

Spirituality & Community

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www.spiritualityandcommunity.com

Jarvis the Duck
Kurt Venables



Confucius
Analects

The Green Spirit
Michael Cohen

Life As Prayer
Stewart Bitkoff

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Who We Are

www.spiritualityandcommunity.com

Welcome! Seeking spiritual fulfillment? True happiness and mental wellness? Well, that's what we're all about. Spirituality & Community is a magazine, web site, and online community for those seeking answers to life's deepest questions. ***We are dedicated to promoting spirituality, true happiness, mental wellness, and appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.***

A New Age of Light

Our focus is spirituality, which we view as an inner search for happiness and fulfillment. We are concerned with what lies within the heart. ***We believe that within everyone lies a pure love that we call the Light or the Lord within. We believe that one must open one's heart to the Light to attain spiritual fulfillment and that only this brings true happiness and mental wellness.*** The Light is the essence of humanity. ***Ultimately, we find our way by casting our gaze inward.*** We will search this inner world over until we find our home:

***We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
T.S. Eliot, Little Gidding***

We believe that mankind is entering a new age, an Age of Light. We see a growing spiritual crisis in the world today. Our culture has brought us unprecedented material well being, but we seem further away than ever from true spiritual wholeness. We also perceive an increase in mental health issues in our society and believe this to be linked to spiritual detachment. Many wander endlessly in search of the material gratification that will bring them happiness. Many have lost faith in religions and traditions. Others sincerely believe in traditional religions but remain unfulfilled spiritually and unhappy. Unfortunately, too many are so close-minded they refuse to ask what is missing from their lives. Yet, many hunger for spiritual wholeness and are searching for answers. ***We believe that we are entering a new age of enlightenment in which genuine spiritual progress will be made and that spiritual development depends upon a genuine appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.*** An appreciation for diversity of belief provides us with a fresh view of the beliefs of others, allows us to take from each set of beliefs that which rings true, and enables us to synthesize a personal spirituality that makes sense for each of us. When we view the beliefs of others with our hearts, we see truth shine through. We look with the highest regard to traditional beliefs and religions for guidance, and we also look forward. ***We believe that the past is not the end but the beginning.***



What We Do

Spirituality & Community produces a magazine and encompasses an online community. Both aspects serve as the basis for bringing together those who share our aspirations and beliefs, to meet each other and exchange ideas. We provide many opportunities for exploring spirituality and communicating with others:

- *Spirituality & Community magazine*
- *Features on the site*
- *Online chats* (as interest arises)

The magazine is based on a Reader's Digest® type model. It is comprised primarily of reader submitted material. It is the primary mechanism for a member to both explore spirituality and communicate his or her ideas to others. Features are also posted on the site. When interest is sufficiently high, we will hold chats online. *We sincerely hope that you will find truth within, and we wish you only the best on your own personal journey!*

Confucius

Analects

(excerpts)

Translated by James Legge (1893)



Portrait by Tang dynasty artist Wu Daozi

1

The Master "Is it not pleasant to learn with a constant perseverance and application?

"Is it not delightful to have friends coming from distant quarters?

"Is he not a man of complete virtue, who feels no discomposure though men may take no note of him?"

The philosopher Yu said, "They are few who, being filial and fraternal, are fond of offending against their superiors. There have been none, who, not liking to offend against their superiors, have been fond of stirring up confusion.

"The superior man bends his attention to what is radical.

That being established, all practical courses naturally grow up. Filial piety and fraternal submission,-are they not the root of all benevolent actions?"

The Master said, "Fine words and an insinuating appearance are seldom associated with true virtue."

The philosopher Tsang said, "I daily examine myself on three points:-whether, in transacting business for others, I may have been not faithful;-whether, in intercourse with friends, I may have been not sincere;-whether I may have not mastered and practiced the instructions of my teacher."

The Master said, "To rule a country of a thousand chariots, there must be reverent attention to business, and sincerity; economy in expenditure, and love for men; and the employment of the people at the proper seasons."

