

O
B E I N G

Grounding Virtues

WHAT WE PRACTICE, WE BECOME.

*These six “grounding virtues” guide everything we do through The On Being Project.
Virtues are not the stuff of saints and heroes.
They are spiritual technologies and tools for the art of living.*



Words That Matter

We are starved for fresh language to approach each other. We need what Elizabeth Alexander calls “words that shimmer” — words with power that convey real truth, which cannot be captured in mere fact. Words have the force of action and become virtues in and of themselves. The words we use shape how we understand ourselves, how we interpret the world, how we treat others. Words are one of our primary ways to reach across the mystery of each other. As technology reframes the meaning of basic human acts like making and leading and belonging, the world needs the most vivid and transformative universe of words we can muster.

Hospitality

Hospitality is a bridge to all the great virtues, but it is immediately accessible. You don’t have to love or forgive or feel compassion to extend hospitality. But it’s more than an invitation. It is the creation of an inviting, trustworthy space — an atmosphere as much as a place. It shapes the experience to follow. It creates the intention, the spirit, and the boundaries for what is possible. As creatures, it seems, we imagine a homogeneity in other groups that we know not to be there in our own. But new social realities are brought into being over time by a quality of relationship between unlikely combinations of people. When in doubt, practice hospitality.





Humility

Humility is a companion to curiosity, surprise, and delight. Spiritual humility is not about getting small. It is about encouraging others to be big. It is not about debasing oneself but about approaching everything and everyone with a readiness to be surprised and delighted. This is the humility of the child. It is the humility in the spirituality of the scientist and the mystic — to be planted in what you know, while living expectantly for discoveries yet to come. The wisest people we've interviewed carry a humility that manifests as tenderness in a creative interplay with power.



Patience

Like humility, patience is not to be mistaken for meekness and ineffectuality. It can be the fruit of a full-on reckoning with reality — a commitment to move through the world as it is, not as we wish it to be. A spiritual view of time is a long view of time — seasonal and cyclical, resistant to the illusion of time as a bully, time as a matter of deadlines. Human transformation takes time — longer than we want it to — but it is what is necessary for social transformation. A long, patient view of time will replenish our sense of our capacities and our hope for the world.



Generous Listening

Listening is an everyday art and virtue, but it's an art we have lost and must learn anew. Listening is more than being quiet while others have their say. It is about presence as much as receiving; it is about connection more than observing. Real listening is powered by curiosity. It involves vulnerability — a willingness to be surprised, to let go of assumptions and take in ambiguity. It is never in "gotcha" mode. The generous listener wants to understand the humanity behind the words of the other and patiently summons one's own best self and one's own most generous words and questions.



Adventurous Civility

The adventure of civility for our time can't be a mere matter of politeness or niceness. Adventurous civility honors the difficulty of what we face and the complexity of what it means to be human. It doesn't celebrate diversity by putting it up on a pedestal and ignoring its messiness and its depths. The intimate and civilizational questions that perplex and divide us will not be resolved quickly. Civility, in our world of change, is about creating new possibilities for living forward while being different and even continuing to hold profound disagreement.