

Facets of Unity – The Enneagram of Holy Ideas

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Chapter Four

Basic Trust

We will begin our exploration of the Holy Ideas by inquiring into a particular condition or orientation of the soul that is their basis. The relative presence or absence of this condition in our individual consciousness, or soul, has a significant effect on our orientation toward or away from Being. When this state is present, the development of the soul moves toward Being; when it is relatively absent, the soul develops more toward ego. The soul always develops an ego and an identification with it, due to the nature of infant helplessness, physical embodiment, and conceptual development (*see Chapter 22 in The Pearl Beyond Price, Almaas, 1988*); however, the degree of fixedness and completeness of that identification will be greatly influenced by the degree to which this state is present. By understanding it, we can see why spiritual development seems relatively easy for some people and more difficult for others, as well as why that development seems to happen on its own for a few people but not at all for most people. The amount of presence or absence of this quality does not explain these differences in development entirely, but it is a strong determinant.

To understand the significance of this condition, we need to understand what happens in the process of spiritual transformation. The ego is a psychic structure that is based on crystallized beliefs about who we are and what the world is. We experience ourselves and the world through the filter of this structure. Spiritual awakening involves connecting with those dimensions of experience obscured by ego structure. In our work, the Diamond Approach, this development is a gradual process of moving through the various facets of this ego structure—particular beliefs and images that we have identified with and taken to be true.

The Importance of Basic Trust

The first step of this process in dealing with any sector of the ego has two parts. The first is becoming aware of—actually perceiving and experiencing—the particular belief or identification that constitutes the structure. The second is the dissolution of that facet of the ego structure. The latter is the most difficult one in the process of transformation, since it means letting go of part of one’s identity, and this surrendering can be experienced as a dissolution, a disintegration, a fragmentation, or a sense that you are falling apart. This juncture can be very painful or frightening because the old sense of your identity is crumbling and falling away and you don’t know what—if anything—will take its place. What you’ve held on to has felt real to

you, and now you're letting it go and heading into what feels like unknown and uncharted territory. It feels like jumping into an abyss and it can be terrifying.

If this jumping into the abyss is easy, one's transformation tends to happen easily. But if this letting go of past identities is difficult—very painful or excessively fraught with fear—one will tend to hold on to the old, staying aligned with one's ego. What makes the difference is the presence of a certain kind of trust that we call basic trust. It is an unspoken, implicit trust that what is optimal will happen, the sense that whatever happens will ultimately be fine. It is the confidence that reality is ultimately good; that nature, the universe, and all that exists are of their very nature good and trustworthy; that what happens is the best that can happen. Basic trust is a non-conceptual confidence in the goodness of the universe, an unquestioned implicit trust that there is something about the universe and human nature and life that is inherently and fundamentally good, loving, and wishing us the best. This innate and unformulated trust in life and reality manifests as a willingness to take that plunge into the abyss.

When this trust is deep, it manifests in how you live your life, not necessarily in what you feel or what you think. Basic trust is experienced as an unquestioned sense of safety and security that is intrinsic to the way you act and live. When deeply present, this trust is so much a part of the fabric of your soul that it is not something you think about—it is preconceptual, preverbal, pre-differentiation. Furthermore, it is so basic that events and circumstances in your life cannot disrupt it.

For this reason, basic trust is different from our usual psychological sense of trust. Our ordinary confidence in people and situations is highly conditional and dependent on familiarity and reliability. Painful experiences or personal betrayals can disrupt our trust in the external and internal elements of our life. So ordinary trust is of little value for stepping into the unknown because those elements are always subject to change.