The Master said, "A youth, when at home, should be filial, and, abroad, respectful to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the friendship of the good. When he has time and opportunity, after the performance of these things, he should employ them in polite studies."

Tsze-hsia said, "If a man withdraws his mind from the love of beauty, and applies it as sincerely to the love of the virtuous; if, in serving his parents, he can exert his utmost strength; if, in serving his prince, he can devote his life; if, in his intercourse with his friends, his words are sincere:-although men say that he has not learned, I will certainly say that he has.

The Master said, "If the scholar be not grave, he will not call forth any veneration, and his learning will not be solid.

"Hold faithfulness and sincerity as first principles.

"Have no friends not equal to yourself.

"When you have faults, do not fear to abandon them."

The philosopher Tsang said, "Let there be a careful attention to perform the funeral rites to parents, and let them be followed when long gone with the ceremonies of sacrifice;-then the virtue of the people will resume its proper excellence."

Tsze-ch'in asked Tsze-kung saying, "When our master comes to any country, he does not fail to learn all about its government. Does he ask his information? or is it given to him?"

Tsze-kung said, "Our master is benign, upright, courteous, temperate, and complaisant and thus he gets his information. The master's mode of asking information, -is it not different from that of other men?"

The Master said, "While a man's father is alive, look at the bent of his will; when his father is dead, look at his conduct. If for three years he does not alter from the way of his father, he may be called filial."

The philosopher Yu said, "In practicing the rules of propriety, a natural ease is to be prized. In the ways prescribed by the ancient kings, this is the excellent quality, and in things small and great we follow them.

"Yet it is not to be observed in all cases. If one, knowing how such ease should be prized, manifests it, without regulating it by the rules of propriety, this likewise is not to be done."

The philosopher Yu said, "When agreements are made according to what is right, what is spoken can be made good. When respect is shown according to what is proper, one keeps far from shame and disgrace.

When the parties upon whom a man leans are proper persons to be intimate with, he can make them his guides and masters."

The Master said, "He who aims to be a man of complete virtue in his food does not seek to gratify his appetite, nor in his dwelling place does he seek the appliances of ease; he is earnest in what he is doing, and careful in his speech; he frequents the company of men of principle that he may be rectified:-such a person may be said indeed to love to learn."

Tsze-kung said, "What do you pronounce concerning the poor man who yet does not flatter, and the rich man who is not proud?" The Master replied, "They will do; but they are not equal to him, who, though poor, is yet cheerful, and to him, who, though rich, loves the rules of propriety."

Tsze-kung replied, "It is said in the Book of Poetry, 'As you cut and then file, as you carve and then polish.'-The meaning is the same, I apprehend, as that which you have just expressed."

The Master said, "With one like Ts'ze, I can begin to talk about the odes. I told him one point, and he knew its proper sequence."

The Master said, "I will not be afflicted at men's not knowing me; I will be afflicted that I do not know men."

2

The Master said, "He who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place and all the stars turn towards it."

The Master said, "In the Book of Poetry are three hundred pieces, but the design of them all may be embraced in one sentence 'Having no depraved thoughts.'"

The Master said, "If the people be led by laws, and uniformity sought to be given them by punishments, they will try to avoid the punishment, but have no sense of shame.

"If they be led by virtue, and uniformity sought to be given them by the rules of propriety, they will have the sense of shame, and moreover will become good."

The Master said, "At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning.

"At thirty, I stood firm.

"At forty, I had no doubts.

"At fifty, I knew the decrees of Heaven.

"At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of truth.

"At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, without transgressing what was right."

Mang I asked what filial piety was. The Master said, "It is not being disobedient."

Soon after, as Fan Ch'ih was driving him, the Master told him, saying, "Mang-sun asked me what filial piety was, and I answered him, '-not being disobedient.'"

Fan Ch'ih said, "What did you mean?" The Master replied, "That parents, when alive, be served according to propriety; that, when dead, they should be buried according to propriety; and that they should be sacrificed to according to propriety."

