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### **Spiritual Addiction**

A spiritual person can become addicted to spiritual highs and miss the experience of Truth. Spiritual addiction occurs when something great happens and it feels as if you have received a hit of a great drug. As soon as you have it, you want more. There is no drug more potent than spiritual experience. The intellectual component of this addiction is the belief that if you just had enough of these experiences, you would feel great all the time. It's like morphine. You get a hit of it in the hospital because you break your arm, and you think, "If I had a little drip going all the time, life would be relatively pleasant no matter what happens." Spiritual experiences often become like this, and the mind puts them into its familiar pattern, thinking, "If I had this experience all the time, that would be freedom."

Soon you find that your condition is not much better than that of a common drunk, except that drunks know they have a problem because it's not culturally acceptable to be a drunk. The spiritual person is very certain that there is no problem, that his or her inebriation is unlike the other forms of inebriation, and the whole point is to be spiritually inebriated forever. That's the mindset of an addict: "I got it and I lost it. I need it. I don't have it."

In our culture, with most kinds of addiction, the addict is understood to be miserable. But not in the spiritual world. The seeker is told that spiritual addiction is different from all the other addictions. You're not a junkie. You're a spiritual seeker.

This problem will last as long as there is something in you that holds out some hope for the high experience. When that begins to break down, you start to see that pleasant, wonderful, and uplifting experiences are somewhat like very pleasant and uplifting alcohol binges. They feel great for a short time, and then there is an equal and opposite reaction. The spiritual high is followed by a spiritual low. I have seen this in many students.

Once these high and low experiences have played themselves out for a long enough period of time, it starts to dawn on you that maybe the high spiritual experience is just a pendulum swing followed by a low experience. At some point, you may have an ordinary moment and get on to the fact that these pendulum swings are equal and opposite reactions. You realize it's impossible to sustain one part of the pendulum swing because its nature is to move back and forth. There's no way you are going to pin that pendulum to any one point.

This is the movement of the seeker, but it's also the movement of the me because the me is always interested in opposite and equal reactions, trying to sustain one experience and avoid other experiences. That's what the me does. It chases after the good and avoids the bad. As long as identity is in this movement, even if it's at the spiritual high point that seems very noble, you are never going to be free. There is no freedom in this because there is no such thing as sustaining an experience. By its very nature, freedom doesn't have anything to do with sustaining a particular experience, because the nature of experience is to move. Like a clock ticking, it continually moves.

We have to discuss this issue of spiritual addiction, because unless you understand it, the second point I am going to make will just be another fancy spiritual concept. But if you get the first part—that spiritual awakening is not about any particular high experience—then the second part becomes much more meaningful and interesting. The second part is that everything is consciousness. Everything is God. Everything is One. Seeing that everything is One shoots a hole in trying to pin the pendulum swing of experience in any particular place. If it's all One; it's no more One when the pendulum is in the high state than when the pendulum is over in some other

state.

Zen teachers don't explain anything in an abstract way, which is both the beauty and the terror of it. My teacher's way of explaining this would be to hold up his staff and say, "This is Buddha." Then he would bang it on the ground, and everyone would think, "Wow! That's really wild Zen stuff. I wish I knew what he was talking about." Then he would go—bang, bang, bang, bang—and he would say, "This is Zen. This is it!" And everybody would react, "Oh wow!" People would wonder, "What? Where?" but nobody would say that. "It couldn't be *that* because that's just beating a stick on the ground." Since it's not all One to the mind, the mind keeps looking for it, "Where is it? What state is it?" Because the me references everything to its own emotional state, that's what it uses to decide what is true. It thinks that what is true is always a spiritually high emotional state, but this stick pounding is not a very spiritually high emotional state. Then, to make it worse, to make it more horrifying, he would say, "This is a concrete description of the truth. This is Buddha. This is not abstract." Then we would really be defeated.

It is a real blessing to have a teaching that insists upon being concrete, because he could have just said, as I sometimes do, "Everything is consciousness. It's all One." Then the mind thinks, "I got it. I'll buy that. I know what that means." But when a stick bangs on the ground and the teacher says, "That's it!" you can't wrap your mind around it. That banging of the stick is as much God as you're ever going to get. Everything else after that is an abstraction, a movement away from the fact. In Zen, no concessions are made to abstraction. This is both Zen's power and its curse because it forces students to realize the real thing instead of thinking they understand something when they don't.

This puts a spiritual seeker into a dilemma. In contemplating what it means that everything is One, the me starts looking for an experience of Oneness. Then it reads a book about the experience of Oneness, and sees a description of merging and losing oneself in the tree bark or somewhere else, and starts hunting in past emotional experiences to find if it's had that kind of experience.

The merging experience is very pleasant and very beautiful, and you may or may not ever have it. If you have a particular type of body-mind, you might experience having it every five minutes. If you are another type of body-mind, you might have it every five lifetimes. It means nothing whether or not this happens or how often. I have met many people who can merge at the drop of a hat, and they are about as free as a dog chasing its tail in a cage. Merging has nothing to do with being free or actually having any idea what Oneness really is. Oneness simply means that everything is the One. Everything is That, and everything always was That. When there is a very deep knowing that everything is One, then the movement of the me trying to find a past experience ceases. Movement is cut off. Seeking is cut off. The seeker is cut off. Realization cuts everything off all at once. Every experience that you will ever have is the One, whether that experience is merging or having to go to the bathroom. Even when it's beating a stick on the floor and saying, "This is it. This is the Buddha. This is enlightened mind. It doesn't get more enlightened than this!" It is all God.

So every experience is just an expression of that which is not an experience. Everything is that, and there is nothing but that, and there never was anything but that. This is what it really means to know that everything is One. That's why all the sages throughout time have said, "This is the Promised Land." This Oneness is God. This is the One. This is *it*. It's not somewhere else. And as soon as the center is seen to be empty, and you know there is nobody there looking for it to be other than it actually is, this is much better than the highest of the high spiritual states. As nice as those are, the Truth is infinitely more free.