

WISSENSRAUM NO. 14

FAITHFULNESS TO ONE'S OWN PERCEPTION

On Trust, Attachment and the Limit of the Knowable

“Closeness rarely begins with proof, but with resonance.”

AKADEMIE DER WEISHEIT — WISSENSRÄUME

◆ 1. The Beginning That Cannot Be Pinned Down

There are encounters whose beginning can hardly be fixed in hindsight.

At some point there was a word, a voice, a message, perhaps merely a passing attention that claimed no special place in memory and yet opened something. Single sentences became conversations, conversations became familiarity, and familiarity became that quiet form of closeness which settles into everyday life without ever having been decided upon. A person suddenly belongs to the morning, to a thought during the day, to a sentence in the evening. One tells, listens, contradicts, laughs and thinks on together, and over time a small world comes into being that only two people know in exactly this way.

In such moments no one asks how much of it can be verified. Closeness lives from not pausing after every utterance to ask where it came from. We hear a story and at first simply take it in, just as we take in a glance, a touch or a familiar tone of voice. Only with time does a figure take shape from many small details, and at some point we believe we know who stands before us, although every human being remains unfathomable even in the most immediate encounter. Perhaps this is part of the dignity of a relationship: that the other never becomes fully available.

This space of knowledge therefore begins not with suspicion but with an acknowledgment. Trust is neither weakness nor carelessness; it is one of the great capacities of being human. We do not live from facts alone, we live from connections that we create. Memory joins single days, hope extends the present into the future, and trust bridges the places where knowing ends. Love would hardly be possible if complete knowledge had to precede it.

And yet something changes as soon as the gaps grow larger. This is what this space is about: what happens when closeness has been real and questions nevertheless remain open, and about a faithfulness that then no longer turns only toward the other, but toward one's own way of seeing.

| *"Closeness rarely begins with proof, but with resonance."*

◆ 2. The Crack in Trust

It usually begins inconspicuously, as a detail that no longer quite fits.

There is a form of the unknown that shows itself more quietly than any revelation. At first something merely falls out of the familiar context. An answer comes where a different one would have been expected. A detail remains open. An explanation does not carry as far as the question that preceded it. One notices and moves on, because the whole seems greater than this small

inconsistency. The shared history is already long, trust is older than doubt, and somewhere inside an almost imperceptible labor begins: the mind tries to fit the new into the familiar so that both can exist side by side.

Psychology knows this movement as the effort to smooth over inner contradictions, and it is deeply human. The heart lives more slowly than the mind. It holds on while the mind is already asking questions, for what has grown over months or years cannot be erased by a single contradiction. Between the two arises a peculiar unrest that hardly has a name. It is not yet distrust and certainly not certainty, rather a fine shift between what is said and how something inside responds to it. One hears the same words as before and suddenly hears them differently. One reads a sentence twice. Something stays behind while the conversation has long moved on.

Then the mind begins to gather, not because it wants to accuse, but because it is looking for coherence again. It recalls earlier sentences, sets times side by side, compares explanations and asks when something first sounded different. And the longer it searches, the clearer a boundary becomes that was hardly visible before: the boundary between what is actually known and what has been believed over a long time.

This boundary can shake us, for it rarely concerns single pieces of information only. It touches remembering itself. Suddenly something wavers that had long been anchored within, and one begins to look backward. Earlier conversations appear in a new light without thereby becoming untrue. A loving message remains something that was read lovingly, a thought may have sustained, a closeness may have been felt. What changes is less the past itself than the gaze that now falls upon it.

"The whole appears greater than the small inconsistency."

◆ 3. When True and False No Longer Suffice

Perhaps the deepest confusion arises where what was lived keeps its truth while the story in which it took place loses its certainty.