Basic trust, on the other hand, is not a trust in some thing, some person, or some situation, and so is not readily diminished by life circumstances. Instead, it gives you an implicit orientation toward all circumstances that allows you to relax and be with them. You feel in your bones that you are and will be okay, even if the events at the moment are disappointing or painful, or even completely disastrous. Consequently, you live your life in such a way that you naturally jump into the abyss without even conceptualizing that you will be okay, since you have the implicit sense that the universe will take care of you. Your life itself becomes a spiritual journey, in which you know that if you stop trying, stop efforting, stop grasping, stop holding on to people, objects, and beliefs, things will be okay, that they will turn out for the best. This doesn't mean that letting go or allowing structures to dissolve will necessarily feel good—that's not what you trust. Even if it doesn't feel good, even if you are frightened, you somehow know that this dissolution will be okay. The capacity to accept the most problematic phase of spiritual transformation—the dissolution of

familiar structures and identities—arises from this innate sense of safety and security.

Basic trust is difficult to discuss because doing so makes it explicit, while it is fundamentally implicit. Those who have it never think about it, never question it, never even know that there is such a thing. When they see someone who doesn't have it, they wonder why he is having such a difficult time, why he doesn't know that things will be fine. In those who have never lost basic trust, there is an innocence. Only when you have lost it and go through consciously developing it again, do you understand what it's like not to have it.

The Presence or Absence of Basic Trust

The Presence or Absence of Basic Trust Basic trust is the soul's way of attuning to a fundamental law of reality, the fact that our sense of existing as a separate and isolated entity is false, that our ego experience of isolation and helplessness is an illusion based on identification with the world of physical manifestation. Knowing that we are all part of one reality means that our true nature is not defined by ego experience or the physical body and cannot be fundamentally hurt or destroyed. If the individual soul is in touch with this reality of non-separateness, then it will reflect that by functioning in a way that expresses this knowledge. However, to someone who has lost touch with non-separateness, the first person's actions will appear trusting in a way that seems unjustifiable. Even to the conscious mind of the first person, her own actions may appear mysterious if she is not in touch with the experience of non-separateness. For this reason, she can only feel that she simply trusts things will work out, but trusts so implicitly that she almost feels she knows. When the soul's experience is consciously that of being a separate individual, it can only experience the contact with implicit non-separateness as the sense of the benevolence of life, as basic trust.

Most people do not have a lot of basic trust; they feel that it's okay to trust in some situations and not in others. Certain conditions have to be met in order for them to trust. This is not an inherent trust in life. This is conditional trust. When basic trust is prominent, it affects one's life globally.

Each of us has some degree of basic trust; it isn't something we either have or we don't have. Without it, we wouldn't be able to function. Its manifestation in everyday life is the way you trust your body based on the physical laws of nature. For instance, unless you are blind, you trust that if your eyes are open, they will function and you will see. It is so basic an orientation that it's hard to call it trust; you just take it for granted. When you go to sleep at night, you take it for granted that you will wake up the next morning. You don't have to tell yourself, "I trust that it will be okay if I fall asleep"; you just close your eyes and go to sleep. Beginning the work of spiritual transformation indicates that you have a measure of basic trust well beyond what

you have in the functioning of your body, and in the course of doing the Work, this trust deepens and becomes more integrated.

Basic trust gives us the capacity to surrender, the capacity to let go, the capacity to jump into the unknown. With it, you don't need assurances that things are going to be okay because you implicitly know things are going to be okay. It isn't a trust in something in particular since it is preconceptual—it is prior to your differentiated ideas about what you trust. So basic trust is even beyond trusting in God, because feeling that you trust in God means that you already have a concept of God.

The presence of basic trust indicates that you have the innate sense that life is fundamentally benevolent, and that that benevolence exists independent of you and your actions. You will have this sense to the extent that your grounding in the universe has not been disturbed. The relative presence or absence of basic trust is a belly quality, something one's whole being is either grounded in or not. The disturbance of basic trust is a significant factor in ego development because the perspective of ego is diametrically opposed to the sense of basic trust. The ego's perspective arises out of a lack of this trust. It is based on distrust, on paranoia, on fear, on the conviction that you're not going to be adequately taken care of and that the universe is not there to hold and take care of you in the ways that you need. This conviction causes you to believe that you have to engage in all kinds of manipulations and games to get your needs met and to make things work out.

