth, and being who we really are. I believe that this kind of love is what the Apostle Paul was referring to when he wrote, "Love is patient and kind; it is not possessive or jealous. Love is neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance. Love is never rude or selfish; it does not take offense, and is not resentful. Love does not gloat over the failings of others; rather, it delights in the truth. Love knows no limit

to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything. Love never fails.” (1 Cor. 13: 4-8a)

Whenever we reside in the space of love, we are free to enjoy the fullness of life and the process of time. We delight in existence itself. We stop playing judge and jury and allow the universe to take over these roles. Since time is a faithful judge, we don't have to be. We can remain open and curious. In the space of love we can accept ourselves and others in the moment, trusting that we each tend to do the best we can given the internal and external resources available to us at the time. When we respond to injustice, or work for peace, we do so nonviolently, with a heart of compassion. A prophetic witness grounded in love and compassion is far more effective in the long run than one based on anger and resentment; as Jesus, Dorothy Day, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and many others have shown.

In the space of love and trust, we can delight in each other as individuals and appreciate the fact that every one of us has a unique blend of strengths and weaknesses. Most of us are beautiful, compassionate, sensitive, and creative. We are also resentful, selfish, insensitive, and rigid. We are all these and more - a delightful mix of sinner and saint. The more time we spend in the space of love, the more understanding and forgiving we are regarding the faults and transgressions of others, and the less our own shadow hinders mutual respect and friendship. But it takes time and continued practice to develop the habit of staying in that openhearted place.

Whenever people live together or relate like family there is bound to be conflict. This is both normal and healthy. That is why it's important for all groups who live together to have a process for resolving conflict during regularly scheduled meetings. I'll say more about this process in the section on "Respectful Communication."

The day will come when, after mastering the wind, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, humanity will have discovered fire.

— Teilhard de Chardin

Often I find that I am having 'sex' merely by being in the presence of certain people. It no longer matters whether they are male or female, what they look like, how they live, what they do.... I am always 'making love' with those around me in accordance with their capacity to enter energetic rapport. It does not require words, or even knowing one another. — Richard Moss

III. Touch and Tenderness

It is highly probable that sexual activity, indeed the frenetic preoccupation with sex that characterizes Western culture, is in many cases not the expression of sexual interest at all, but rather a search for the satisfaction of the need for contact.

— Ashley Montagu

Every human being craves touch and tenderness. Without touch a baby dies, the human heart aches, and the soul withers. Touch is not only a biological need, it is a profoundly elegant and essential form of communication. Touch is a language that can communicate more love in five seconds than five minutes of carefully chosen words.

Most of us can relate to the joyful experience of making up with a loved one after an argument. One of the things that feels so good about making up, of course, is the reconciling touch - the embrace, kiss, caress, or passionate lovemaking that communicates "I love you and I'm glad to be one with you again." When love is expressed through touch and tenderness, we feel great.

Touch and tenderness are far more important for personal, family, and community health than most people realize. Research over time and across cultures has shown that we live longer, happier, and more peacefully when we are affectionately touched on a regular basis. There seems to be no substitute for a heartfelt hug, a loving massage, or a timely kiss. Such communication quenches our soul's thirst like mountain spring water on a scorching day.

The need for touch begins at birth, and continues until we die. Infants need to be touched, cradled, and rocked consistently in order for their nervous systems to develop properly, and for their healthy emotional and psychological development. This is true for other animals as well. As Phyllis Davis notes in her book, *The Power of Touch*, "All mammal young demonstrate the necessity of touch to healthy physical and behavioral development. Even baby rats prosper from being handled and petted. When they are touched and handled, they outweigh, outlearn, and outlive other rats.... Children from homes with loving, touching parents look and act differently than those who are rarely touched. Touched children feel better about themselves and are less hostile, more outgoing. Well-touched children almost seem to glow." If we do not receive adequate touching as children, the effects can be serious. Touch deprivation can cause mental and physical retardation, and even death.

A panfaithful family or community will ensure that its infants are carried, cradled, rocked, stroked, tickled, massaged, and otherwise touched as often as possible. Such a community will also provide emotional and economic support for mothers or wet nurses to breast feed infants for an extended period of time. This is crucial. Reporting on studies done over the last forty years, Phyllis Davis notes, "Breastfed babies have fewer respiratory ailments, diarrhea, eczema, asthma, and other ailments than bottle-fed babies. Additionally, breastfed children tend to be physically and mentally superior in their development, and the longer they are breastfed, the more striking the advances. Evidence indicates that breastfeeding ought to continue for at least a year or longer, until the baby demonstrates a readiness for weaning." In some cultures, the young nurse for as long as three to five years, depending on the needs of both mother and child.