Then the simple division between true and false hardly helps, for life rarely knows such purity. People can be sincere and conceal something at the same time. They can feel closeness and still play a role. They can love someone and at once attach expectations to them. They can tell themselves stories they have long come to believe. Sometimes deception has exactly the clarity one expects of it, a plan, an intention, a goal; and sometimes it lacks it, and people live in their own constructions for so long that it is barely discernible to them where reality ends and assertion

begins. Both occur, and from the outside the two forms are hard to tell apart at first, for as long as one stands in the middle of them they feel the same.

Whoever looks at such circumstances from outside has it easier. There are lists, contradictions, warning signs and reasonable questions. From inside, a relationship looks different. There, years stand between a person and a verdict; there, words have comforted, conversations have carried nights, thoughts have opened one another. A history of closeness exists that no single doubt can retroactively extinguish. And precisely at this point the question of faithfulness arises.

The presentation sets this tension into an image: on one side what was lived, with sincerity, real closeness and felt love; on the other the unresolved story, in which something may at the same time have been hidden, a role played, an expectation spun. Both sides interlock like pieces that cannot be separated without breaking something. Whoever admits only one of them loses either the lived experience or wakefulness. The task is to let both stand side by side, even when the mind demands a single answer.

"The simple division between true and false is not enough. Life rarely knows such purity."

◆ 4. Māyā — The Veil of Perception

We never merely see. We see through something.

Perhaps this is exactly where we find the in-between space that Asian philosophies have contemplated in different ways for centuries. Indian philosophy knows the concept of Māyā, which its traditions define in different ways and which is often too quickly translated as "illusion." In the reading chosen here, Māyā does not simply denote a false world. Rather, the concept opens the question of how reality appears when perception already passes through forms, names, experiences, expectations and ideas. The same applies to the other traditions that resonate in this space: they appear here as spaces of resonance and as readings, not as unified doctrinal positions.

The presentation makes this visible with a simple image: a ray of light, the fact, passes one after another through several panes, memory, longing and fear, and emerges at the end as something else, a constructed truth. The ray was real, the panes are real too, and yet what arrives is no longer the same as what was sent. Each pane tints, refracts and shifts without our noticing, for we look through them, not at them.

This is why deception is not solely something that happens from outside. Our own consciousness, too, continually shapes reality. It joins fragments, closes gaps, gives events

meaning and recognizes patterns, and sometimes something endures precisely because a person has already found so much meaning in it. Longing lets us overlook what would be visible. Fear enlarges images. Memory smooths what does not fit together.

This by no means implies that the experience was untrue. An experience can be entirely real even if its outer preconditions later seem questionable. Love may have been felt, closeness may have sustained, conversations may have changed us. None of this disappears retroactively merely because individual facts remain unresolved. And perhaps this insight is harder to bear than any clear answer. For the human mind likes to seek clear-cut answers: true or false, genuine or fake, trust or deception, friend or opponent, and life can only rarely be held entirely within such opposites.

"Māyā is not a false world. It is the recognition that we see through our hopes and attachments."

◆ 5. The Hand That Holds On

Letting go does not begin with dropping the other. It begins with opening the hand.

Buddhism meets uncertainty in its own way. It asks less which story must be preserved at all costs and more what the mind clings to: an explanation, a person, a hope, the need finally to know what really happened. Attachment here does not mean love. It means the inner compulsion that something must keep a certain form: that a relationship must stay, that a person must return, that a truth must be found, a riddle solved, a loss undone, so that peace becomes possible.

The wisdom traditions have found many images for this kind of entanglement, but the simplest may be that of grasping. A hand closes around something it wishes to keep. At first there is tenderness in it; the hand closes gently in order to protect. Later the grip grows firmer because what is held becomes less certain, and in the end the hand barely knows whether it holds on to protect something or because it fears what will happen when it opens. Tenderness has become first insecurity and then compulsion, and hardly anyone can say at which point the transition occurred.

The difference that is easily lost in everyday thinking lies in the word itself. We often understand letting go as a decision against something: as an ending, a turning away, a giving up. In a deeper view, at first only our relationship to our own holding on changes. A person need not devalue the past nor prove that everything was false. They need no final verdict about the other.