Unfoldment of the Soul

Now we can see how the presence or absence of basic trust is crucial to the initial step in the process of the transformation of any sector of the ego. This step is only completed by giving up the particular structure we have been holding on to. Basic trust gives you the capacity and the willingness to let go of the images, identifications, structures, beliefs, ideas, and concepts—the remnants of the past that make up the ego.

Implicit in this initial step is the second one: If you are able to surrender, then you are willing to be. You are willing to not try to change things, to not manipulate them, to not push and pull at them. You are willing to just be present, which is a sort of realization itself. First, then, is the death of the old; second is the realization of Being. If you don't have basic trust, you will react to what arises in accordance with your conditioning and will want your process to go one way or another. You won't let yourself just be present; you'll be tense and contracted. So basic trust is needed for you to be able to allow the ego to die, and also for you to be willing to just be, without reacting.

The third step of transformation also requires basic trust. The third step is to allow things to develop spontaneously and naturally the way they want to develop, without trying to channel them in ways that you think they should go. This means

not trying to determine the course of your development or push it one way or another. So if you have basic trust in your process, you not only are willing to jump into the abyss, you not only are able to be with whatever arises, but you also trust that wherever things take you will be okay. This allows the natural unfoldment of your soul, opening to your inner nature.

So if basic trust is present, the soul will more easily let go of old structures, will more easily settle into simply being, and will tend to let its process unfold without interference, which will lead naturally toward essential development. Without basic trust, the attitude of ego will predominate; the soul will lack implicit confidence in her life and process. The ego will try to take things into its own hands and manipulate, pushing things one way or the other, resulting in the further isolation and entrenchment of ego.

Basic trust is an inherent condition of the soul. Your soul has basic trust like your bones have calcium. It is that fundamental, that basic to the nature of the soul. It is beyond non-conceptual; it is not even an experience. Rather, it gives our experience a sense of ease, of safety and security, with a carefree state in the mind. A lack of basic trust is evident in all the insecurities of ego. Like all qualities which involve a sense of support, the presence of the quality which underlies basic trust tends to remain unconscious or implicit until its absence is felt. And since ego structures and activity are connected with the sense of the lack of trust, the focus of the personality will be on this lack, on fear, on worrying and planning and compensating for the perceived lack of support. This is why we can say that this quality is inherent in the soul while at the same time the sense of a lack of support predominates in one's conscious experience.

The more that basic trust is present, the more the process of realization and transformation can proceed smoothly. If we lack basic trust, it becomes important for us to develop it. Development here does not mean building up some new experience of self. It means experiencing the factors which brought about the original profound disconnection from reality and, in particular, experiencing repeatedly the fundamental truth of nonseparateness to the point where the soul can again rest in the knowledge of that truth. Each new experience of essential truth deepens the soul's contact with her own basic trust.

Ease and Freedom in Living

In a sense, basic trust is a bedrock for the process of spiritual development, but it also affects the quality of the whole of our lives. It gives us the sense that our lives are evolving naturally, moving and progressing in ways and directions that we may not yet know or understand but that we feel confident will be okay. If basic trust is present, our lives have a sense of freedom. Then the desire to know where things are going arises, not out of wanting to control the unfoldment, but out of simple curiosity.

When you are functioning from basic trust, it is implicit in how you live, how you interact, how you act in the world, how you go about your life. It is a fundamental quality for human living, as well as a necessity for the work of transformation. We can see to what extent it is present or not in observing the way we live our lives. Basic trust manifests through our actions rather than through our thoughts or feelings, since it is knowledge in the belly and belly knowledge shows through action. So it is a type of knowledge that we don't usually think of as knowledge.