Children and adolescents regularly need reassuring touches and hugs. But beyond the need for physical affection, children also need to be spoken to tenderly and respectfully. A child's spirit is easily bruised by harsh, angry, and judgmental words, especially coming from a parent or other beloved adult. In such cases it is important for the adult to sincerely apologize to the child, when the child can receive it. Forgiveness and reconciliation bind wounded spirits.

We touch each other with our words and actions, as well as with our hands. How we touch each other affects the health of our bodies, our families, and our communities.

In our culture, the craving for touch, or "skin hunger," as behavioral scientists refer to it, is often confused with sexual desire. This is a major reason why touching is initially threatening to many people. For millions, the only time they experience affectionate touch is when it is connected in some way with sexual activity. This is tragic, and, I believe, a root cause of much of the violence in the world. Because we fear that intimate touching might lead to sex, we avoid touching. When we don't touch, we fail to meet a basic human need, as important as the need for love, and we do unconscious violence to others and our world because of our repressed anger.

Among my own family and friends, we regularly hug, kiss, and otherwise affectionately touch each other without it leading to anything else. As humans, loving touch is what we crave; the experience of communion, our deepest need. Because most of us have a lot of unconscious cultural, family, and personal baggage around sex, it can often get in the way of the touch we really desire. I

know of no greater joy, and nothing more spiritual, than to snuggle with a friend, or exchange massage, without fear of the intimacy becoming sexual.

Of course, romantic/erotic tenderness is also beautiful, and can be celebrated as a sacred act of mutual adoration: different images of God worshipping each other. For sexual touch to be faithful to all, however, it must be within the context of a loving relationship of equal power, honesty, and respect. The eightfold path of panfidelity must be followed as a whole. For example, where there is a contract or mutual understanding to be sexually monogamous, or non-sexual, then that contract or understanding should be honored. If it cannot be honored, then, like any agreement, it should be renegotiated. Romantic and erotic energies can be tremendously life-giving when they are in the service of love and spirituality. But if the relationship is not faithful to *all*, then those very same energies can become addictive or otherwise harmful, and may cause great suffering. That is why I discussed integrity and love before dealing with touch and tenderness.

The effects of pleasure are wholly positive. Physically, pleasure improves circulation and increases energy. The emotional effects include greater self-esteem, increased self-confidence, and a generally sharper mind. Spiritually, enjoyment enhances your appreciation of your blessings and contributes to a brighter outlook. — Harold Bloomfield and Robert Kory

The last thing I'd like to mention in this section is the power of touch for healing. Because touching tenderly communicates love and care, consciously or unconsciously, it triggers metabolic and chemical changes in the body that help in healing. Touching also stimulates the production of endorphins - natural body hormones that control pain and nurture our sense of well-being. In addition to communicating love, tender touch also communicates safety, security, and support. This is why the sick and elderly should be massaged, held, caressed, or otherwise touched as often as they like. A loving, touching community is usually a happy, healthy one.

Our beliefs make a difference. A community that celebrates the sacredness of the body and its life energy is more likely to encourage loving touch than one that believes that the spirit and the flesh are constantly at war with each other. The panfaithful model honors nature - the entire universe - as the physical body of the divine spirit. A panfaithful community celebrates the life energy of the body as divine energy.

IV. Responsibility and Commitment

For a loving relationship to work over time, each person must take responsibility for the quality of the relationship. Each person must also be deeply committed, both to the relationship and to the sometimes hard work of processing all the emotional "stuff" - the hurt feelings, disappointments, frustration, anger, sadness, and pain - that inevitably arises whenever human beings interact closely and communicate openly and honestly.

In a panfaithful model, to take responsibility means refusing to play the blame game. This is not always easy, of course. After they had been living panfaithfully for fifteen years, the U.V. Family had this to say about responsibility:

"Personal responsibility extended to every aspect of our relationships: to perceiving, initiating, and completing jobs; to communication; to sexuality (when, where, and even how good); to decisions about our future focus. In essence, each of us took a vow to be 100% responsible for the quality of the relationship (not 50-50, not 100% for our part only, but for all of it) and for the positive outcome of it. *We gave up the right to blame each other.* A short sentence, but profoundly transforming. Miraculous breakthroughs can happen when the energy normally focused on assigning blame ('If only he would...', 'He made me...', 'If she weren't so...then I wouldn't...') is instead dedicated to creative re-perception of the 'problem' so that a solution can become evident.

- What am I *not* seeing that makes this look like a problem?
- From the perspective of love, what does this look like?
- What is the most skillful way to work with these circumstances so that it turns out perfectly for everyone concerned?
- What would it take *from me* for this complaint to evaporate?
- How can I provide what I think is missing instead of demanding it?

