

“God’s Version of You”

By Munir Peter Reynolds

Many of us may aspire to be aware, free, focused, present, loving, strong and healed. These are beautiful aspirations. Perhaps we can even be most of these things most of the time. But sometimes one or more of them just seem out of reach. We can feel deficient in terms of one of these areas.

But, if this is a metaphor for “the best we can be”, what is required to be the best we can be all of the time? Another way of saying it is, “What is required to be at our best regardless of situations and circumstances.”

If we’re honest, we have to enter into some kind of self-reflection and observation, find the resistances within ourselves, and also find the source of strength, love and wisdom to be a blessing in the world rather than reacting to what is happening all of the time.

Let’s explore spiritual practice....

Why would we want to be the best we can be?
What is spiritual practice?
What could a basic spiritual practice consist of?
What is revealed?

Why would we want to be the best we can be?

There can be many reasons. We may feel that we’re not coping with the stress and rapidity of change in daily life. We may be suffering from the state of the world, from relationships, from loss, physical disability and pain. Suffering often precedes taking up spirituality in a concerted way, because we are looking for answers.

But, we can also come to spiritual practice out of love. We want to be more loving and also to feel worthy of love.

Some people feel that they “should” do some kind of practice. But, I would say that an open, honest and compassionate human being will take time for some kind of daily remembrance or practice simply as a response to life - gratitude simply for the gift of being here. This is the most genuine and sincere practice - one done to say “thank you” to the universe, or source of life.

As Rumi says, “Submit to a daily practice. Your loyalty to that is a ring at the door. Keep knocking, and the joy inside will eventually open a window and look out to see who's there.”

Also, Jesus said in Matthew “Go into your closet, close the door and pray to your father who is in secret.” Your closet is your very own being, not thoughts, emotions or perceptions, though

you will find these in there. Sooner we or later we retreat into our “closet” because we want to know the truth about ourselves and about life.

What is Spiritual Practice, anyway?

Spiritual practice is a habit of stepping back from our daily “set point”. It’s shutting down activity for a time and taking a close look at how we’re doing, what’s coming up, what’s affecting us. It’s a chance to see what is happening with our heart, and how aware we are of the inner and outer planes.

Recent research found that average Americans are on autopilot 47% of the time. This means they are lost in thought, rushing, stressed and not really present. That’s a lot of wasted life we’re not really showing up for. More than this, mind body medicine is finding that a growing number of diseases and chronic conditions stem from poor stress management, food habits, lack of exercise, and the toll taken by repetitive negative thinking.

So in spiritual practice we step back as it were and go to our *direct experience* for a time and take a reset. This requires consistency, curiosity and sincerity. These qualities are *way* more important than what you do.

What does a basic Spiritual Practice consist of?

At minimum two simple things. Meditation and Caring for your Heart

Meditation - More than 1,500 medical studies prove the benefits of meditation. If you want better relationships, longevity, improved health, better sleep, heightened creativity, meditation is for you.

There are many different forms of meditation, so you can look for the one that works for you. I did Transcendental Meditation daily for 20 years. This uses a mantra, but after a while the mantra just fades away.

But regardless of how you go about it, meditation is a time to just let everything be as it is and experience directly the momentum of you, without judgment.

It’s been said that meditation is an unqualified “YES” to all experience. We let everything be as it is in the deepest possible way. Surely for 10 minutes a day we can all do this!

Caring for Your Heart - The heart is our organ of wholeness. It’s how we know the whole of life. It’s also a source of divine wisdom and guidance. Taking time for your heart every day is just good hygiene. HeartMath Institute research has proven that simple breathing practices focused on the heart increase brain/heart coherence. You’ll be much happier and function much better with coherence, because you’re closer to the truth of your being. Problems become situations; situations are less charged; the way forward seems clearer.

Coherence shows that love is simply the dropping of separation - of seeing Wholeness. If the heart is the organ of wholeness, that means it's impossible to discover the unity of life if our hearts are closed. Sometimes in Sadhana we have to wrap our hearts in love, soak the heart in the marinade of no boundary, in order to revive and jumpstart it. With the heart "online" we're much more available and able to meet life in creative and compassionate ways.

But, if not meditation and Heart Math, Spiritual Practice could still consist of:

Prayer - a sincere feeling of appeal to and communion with the divine

Contemplation - being with a longing, an insight, an intimation

Being quiet - just being prior to thought, which in the Christian tradition is called practicing the presence of God.

Undertaken with curiosity, consistency and sincerity, spiritual practice may start to reveal some things that are going on...

Facing Resistances - From decades of reacting to life, seeking from life, making demands on life, we've built up some bugs on the windshield. These bugs are actually more like mud. We've been wallowing in the mud of the personal self rather than staying clean in our pristine true nature. Resistance is the mud of illusion.

Spiritual practice can help to reveal all the ways that we are resisting life. As we sit with that fact, the resistance is revealed. I always say that 95% of overcoming resistance is just seeing that you're doing it. This is because resistance is the substance of the separate self, the one that believes it can have life on its own terms.

