

Everyday Spirituality: Life as Prayer

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We are participating in an explosion of new age teaching, interest in eastern religion, and a general curiosity about the usefulness of everyday spiritual practice. When you turn on the television, it seems just about every talk show host is discussing how to maximize human potential and help viewers become a more advanced version of self.

In our effort to reach higher, spirituality is a major interest in the books we read, the classes we take, and the inner peace we want to find. Accordingly, there is growing dialog concerning differences between traditional religious teaching and a form of spiritual practice termed: everyday spirituality or spirituality of the market place. Interestingly enough, the usefulness of spiritual practice in everyday life is an ancient teaching, and lies at the heart of human development systems like Sufism; where travelers are taught, through ordinary daily activity, to align with the Higher and make life a prayer.

To help travelers add this practical approach, we will examine the basic difference between traditional religious form and spirituality; offering various ‘things to know, and things to do’ while following a personal spiritual path.

*Religion may be compared
To a great river that feeds the land.
The River winds its way as a mighty force
And smaller tributaries are formed
to serve the distant regions.
Some are satisfied
To drink of the small stream
And forget they must travel
The river to its Source.*

*Beyond the river's gate
The Ocean is waiting.*

Religion & Spirituality

For spiritual travelers, at some point, it becomes clear that new age and eastern systems offer techniques that speak to the basic difference between religious form and personal spiritual experience. While all traditional religious systems are based upon spiritual teachings, inner personal experience is not always emphasized and many travelers leave the religion of their birth with a deep, inner hunger that religious form did not completely fill.

In the beginning stages of any learning, adherence to form is essential; and as the traveler matures in their traditional religious training, a deeper more personal experience may be available. However, many travelers leave for a variety of reasons or get ‘turned off’ long before this happens. One of my spiritual teachers used to say: ‘after you have studied with me and

experienced the Light, you will return to the religion of your birth and become a better Christian, Jew or Muslim.’

External Form. In viewing traditional religious teaching and spiritual experience, it is important to discuss the difference between internal and external reality. Most of us are familiar with the external form of religious teaching; usually this was the presentation offered during our early childhood and emphasized standard prayers, teachings, and social prescription which was directed at a large segment of humanity.

Over the centuries, this is the part that looks different, because it is and changes; external form varies depending upon culture, geography, historical context, and the changing needs of the receiving community. Because this part is not the same, and is tied to time and place, it confuses people; this is the part that travelers argue and fight about it. Yet, internally all forms at their highest level are one, united in spirit.

Internal Form. The internal or spiritual essence which gives life to the external religious form is a living, vibrant element. This part, termed the Light in some presentations, is the inner core or life current to the external form. This is the part which fuels the updating of the Teaching into a newer presentation, and the grace which enables the living teacher or exemplar to function. This is the spiritual essence, the new age traveler seeks to embrace, and become one with.

Religion is like a beautiful maiden, who to fit the changing weather, wears an assortment of clothing. Some days, because the weather is cold or sunny, her outer garments are different. If you were to describe her on these days, one day she would be the maiden in the tall woolen hat, scarf across her face and long coat, and on another day, the woman in the light, bright, yellow cotton dress. On the first day, not seeing her covered face, some observers might be fooled and argue or disagree about the woman's identity or description on the second day; not realizing underneath the various clothing, it is the same young woman wearing the light cotton dress.

Things to Know

In this section, to help spiritual travelers realize their own inner potential, we will examine some of the postulants or learning statements that must be understood about everyday spirituality.

- *You Already Are Spiritual.* This is true, and an overriding theme of new age systems and eastern traditions. We are spiritual beings who have entered the earth phase to learn, experience, serve and be co-creators. When you are ready, no one can stand between you and personal, inner, spiritual experience. However, getting ready to unlock your own experience is the challenge, often requiring learning the right things, in the right order, with the right people.
- *Living In the World Blocks Spiritual Experience.* For the most part, every day activity, work, and worry block the inner awareness from coming forward. When focusing on daily life, the ‘noise’ or vibration of this activity prevents the inner awareness from being accessed and perceived. With a period of training, travelers can be taught to operate both

streams of consciousness simultaneously. However, this is not a static condition; the capacity to tune in and use the higher consciousness, comes and goes, depending upon the traveler's capacity and higher needs of the situation.