"These were the questions we trained ourselves to ask. So, there was lots of growth, and precious little complaint. Sure, our minds would holler, 'But he really *did* do it!' 'She really *was* nasty!' 'I'm right, there's something really wrong here *and it ain't me!*' 'I'm putting in my 100% but what about *his* 100%?' But blame always backfires - it's purpose is to unburden ourselves (usually of guilt) but actually it

only weakens us and saps our power. So eventually, if sometimes reluctantly, we'd get back on track and feel that surge of energy that is always there when true 100% responsibility is taken. Perhaps the most important outcome of this vow of responsibility was the amount of energy that was released to be used in positive, life-serving ways."

If radical honesty is telling your detailed truth, radical responsibility is blaming no one and being personally accountable for the quality of life in your inner circle, community and bioregion. It means being personally responsible and committed to making a difference wherever possible and trusting that others are doing the best they can given what they have to work with.

Responsibility and commitment go hand in hand. A panfaithful love is deeply committed to the health of each person and to the health of the body of life upon which we all depend. This commitment is holistic: it is concerned with mental, physical, spiritual, and ecological wholeness. It takes this kind of total commitment to have the courage and patience to deal effectively with the shadow side of life: its ugly, chaotic, confusing, painful, and depressing aspects.

Every relationship and community has its shadow side. Without commitment, it is all too easy to bail out when the going gets tough. Commitment helps us deal openly and creatively with the conflicts inherent in living authentic, transparent lives.

To be panfaithful means to be faithful to all; to be loyal to life; to be true to the divine life force of the universe. It means being a person of integrity in all situations and relationships. Within a panfaithful context, sexual and relational diversity can run the gamut. Some people will be gay, others will be straight, yet others bisexual. Some may choose to be celibate, others monogamous, and still others may be responsibly non-monogamous. These are not hard and fast categories, of course; they are on a continuum. It is not uncommon for someone to identify herself or himself one way at one time in their life and another way at another time. What is most important in being panfaithful is not a person's sexual orientation, nor how many sexually intimate friendships they have, but how honest, loving, and committed they are with those with whom they are in relationship. What's also important is whether or not the bond that naturally occurs as a result of shared intimacy is honored.

We live in an interconnected and interdependent world where, at this point in time in history, nothing is more important than for differences to be respected and for there to be a flow of honest communication and feedback between people. Thus, the panfaithful norm, whenever possible, is "once intimate, always friends." While this may not apply in all situations (e.g., battered women who end abusive relationships), one should generally avoid severing ties to past lovers and friends, practice forgiveness, and remain committed to telling one's own truth. It is possible to be lovingly honest while maintaining clear and distinct boundaries.

V. Respectful Communication

The main task of the immediate future is to assist in activating the inter-communion of all living and non-living beings in the emerging Ecozoic era of Earth development. What is most needed in order to accomplish this task is the great art of intimacy and distance: the capacity of beings to be totally present to each other while further affirming and enhancing the differences and identities of each.

- Thomas Berry

It is impossible to be in the space of deep communion with another, or to be in authentic community with others, without respectful communication. Respect is a basic human need, no matter what a person's age, gender, race, class, culture, or subculture. If we would create a sustainable society, nothing is more important than for us to respect differences and communicate honestly with each other.

Respect means different things to different people. What constitutes respect to one culture may differ from what another culture considers respectful. For example, among some Native Americans and Asians, it is considered disrespectful to look directly into the eyes of an elder who is addressing you. In other cultures the exact opposite is true. Differences also exist among individuals within the same culture. So if you are not sure, it's often helpful to ask a few simple questions: "What does respect mean to you? What does disrespect mean to you? What would you see, hear and feel that would let you know someone was being respectful or disrespectful?" Responses to questions such as these generally yield a wealth of useful information for those who would relate to others in a respectful manner.

Though cultural differences exist, many criteria for respect are consistent across cultures. I think most people would agree that, at the very least, "respect" means listening with full attention, accepting differences, acknowledging feelings, and gently speaking the truth. It also means no blaming, no accusing, no name

calling, no commanding, no lecturing, and no sarcasm. Respectful communication is clear, clean, and compassionate.

The difficulty, of course, is that this kind of communication does not consistently happen just because we want it to. Rarely do we choose our communication patterns in the moment. More often, our responses are unconscious habits formed over many years. Without even realizing it, we absorb the dysfunctional patterns modeled for us by our families and peers. Culturally, we have neither been empowered nor encouraged to communicate honestly, directly, and clearly. Disrespectful habits of speech are not replaced by respectful habits of speech overnight, nor easily. It takes more than willpower, it takes practice - lots of practice - and a safe context in which to practice. We need to have people with whom we share a commitment to counsel and practice communication.

