

The Travelers Within



The Path of “Reality-Based Spirituality”

“I spent half my life aspiring to be spiritual. I’m going to spend the next half being fully human. For while the direction may seem different, the destination is exactly the same.”

— Val Jon Farris

Notice the contrast between the reality of solid stone and the whimsical image of its watery reflection? Which of these two mediums would you choose to walk across in order to arrive safe and dry on the far side? Unless you possess the talents of Christ, I’ll bet you’d join me in a stroll across the solid bridge of reality.

While walking life’s path I’ve encountered many fellow travelers who have cast the whimsical image of being “spiritual beings,” devotees of faith, unconditional love and compassion. But, through demonstrations of character the reality is only a handful of these pilgrims were as spiritually mature as they presented themselves to be.

Not everyone aspires to walk the path of a spiritually grounded life, but for those who do, engaging in the “reality gap” between what we espouse our spiritual beliefs to be and what we actually demonstrate in our daily lives is paramount. In essence, if we don’t live the beliefs we espouse they’re nothing more than whimsical reflections.

And it’s not just about demonstrating spiritual beliefs when things are easy, but when they are hard. To make this point personal, just in the last few weeks I’ve endured a landlord changing their mind at the last minute leaving me virtually homeless, my computer system containing three decades of work along with many other irreplaceable possessions were stolen out of storage, the wheel fell off of my vehicle, followed by one of my crowns falling out of my mouth. And just for good measure, vital client funds were lost in the convoluted wire transfer proceedings between USA and Mexican banks.

So how am I doing with bridging my own reality gap? Honestly, I’ve been devastated . . . and I’m in deep gratitude for my life and not at all deterred from living here. And while I’ve had my dark moments, I’m living the spiritual values and beliefs I espouse, which include a commitment

to being real, keeping my heart open even in the face of adversity and maintaining a deep appreciation for all that life gives me and all that it takes away.

Bridging the gap between what we espouse and what we actually live requires understanding the difference between belief and faith. To “believe,” from Old High German, “galaub” means “the mental acceptance of something being true.” While belief is important, by its definition it’s limited to mental capability, which is incapable of providing the continuity of conviction required to embrace life’s intense emotional onslaughts of fear, survival, shock, loss and grief.

The word “faith” on the other hand from the Latin root, “fides” means “trust, self-reliance and loyalty based on promise or conviction.” Notice the mind is not part of the definition? What is present is conviction, which is a deep reality-based and heart-centric characteristic.

There are two aspects to practicing what I call “reality-based spirituality.” First, is grounding ourselves in faith rather than belief, and second is redefining what it means to “be spiritual.” We’ve discussed the first step so let’s explore the second. I don’t claim to know the “true” meaning of spirituality, but what I can do is offer a definition that reflects the word’s original meaning and provides a reality-based understanding of it.

Spirituality, from the Latin root “spiritus,” means “breath of life.” But what is the connection between the human function of breathing and the omnipotence of divinity? It’s a linkage between the practical and the paradoxical. Practical in the sense of being so fundamental that we place no attention on it. And paradoxical in that while it appears to be composed of two separate activities, inhaling and exhaling, it’s actually a single process with no division between the two, other than a momentary “breathless” space.

It is within this breathless space that the connection between our humanity and divinity exists. The act of inhaling is synonymous with drawing in life’s experiences and having reality fill us with its vivid presence. This action not only infuses our flesh with life-giving energy, it inspires new life into our experience of faith as well.

The act of exhaling is about letting go, surrendering what we’ve drawn in. So the practice isn’t only about holding onto life’s experiences, it’s about letting them go. It is this breathless space between holding on and letting go that our humanity and divinity coexists. Ahhh, let us breathe deeply into being both human and divine! And as we do, what do you say we take nice safe, dry stroll across that stone bridge together?



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