Something may have been meaningful and still lose its claim on the future, and an open hand has denied nothing.

"Letting go is not a decision against someone. It begins with the simple opening of the hand."

◆ 6. The Limit of the Knowable

There is a kind of knowing that consists only in acknowledging the limit of what can be known.

With this, an unfamiliar space opens. As long as a person believes that peace is possible only once everything is clarified, they remain bound to the unresolved. Every open question then still carries a task within it: Who was this person really? Why did this happen? Why did that answer never come? What should I have recognized earlier? What was intention, what coincidence, what truth, what invention? These are understandable questions, and some are answered. Others remain. And at some point the search for truth can imperceptibly turn into a new form of captivity. One no longer researches for the sake of one's own life but fights against the empty place. The past demands ever new hours, documents, conversations, reconstructions, and every detail found opens two further questions. The person searches for a point at which everything finally fits together, and perhaps overlooks that the very impossibility of such completeness belongs to the truth of the experience.

The presentation arranges this limit in three rings. At the center lies what can be substantiated: this I know, this I have lived, this I can prove. Around it lies what was believed: this I was told, this I believed, this seems contradictory to me today. And at the outer edge lies what remains open: this stays open. It is a circle that passes no judgment but assigns places. It asks for a quiet precision that evades neither into suspicion nor into trust. Perhaps truthfulness begins exactly with this separation. It does not demand that we fill the empty place with suspicion, nor that we keep bridging it with trust. It leaves it empty.

Something curious happens in this emptiness. For a moment the other loses their power to determine one's own reality, not because they become meaningless, but because the question of their truth no longer decides the truth of one's own life. A person can vanish without the past years vanishing with them. They can return without all open questions being resolved. They can explain themselves, and still something may remain unclarified. One's own path goes on.

Zen suggests an attitude for this that can hardly be put into a concept: not-knowing. It means no resigned shrug and no indifference, but an open attentiveness that stops filling every emptiness at once with an explanation. "I don't know" can be frightening because it takes away the mind's familiar railings. At the same time this sentence has an unusual purity: I do not know what another person really thought, which of their stories were true, why someone stays or disappears. Insight does not always begin where an answer is found. Sometimes it begins where a person stops forcing an answer.

One reading of Advaita goes one step further. It questions not only the story but also the one who demands certainty: Who is it that wants so urgently to know? Who suffers from the unresolved? Who says it should have been different? The outer question does not thereby become unimportant, it merely changes its depth. For behind the question about the other appears the question of one's own relationship to reality, and it leads, as the presentation describes, out of the inner courtroom: into the liberation of renouncing the final answer.

"This I know. This I believed. And this remains open."

♦ 7. Perception Is Not Judgment

Faithfulness to one's own perception demands no hardness. It demands great inner delicacy.

Here lies a faithfulness that reaches deeper than loyalty to a person. It by no means means declaring every sensation to be truth, for that would only be a new form of blindness. Perception can err, memories can change, fear can enlarge images, longing can let us overlook what would be visible. Humility is needed toward perception too.

Faithfulness to one's own perception is therefore not faithfulness to one's own interpretation. I can take seriously that something in me is tightening without concluding that the other must be lying. I can notice a contradiction without knowing its cause. I can follow my no without turning it into a verdict about the other. Precisely here lies the peculiar freedom of this faithfulness: it needs neither self-denial nor certainty.

Faithfulness to perception means something finer: no longer overriding one's own experience. Giving room to an inner irritation without immediately turning it into a verdict. Letting a contradiction stand. Taking a boundary seriously before one can justify it, and noticing one's own no even when the heart is still attached.

The distinction that the presentation sets in two columns is of great consequence. "Something no longer feels right" is something different from "I know that you are deceiving me." "I cannot verify this story" is something different from "It is false." "I can no longer walk this path with you" is something different from "Your entire path is worthless." Perception needs no hardness and protects one's own measure. Judgment demands proof and, where it finds none, leads straight into the next entanglement.