Over the years, I've used a variety of means to help me develop the habit of communicating more respectfully. To date, what I've found most helpful is internalizing and regularly asking myself the following questions:

- "What's the gift, the blessing, in this situation? How is this the universe conspiring on my behalf?"
- "How can I take full responsibility for what I am experiencing right now, without making anyone or anything wrong?"
- "What could I let go of right now that would transform this situation or relationship?"
- "What am I willing to do or say (or stop doing or saying) that would make a difference?"

By memorizing and rehearsing these questions (while driving, exercising, washing the dishes, etc.) they have become part of my everyday thinking. Because they are memorized (this is the key!), they come to mind when I most need them, often many times a day. They almost always transform my emotional state and empower me to act more lovingly.

Memorizing and regularly asking yourself these four questions can help you, too, communicate more respectfully and lovingly.

Another means toward this end is to align with and practice the following five functional relationship agreements:

1. Each of us has the responsibility to treat each other with respect and awe.
2. Each of us has the right to speak our truth without fear or shame.
3. Each of us has the right to ask for what we want.
4. Each of us has the right to refuse or say "no" without fear or shame.

5. Each of us has the responsibility to express displeasure. (Therefore, we don't need to fear each other's internal thoughts.)

It is important for any family, group or community that seeks to communicate respectfully and grow in love with each other to have regularly scheduled "family meetings." Here, adults and children alike can offer appreciation to each other, confess wrongdoings without fear of punishment, express anger, resentment or hurt feelings, peacefully resolved conflict, plan ways to have fun, and deal with all the issues common to family and community life. It's essential to use an agreed upon set of rules and a process that serves to keep you faithful to your higher ideals. These guidelines also serve as a reminder for how to communicate with each other throughout the week. Here are the guidelines my family has found useful:

- Everyone is respected.
- Adults and kids have equal power.
- Everyone can tell their truth on any topic without fear of being interrupted or criticized.
- Everyone's perspective is valued.
- Decisions are made by consensus.

By practicing this kind of relating once a week, it becomes easier to do it at other times as well.

As with the other principles of panfaithful living, I do not wish to give the impression that my circle of friends and family have mastered respectful communication. We haven't. But we are more respectful now than we used to be. Despite our frequent failings, we seem to be moving in the direction of greater respect and appreciation of differences. Sometimes the going is slower than we'd like, but the journey is rewarding just the same. One of the things that makes the journey so rewarding is the playfulness and creativity of the panfaithful path.

VI. Playfulness and Creativity

All the great astronomers of the 15th and 16th centuries were convinced that the whole universe was a huge living being. Even during the height of western culture, the Greeks thought of the Living Planet organism as a fact of life. - Eugene Koli (As a result of scientific discoveries made during the twentieth century...) Life appears no longer as a phenomenon unfolding in the universe - the universe itself becomes increasingly alive. - Erich Jantsch

In my own dream, our destiny is to become Homo ludens - the playing human. The universe is awaiting us to embrace our destiny. - Brian Swimme

Playfulness and creativity lie at the heart of the universe process and at the heart of what it means to be human. Thus, any relationship or community that would be "faithful to all" must honor the playful, humorous, and joyful side of life, and must be a channel for the ongoing creative energies of love.

Human beings are a recent evolutionary development of the unbroken process of divine creativity that began some 12-15 billion years ago in a stupendous explosion of light and energy. Creation is not something that happened once upon a time and then stopped; it is something that is still happening. As evolution continues, God's creating continues. Whenever we are guided by love or truth to bring something into existence - when we give birth to beauty in the world - we co-creatively participate in the ongoing creation of God. This is why it is important for families to nurture the time and space for artistic creativity. It is part of our deepest nature to create, to play, and to laugh. It is what makes us human and unites us with the divine. As Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

A common characteristic of all mammals is that the young are consistently playful and exploring. With adulthood, however, this curious, creative side tends to close down. Humans are a fascinating exception to this rule. We can remain playful, curious, and inventive all of our lives. What Life essentially did when it created the human was to take mammalian youth, stretch it out, and call it a species. Scientists call this "neoteny."

When children grow up in an atmosphere of love and tender touch, their natural state tends to be curious, playful, trusting, spontaneous, and creative. In the process of becoming adults in a dysfunctional world, however, we often become fearful, serious, rigid, predictable, and addicted to everything from food, drugs, and alcohol, to television, shopping, and our work. This is why virtually every religious tradition in the world teaches that the way to [enlightenment, salvation, wholeness, maturity] is to recapture the mind and heart of the child.

