

Thoughts on The Spiritual Secular Conversation

When we talk about Spirit, or meditation, there can be many different understandings and interpretations. I want to refer to every thought, word, movement and action, tree swaying in the breeze, tuna fish in a can, war and peace, love and hate. Everything is a manifestation of spirit. The good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, the love and the hate. Spirit allows a flower to be a flower, a cloud to be a cloud, a donkey to be a donkey, a thought to be a thought, an action to be an action and so on.

It may be interpreted as bad, and still it is a manifestation of spirit. We can not do something that is not an expression of our spirit. We are spirit, as we are body, mind, emotions and actions. To be responsible is to own all that makes me, me.

Spiritual Practice is not just sitting and meditating. Practice is looking, thinking, touching, drinking, eating and talking. Every act, every breath, and every step can be practice and can help us to become more ourselves.

Thich Nhat Hahn

In our evolution as human beings we collectively have developed many practices to cultivate awareness, more desirable consciousness, and expressions of spirit that promote the well being of ourselves, as well as, all human beings. (And that can be extended to include all sentient beings!). I imagine that is what people mean to say when they say meditating or practicing Yoga or Qi Gong is a spiritual practice.

There are many practices that we humans do that help keep us on the path we choose to be on. For example, if I am awake and practice a discipline focused on movement, then this practice is supporting my evolution. It is supporting and reflecting how I want to manifest as a human being. As I develop and evolve I want to become aware that everything I think, say and do, can be a practice in awareness. If I

follow the quote from earlier then I see that everything I do has the potential to be a spiritual practice.

If I practice yoga, meditate or dance as a spiritual practice and then yell at my neighbor, if I think negative thoughts about somebody acting weird in the grocery store, or if I kick my dog for chewing up one of my favorite shoes, then is my “spiritual” practice really helping me wake up? Is it really helping me be that harmonious and generous soul that I am intending to be? I am still expressing my spirit, but is this the manifestation of spirit I want to be expressing?

(I want to make a little note that of course we all fall down, screw up, and make dumb decisions, and we get back up and practice some more!)

If I am present with what I am doing, be it washing the evening dishes, or vacuuming the living room rug, if I am aware of my breath flowing in and out of my body or the movement of my right arm, is this a spiritual endeavor? I align with Thich Nhat Hahn and say of course. I am cultivating the flowers of my being and the fruits of my presence.

We want to translate our practices from Church, the Temple, Mosque, dance studio, Yoga mat , meditation cushion or wherever we practice our “spirituality” and bring these practices into our daily life. We want to translate these practices into acts of kindness, generosity, and appreciation. This to me is the key to Spiritual Practice.

A question i need to ask myself is how do I want my “spiritual actions” to reverberate? Do I want to express my spirit as an act of awakening or do I want my “spiritual action” to reinforce my shadows and dark side? I know that I do not want to support the dark side of my nature. That is why I cultivate practices. I use them in my daily life to cultivate my light! That is my intention, my meditation in action.

When I become aware of my shadows it is the first step in their transformation. As Lao Tzu says we have to accept what is. The point

is that i become aware, i accept and then I begin working so I don't continue repeating thoughts, words and actions that continue to get in the way of being the person I choose to be. I do not want to pretend my shadows and dark side is not there, I want to use them as resources in my development in becoming the human being i desire to be.

Since everything is but an apparition, perfect in being what it is, having nothing to do with good or bad, acceptance or rejection, one may well burst out in laughter.

Long Chen Pa

Movement As Spiritual Practice

Movement has been accepted as medicine for the body for a long time. Now it is become more clear than ever that movement is good medicine for the mind, emotions and spirit as well.

When I dance, or move, and I am connected and conscious in my body, in the moment and in the movement, or when my intention is to move/dance as an opportunity and practice to express and create, to heal or transform, then I say I am cultivating spirit. I am meditating in action. I am moving in the lineage of centuries of Sufi's, Yogis, Martial Artists, and Trance Dancers from all corners of the world. I am connected to all those people who move to wake up, become more aware, be present in the moment or move just to feel good and take that feeling out into the world.

Every time you dance/move it is an opportunity for Spirit/Life Force to manifest through you in away that is uniquely you, and only you have that ability to do this!

Soto

In the end we want to have practices, whether they are in Movement or Stillness, that serve to wake us up and cultivate awareness that

translates into our daily lives. So that there is no division between our secular and spiritual lives. That our every thought word and action reflect how we want to manifest as human beings.

Footnotes: Examples of anchoring the mind in the body in movement!

I would like to present a five example of exercises to illustrate how I bring my awareness, my mind, into the exercise so that there is no separation of my body and mind in the exercise. I want to clarify that I am using the word mind as *the brain in action*.

For example Tai Qi...one reason I am attracted to Tai Qi is the flow of the movements, i love the movements and how they flow seamlessly together.

First I could focus on aligning my breath with the movements. There are points in the form where it feels much more in sync to breath in and other places where it feels more in sync to breath out. So I keep my attention on the synchronization of the movements and the breath.

Second I focus on a body part throughout the movement sequence. For example my lower back. As I move through the form I am constantly coming back to opening and relaxing my lower back. Some points in the form it can be quite stressful and other points where it is not so stressful and I keep bringing my mind back to my lower back and opening and relaxing it. It is similar to my sitting meditation practice where I keep bringing my attention back to my breath in the present moment. If it wanders into thinking then when I catch it wondering I bring it back. This could be applied to any body part, for example the shoulders, or spine.

Third, if I am doing stretching either standing or lying on the floor I will constantly return my attention to the sensations the stretch or movement is creating. I will continually come back to opening my mind and body in that part of the bodymind. For example if I am sitting and

doing a forward flexion I will breath in to the sensation created by the posture. I will focus on the breath and consequently attention, coming back to the body where the feelings (kinesthetics) are most pronounced. My attention will follow the breath and energy will follow my attention. The sensation could be tight, painful or releasing. I want to be sure that my mind and body are together, that I am aware of what is happening in my body at that moment, and focusing on opening and letting go.

Fourth, when i am doing my forms, be it empty hands, sword or fans I can focus my attention on how my feet are in contact with the ground. How weight in being transferred as I flow from one position to another. I can focus on feeling how my feet are balancing as I stand on one leg or the other. This can be extended up into the lower leg, the knee and the upper leg and iliofemoral joint as well. Balance is a powerful resource in standing on two legs and when we shift to balance on one leg as we extend into a kick, slow turn or jump from one leg to the other it is a compelling place to focus our attention.

Fifth, there are times when I want to allow my mind to move through my body and movements as I move through the forms. Allowing it to flow as the movements flow and be aware of the body in the movement in the moment.