

## **SPIRITUAL PRACTICE**

All spiritual practices are designed to release us from the tyranny of the analytical mind. Sometimes we use the mind to defeat the mind. Sometimes we do it through devotion or through working with energies like breathing and so on. The minute we break identification with thought, it's as if we come into a quality of awareness, that, besides the quality it has of presence and clarity about the universe around us and within us, there is also a quality that is very soft in it. And I see that as the "heart mind", intuitive heart, or spiritual heart.

Spiritual practice is breaking down the armor so that the intuitive heart can function. When we cut ourselves off from our intuitive heart with mind/thought armor we end up feeling stranded. Because it is through that intuitive heart that we actually get fed by the universe. It's like an umbilical cord of love and light that comes into us and when we cut it off with the mind, we end up feeling alienated and starved. That's why we become greedy, craving, filled with desires, wanting more of everything to fill a hunger in us created by the way we have reinforced our own separateness from the universe.

You can see the pathology of it all in the ways we have abandoned family and community in favor of the illusion of external freedom and individuality – not needing to rely on anyone or anything. The cost is increasing experience of polarity and suffering.

The mind processes in duality and polarities. We are happy or sad. If we want to be happy, we push away anything we think makes us sad. This is essentially the paradox of suffering. What we resist – persists! We continually give strength and substance to these two polarities. How are we to deal with suffering? What appears to be required is that we expand ourselves to embrace all of the planes of consciousness simultaneously to allow true compassion to arise.

If we alter our consciousness sufficiently so that we are standing at the cusp between form and formless - right at the edge; and we look out at all forms, all created things from the intuitive heart, we are absolutely awed by the beauty, the exquisite, and awesome nature of how all of creation is related by natural law (Law of Creation, Law of Karma, Law of God). But if we continue to identify with our own suffering narratives or our own pleasure desires, we don't actually see the pure truth of creation. If we are grasping after it or pushing it away, we don't see the beauty. It's only when we develop a certain empty equanimity that we can see all the interconnected beauty of all things.

And then we can see that even our own thinking mind is part of that natural law of creation. And further, we see that even suffering is part of that natural law of creation. When we sit in that place there is no good or bad in the universe. Where we are, right now, with all of our thoughts and narratives, all of our problems, regrets of the past, fears of the future, doubts in the present, is the optimum place we need to be from a spiritual point of view for optimum spiritual growth. And any thoughts or statements about, "I need to be more this or that or less this or that." is also part of this ultimate perfection. And then we can also see the way in which suffering works from a spiritual point of view.

But when we identify with our humanness, our separateness, our emotional heart, we experience suffering. And when we look at the pain of another human being it triggers us because we empathize with them and feel so horrible about their pain, and we would do anything to take it away. And the problem is that there is so much of it. So much suffering: starvation, inhumanity, domestic violence, racism, species becoming extinct, vast forests being cut and burned, on and on. Where to begin? It's so overwhelming to the human heart that we further armor ourselves with the mind so that we can stay safe.

But if we are going to be free, there is nothing we can turn away from or turn off. So how do we keep our hearts open in hell? The best way I can understand it now is the balancing of these planes of reality inside myself that allows me to do that. At one level we have all the compassion and empathy for suffering and pain and wish it would go away. And at the same time, we can see the wisdom teaching that is coming through the experience of the pain. Through this process we can watch the ego surrender and the spirit come forth. It is an awful and, at the same time, awesome grace. We can allow our heart to break at the pain and suffering of another and, at the same time, see it all as the unfolding perfection of the universe.

As we extricate ourselves from identification with separateness our whole feeling about death changes. Part of us that is not affected isn't coming or going, no birth or death, it just is. But, because that part of us is not knowable by the mind, the mind keeps denying its existence. The part of us that is not in ego-mind-body form is only "be-able" not "know-able." And the mind goes up the wall trying to figure out how to control that part of us. And what's called for is for us to stretch what feels like a paradox of the mind, that it's all perfect and horrible. All that's left is to get on with it. See that it's all empty. And when we embrace all of it, embrace the human condition, we embrace the suffering as well. We are not separated from the full process of creation.

There is joy in the beginnings and endings, birthings and dyings. If we are the fullness of the moment, everything presents as the intrinsic love of creation and perfection of the universe.