Humor is an essential aspect of playfulness and creativity, and a must for healthy relationships. As Patch Adams, M.D., one of the world's most respected doctors, has said, "Humor is an antidote to all ills. It forms the foundation of good physical and mental health. Humor is vital in healing the problems of individuals,

communities, and societies.... People crave laughter as if it were an essential amino acid. Humor and fun (which is humor in action) are equal partners with love as ingredients for a healthy life."

Though we are not always successful at it, in my family we try not to take ourselves too seriously. Humor is almost always welcome and appreciated. Over the years, we've discovered that a little bit of silliness can go a long way toward relieving the stresses and burdens of everyday life. When we can laugh at ourselves - at our problems, idiosyncrasies, and shortcomings - we re-enter that heavenly space of love and forgiveness, trust and acceptance, where healing and reconciliation happen.

VII. Green Faith and Ritual

The first peace, which is the most important, is that which comes within the souls of men and women when they realize their relationship, their oneness, with the Universe and all its powers. — Black Elk

Our individual self finds its most complete realization within our family self, our community self, our species self, our earthly self, and eventually our universe self.
— Thomas Berry

The soul of panfidelity is its life-affirming spirituality - what I have called green faith and ritual.

Green faith is a spirituality that validates all the world's religions and grounds them in the reality of Life itself. In my circle of close friends and family, several different faith traditions are represented and some of us find nourishment in more than one tradition. What unites us in our diversity is our shared green faith. By that, I mean our shared love of nature and trust in the universe process.

For most of human history the world has been understood from a spatial point of view. *From a spatial perspective, the universe is thought of as a place.* Time is understood as the ever-renewing cycles of nature *within* the universe. Our common language reflects and reinforces this perception even today. Human beings are said to live *on* Earth. Earth is understood as a planet *in* the Milky Way, one of more than a trillion galaxies thought to be *in* the universe.

Popular Western theology reflects this spatial world view. God and heaven are up. Hell is down. Both are considered places we may go to when we die. Even the biblical concept of developmental human history is understood as unfolding

within a fixed and completed world. Creation is primarily thought of as a noun, a thing, an artifact made by God sometime in the past. History takes place *within* creation but is not itself considered the story *of* creation. To speak of human history as part of the story *of* creation is to begin thinking of the world and ourselves from an evolutionary, or time-developmental, perspective.

Scientific discoveries made during the last few centuries have gradually revealed a universe that is more like a developing superorganism than it is like a place. Since its beginning some 12-15 billion years ago, the universe *as a whole* has been expanding, evolving, maturing. As the universe has grown, it has become increasingly complex: from simple hydrogen and helium, to galaxies, stars, and the creation of atomic elements, to the progression of life; from bacteria to primates to the evolution of human consciousness, culture, and technology. The story of the universe is the story of the development of matter and spirit from simpler to greater complexity in structure and functioning as well as to a greater variety and intensity in forms of conscious expression. The whole of human history is only the last page in this multi-volume adventure story of the universe, a story still very much in process.

From a time-developmental perspective, everything looks different. Rather than understanding God as a supreme landlord who resides off the planet and outside the universe (a spatial perspective); from an evolutionary point of view God can be understood and, more importantly, *experienced* as the creative Life force and Love force of the universe. Heaven and hell can be seen as states of consciousness, or nonmaterial dimensions of reality. Creation can be understood more as a verb than a noun - a process, a story, an unfolding mystery. The universe is not exactly a place or a thing; it is a being still becoming - and we are part of it! We are a part of the universe that has evolved to the extent that it can think about itself, learn its story, and co-create its own future. We are not separate beings *in* the universe, who live *on* Earth; we are a mode of being *of* the universe, an expression *of* Earth. We did not come into this world, we grew out of it - in the same way that an apple grows out from an apple tree. We are organically related to the rest of nature.

The Universe shivers with wonder in the depths of the human. — Brian Swimme

This is an awesome and wondrous thing to reflect upon! It is faith inspiring. Four billion years ago the planet Earth was molten rock. Now it sings opera and

dances! It laughs and it cries! Such is the fruit of human nature and the human fruit of Nature. If we had taken time lapse photography over the last 600 million years, we would see life springing forth from the seas and the land, becoming more complex over time, and giving rise to concert halls, railroad stations, and the Internet. Now if that isn't a miracle, I don't know what is!

It is important to note here that, as far as we can tell, at no point in time during the past four and a half billion years, the age of our solar system, did anyone literally come from the outside and put anything *on* the planet. "God" is the inner Wisdom, the Life force, the incomprehensible Love at the heart of the process, the Great Mystery revealed in and through the universe. In the Bible, when Genesis 2:7 speaks anthropomorphically of God forming us from the dust of the ground and breathing into us the breath of life, this is a poetic, mythological, and spatial way of describing the evolutionary process I am outlining here.

