

## Living Fully in the World

On the spiritual journey the goal isn't to be perfect. You might as well drop that fictional goal right away – it's never going to happen. We're human and our humanness may be refined over time, but “perfection” is a non-achievable concept laden with judgment. However, we can do the best we can with the level of understanding that is functioning at any particular time in our life. That is a worthy and achievable goal.

We can recognize that the best we can do is a function of what we've learned up to that point. If we look back ten or twenty years, depending on our age, we might say, “Well, I did something back then which looks embarrassing from my current vantage point. I didn't handle the situation well then. Now, I would do it differently.” It is not something to regret. Instead, we can be happy that we have grown in emotional and/or interpersonal maturity in the last few decades. Great!

We have always been doing the best we could with the tools that we had available. If we're not making our fair share of mistakes, I'd suggest that maybe we're not trying hard enough. To a large extent, we learn by trial and error.

If we go out and try something and are honest enough with ourselves, we may say something like, “Okay, that didn't feel quite right. I noticed that there was a reaction in my friend when I said that and now I realize my actions may not have been the most skillful.” By the way, I like the terms “skillful” and “unskillful” much better than “good” and “bad” because the terms are not quite so charged with judgment.

We can recognize that each of us acts in the best way we can with what we know at the time. I don't say this to whitewash our inappropriate behavior. Rather, it is to recognize that it's okay to be compassionate towards ourselves in recognition of what we understood at any particular point. To go back and judge our past acts by what we now know isn't useful. It tends to lock in a sense of guilt or shame, hatred, anger, or whatever the debilitating emotion may be.

We can have compassion towards ourselves and others for things that have happened and how we've behaved. There is a deeper understanding which is: “Yes, at that point, I did the best I could. It didn't turn out well and I didn't act in a skillful way, but I learned something valuable. Hopefully, in the future, I will act more skillfully when a similar situation arises.”

There's a wise saying: “If I hadn't done so many stupid things, I'd still be stupid today.”

And that's how it is. We learn by being out in the world, taking chances, being willing to be embarrassed, hurt, and wrong; and being willing to be judged by others and feel exposed. This is all part of the package of being open-hearted in the world. It's our chance to learn. If we hide away and try to pretend that we're something that we're not, we're not going to have the exposure to life that's really needed to uncover all of our unskillful tendencies. If we always play it safe and don't take chances, we deprive ourselves of this opportunity.

We usually acquire most of our conditioning early in life and then spend the rest of our lives trying to eliminate our less-than-fully functional habits. It's not that we'll ever get it perfect, but working through some of this conditioning helps to "grease the wheels" of being in the world. If we're willing to be out in the world, take chances and make mistakes, we have the opportunity to improve our way of being in the relative world.

The spiritual journey isn't about getting to some place of perfection. Nor is it a "self-improvement project." However, by working through some of this conditioning it tends to free us from squandering a lot of energy on emotional and inter-personal drama. If we believe that the spiritual journey is defined by our self-perceived level of "perfection," we are very likely to hide behind a PR shield. We will try to camouflage behaviors that we're not really comfortable with. Unskillful behaviors – ones that do not serve our higher goals – just indicate that we still have some shadow work to do. It's better just to be out there in the world and let the world be the teacher that it is.

Please don't act out of every negative tendency that you have. You just need to be willing to see the challenging behavior and allow it to arise within the privacy of your own mind. It's like, "Yes, I can see my unskillful behavior and I will allow it to be without judgment but I opt not to act on it." This type of maturity develops over time if we allow ourselves to live life wholeheartedly and courageously. By doing so, we can achieve the fullest understanding that we can within the very short time we have on this planet.

I encourage you to live wholeheartedly and be willing to stub your toe every now and then. I encourage you to move forward and not be intimidated by Life; to live it fully and give yourself the opportunity to learn the lessons that Life gives you.

Trust Life to give you the lessons and experiences that are needed for your own very unique personal journey, growth and understanding.