This distinction protects not only against deception. It also protects against the countermovement of distrust, for someone deeply disappointed may be tempted to believe nothing at all in future. Yet total distrust is merely the mirror image of blind trust, and both lose the mind's mobility: the one says everything is true, the other that nothing is. Wisdom perhaps lies in between. It stays open and awake, it listens, feels, examines and waits, and where something cannot be known, it leaves it unknown without at once making a worldview of it.

Taoism offers the image of water for this, which remains effective precisely because it does not hold on. It flows, it goes around obstacles, it does not lose its nature merely because the path changes. Perhaps trust, too, could take such a form: no longer as a rigid pledge, "I believe you under all circumstances," but as a living attitude, "I meet you openly, as long as I do not have to abandon myself in doing so."

"Perception needs no hardness. It protects one's own measure."

◆ 8. When Faithfulness Loses Its Direction

Faithfulness has something beautiful about it as long as it comes from freedom.

At first it seems to be directed toward the other. One stays connected to a person, to a shared history, perhaps to a promise. One does not want to judge too quickly, wants to remain fair, endures and waits. Faithfulness carries us through times when certainty is missing and keeps relationships from breaking at the first contradiction. Yet it can lose its direction, and this rarely happens visibly. No moment announces that connection has now become self-neglect. It begins far more inconspicuously: one explains away an inconsistency more than one perceives it. One overhears one's own resistance because the other is suffering. One shifts a boundary because the situation seems extraordinary. One carries responsibility for something that lies outside one's influence, and at some point the wish to help becomes an inner mandate whose origin has long been forgotten.

One's own voice grows quieter in the process, but it does not vanish. Perception remains astonishingly persistent. It makes itself known in small stirrings, in tiredness after conversations, in irritability, in a question that keeps returning, in the feeling of constantly having to explain, in a growing need for proof. The body, too, belongs to this perception. It registers tension, tightness, exhaustion, the barely noticeable drawing back in a moment that seems outwardly familiar. These signals prove nothing about the other person and do not yet explain what caused them. Yet they belong to one's own experience and deserve attention. Sometimes they show earlier than any formulated thought that something in one's own experience has lost its self-evidence.

This early voice is often overridden, out of loyalty, out of compassion, out of hope, out of fear of loss, out of the wish not to judge a loved person unjustly. And sometimes also because so much time, strength, feeling or money has already flowed into a path that turning back seems like betrayal. Yet life keeps no ledger of faithfulness. Past devotion does not obligate future self-abandonment. What was given is given, what was lived is lived, and what was loved is loved. No further step can make the past truer, and no withdrawal erases it.

In this way the meaning of obligation can change. Time, attention, loyalty, discretion, responsibility, money, pity, patience: each of these forms can be an expression of genuine connection. But free faithfulness can turn into inner duty, compassion into responsibility for things beyond one's influence, support into the feeling of having to rescue the other, loyalty into the fear of becoming guilty by withdrawing. And from trust arises the idea: if I stop now, I betray everything that was between us before. Here begins the deepest confusion. Faithfulness does not mean having to follow every development. Love does not demand that we meet every demand. Compassion obliges no one to take on responsibility for another person's life, and trust does not mean giving up asking questions.

The presentation sets these two attitudes against each other: on the left a dense tangle, the inner duty, born of loyalty, habit, compassion as responsibility and the fear of becoming guilty by withdrawing; on the right a calmly flowing band, the free attitude, in which gratitude demands no obedience and past devotion does not oblige future self-abandonment. The saving boundary between them consists of two words.

| *"This far."*

◆ 9. Bearing Paradoxes

The moment in which a boundary is set is rarely dramatic.

There is no great awakening, no final revelation, no complete explanation. Sometimes only something very quiet happens. A person says: This far. Not out of hatred, not out of revenge, not even necessarily out of disappointment, but out of insight. I can love you and still say no. I can be grateful and still go. I can have experienced something valuable and still recognize that other things are no longer bearable. I can honor a relationship without having to resolve its contradictions, and I can miss a person and still stop feeling responsible for them.