To have green faith is to trust in the universe process, to have faith in the God of nature, to believe in ourselves and in time. It means aligning oneself with Ultimate Reality, i.e., Real Life, Love, and Truth. Different cultures prefer different names for Ultimate Reality. But whether one calls this Mystery God, the Goddess, Brahman, Allah, the Risen Christ, the Holy Spirit, Aluna, Fate, Nature, the Universe, their Higher Power or some other name, when they follow its leading they typically feel more connected and whole, and experience a deep and meaningful peace even in the midst of great difficulties. On the other hand, when someone is in denial - when they ignore the signals of their body and soul, or when they scorn Truth - they often feel alienated and angry, and experience an inner emptiness and restlessness no matter how well things seem to be going externally.

Green faith is a spirituality grounded in an evolving, living world. Earth is not so much a planet with life *on* it (a spatial view), as it is a *living planet* - a body of which we are a part. The physical structure of the planet - its core, mantle, and mountain ranges - acts as the skeleton or frame of its existence. The soil that covers its grasslands and forests is like a mammoth digestive system. In it all things are broken down, absorbed, and recycled into new growth. The oceans, waterways, and rain function as a circulatory system that moves life-giving "blood," purifying and revitalizing the body. The bacteria, algae, plants, and trees provide the planet's lungs, constantly regenerating the entire atmosphere. The animal kingdom provides the functions of a nervous system, a finely tuned and diversified series of organisms sensitized to environmental change. Each species is a unique expression of planetary consciousness, with its own unique gifts to the body.

Humanity allows the planet to exercise self-conscious awareness, or reflective thought. That is, the human enables Earth to reflect on itself and on the divine Mystery out of which it has come and in which it exists. We are a means by which Nature can appreciate its own beauty and feel its own splendor; or do tremendous violence to itself.

This shift, from seeing ourselves as separate beings placed on Earth ("The world was made for us."), to seeing ourselves as a self-reflective expression of Earth ("We were made for the world."), requires a new understanding of who and what we are. It is a shift at the deepest possible level: our identity, or sense of self.

When we look more closely at our relationship to "the environment," the need for a broader understanding of the self becomes obvious. It turns out that the environment is not "out there," separate from us. We are part of it. We are part of vast cosmological, geological, and biological cycles which are interrelated. My own body, for example, is constantly exchanging matter, energy, and information with my "environment." The atoms and molecules of my body now, what I collectively call "me," are not the same ones that made up my body a year ago. Every five days I get a new stomach lining. I get a new liver every two months. My skin is replaced every six weeks. Every year, 98% of my body is replaced. The molecules that are continually becoming "me" come from the air I breathe, the liquid I drink, and the food I eat. Before that, they were part of worms and fish, plants and trees, bacteria and other humans, and all that we eat and drink. I give out as I take in. It makes little sense, then, to overly identify with my "ego" self, for that is only a very small part of the real "me." My larger body is the body of Life itself. This is why any society that thinks it can "throw away" its garbage is a society seriously out of touch with Reality. There is no "away." The toxins our factories spew into the air, water, and soil end up in our bodies and in the bodies of our children, and there they accumulate and eventually contribute to cancer, birth defects, AIDS, and a host of other diseases. What we do to the environment, we do to ourselves.

We are the product of creation, not its masters. We will suffer or thrive to the degree that our bioregion and the planet as a whole suffers or thrives. But we need not despair at the enormity of the tasks before us. Indeed, we have good reason to hope. In the words of one of this century's greatest thinkers, Thomas

Berry, who wrote *The Dream of the Earth* and co-authored *The Universe Story* with physicist Brian Swimme:

“The basic mood of the future might well be one of confidence in the continuing revelation that takes place in and through the Earth. If the dynamics of the universe from the beginning shaped the course of the heavens, lighted the sun, and formed the Earth, if this same dynamism brought forth the continents and seas and atmosphere, if it awakened life in the primordial cell and then brought into being the unnumbered variety of living beings, and finally brought us into being and guided us safely through the turbulent centuries, there is reason to believe that this same guiding process is precisely what has awakened in us our present understanding of ourselves and our relation to this stupendous process. Sensitized to such guidance from the very structure and functioning of the universe, we can have confidence in the future that awaits the human venture.”

Hope and confidence based on the sacred story of life, or based on some other life-affirming cosmology, is a mark of green faith. But such faith must be deeply integrated in the body and life of its practitioner(s) before it can produce fruit or lead to effective service and action, and this is a function of sacred ritual. Thus, an essential aspect of any panfaithful community will be sacred ritual and heart-centered celebration.

