



Why is Spirituality so Difficult?

By Ross Bishop

Why is it so difficult to live a spiritual lifestyle? Everything about it is better than the alternative. A life built upon qualities like compassion, kindness, peacefulness, honesty, etc. is miles ahead of one based on fear, anxiety, stress, feeling unworthy, and so forth. You feel better, you are more at peace, you will be healthier, happier and you will live longer. And yet, faced with the unequivocal benefits of spirituality, and I am not talking about becoming a monk, but simply living from spiritual principles, we seem to be passionately driven to shoot ourselves in the foot (or worse). For thousands of years our most important teachers like Buddha, Christ, Indian Gurus and literally thousands of Rinpoches, shaman, monks, rabbis, ministers and priests have urged us to love each other and to love ourselves.

So what is it that gets in our way? You don't really want to be angry or anxious or depressed. You don't enjoy being unkind to your partner or family, you don't really want to snap at your boss, or be angry at God. But sometimes you just cannot help yourself (or so it seems). And then of course you feel bad afterwards.

The drive for these behaviors seems to come from so deep inside that you hardly know who is doing it. And if it's not you who is doing it, there is always some way for things to go wrong anyway. No matter what you do or how hard you try, it often feels like life is just going to go sour on you anyway. It can seem very unfair. I think John Ruskan speaks for most of us when he wrote:

I see that I am often angry. I see that I experience much pain in my intimate relationships. I see that I am still isolated, lonely, and living in anxiety if not downright fear. All this even though I'm trying my best to keep up a dedicated meditation and yoga practice, trying to be conscious of the karma I am generating, trying to be a "loving and spiritual" person. One of the few consoling realizations is that I am certainly not alone. As I look at others, I see the same if not exaggerated condition.

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As a very important aside, anytime you find something dysfunctional that cuts across virtually all of human behavior, you have to know that something much deeper than poor human judgment is at work. I will speak of this in a minute, but for now let's stay with your struggle.

One explanation for your dilemma is that you are really more than just one person, and that your various parts often operate in conflict with one another. Sometimes an inner struggle takes on the proportions of a civil war, creating literal inner hell. These conflicts can generate considerable internal damage and lead to emotional problems like depression or the physical breakdown we know as disease.

Your inner self is not being contrary. It is just that she holds a different perspective on life than you do. If as a child you felt unloved for example, she will hold a view of herself, life and the world that is skewed. A 3 year old does not have the capacity to sort out that her mother has repressed sexual issues and that her father was never encouraged to openly express his emotions. All a child knows is that she hurts and that the love that she needs isn't there. And then, she makes what I call THE FATAL STEP, which every child takes. She says, "The love that I need isn't here, there must be something wrong with me." And in that moment, the downward spiral begins.

She has come to believe that the difficulties were either created by her or that they were created in response to her. She will not realize that she is just an innocent child caught in a dysfunctional situation. All she knows is that something – and she won't know what – is wrong with her. Instead of remaining with the family situation where it was created, the dysfunction is now a part of her. She has come to believe that the problem was at least in part, created by who she was. Since she was in some way responsible for what happened, she will then carry her defectiveness with her wherever she goes.

Thus she will be driven to compensate for her failings as she grows up and moves out into the world. This will inhibit her ability to be free in life and requires that she take defensive measures in order to protect herself. She will be isolated from her passion, from her power, from her self-confidence. Making the situation even more difficult is that the injured inner one who holds the defective attitudes is hard-wired into the adult's power. She can pretty much do as she pleases and there isn't a lot the adult can do about it.

So today, you want to take a risk and she panics. You want to become intimate with someone and she is overwhelmed by the fear of being rejected. You want to deal with your inner pain and she fears the overwhelm that she felt when she was a child. You want to be successful in your business and she cannot permit that kind of public exposure.

And as if that weren't enough, she has the power to totally dominate your life. You have your wit, wisdom and intellect, but when it comes to emotionally charged situations, she takes over. That is her domain. And the person who takes over is a

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powerless, vulnerable, scared, defective, unloved, hurting, emotionally challenged 3 year old. Back then, the world was dangerous. Big people could not be trusted. Guess what is going to happen today?

You try to run your life and she keeps pulling the rug out. She is not trying to be contrary or difficult, she just holds a fearful perspective of life. From her point of view, her reactions are reasonable. She is doing what she feels is necessary to survive in an unsafe world. But, it can make your life a living hell. And by the way, the view you hold of yourself may not be helping things either. You can overpower and ignore her for a time, many people do, but it comes at a significant price.

There are some Buddhist sects and New Age teachers who urge people to ignore their emotions and simply meditate and go to the light. They urge people to "just get on with it" and ignore their emotional pain. They want to rush in and forgive others without dealing with the pain an individual holds. It doesn't work. You can hide out in that space for a while, but eventually the unresolved emotional issues will surface. They must.

A person's resistance to feeling inner pain can be so strong that it takes the equivalent of emotional dynamite to move them. Life will literally have to beat them into emotional submission before they surrender their dysfunctional ways of being and thinking. They cling to their beliefs and psychological compensations with a tenacity that puts a bulldog to shame. We see this behavior clearly in drug addicts and alcoholics, but the pattern exists in most people. Addicts are so invested in avoiding (medicating) their emotional pain that they have to "bottom out" i.e., become so frustrated with what they have been doing that they become willing to let go of the old beliefs that they have been hanging on to. Once they surrender their ego defenses, they can then begin the road to recovery. What is recovery? Accepting the truth about who they are and integrating that truth into their daily lives.