Mang Wu asked what filial piety was. The Master said, "Parents are anxious lest their children should be sick."

Tsze-yu asked what filial piety was. The Master said, "The filial piety nowadays means the support of one's parents. But dogs and horses likewise are able to do something in the way of support;-without reverence, what is there to distinguish the one support given from the other?"

Tsze-hsia asked what filial piety was. The Master said, "The difficulty is with the countenance. If, when their elders have any troublesome affairs, the young take the toil of them, and if, when the young have wine and food, they set them before their elders, is THIS to be considered filial piety?"

The Master said, "I have talked with Hui for a whole day, and he has not made any objection to anything I said;-as if he were stupid. He has retired, and I have examined his conduct when away from me, and found him able to illustrate my teachings. Hui!-He is not stupid."

The Master said, "See what a man does."

"Mark his motives.

"Examine in what things he rests.

"How can a man conceal his character? How can a man conceal his character?"

The Master said, "If a man keeps cherishing his old knowledge, so as continually to be acquiring new, he may be a teacher of others."

The Master said, "The accomplished scholar is not a utensil."

Tsze-kung asked what constituted the superior man. The Master said, "He acts before he speaks, and afterwards speaks according to his actions."

The Master said, "The superior man is catholic and not partisan. The mean man is partisan and not catholic."

The Master said, "Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous."

The Master said, "The study of strange doctrines is injurious indeed!"

The Master said, "Yu, shall I teach you what knowledge is? When you know a thing, to hold that you know it; and when you do not know a thing, to allow that you do not know it;-this is knowledge."

Tsze-chang was learning with a view to official emolument.

The Master said, "Hear much and put aside the points of which you stand in doubt, while you speak cautiously at the same time of the others:-then you will afford few occasions for blame. See much and put aside the things which seem perilous, while you are cautious at the same time in carrying the others into practice: then you will have few occasions for repentance. When one gives few occasions for blame in his words, and few occasions for repentance in his conduct, he is in the way to get emolument."

The Duke Ai asked, saying, "What should be done in order to secure the submission of the people?" Confucius replied, "Advance the upright and set aside the crooked, then the people will submit. Advance the crooked and set aside the upright, then the people will not submit."

Chi K'ang asked how to cause the people to reverence their ruler, to be faithful to him, and to go on to nerve themselves to virtue. The Master said, "Let him preside over them with gravity;- then they will reverence him. Let him be final and kind to all;-then they will be faithful to him. Let him advance the good and teach the incompetent;-then they will eagerly seek to be virtuous."

Some one addressed Confucius, saying, "Sir, why are you not engaged in the government?"

The Master said, "What does the Shu-ching say of filial piety?-'You are final, you discharge your brotherly duties. These qualities are displayed in government.' This then also constitutes the exercise of government. Why must there be THAT-making one be in the government?"

The Master said, "I do not know how a man without truthfulness is to get on. How can a large carriage be made to go without the crossbar for yoking the oxen to, or a small carriage without the arrangement for yoking the horses?"

Tsze-chang asked whether the affairs of ten ages after could be known.

Confucius said, "The Yin dynasty followed the regulations of the Hsia: wherein it took from or added to them may be known. The Chau dynasty has followed the regulations of Yin: wherein it took from or added to them may be known. Some other may follow the Chau, but though it should be at the distance of a hundred ages, its affairs may be known."

The Master said, "For a man to sacrifice to a spirit which does not belong to him is flattery. "To see what is right and not to do it is want of courage."

For more, see: www.sacred-texts.com/cfu/index.htm

Jarvis the Duck

Kurt Venables

The Starry Night

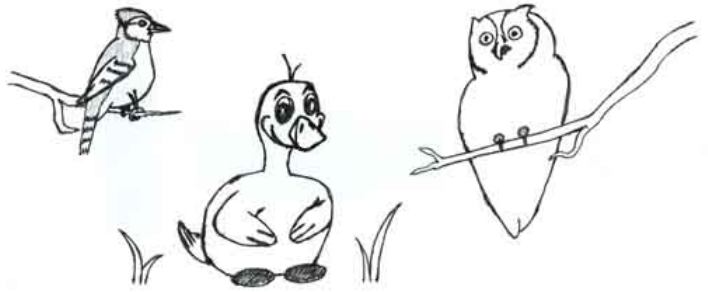
Jarvis is a young duck that lives on a small pond in The Great Poplar Forest. These are the chronicles of his adventures.