- *Consciously, We Create Our Own Reality.* All life operates through consciousness; which is awareness and energy on multiple physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels. Through our soul, which is comprised of a spiritual energy fabric, we create our own multiple level realities, every moment of the day. And because we are both different and the same, we share reality we both agree upon and experience uniquely.
- *A Completed Person Adds Spiritual Awareness.* The goal of spiritual paths, is to add a measure of conscious, spiritual awareness to the traveler's individual life and day; this awareness serves as an enriching, enabling element so the traveler can complete daily and higher functions. Each traveler is unique, and as such has an individual life plan which ultimately leads them to join in as co-creator, helping to influence their own and higher destiny of others. Traditionally, in this realm, the completed person is God's deputy or vicegerent.
- *Living Exemplars.* In many new age and eastern traditions, the living teacher or exemplar serves as guide to lead the traveler higher. Through the grace of the path, this person serves higher functions; enabling others to embrace their own latent capacity. This person has a duty to discharge and uses the natural, spiritual laws, to help others reach completion. Unfortunately, there are many imitators, and travelers need to be cautious; by tradition, the authentic teacher is the earth's greatest resource.
- *Religion as Business.* In every age, religion and spirituality have been used as a camouflage and business; a way to gain power, money, or satisfy personal emotional needs. Just because something is wrapped in spiritual garb, it does not mean that it will not *take* from you. In fact, this tendency to use spiritual forms in order to achieve selfish and harmful ends, historically, has driven many away and thrown one religion against another; and in our world today, this is one of the most harmful elements.
- *Use Your Common Sense.* In selecting a path, if something seems to be too good or easy, it probably is; and the traveler needs to be wary of systems that 'guarantee success in 10 easy steps.' In this endeavor, no one can guarantee anything; your progress along the Path is dependent upon your correct effort and the Grace of God. Also, some Paths prescribe a certain dress, way to look or similarity of action; they are not flexible about this and codes are strictly enforced. If you are uncomfortable with these rules, or there seems to be too much emphasis upon the Master, listen to your inner own voice; it is there to protect you. Remnant sects abound, and your own individual Path, should be as natural to you as drinking a fresh, clear glass of water.
- *Selecting a Path.* The reason there are many Paths, is that travelers are different, with changing needs. If you are not satisfied with the religion of your birth, ask and petition The Radiances of Truth for a new path to open to you; then when it appears, follow it to completion. Remember, in this matter, there are 2 considerations; first, what Path seems most natural and second, which Path reaches out and embraces you.
- *Life as Prayer.* In some traditions, the goal of the spiritual traveler is to make their life a prayer; through intention and focused energy, turn every action into an act of remembrance and service for the Higher Destiny. Each of us is familiar with going to work or school, and using all of our talents and energy to get ahead so we can personally

gain or feel more fulfilled. Similarly, in every action, the spiritual traveler works hard to remember and serve God.

- *Diversity of Spiritual Experience.* Every traveler has spiritual experience; these experiences are natural and emerge, in part, from our very composition. Many times, these experiences are often not understood as such to be spiritual, seemingly mysterious, and usually quickly forgotten. Often, they may come in the form of an intuition about something that occurs or a happy, positive energy and sense of being connected to everything. Traditionally, spiritual experiences are given so the traveler can learn and move forward. These are not the goal of the journey; they are foretastes of a higher state of awareness, which are as varied and natural, as spiritual travelers themselves. Typically, in time with training, travelers recognize these experiences as spiritual, because they are unlike other forms of mental or emotional consciousness, and learn to move beyond them.

Things to Do

In order to help prepare travelers for their own spiritual experience, the following techniques, actions, and exercises are offered.

- *Quiet, Alone Time.* Daily, each traveler needs to set aside 10-20 minutes to travel inward. This is personal time where the external noise of the world can be turned-off and an examination of the many parts of self may be conducted. Even busy mothers or executives must be 'selfish' about this, and take the time to do something for self. Over time, we must identify the many selves so we can push them aside for a time, and unlock what lies beyond daily consciousness. Going inward, may be accomplished through prayer, journaling, meditation, or at day's end, observing the repeating patterns of thought.
- *Travel Inward.* Find a hobby or activity that you enjoy where you can express your inner self. If it is working on a craft, reading uplifting material, gardening, going for a walk, listening to relaxing music, collecting coins, or taking a yoga or exercise class, you want to learn to express the many, hidden parts. Each of us has a creative, spiritual potential, and in the beginning you must make time to explore and refine it. The creative expression of the artist or craftsmen, where numerous factors come together; once experienced, will help expand your daily consciousness and help you begin to perceive what is possible.
- *Give to Others.* Part of healthy, balanced living and ordinary social duty is being part of a family or community, and giving to others. If you have time, volunteer once a week at the local hospital, or nightly help your children do their homework. Perhaps, listen to the problems of a neighbor, join the local food pantry, or routinely give to your favorite charity. This activity of giving should be entered into freely, without resentment or repeated troubling thoughts like, people tell me I need to do this. If you cannot do this without displeasure, wait until you can. Then observe the many benefits.
- *Seek the Higher Road.* You know, most of us know what the right thing is; we are born with an inner sense of correct action and helping others. Religion prescribes service and giving activity, because we forget or the business part of religion kicks in; a certain

amount of money is needed to run the operation. In your conversation and daily activity, try to help, not hurt; as a guide, listen to your own inner voice, which is a natural barometer. In the healthy personality, there is a balance between our own needs and the needs of others. It is only when we are fearful, angry, or hurt that we seek to do harm. When possible, avoid action when you are feeling this way.