When a person comes to me for healing I know that we are dealing with at least two personality parts. One part of the client sincerely wants to heal or she would not be coming to see me, but the other part does not want to do that. If it did, the client would have already healed herself and she wouldn't need my help. The dilemma for the therapy process is that in order for a person to heal, they will have to confront the pain that they have been avoiding all these years. So by asking them to address what has been buried, the initial healing work actually makes them feel worse than when they came in! Fortunately this pain is short lived and after a little work, the client begins to feel the powerful benefits of the healing work.

Let's look at this inner conflict from the rational perspective for a moment. Why can't she just get over it and let you get on with her life? After all, most of that stuff happened 20, 30 or maybe ever 40 years ago. The reason is that it is not just old pain. If it was, it would be like having an old unpleasant memory. You wouldn't like having it, but so what! The rub is that the fear and anxiety exists in the present.

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What makes it enduring is that it was seared into her consciousness as, "Something is wrong with me." Thus it is necessary for her to compensate through her beliefs, thinking and behavior.

There is another, a wider, perspective on this issue that may be useful to you. I will repeat what I said earlier, when we see something dysfunctional that cuts across the entirety of human behavior, we know that something larger is at play. If virtually every child on the planet feels wounded or inadequate, even with all the love parents have for their children, something far more significant is taking place. That something has to do with our evolution as a species. This is especially relevant when you start looking back over people's past lives and realize that they have been bumping up against these same issues for several lifetimes as well.

From this wider perspective, you came to earth to learn compassion - compassion for yourself and compassion for others. Since you have free will, the best way for God to help you learn that lesson is to put you in circumstances that will make you feel otherwise. The safety net is that at some point you must come to realize the truth. So, it is only a matter of time (which He has plenty of) before you come to the realization that you are not the cretin you believed yourself to be, but that you really are a beautiful, wonderful and special being. And, when you come to that realization on your own, and accept yourself for who you truly are, that truth will be held deeply in your consciousness. This would not be possible by any other means.

As we stumble around down here, getting lost in our emotions and our anger, we can get pretty frustrated with God and our circumstances. Most of that has to do with our continued unwillingness to surrender our innermost fears and accept ourselves for who we are. As you back away from the somewhat limited human perspective, you begin to comprehend the incredible perfection of the process. You see that every event, every encounter, has been perfectly crafted to give everyone involved exactly what they needed in order to grow. Most of the time we don't take those opportunities, and so they come back to us with an even greater intensity. We see these opportunities as "problems." We get wrapped up in our egos and move into guilt, shame and blame and miss the greater lesson that The Universe is presenting. This insures that the lesson will repeat, perhaps under different circumstances, until we get it.

God doesn't really mind that you get angry with him as you go through the process. He knows that you must eventually come to see the truth. The truth about what is happening, the truth about His love and especially the truth about yourself. There is simply nowhere else for you to go! And, although we can cause a good deal of pain and harm to each other here on earth, in the eternal sense, there is nothing negative that happens here that will carry beyond our earthly existence. Your pain and your hurt will die when you do. The karma of your experiences does continue, but that subject is largely misunderstood, and too large a topic for this writing. Suffice it to say that there is no future punishment for what you do today.

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From the human perspective, life can be hell - people get killed, there are wars and disease, industry destroys the environment and dinner with your relatives can be a real pain. But from the perspective of spiritual development, your life is perfect. The sooner that you recognize that the events of your life are being shaped by forces far outside yourself and that you cannot control them, the whole process becomes more peaceful.

And, although you may not be able to control the events of your life, you do get to decide how you will feel about what happens, and this is the great secret to living a spiritual life. You don't have to like what's going on, in fact, much of the time you are not going to like what is happening. The challenge is to remain open-hearted and at peace, regardless of what comes your way. And this is the secret:

The quality of your life experience is not determined by what happens, but by how you respond to it.

Life does not change; we change our relationship to it. To paraphrase Aldous Huxley, "Experience is not what happens to a person; it is what a person does with what happens to them." I offer you a dream that a client recently shared with me:

In my dream I saw an altar. I was trying to arrange it, fix it up, figure it out, but felt frustrated. A wind of Spirit swept through the room. Everything scattered, completely upheaved and then rearranged. Once they were rearranged, I could see how they fit perfectly. I heard a voice. "Bring me the right ingredients and allow me to do the arranging."

I woke up wondering, "What are the right ingredients?" I asked my inner Teacher. Without words, he communicated, "Bring the healed heart, bring the heart into every moment. This is the essential ingredient. When you do this, the actions you take, the decisions you make and the results will all be arranged by the Creator. If you can allow that moment-to-moment then the altar will be arranged perfectly."

I have written about this subject in other articles, so I will not repeat myself here but the best thing you can do in response to life is to:

LOVE EVERYTHING.

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There is a very simple and powerful reason for doing this, because:

Everything you do not love will become a lesson.

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