The last three thousand years of humanity have been an excursion into ideals, bodilessness, and tragedy. Now the excursion is over.... It is a question, practically, of relationship. We must get back into relation, vivid and nourishing relation to the cosmos.... The way is through daily ritual, and the reawakening. We must once more practice the ritual of dawn and noon and sunset, the ritual of the first breath, and the last.... We must return to the way of 'knowing in terms of togetherness'...the togetherness of the body, the sex, the emotions, the passions, with the earth and sun and stars. — D. H. Lawrence

Rituals work at a level of consciousness far deeper than the merely rational and verbal level. They engage the mind, heart, feelings, body, and soul - the total being. They bond us to each other and align us with the cycles and rhythms of both our inner and outer nature. As deep ecologist, Dolores LaChapelle states in her book, *Sacred Land, Sacred Sex*, “Sacred ritual takes us out of this narrow,

artificial human world and opens us up to the vast unlimited world of nature - both outside, in our non-human environment, and inside, in the deeper layers of our older brains and cellular body knowledge." In ritual, we move beyond the narrow confines of our neocortex and reconnect with the Mind of the cosmos within and around us.

Sacred ritual tends to facilitate *the experience* of a deeper and more expansive sense of self. We identify with our smallest ego "self" when our brain waves are at a frequency known as Beta, or ordinary waking consciousness. When our brain wave state drops to Alpha, however, we naturally experience more interconnectedness with all of Life. Our sense of self expands even more in the Theta brain wave state. Strong feelings of joy, peace and contentment typically accompany these deeper states of consciousness. We feel our "self" as larger, and can experience and feel (as opposed to think about) our connection to each other and the living cosmos as a whole. Alpha and Theta states of consciousness are reached most effectively through practices like deep breathing, prayer, meditation, drumming, dancing, chanting, singing, rhythmic movement, sacred sex, and the use of symbolic gestures, incense, candles, bells, and other means of entering "sacred time and space." The effects of community generated sacred ritual are a deeper alignment and resonance with one's self at all levels of reality: family, community, bioregion, and cosmos.

No community can survive without attending to, and being grounded in, the spiritual dimensions of reality. Whatever differences exist between tribal cultures all over the world, a common chord to all is their use of ritual, and their seasonal celebrations and festivals. Anthropologists tell us that this has probably been the case for millennia. It seems that certain things can be expressed only in ritual and, for that reason, ritual is without equivalents or alternatives. That which can be expressed only in ritual is vital to the spirit of community. As individuals and communities, our health depends on sacred ritual more than we may realize.

Within my circle of family and friends, we celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, and other personal and community holy days. We also celebrate various religious, cultural, and seasonal holy days. We honor these special days in different ways, of course. No two are recognized or ritualized in the same way. Eventually, we plan to commemorate throughout the calendar year the major events of the story of the universe.

The spiritual life of any individual or community is always in flux. I know I go through seasons of being disciplined and consistent in my spiritual practice and

other seasons of being undisciplined and inconsistent. But however I'm doing on any given day, or in any given month or year, my spiritual food is to be with my community of family and friends in love and forgiveness, in truth, and in sacred ritual. Green faith and ritual are essential components of a panfaithful spirituality.

VIII. Synergy and Service

The universe is made up of wholes within wholes: atoms, molecules, cells, organs, individuals, social groups, bioregions, solar systems, galaxies - each has its own integrity, its own "personality." Each, as a whole, is more than the sum of its parts. That is what is meant by "synergy." At any given level, more energy is coming out of the system than went into it. In *The Global Brain*, Peter Russell notes that synergy occurs "when the goals of the individual components are in harmony with the needs of the system as a whole." In the words of Abraham Maslow, it is "a social order in which the individual by the same act and at the same time serves his or her own advantage and that of the group."

The U.V. Family, in their essay *The Possible Relationship*, have a wonderful discussion of synergy within a panfaithful context:

"What we say is that the law of synergy is the law of squares. Two people working together in synergy can accomplish the work of four, three can do the work of nine, four of sixteen.

"Synergy is to a group as erotic love is to a couple or ecstasy is to an individual. It is the energy that is available when the brakes are off, the barriers are gone, and the need for defenses drops away. It is thrilling to experience and powerful in its ability to affect the world. It is also morally neutral; the energy of synergy could as well fuel the Nazi Youth Corps as the cast of the Royal Shakespeare Company. Consequently, in our conscious invocation of this power we are mindful to do it in the context of love and service.

