

Ride One Horse, Dig One Well?

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In some spiritual traditions there is the idea that if we constantly jump around from one practice to another that we will delay our spiritual growth. As our ego becomes bored or begins to bump up against its dysfunctional discomfort it will try to distract us by finding some exciting new shiny practice or path to pursue. In fact, the Course in Miracles (ACIM) asserts that the ego's entire agenda can be summarized as "seek but do not find." Certainly in our current spiritual

marketplace there is no shortage of new spiritual goods to keep us distracted! This is why throughout history various spiritual teachers have advised seekers to "ride only one horse" to your destination, "dig only one well" in order to reach the spiritual waters in our depths. While this is very true, I would like to offer another idea which is just as true, but perhaps not as obvious. *Our spiritual progress can also come to a screeching halt when we give away our power to an outer authority and continue to stick with a practice, an organization or a teacher that no longer fits us.*

In my own life, as I have trod the windy spiritual path, I have been untrue to myself so many times it is painful and embarrassing to admit. I have given away my power to Zen teachers, Christian doctrine, New Age principles, channeled beings, enlightened people, scientific geniuses, experts, ancient texts, psychics, diet gurus, spirit guides, the internet and friends. I have looked to an outer authority to find out how to think, how to practice, what to practice, how to behave, what to eat, how to breathe, how to process my emotions; in short, how to live my life. As so many of us do, I unconsciously approached the spiritual path in the same way I learned to navigate life in general. In my case, one of my survival strategies was: "Be the good boy, follow what the authority tells you to do, excel at that and you will be okay." Unfortunately, I have come to find out, both in my own process and in working with clients, that the strategies that helped us cope and survive in the world can actually hinder us on the spiritual Way. Instead of maturing spiritually, we stagnate and feel disconnected, depressed and angry. In some instances we can't even acknowledge our struggle because of the misunderstanding that it is not "spiritual" to feel these things.

Over the years, the pain of not being true to myself increased and as a result I became more willing to begin trusting my inner teacher, that intuition that whispers "this is for you" and "this is not for you" or "this is *no longer* for you." And I have found that this inner teacher *is* my "one horse" and my "one well." Even though I may seem to be jumping around from one spiritual tradition to another or move from one practice to another, if I am doing so because my intuition is guiding me to do so, than I am actually still on-track, riding my one horse and digging my one well. However, if I am jumping around as a control strategy to avoid and protect against life then I am indeed caught in my ego. As with so many things, it is not *what* we do as it is *why* we do it that is important. It is crucial to be honest with ourselves and ask "where is my decision coming from and is my intention to control or to grow into greater loving?"

I believe the authority issue is one of the painful lessons we all must face on the spiritual path: Do I override my inner knowing with an outer authority or do I trust my own truth even when it differs from what the experts say?



Image obtained from: <http://dailybackgrounds.com/wp-content/gallery/wild-horse/running-wild-horse.jpg>

This does not sound like such a scary proposition until we are faced with a situation where we are standing before a doctor telling us we will die if we do not undergo a procedure that we sense is not loving for us. Or when we must confront a spiritual teacher who abused their power and yet not discard the great good we received from this person. You might be faced with the prospect of challenging your therapist, your parents or the government by speaking your uncomfortable truth. Or, in order to be true to yourself, you might need to end a relationship or initiate one that is unacceptable to your loved ones. Even though it may not seem obvious at the time, all of these situations are opportunities for our souls to grow into greater sovereignty and to learn to trust our own connection with the Divine directly instead of turning towards the world to tell us what to do. When we listen to and then act on our inner authority we are performing giant spiritual pushups. And this is the meaning of the popular Buddhist saying: “If you see the Buddha on the road, kill him!”

It is so much more convenient and easier to surrender our spiritual sovereignty to an outer authority. We don't need to take responsibility, we don't have to risk, and we don't have to struggle with finding and following our inner truth. We are afraid to cut ourselves free from the safety rope as we find ourselves dangling over the abyss, after all what if we make a big mistake? And yet, we reach a point in our development that if we don't cut that safety cord and begin to connect with our inner essence and trust ourselves, it will happen that the safety rope will block our spiritual circulation and will slowly choke off the connection with our spiritual core.

In my own process of “killing the Buddha”, I found myself quitting formal Zen practice even though my ego told me that I was a coward and was in avoidance. I found myself secretly watching football on TV and really enjoying it. I bought a gun (because my inner child has always loved them). I began eating meat again...the very red kind that really upset my inner militant vegetarian. I found myself buying a very unpractical motorcycle and sometimes riding it really really fast. I found myself listening to the music I actually liked instead of just the spiritual stuff all of the time. Then I found myself meditating, not because I needed to log some more hours on the cushion in the race to enlightenment, but because it felt so wonderful to connect with my core and open to Spirit. And to my surprise I found myself becoming happier, freer and kinder. Life is a lot more joyful and fun now. And life is a lot more spiritual as well. Because all of life *is* spiritual when we are true to ourselves. When we follow the inner teacher it will inevitably guide us home. Our inner teacher will help us drill down into our core and reveal to us the life-giving spring of our spiritual essence. We just need to trust it and act on it. It is a risky venture but I encourage us all to go for it!



(Image obtained from: <http://deskrigde.deviantart.com/art/Jumping-Horse-441654018>)

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