The party followed The White River north for two more weeks. The number of Harpy patrols they sighted had gradually dwindled as they moved north of the chasm, and they had not seen a patrol now for almost a week. Also, they were traveling by day and had no further incidents with Vampires. They sometimes heard distant screeches at night, but Talon explained that the Vampires homed in on movement and that they would be safe bedded down in the canopy.

It was now mid-December and had become bitterly cold. The river had frozen completely over, and the terrain had become mountainous. The land was contorted like a pile of broken egg shells; they seemed to be flying over an endless series of ridges. The forest, however, appeared distinctly lighter from the air, and perhaps less ominous, as thick snow covered a large part of the canopy. The spirits of the party had lifted because they were now approaching their destination: Temple Mountain. The party was bedding down in the canopy near the river bank after another day's flying.

"We should reach Temple Mountain tomorrow," said Talon enthusiastically.

"I'm a little nervous," replied Angeldown, "Will we really meet Gnosis?"



"Yes, and though he is very wise, I remember him as very down to earth," reassured Talon.

"We'll do fine, Angel," replied Jarvis with a smile, as his eyes met hers. She quickly returned a pretty smile.

"So you know Gnosis, man," said Sage to Talon.

"I wouldn't go that far," replied Talon, "but my parents, being the high priest and priestess of Heliopolis, would often visit him at Temple Mountain. Though, as I was a young bird, I really spent most of my time there with the young owls. I do remember him as being a very kind, old bird. He was old even when I was young, and I remember him as very, very wise."

"I'm excited to meet him, dudes," exclaimed Jay. "Looks like we may have a clear day for flying tomorrow," he added pointing up to the sky. It was as crisp and clear as a bell. The stars seemed to jump out at them.

“My mother used to tell me that a star is a beautiful soul,” said Talon looking up, lost in thought, “a soul that knew the answer to the riddle of Osiris, when asked in the underworld. She would tell me that the brightest stars were the greatest priests, priestesses, queens, and kings of long ago. She would even tell me their names. Birds nowadays don’t believe in the stars, or Osiris, or Ra. All they think about is themselves and their luxuries, their Goldenreed, their thistle down.” Talon’s voice trailed away.

“When we meet Gnosis and talk about this riddle, I hope our souls can shine like the stars,” replied Jarvis quietly.

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The Green Spirit of Ecology and Psychology: Educating, Counseling, and Healing with Nature through 53 Natural Senses

Michael J. Cohen, Ph.D.

The deteriorating state of most aspects of the world indicates that with regard to sustaining the health of our society and the environment, we have been bewildered since the days of Henry David Thoreau. Advanced research suggests that this is simply because we omit an important factor in our spirituality and thinking. We seldom view natural attractions as valuable scientific facts so we continue to suffer from their loss.

The ecology of natural attractions is a holistic environmental psychology process, a green spirituality that explores nature's blending of the way we think and the way natural systems work. It is a blend that Industrial Society teaches us to ignore.

Research into this blend finds that by the time we are born, we have at least 53 natural attraction senses that enable our thoughts and feelings to make sense by connecting with nature so we may live in balance with the whole of Planet Earth, its spirit and each other. However, to our loss, we have learned to overlook this inheritance. For example, most of us in Industrial Society have enjoyed a walk or meditation in the park or other attractive experiences in nature that have relieved our stress, cleared our thinking or strengthened our spirit. Although we often take this restoration for granted, the reason it occurs is because humanity is part of the web of life. In a natural area, gently connecting our natural senses with the grace of nature's balancing and purifying attraction powers revitalizes our psyche.