- *Pray.* As part of our childhood, most of us have been taught specific prayers; some of these prayers become part of our lives and others we leave behind. Usually, specific prayers are different than praying. Prayer is a song that arises from your heart that you wish to share with God. This is a communication that springs from your very essence and cannot be taught; it is already part of you. Daily, spend time talking with God; on a deep inner level, there is a part that is most like God. Experience that part; that is our spiritual center and has traditionally been called ‘the heart.’
- *Consciousness Building Activity.* Daily in the beginning, each traveler needs to add consciousness expanding and focusing activity. One of the most familiar exercises is meditation, because it teaches many things: skills like concentration, focus, and switching attention back to the focus word or object. If you have trouble meditating, try another activity, such as prayer or Reflecting the Light. This type of exercise may be learned from a book, class, or a teacher; for many it is part of the learning required, to still and push aside that which stands in our way.* Usually, specific exercises are bridges to something else, and as such, intended for fixed periods.
- *Physical Exercise/Healthy Living.* Because we are multi-level beings, we must maintain a balance, or healthy level of homeostasis, so we can access what lies deep within. When we are in physical or emotional pain, it is very difficult to travel inward. Also, when our muscles are tense and we are experiencing troubling, repeating thoughts, the journey inward is further slowed. That is why often the prescription to make the daily, inner journey is begun with a cleansing of sorts. As a form of readiness, a hot, relaxing shower to clean-off the ‘dirt’ of the day, or a deep breathing exercise to connect with our inner rhythm and bring refreshing air and oxygen into our system, is often suggested. Relaxing, cleansing activity helps tune and make us ready to connect with our inner current.
- *Intention.* Just about any activity may be done for the Higher Destiny; when we are vacuuming the house, driving our children to school or commuting to work, by offering-up this activity to the Higher, the activity becomes something we no longer do for self, but to make the world a little better.* When you arise in the morning, who do you go to work for? Are you working solely for self or to help others and yourself? Are you picking-up children at the sitters and raising them to be more complete people, or better consumers of all the things they want? Begin to consider your motivation and intention, so, you can turn it over to the higher, and travel further.
- *Repeating the Holy Name.* In some traditions, travelers are taught by very slowly repeating the Holy Name, with love and reverence over and over, throughout the day and their lives, they will reach journey’s end. Attached to this Name there is Light and energy; when you align with the Highest, gradually, you become one with the Highest. Throughout the day, try this simple technique of repeating the Name; see what happens. What do you have to loose?
- *Practice Gratitude.* When you are feeling down, sad or depressed, practice gratitude. When you are at your lowest, take a personal inventory and number those things for

which you are grateful. Thank yourself or thank the universe for placing these things, people, or events into your life. Do this over and over; in using this repetitive cycle of replacement thought, which recounts the good in your life; you will change your consciousness and the energy being created. This more positive thought pattern has healthy and regenerating energy attached to it. Every one has many things for which they can be grateful. Think about it.

- *Good Deeds.* Daily, do something positive, generous, or helpful for another person. Make a list of good deeds or positive actions that you want to accomplish for others. In performing this positive activity, the good feelings you generate, will be your reward and the energy attached to your feelings, gradually, will change you. If you no longer need to do these things to help feel better, than do these things for others and the Higher Destiny. By making your deeds an offering; you will be joining in the Higher Destiny and consciously moving along the Path.
- *Take a Class:* If you have time, take a class on spirituality or read a new self improvement book. Challenge yourself, learn something new and examine what is happening in this exciting world. Do not be afraid to critically examine your own or society's most cherished beliefs; because that is how the journey to personal enlightenment and higher knowledge begin.

Life as Prayer

For the Sufi, daily life and traveling down the highway is potentially a prayer. Every moment is an opportunity to align personal action with the Higher Impulse. Through intention and by temporarily surrendering individual need, the spiritual traveler makes their commute to work a prayer of joyfulness and service.

We were created to participate in everyday affairs, using our diverse range of skills to make the world better.

*Let every action become a prayer. Let every moment bring you closer to you Higher Self and the Higher Destiny.**

*For further discussion on consciousness building exercises or to learn more about daily activity as spiritual practice, the reader is referred to Dr. Stewart Bitkoff's recently published book: "A Commuter's Guide to Enlightenment," Llewellyn Worldwide, 2008. It is available at all book stores, online venues, or linking through: www.thedeeganproject.com.