

WISDOM CIRCLES

March 2014

How do I Become a Spiritually Mature Person?

What must one do to be saved? How do we attain enlightenment? How do we become spiritually liberated? All these words from different world religions referring to the goals of religion are in one way or another about wholeness and healing. In fact, our English word for salvation has its root in the Latin *salve* or healing and the word for “holy” has the same Anglo-Saxon root as the words “whole,” “health,” and “hale.” All this seems to indicate that a spiritually mature person is a spiritually whole or healthy person.

There is a Yiddish word that comes close to describing a spiritually mature person. That word is *mensch*. A *mensch* is a person of integrity and honor. A stand-up guy. A *mensch* is someone people want to be with. Someone who is kind and authentic, someone you feel you can trust.

The spiritually whole person is never a perfect person. There is never a goal of spiritual growth that we arrive at once and for all. In fact, our imperfect humanity is vital for spiritual growth as both a motivation and a vehicle for our realization or awakening. The descriptions of a spiritually whole person in the different traditions vary somewhat, but all of them present guideposts along the way and there is a good deal of agreement across traditions about what some of those guideposts are.

UUs maintain conviction about one thing that is NOT necessary for spiritual wholeness. One doesn't need to believe certain things. UUs maintain that one can be a spiritually whole person and be a Christian, Buddhist, Mystic, Pagan, Humanist, even an agnostic or an atheist.

According to spiritual writer Elizabeth Lessing one of the guideposts of a spiritual mature person is that they deeply realize that the truth works. She writes, “When your life works better—when drama and chaos get tiresome, and goodwill and peace are your preferred companions...when you are naturally happier, stronger, and more deeply engaged with people and place, you can assume that you are touching the truth...” As we grow in spiritual maturity we quit fooling ourselves. We can tell our own truth kindly and without fear. We can be ourselves without hurting others. And increasing fearlessness is a sign of spiritual growth.

A spiritually mature person is in touch with reality. They are less prone to wishful thinking, denial and self-deception. A spiritually mature person gives up fighting with reality and meets the circumstances of life with the equanimity expressed so well in the Serenity Prayer. “Grant me serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference.”

One essential guidepost to spiritual maturity is a growing compassion for others and a natural tendency to reach out to help and serve them, out of wisdom and not out of obligation. There is a growing sense of the relatedness of all persons and the mutual dependency we all share. In this sense the final guidepost of the spiritually whole person is love.

Spiritual Exercise: Gauging Your Spiritual Progress

Meditation teacher Shinzen Young lists five signs of spiritual progress. Here they are:

1. You have less suffering. You are less plagued by resentment, self-pity, negative judgment of self and others and envy. You are able to take the bumps and hardships of life with greater calm and equanimity.
2. You have more fulfillment. You experience gratitude for your life and the many joys and gifts that you have been given. You enjoy your loved ones, your friends, your community, your activities and your material goods. Nature nurtures you. You feel your life matters.
3. You have more insights. You see more and more the interconnections between your own existence and the world at large. You intuitively sense the right action to take more often.
4. You have more positive behaviors and fewer negative behaviors. You find yourself being kinder and more patient with others. You are less judgmental. You may find yourself having an easier time letting go of unproductive habits. You may find it is easier to take good care of yourself.
5. You have a natural tendency to act more compassionately and to serve others.

The spiritual exercise this month is to look back on the past twelve months and reflect on any spiritual progress you might have made in any of these areas and journal about them. The process of spiritual progress is subtle and steady even in the best of circumstances and we really cannot see the results of any practice we might be doing without the perspective of some months. What practices have helped in making that progress that you can reinforce? What might you be able to do in the near future to grow in those areas where you have not made progress? What resources can you bring to bear?

Share your reflections with your group.

Questions for Reflection

What experiences in your life have helped you grow spiritually or have motivated you toward spiritual practice? What resources have helped with this?

Have there been times in your life where you have regressed in your spiritual progress, according to the five signs or your own assessment? What were the circumstances? How did you reverse this trend?

Words of Wisdom

The salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human meekness, and in human responsibility.

~ Vaclav Havel

Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime,
Therefore, we are saved by hope.
Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history;
Therefore, we are saved by faith.
Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone.
Therefore, we are saved by love.
No virtuous act is quite a virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as from our own;
Therefore, we are saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.

~ Reinhold Niebuhr

You know quite well, deep within you, that there is only a single magic, a single power, a single salvation...and that is called loving. Well, then, love your suffering. Do not resist it, do not flee from it. It is your aversion that hurts, nothing else.

~ Hermann Hesse

Work out your own salvation. Do not depend on others.

~ Buddha

Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.

~ Mahatma Gandhi

Watch your thoughts; they become words.
Watch your words; they become actions.
Watch your actions; they become habits.
Watch your habits; they become character.
Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.

~ Lao-Tze

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.
We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?
Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the World.
There is nothing enlightening about shrinking so that other people won't feel unsure around you.
We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.
It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone.
As we let our Light shine; we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our own fear; our presence automatically liberates others.

~ Marianne Williamson

We are not human beings having a spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a human experience.

~ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Before enlightenment; chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment; chop wood, carry water.”

~ Zen Proverb

“If you ever reach total enlightenment while drinking beer, I bet it makes beer shoot out your nose”

~ Jack Handy

“Do not think you will necessarily be aware of your own enlightenment.”

~ Dogen

“Enlightenment must come little by little-otherwise it would overwhelm.”

~ Idries Shah