We seldom learn that our body and mind consist of ten times more cells of other organisms than human cells; over 110 species live on our skin alone, our genetic makeup includes plant and animal DNA and every 2-7 years every atom in us is replaced by atoms from the environment. Throughout our lives the natural world becomes us and we become it. We are obviously part of Earth's web-of-life community and its green spirit, a seamless continuum of its flow through our body, mind and spirituality.

The detrimental effects of our indoor lives excessively disconnecting us from nature's regenerative ways clearly show that the global ecosystem is a heart of our lives. What is also true is that *in order to be part of any system, one must be in communication with that system.* We seldom recognize that, as part of the global ecosystem, *we biologically inherit the ability to communicate with it.*

As noted above, Earth communicates with us, as part of itself, through the intelligent sensibilities of at least 53 natural senses. For example, our sense/sensation of thirst intelligently "turns on" to attract us to drink water, to make the global water cycle flow through and sustain us. In addition, when we have enough water, thirst reasonably "turns-off" and, in balanced ways, attracts us to stop drinking. Each of our additional 52 senses is a similar attraction intelligence. Besides the sense of thirst, our love for water, these senses include our love of community, reason and trust; aroma, place and consciousness; color, taste and motion; belonging, beauty, music and gravity along with 40 additional natural sensory attractions. The web-of-life and we hold them in

common while they, without words, hold us together in natural unity.

We suffer because we have learned to ignore or obstruct the peaceful and biologically balanced fulfillment of our 53 natural senses. Rather than honor them for what they are as nameless, green spirit attractions that we can sense or feel, we entangle ourselves with labels and stories we have attached to them that seldom agree. For example, are our 53 natural attraction sensitivities, needs, drives, spirits, instincts, divas, wants, motives, angels, desires, intuitions or god callings? We build differing technologies, institutions and belief systems around these labels and their stories. We think and relate with the meanings of the stories, not directly with the nameless green spirit sensations of natural attractions and their ability to unify. This reduces our inherent ability to make sense and cooperatively enjoy nature's peace. Instead, it often results in estrangements, arguments or war over beliefs and other differences.

Significantly, on average, Industrial Society's prejudicial need to profit by excessively naming and exploiting nature socializes us to disconnect over 98 percent of our time, thinking and feeling from the satisfactions we obtain from the restorative callings of "nameless" attractions we find in nature.

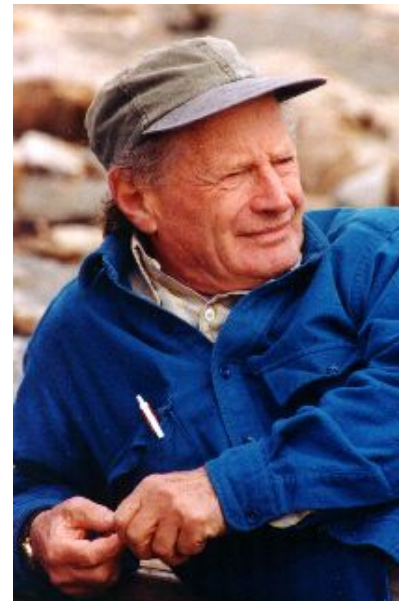
Our extensive loss of rewarding support from nature's green spirit perfection leaves us wanting. We feel that we never have, or are, enough. This spawns our excessiveness, feelings of inadequacy and other problems. We become destructively greedy, stressed, abusive, depressed and/or chemical and relationship dependent.

Nature knows how to sustain its optimums of life, diversity, balance, purity and cooperation. It does this without producing garbage and with a minimum of greed, abusiveness and isolation. Everything in nature belongs, including us. As part of nature, because we register natural attraction sensibilities, we meditate and dream about living in their perfection.