Going back down through the thoughts, emotions, sensations into quiet being can seem at first like an insurmountable task. But, anyone who says "I can't meditate." is really saying, "It's too painful and challenging (yet) for me to face the reality and momentum of the separate self." But, if we want to be free there is no other way. We have to truly want to know and live from our real self to be happy.

Clearing Samskaras - "Samskara" is a sanskrit word for the unintegrated impressions that can accumulate within us. We all have residue in the body/mind left from past experiences that we couldn't quite handle, be it traumatic or just unacceptable to us. The body stores, "saves for later", these emotions that become fused to a perception or impression. The body/mind is a faithful accountant, keeping precise track of anything left behind. When we open to our experience without resistance or judgment, everything runs in reverse. These samskaras just present themselves in their own time. With consistent openness and nonjudgement the intensity goes down and the frequency of recurrence subsides into Aware Being. A helpful stance to take with samskaras says, "I am not you, but I lovingly welcome you into the open space that I am."

Disbelieving Thought - Thought is the white bread at the feast of life. We have this rich feast laid out before us: the seamless, intimate experience of the five senses. The taste of orange,

the vista of the mountains, the warmth of the fire. And what do we reach for? The white bread, the “empty calories” of thought. Thought is actually a socially acceptable form of avoiding the present moment. It is yet another form of resistance.

It would be an error to try to stop thinking through effort. But, we *can* become curious about thought, notice its content, especially when negative, and clearly see that *thoughts do not belong to you*. They are not *yours*, they just arise. How do your thoughts make you feel? Spiritual practice reveals thought manufactures feelings in the body. Thought, especially in the form of the superego, can be a cruel and uncompromising master over us. However, questioning the truth of thought and simply stopping believing thought is, by itself, a huge step toward defanging it. Thought becomes the tool that it was meant to be. As Krishnamurti said, thought is useful in the world, but has no place in the psychology of human beings. Isn't that interesting!

Realizing the Primacy of Awareness - Awareness is the overlooked pot of gold buried in the potter's field of you. It's the doorway to you as a cosmic being. In meditation we recognize that our entire world is *revealed within and made of* seamless, intimate awareness. As I said here recently - Awareness is our true body. Not a faculty that puts in touch with a world “out there” but our direct knowing *within our being* of self and world. This “crack in the world” as we knew it enables us to break out of limitation. We experience no lack, or separation and no conflict because all is eternally One. In aware presence we return to what we always have been.

Sadhana

We could adopt the word “Sadhana”, which gives spiritual practice its proper context. “Sadhana” is everything we do to bring our lives into congruence with *cosmic law*. There actually are cosmic or divine laws, but many people live their lives as if there is no structure to the universe and no consequence to their behaviors and actions.

In Sadhana, we want to know the truth of:

Who am I?

What is the nature of mind?

How shall I live?

Until we glimpse the truth on these three questions, we're going to be consciously or subconsciously seeking fulfillment through behaviors and activities that do not serve us. We'll be looking for the answers in objects, activities and relationships - all of which constantly change. The only thing that will satisfy what we are longing for is a life based on that which *does not change*.

The perennial philosophy, first articulated by Aldous Huxley in the last century, says:

Underlying all of life is a single, unchanging, infinite reality;

That reality is at the core of every human being; and

The purpose of life is to realize that reality and live from it.

It is our true nature that is filled with the happiness, peace and love that flow from living this understanding. Whether we realize it or not, we're all seeking our true nature, that which does not change, which is an expression of the ground of being.

So, in the end, Sadhana is like waking up from a dream. What we took up in order to feel better starts to reveal more and more until we realize that we have been trying to play God, through a separate, illusory self. Coming back to our real self, which is simply our true being that we have always been, reveals that everything and everybody shares this being - it's all God's being. In fact we discover that we never left God's being at all. It just became veiled from us for a time.

"How shall I live?" then becomes living and moving within the mystery of God's being, trusting the wisdom of our true nature that always knows how to be "Aware, free, focused, present, love, and healed."

Doing this inner work in a consistent way with an open heart and mind is the day to day journey of *Sadhana* - spiritual practice. We're all invited to take this to heart and take up a spiritual practice, as Rumi advises.

Facing ourselves may be difficult at first, super difficult from time to time. But sooner or later we discover things get better. We're learning, growing and coming into coherence with cosmic law. It's an adventure in universal consciousness - because that is what we have been all along.

Ultimately we discover that nothing is ever personal, here or anywhere else. In fact, because in *being* - according to cosmic law - there are no separate persons, no separate things and nothing to take offense about.

This can't be emphasized enough. Unless we do sadhana and thereby take the adventure to live the dharma, live by cosmic law, we're going to suffer. It's too easy to slip into old patterns and unquestioned assumptions, and go back to sleep

As Rumi says:

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.

Don't go back to sleep.

You must ask for what you really want.

Don't go back to sleep.

People are going back and forth
across the doorsill
where the two worlds touch.

The door is round and open.

Don't go back to sleep.

Ultimately we do Sadhana because *that is what we are*. Ultimately we discover that we *are* Sadhana, and being a person is something we *do*. That's the thing about spiritual practice. If it is persistent and authentic, it turns ourselves and the world upside down and inside out. That's a miracle, because then we get to find out what it is like to live life from no boundary and no limit. That's the real adventure open to you and me.