"In her original work on synergy the anthropologist Ruth Benedict identified several commonalities among synergistic societies, two of which are: 1) siphoning of 'wealth' (i.e., when any member accumulates more of what is deemed valuable, that excess is siphoned off and redistributed to the rest); and 2) a way to make amends for errors. Sharing (not hoarding) and forgiveness (not resentment and blame) - these are two qualities built into our relationship. In our

commitment to service, none of us hoards credit or recognition for enhancement of our egos. It's about 'getting the job done,' not about who does it. And through our commitment to honesty, we don't harbor dark secrets or silent grudges, so mistakes can be acknowledged forthrightly and *corrected*. It is in the cleaning up of an error that we demonstrate our good will and real intentions. Forgiveness of oneself for having blundered is complete when the apologies are delivered *and* the effects of the error are corrected. Forgiveness of one another is complete when the trust that we are solidly aligned in vision is re-established. In that light, any act is simply an expression, skillful or not skillful, of the divine intent.

"Fostering synergy could be seen as one way to transmute common interpersonal power struggles. A key to this is empowerment. Rather than wasting precious human time, energy, and resources on 'cutting each other down to size,' we seek to *increase* and maximize the power each of us is stewarding, since that allows us as a team to be effective. It requires that each of us be comfortable with our own power, that we allow ourselves to be powerful with each other, and that we have the humility to acknowledge to others our gratitude for and inspiration from each other. This surprises people who are accustomed to intimates disempowering each other - i.e., complaining about each other's faults and weaknesses.

"To further clarify synergy, we can make an analogy to a high-powered telescope. The most important component allowing such a telescope to bring Saturn into perfect focus is a series of lenses, carefully polished and in proper orientation to one another. However, if the lenses are out of alignment, if one is smeared with dirt, if they are not focused correctly, or if they are the wrong distance from each other - nothing happens. The power of the telescope depends on the right relationship of its component lenses. Likewise, synergy depends on the people involved being in alignment, with a shared vision and a shared purpose, with their hearts and minds open, with a willingness to share all and a commitment to stick with it till the game is over. With all that in place, energy can flow through that single instrument and truly light up the world."

To light up the world is to serve the world in love. To be panfaithful, to be faithful to *all*, is to love God, or Life, by serving the body of life - our larger Self. Service is green faith in practice. Once again, the U.V. Family,

“Relationships are not for the individuals in them - they are for the world. When relationships ignore that they are conducted in a much wider arena called life-on-earth and do not see as their primary purpose the enrichment of this greater whole, they tend to display symptoms of dis-ease.... The short way to say this is that the purpose of a relationship is service to the well being of all of life. It’s not about getting anything - a mate, married, kids, grandkids, old age security, approval and acceptance, emotional support, strokes.... Service is not an activity but an attitude, a willingness to do whatever is needed for the highest outcome for all.

“In this context of giving out rather than getting from, relationships have a purpose that is both greater than the individuals involved and in alignment with the real needs of life. And that’s the secret to lasting love, for energy = ecstasy = love, and service is what opens the valve.”

Panfaithfulness is a service-orientated philosophy and way of life. The purpose of living panfaithfully is to serve humanity and to serve the body of Life of which humanity is a part. For the panfaithful, social justice and environmental restoration go hand in hand. We cannot achieve one without the other.

Service can be thought of in a many ways. From a time-developmental perspective, we can serve the past by cherishing the gifts and contributions of previous generations, both human and nonhuman. We can serve the present by being a blessing to others and by enriching our communities here and now. We can serve the future by restoring ecological integrity to our bioregion and by working to create a just and sustainable economic and political order, nationally and internationally. It’s giving the next generation reason to hope.

We must learn to live and love panfaithfully if we want to experience real community among our family and friends and if we want to experience love that is mutually satisfying, empowering and deepening over time. The dream of having sustainable intimate relationships and healthy families and communities can

become a living reality by making a habit of practicing the eightfold path of panfaithfulness. But far more is at stake than simply our own happiness and peace of mind. We need also live sustainably, panfaithfully, if we wish to be a blessing rather than a curse to future generations.

If we would know deep peace and fulfillment in our relationships, and if our children and grandchildren are to inherit a livable world, nothing may be more important than living and loving panfaithfully. We must learn to live our lives in communion with each other and with our bioregion: willingly and joyfully sharing possessions and dwelling space, growing food together in a way that enhances our lives and the soil, resolving conflict creatively, laughing, working, playing, and celebrating together, and, in short, living unpossessively in love with each other and with all of Life. We must create communities where we can be most truly ourselves, where we can experience loving physical touch, where we can share our wounds and brokenness and still feel loved, and where we are both supported and challenged to be all that we can be. Living panfaithfully is a way of life designed specifically to nurture and grow such intentional families and ecological communities. Whether we are straight, gay, or bisexual, whether we are monogamous, non-monogamous, or celibate, may we each commit to living panfaithfully, for our own sake and for the sake of all future generations of Earth-life.

To be saved, to be made whole...is to be able to be anywhere in the world, with anyone, in freedom and in love. To be whole is to know one's relatedness to all of life. — Parker Palmer

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