

Awareness and ‘Awakened’ Democracy
Russell Delman January 2021

True democracy requires free minds.

This is rare.

This is essential.

Recently a person responded to one of my writings by attacking me for being corrupted by the “main stream media and not seeing that Trump was a savior of the country and maybe the world”. This person was absolutely certain of her position. If I questioned her “facts”, she aggressively asserted that I am brainwashed. In my mind, though not in my response, she was lost in a cultish mental prison. If we cannot agree on facts, how do we move forward?

Staying at the level of positions, right/wrong and beliefs, two opposing systems will simply deny the other’s reality. Like two televisions on different stations facing each other, movement is impossible. This is true in both personal and political impasses.

I am passionate about the connections between awareness, questioning, self-reflection, empathy and “awakened” democracy. Especially in these turbulent times, the wisdom of “healthy uncertainty” is instructive and helpful toward this end. For me, the greatest threat we face is that of closed-minded belief systems. True democracy depends on inner development of empathy and the capacity to see from multiple points of view. This is both rare and essential.

Holding our views lightly, while enacting ideas congruent with our values is the best we can do. To have open, questioning minds, even seeing a bit of “rightness” in almost any position, is a requirement for true or “awakened” democracy. Those capable of doing this become models for those who cannot.

This does not mean that all things are equal or that viewpoints do not matter. The dynamic challenges of authoritarianism, intentional deception, conspiracy theories and bigotry must be met vigorously. Dangers abound and for some of us these are present everyday. Still, the wisdom of uncertainty asks us to be humble, as we stand up for our deeply investigated truths. Humility requires great inner strength and calm. Even when standing

up for agreed upon universal moral truths, uncertainty is healthy when deciding how to enact these truths. “Not-knowing” inhabits the space closest to the truth.

The Danger of Closed Systems

More than ever, I feel the importance of active, engaged awareness as an antidote to closed-minded systems. Impenetrable, hardened structures of belief invariably lead to destructive outcomes, no matter the political or philosophical point of view. This is a test for awakening humanity right now!

This is where attending to PROCESS (the how) rather than POSITION (the what) becomes essential. The following questions guide us in a path for assessing our degree of inner freedom. All require the capacity to PAUSE and listen deeply, which is the touchstone of awareness and freedom.

Attending to process means:

- *Can you reflect on your point of view with a curious, questioning mind?*

Compulsive thinking cannot self-reflect with genuine curiosity. To consider that one might not have the whole picture requires an inner strength and confidence that those trapped in closed-systems cannot tolerate, it is too uncomfortable.

- *Can you acknowledge the limitations and potential dangers of your view?*

All views are approximations; all have downsides and can result in unintended consequences. The absence of questioning and perspective is indicative of rigid thinking.

- *Can you suspend your views, hear others and ask non-aggressive questions.*

Real listening means that we suspend developing our counter argument and stop labeling the other as we open to their view. From this receptivity, we cultivate questions that are not trying to win or put the other down but actually create an atmosphere for mutual investigation. People in closed systems, cannot do this because, again, it too uncomfortable and anxiety producing. Respect for the deep fears living in others opens our hearts. Rigid thinking has fear as its base

- *Can you state their position clearly, with heartfelt understanding?*

People maintaining a closed, enslaved viewpoint usually find it impossible to authentically and empathetically step into the others worldview, even for a few moments.

- *Can you have authentic empathy for the shared human need or value that the others are trying to meet by their conviction?*

All people are doing their best to get their needs met, even when their strategy is flawed, repellent and unacceptable. Someone might destroy property or hurt another from a need to feel seen, heard and respected. The action is unacceptable but there is a real human need that we share. This does not absolve them of responsibility; it helps us to understand them.

Ideologies uninformed by self-reflection and empathy lead to negative outcomes. The hallmark of rigid, ideological thinking, whether left or right, religious or secular, is the inability to question oneself and to see life from the other's point of view. This capacity is the litmus test for freedom. One stands potently for their values without demonizing the other. This freedom of thought is a requirement for true democracy.

Beyond ideology, when this kind of reflective awareness is present, life blossoms. In my view - held lightly with both commitment and uncertainty - this is how lasting change can manifest. When this kind of awareness is alive in a critical mass of people, we will naturally create a caring, sustainable, and thriving world. Each of us must humbly acknowledge our compulsive, stuck certainties, as we grow in awakened awareness. To accomplish this is our outrageously difficult, thrilling and essential work.

***“Man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible,
But man’s inclination toward injustice makes democracy necessary”***

Reinhold Niebuhr, Christian Theologian

