

## **The Nature of Spiritual Practice**

By Robert Brumet

Spiritual practice has both active and passive elements. The passive element is to deliberately refrain from activities that substantiate and reinforce an egocentric identity. We practice by not doing that which is familiar and habitual.

For example, we may sit quietly and do nothing but pay attention to the breath. Sooner or later we will notice uncomfortable physical sensations, distracting thoughts and desires arising, and many stories beckoning us to indulge in them. The practice then is to simply notice this without reacting and then return to the breath. We do not indulge the ego's demand for our attention. This is the practice of "not doing."

The active element of spiritual practice is to intentionally engage in activities that disrupt the habituated patterns of the ego-centric identity. For example, we may engage in a practice of generosity which will bring to the surface the egocentric tendencies of craving or possessiveness; it may uncover our fear of lack or limitation. We then look directly at these beliefs and their resultant emotions. We are then able to make the conscious choice to believe them no more as we continue our practice of generosity.

Ego-identification feeds upon attention for its survival. As we engage a spiritual practice that refuses to feed this habituated pattern the egoic tendencies will gradually disappear, but first they will assert themselves with vigor! But rather than act upon or suppress this impulse, as we might habitually do, we allow the impulse to arise, we notice it, and we simply return to our practice. We make a conscious choice to neither reject nor act upon the impulses that arise.

Eventually these impulses will diminish; but not without a great deal of protesting! This is why strong intention and commitment to practice is vital. The ego-identity will demand that we feed it with our attention and our agreement with its beliefs and its stories. Spiritual practice is intentionally interrupting our habituated tendency to do this.

For example, the ego-self may have a strong propensity for planning and always anticipating future events. A spiritual practice such as meditation will persistently call us back to our present moment experience, interrupting the mind's tendency toward futurizing. Returning to the present moment we may see that this compulsive planning is a smokescreen for some underlying pain that's calling for our attention. The healing of this will occur only by accepting it in the present moment.

With spiritual practice we are not trying to attain a particular experience or to reach a desired goal. We are not trying to feel a certain way, nor are we trying solve any personal problems. Our primary intention is to simply engage the chosen practice without any attachment to a specific outcome.

As a result of practice we may have some euphoric experiences or gain some profound insights, but we see this simply as a by-product of our practice, not the primary goal. Conversely, we may have some unpleasant or difficult experiences along the way. It is very important not to become discouraged by these. This is where a teacher or a support group can be of help to us.

By Robert Brumet. Excerpted from his book, "Living Originally: Ten Spiritual Practices to Transform Your Life."  
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