To understand basic trust in action, we need to distinguish it from the ego's tendency toward inertia and inactivity. To have basic trust does not imply that you don't act. It does not mean that if someone is pointing a gun at you, you don't do anything to defend yourself. It means that you trust your impulse to run—you trust your inherent intelligent functioning. Likewise, trusting that the universe will take care of you does not mean that you stay in bed all day. The universe will take care of you by making you get up and tend to your business. The universe unfolds in an optimal way, and part of that unfoldment happens through you and your actions.

When you have a lot of basic trust, you are courageous and authentic. You take risks. You don't sit on your capacities. You engage in life wholeheartedly, doing what feels appropriate to you with the confidence that it will work out. Without much basic trust, you are paralyzed with fear of failure and fear of rejection. If you're looking for a mate, basic trust means taking the risk of talking with someone you're attracted to. You may be a little frightened, but the fear is not a big deal and you act anyway. If she rejects you, so what? You feel resilient. After all, there are millions of people in the world. But without basic trust, rejection can feel like the end of the world. You feel hopeless. So basic trust implies real hope, which we will discuss when we get to the Holy Idea of Holy Hope.

When your basic trust deepens, you have an inner sense of relaxation that allows your soul to unfold spontaneously and naturally. The trust affects your mind in such a way that you begin to see that whatever happens is right even if it's painful, and things that you had thought were bad turn out not to be bad. You have a different outlook, seeing a more fundamentally true view of the universe. You see that everything that exists in the world is just right and that whatever happens is just right, that what is can't be added to or subtracted from. This is the Idea of Holy Perfection. To see this truth, you have to trust the universe. When there is a depth of basic trust, you perceive the universe through the Holy Ideas. If there is little basic trust, you see the universe through a closed mind, through the filter of the fixated structure of the ego.

Without feeling the loving holding of the universe, we can have no basic trust. How can you really let go and let yourself be if there isn't trust that things are fundamentally okay, that whatever happens is appropriate? If you don't have this trust, you are constantly scared, constantly tense, constantly fighting reality—inner and outer. So we need to reclaim our basic trust. All work on oneself is necessary

because one's basic trust is not complete. If it were, you would feel completely relaxed and you would spontaneously grow to become what you are supposed to be.

Since our basic trust is not complete, we fight, resist, and struggle; and then we need practices and teachings to see that our struggle is fruitless and is actually the problem. We all want to be at peace with ourselves, with our lives, with whatever situation we find ourselves in. We don't know how to do that, so we are always struggling and fighting with our reality, trying to bring about some harmony and relaxation, some lessening of worry and fear. But all we need to do is to quit struggling with ourselves and with reality. When it is said that suffering ceases when one is realized or enlightened, what is meant is that the struggling ceases. Enlightenment is not a matter of not feeling pain, but of not fighting it.

Basic Trust and Realization

Basic trust, then, is synonymous with being realized, with being settled, with not struggling. When we say not struggling, we mean not struggling with yourself. This doesn't mean that you don't need to make efforts. If you need to chop wood, you chop wood, but you don't hesitate and wonder if it is the right thing to do or judge yourself for how you do it. You simply chop the wood. Most of us can't simply do that because we are fighting with ourselves. When we investigate, we find that we fight ourselves because we don't trust. We don't trust that if we relax, we will have the capacities, we will have the intelligence, we will have the strength, we will have the compassion that we need to deal with our lives. We don't trust that reality as it is fundamentally fine and will work for us and support us without any interference on our part. Basic trust is learning that life is manageable, is workable; that we can relax into it and just let it be. It is the trust that the universe itself supports us and that we have the inner resources to deal with whatever life presents us.

So basic trust means trusting enough to let your mind stop, to be silent within, knowing that if there is something you need to know, the knowing will come. It means trusting that if you need to do something, you will be able to do it. It means accepting and trusting the silence, the stillness, the Beingness. If we don't trust, we can't let our minds be silent and we can't let ourselves be still. We think we always have to be on the go, always making one thing or another happen or not happen, so we don't let our minds or our bodies rest. We believe that if our minds are quiet, when we need certain information, it is not going to be there. We believe that if our bodies are still, when we need to act, we won't be able to.