The soul knows such dualities better than our thinking does. It can miss someone and be relieved at the same time. It can doubt and still remember tenderly. It can grow furious and later feel love again. It can know that a path is ending and still listen for footsteps that might return. There is no contradiction in this. Perhaps the contradiction begins only where we demand to be allowed to feel just one of them. The presentation's image, a solid cube from which a soft, moving form emerges, is perhaps the most exact: what the mind would like to fix in clear edges becomes, in the soul, a structure that carries both.

Perhaps maturity consists precisely in no longer wanting to resolve these opposites by force. Grief and clarity can exist side by side. So can love and boundary, gratitude and doubt, closeness and distance, memory and new beginning. A person need not decide which side is the only true one. They may acknowledge that their life is greater than any single story.

A relationship does not lose its value because a person begins to set boundaries. Perhaps its true value shows itself only there. For a connection that can last only as long as one person gives, keeps silent, believes or obeys carries a condition within it. A connection that can bear questions changes. Perhaps it grows deeper. Perhaps it breaks. Perhaps something unnameable remains. But the person begins to arrive at themselves again.

| *"The soul knows such dualities better than our thinking."*

◆ 10. Closeness Without a Shared Space

Our present time in particular places new demands on faithfulness to one's own perception.

People meet one another through screens. Friendships, partnerships, working relationships and spiritual communities arise across continents. Someone can be present every day and never enter

the same room. Closeness arises from language, trust from continuity, identity from what a person tells about themselves. This form of relationship is neither less real nor automatically less valuable, but it demands a new kind of attention, for almost everything we know of one another comes from what is said, written and shown.

Here it becomes clear how much two levels differ that merge in lived experience: emotional reality and verifiable reality. A conversation can be deep. Companionship can help. A person can mean something to another over years. And yet biographical, institutional or financial claims can remain unresolved. The one does not prove the other. The depth of a conversation does not make a claim true, nor does an unresolved claim undo the conversation. Unresolved is not the same as lied about, and yet it is not the same as confirmed either.

Where only the inner experience is at stake, a question may remain open. Where money, safety or responsibility for others are touched, however, the open must not be confused with the unchecked. Then not-knowing precisely does not mean waiving verification. A claim may remain open and at the same time be independently checked. Wakefulness does not contradict trust; it gives trust a boundary where consequences arise. In the case of a concrete suspicion of fraud, independent advice or the competent authorities can be sensible.

Perhaps we therefore need to develop a new culture of trust, one in which trust is neither blind nor cynical, in which we do not constantly control people and yet remain ready to seek clarity on decisive questions. A culture in which a missing proof does not at once mean condemnation, but is not replaced by hope either. It could be summed up in four sentences: I may like you without having to believe everything. I may listen to you without taking on responsibility for your story. I may help as long as help remains free. And I may stop as soon as help destroys me.

The presentation draws a map for this with two axes: how much openness I allow, and how much I keep my own boundaries. Blind trust, open without boundary, is naive. Total distrust, bounded without openness, is cynical. Awake trust lies where both come together: allowing closeness without giving up one's own measure, asking questions without destroying the person, being permeable, awake and free.

"The one does not prove the other. A new culture of trust lets open questions remain open."

◆ 11. Conclusion — What Remains

Not every story finds its final proof.

Not every person explains themselves. Not every relationship receives closure. Not every disappearance is given a reason, not every lost trust is restored, and not every truth becomes visible at some point. The attempt to force a final answer nonetheless can cost years. Perhaps freedom eventually consists in no longer having to solve the riddle. The past may remain unresolved without continuing to determine the future.

Then memory becomes something different. It is no longer a file that must be reopened every day. It becomes experience. And experience asks less: Who was right? It asks: What have I understood? Perhaps this: that closeness is precious and trust vulnerable. That faithfulness remains a virtue as long as it is freely chosen. That compassion needs boundaries in order to remain compassion. That doubt is no betrayal of the heart and a no does not erase the past. And that a person sometimes grants another the greatest dignity precisely by ceasing to rescue, explain or expose them.

