

## Finding the Sacred

by Rodney Smith

What would a life look like that is aligned with its deepest intentions toward the liberation of the heart? Would it be configured around retreats, a monastic tradition, or a hermitage? Would it be a reclusive celibate life and one of continual meditation? Or could it look like each of our lives, whatever we might be doing, including being engaged with work, family, and relationship?

However our life manifests, and that will be vastly different for everyone, there is only one way to live spiritually, and that is to fully embody the lifestyle we are in. Life is itself spiritual; nothing is needed to make it more spiritual. An urban Buddhist is one who understands that fact and is willing to fully engage with all aspects of his/her life without spiritually prioritizing any form or expression of it.

Traditional meditators do not concede this point easily. Sitting in a special upright posture and attending long silent retreats hold a special place in their spiritual priorities. When someone mentions all environments are equally conducive to meditation, they nod, but feel they know otherwise. They may think that such clichés are used to placate those who don't have the opportunity to sit residential retreats.

Ideas about which activities are and are not spiritual often come from our teachers. Teachers whose central practice has been silent retreats can give double messages, saying our life is our practice while simultaneously implying that serious practitioners focus on retreats. The subliminal message that retreating is a spiritual priority sticks, and many find themselves in conflict with a life that does not allow the fulfillment of this suggestion.

*Emphasizing the sacredness of any expression of our spiritual journey ultimately robs us of a full-hearted intention toward every other aspect of our sacred existence.* All expressions of life require the same intentionality and are equally valid gates to freedom. The only problem is the *belief* that they are not. I am not suggesting that retreats do not have a significant role to play in many people's spiritual path, I am saying that liberation of the heart will not occur when we separate the sacred from the mundane. This belief

fractures intentionality, activates self-doubt, and places a false idea between the truth and us. One thought believed is enough to separate heaven from hell.

When our intentions are corrupted, nothing works spiritually. Delaying our spiritual intention for the right moment, environment, state of mind, or practice leaves us perpetually frustrated when those conditions are not met. We delay our spiritual journey by waiting for the return of the sacred. Awakening the heart occurs now or never. We are very far from realization when we wait for the right conditions in order to show up for our life.

When people ask what practice works for a full and active life, I usually suggest surrendering. Ultimately spirituality is not a practice; it is abiding within the sacred continually before our eyes. We miss the sacred because we place our personal agenda above our intention to merge with the sacred. Surrender is the simple action of relinquishing our need to be separate by letting the sacred take priority over our desires.

Surrendering is not associated with a special environment or state of mind and can be done anywhere at any time. We do not surrender to god; we surrender our protest to reality without qualification. The mind quiets and the heart overflows. We release the need to control the outcome. Control is how we assert our self-importance and assure the pursuit of our personal agenda.

To surrender, pause, drop all resistance, and simply say, "Not two". Do not move from whatever the mind is doing in this moment. Do not reframe it, correct it, or alter it in any way. We will find something opening around all states of mind when every state is fully embraced. That something is what sees out of our eyes and hears out of our ears. It is pure awareness. Awareness is what holds the senses. Not what the eye sees but what allows the eye to see; that is the sacred and it is within every experience of life, waiting for acknowledgment.