Without basic trust, we don't have trust in our nature, our inner resources, and in the universe that gave birth to us and is constantly supporting us, constantly providing for us, and will continue providing for us whatever we really need. Without that trust, we don't experience ourselves as the children of the universe that we really are. We experience ourselves as the children of the universe that we really are. We experience ourselves as abandoned, outcast, left on our own—and not

only on our own, but lacking and deficient in capacities. We experience ourselves as alone, isolated, separated, not being provided for by the universe, and at the same time, small, unable, and without what it takes to provide for ourselves. So we live in a constant state of fear. This is the basic position of ego.

To experientially understand basic trust and to develop it, to let ourselves surrender, let go, and relax into what is, is not simple because our minds have become so complex in our attempt to deal with our ignorance and distrust. Our minds are split into so many fragments that are constantly fighting with reality and with each other. Because our minds are so complicated and disharmonious, it takes a lot of work, intelligence, and energy to penetrate the thick complexity and darkness, to discover what the actual truth of reality is. Reality itself is very simple and straightforward, but we can't see that simplicity, we can't see the normality of our natural state.

Let's look at some examples to understand what we mean by simplicity and complexity. How often is it that you feel hungry and eat a meal and are really at peace and not in some kind of conflict with yourself about it, worrying about whether it is the right time to eat or not, whether you are eating too much or too little, whether you are eating only because your stomach is empty and you want a little food? The mind complicates the experience by thinking about it, reflecting on it, judging it, telling you that you shouldn't eat now or you're bad for eating what you want. Or you are tired, for instance, and you want to just relax and maybe read the newspaper or watch a little TV, but does your mind leave you alone? "How can I rest when there are things I haven't done? How about my responsibilities? Am I wasting my time or not? Am I being indulgent? I should have rested before—I'm tired because I don't give myself time to rest."

If you observe yourself, you will see an almost continuous commentary going on inside. One part of you is always critiquing what you are doing, feeling, and thinking, telling you that you are wrong for what you're feeling or thinking, you aren't doing it right and you never will, you're basically a bad person anyway, you shouldn't do it this way, you should do it that way, and so on. What about just resting when you are tired? What about just sitting down, reading your book, having a cup of tea, watching TV without doing anything else? Can you do that?

When you start working on yourself, the situation gets even more complicated. You are sitting there watching TV, and you start thinking, "I shouldn't be watching television—I should be meditating or reading some holy book instead of wasting my time watching this dumb television program." You bother yourself, criticizing your state: "I should be more cosmic, not enjoying this stupid sit-com."

This is our suffering; this is our pain. We don't leave ourselves alone to just be. Even when we meditate, it's rare that we just sit there and let ourselves be. "Am I doing it right? Nothing is happening. I'm wasting my time." Seldom do we just sit and allow whatever happens to happen. This is what we mean by the discord that arises because we have no trust.

If basic trust informs your experience, your psyche is relaxed. Your soul is at peace with itself and with your situation, resting in the unquestioned confidence that the universe provides, that you have, and will receive, what you really need, and that things are workable. If we really have this trust, this deep inner relaxation, it becomes possible to live our lives out of love, out of an appreciation of life, out of enjoyment in what the universe provides for us, and out of compassion and kindness for others and ourselves. Without it, we live our lives defensively, in conflict with others and with ourselves, becoming self-centered and egoistic. To find our basic trust is to reconnect with our natural state that we have become separated from. When we are innately infused by reality, our soul or consciousness is completely transparent to the truth that we and the universe are one, that we are supported by reality and that that reality is by its very nature good, and that what happens is inevitably right since it emerges out of that inherent perfection. When you understand this, it becomes obvious why it is so difficult to relax and let go, and why it is so important to regain our basic trust.