In natural areas, attractions we find help us remedy many troubles and increase personal, social and environmental well-being. Independent of drugs or hallucinogens, and as a modern tool for shamans, we reasonably reconnect our thinking to the healing flow and spirit of natural systems, in and around us. Backyard or back country, we learn to make genuine contact with authentic natural systems. As exemplified by even a walk in the park, this empowers our thinking to help nature recycle any garbage or pollution that Industrial Society has dumped in our mind.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Recipient of the 1994 Distinguished World Citizen Award, Ecopsychologist Michael J. Cohen, Ph.D. is a Director of the Institute of Global Education, where he coordinates its Integrated Ecology Department and Project NatureConnect. He also serves on the faculty of Portland State University, Akamai University and West Coast University. Dr. Cohen founded sensory environmental education outdoor programs independently and for the National Audubon Society and Lesley University(AEI.) He conceived the 1985 National Audubon Conference "Is the Earth a Living Organism," and has been identified as a "maverick genius" or "the reincarnation of Henry David Thoreau as a psychologist." He is an award-winning author of *The Web of Life Imperative, Reconnecting With Nature, Einstein's World, and How Nature Works* as well as an accomplished folk song artist and contra dancer who presents traditional music programs for the U.S. National Park Service and Elderhostel on San Juan Island, Washington.



www.ecopsych.com

History

In 1936, a New York City elementary school policy insisted that Michael Cohen, a left-handed, six-year old, first grader, write with his right hand. The suppression of this youngster's left-handedness depressed him and led to mild speech, posture, nail-biting and stress disorders. Over time, as he worked to overcome these difficulties, his skills led him to attain a Ph.D. in a blend of outdoor environmental science, education, counseling and psychology.

Research with people in contact with natural areas helped Cohen, in 1965, recognize Earth to be a living organism and that from it we are born with, not just five, but more than 53 natural senses that help us sustain personal and global well-being (including a sense of left-handedness for 10-15 percent of the population).

Cohen's investigation of our natural-senses brought to light that most of the personal, social and environmental disorders that we suffer - including greed, stress, violence, abuse, depression and addiction - result from an unreasonable, but profit making, prejudice against nature in Industrial Society that we seldom acknowledge. This prejudice holds an irrational disregard for nature's integrity and the green spirit callings of the 53 natural senses that we inherit as part of nature. We become less sensible and we weaken our well-being due to the absence of the self-correcting and restorative ways of our natural senses and spirituality.

To our loss, we produce our greatest problems because we seldom learn to think sensibly by respecting the green spirit of our natural senses and their sensibilities. Instead, our unreasonable

prejudice against nature socializes us to injuriously drive these senses out of our awareness and into our subconscious where they lie hurt and frustrated.

To deal with this phenomenon, Cohen produced a hands-on, nature-connecting, sensitivity tool that helps us eliminate our natural-sense deprivation. He demonstrated that his renewing educating, counseling and healing with nature process is a sensory and spiritual ecology that enables us think like nature's restorative processes work. Readily available on-line, and in his newly released book, "Educating, Counseling and Healing With Nature," the process generates genuine, nature-connected learning and relating that heals and renews our injured natural senses. By learning to use the process, we become more resilient and sensitive; we build more sensible relationships and many disorders subside.

"Educating, Counseling and Healing With Nature," is a professionally refereed, practical, environmentally based psychology and spirituality. It helps our thinking and meditation co-create with nature's self-correcting and regenerative ways. Because it is an effective green spirit antidote and preventative for many dysfunctions, including Nature Deficit Disorder, it enables us to increase well-being and decrease our alarming prejudice against nature.

Whenever natural attractions connect our psyche with the web of life, our restored natural senses transform our disorders into constructive relationships. The latter consist of the balance, cooperation and unconditional love that nature shares with us to sustain life in peace.

"We cannot win the battle to increase the well-being of the web of life, that includes our life, without strengthening our natural senses, our emotional bonds with nature - for we will not fight to save what we do not love."

- M. J. Cohen's blend of Stephen Jay Gould and Jalaluddin Rumi

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You may read or download *Educating, Counseling and Healing With Nature* on line at:
www.ecopsych.com/ksanity.html.

Everyday Spirituality: Life as Prayer

Dr. Stewart Bitkoff

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.