There are relationships that remain. Others end. Some vanish without a farewell, some return, others live on only in memory. Yet perhaps the meaning of an encounter is decided not by how long it lasted. Perhaps it is decided by what a person carries from it into their further life: distrust, fear, bitterness? Or a deeper form of discernment, not that hardness which no longer believes anyone, but that quiet clarity which can say: I trust again. But I no longer lose myself in it.

So the question of truth, too, changes. It grows quieter. No longer: Who was this person really? Rather: What happened in me while I met them? Where did I begin to believe my own perception less than another's explanations? When did hope become stronger than what had long been showing itself? These questions are not directed against the other. They lead out of the inner courtroom, and perhaps this is the real movement: the slow return into one's own gaze. Not the great unveiling, no triumph of insight, no final verdict, but that quiet faithfulness to oneself that lay hidden for so long beneath all the other forms of faithfulness. It demands no proof. Only the courage to perceive it again.

"I trust again. But I no longer lose myself in it."

∞ Deepening & Further Reading

Those who wish to continue exploring the questions touched upon here will find related spaces in the WISSENSRÄUME series:

- Wissensraum No. 7 — Beyond Listening: The Essence of True Presence (Sparsha)
- Wissensraum No. 12 — The Reality of Non-Duality
- Wissensraum No. 13 — Truth: The 66 Gates of Inner Awakening
- Wissensraum No. 16 — Degradation of the Self
- Wissensraum No. 21 — The Right to Suffer

◇ Sources & Traces of Thought

The following references are not a complete bibliography but traces of thought: works and traditions that lead further from Chapters 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10. The traditions named are to be understood as readings and spaces of resonance, not as unified doctrinal positions.

Trust and attachment (Chapters 2, 5 and 8)

- Bowlby, John: Attachment and Loss, 3 vols., 1969–1980.
- Erikson, Erik H.: Identity and the Life Cycle, 1959 (basic trust).
- Løgstrup, Knud E.: The Ethical Demand, 1956 (trust as a fundamental phenomenon).
- Buber, Martin: I and Thou, 1923.

Perception and the limit of the knowable (Chapters 3, 6 and 7)

- Kant, Immanuel: Critique of Pure Reason, 1781/1787.
- Husserl, Edmund: Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, 1913.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice: Phenomenology of Perception, 1945.

Māyā and further wisdom traditions (Chapters 4 and 9)

- Advaita Vedānta: Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad with Gauḍapāda's Kārikā; Śaṅkara, Vivekacūḍāmaṇi (in translations and commentaries that define Māyā in different ways).
- Nāgārjuna: Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (Middle Way, Buddhism).
- Laozi: Daodejing (Taoism).

Verification and protection in practical reality (Chapter 10)

- German consumer advice centres (Verbraucherzentrale): information on love scams and romance scams (current guidance on warning signs and what to do when suspicious).
- German police crime prevention (Polizeiliche Kriminalprävention): guidance on fraud in online relationships.

The sources are meant for orientation; please check bibliographic details against the respective edition before sharing or citing.

○ WISSENSRÄUME — Appreciation

The WISSENSRÄUME series is a labor of love — free of charge, but not to be taken for granted. If you enjoyed these impulses and would like to give something back, I would be glad of a voluntary donation: [PayPal.me/VossKati](https://www.paypal.com/donate/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fpaypal.me%2FVossKati)

Thank you for your appreciation. It helps such content continue to come into being — quietly, lovingly and in the service of wholeness.

△ WISSENSRÄUME — Notes

The WISSENSRÄUME serve professional orientation, deepening and personal engagement with topics from health, nursing, palliative care, spiritual care, psychology and philosophy. They do not replace individual medical, therapeutic, nursing or legal advice — in acute or serious situations, please turn to appropriately qualified professionals.