

Spirituality and Karma

To define ourselves as spiritual means that we are affirming, to ourselves and to others, that we accept ourselves as being more than just a body — that there is an invisible part to our being that we want to include as we navigate through life. To be spiritual means we trust that we are living in a universe that loves and cares for us. It means that we believe that we are able to make mistakes, but that those mistakes do not alter our identity. To be spiritually minded means we believe that we can let karma rule. Karma is the cosmic law of a spiritual justice system of cause and effect. Scientifically, karma is reflected as the principle determining that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. In both the universal and worldly courts of justice, we adhere to cosmic, rather than human, justice. We trust that what we put into life ultimately will come back to us. Life is a cul-de-sac, what goes in will eventually come out. Karma also means that we should not be so quick to determine what karmic experiences are being learned through the encounter of two souls in this lifetime. We trust that for every cause, there is an effect and that the effect experienced in this lifetime may have its cause in another.

Spiritual individuals understand that spirit is in a constant dance to seek balance. "An eye for an eye" is ultimately understood to mean that we must receive that which we have given. "*I have no neutral thoughts,*" (W-pI.16) is reflective of the fact that all thought creates form on some level of experience, and of the understanding that thought always precedes action. We trust that if a person makes

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the choice to take another's life, they will eventually have to go through the experience of having their life taken in order to balance their karmic debt or live a life filled with challenge. This law does not need to be governed by people because it is perfectly governed by laws that are inherent in Spirit.

Spiritual people absolutely trust that they are always in the right place at the right time and with the right people. "*There are no accidents in salvation.*"(M-3-1:6) It means that we can relax in faith, knowing that we did, in fact, write our particular chapter within the collective Book of Life before we incarnated into a body. On each page in our book, there are opportunities geared to rouse us to our identity, in settings that include specific people. These people have the capacity to mirror and to jointly heal the wounds that we share.

There are within our chapter of such a symbolic book several paragraphs on each page, of which we must choose one. This one paragraph will be the determiner of the experience that has within it the potential to awaken us. The lowest or bottom paragraph experience is derived from a particular frame of thought most paralleling fear, while the top or highest paragraph is most paralleling love and forgiveness. The assortment in between reflects all possibilities of awareness. The highest or most God-reflective perspective is derived from the highest or most conscious loving thought that we are currently able to embrace. In this sense, then, truth is like water in that it seeks its own level. Yet it is important to realize that the destination of all paragraphs, so to speak, is the same, only the perception of self, and the road traveled, differ.

In other words, I can go to the neighboring city taking back roads or the most common route. I can drive in a worn-out 1990 Honda Civic, a 2001 E-Class Mercedes Benz, or anything in between. Each choice will provide a very different ride and experience. However, regardless of the choice I make, I will ultimately end up in the destination city. In this same way, our level of awareness gives rise to our thoughts, which in turn give birth not only to our experiences, but also to how we view them. To clarify, here are some examples of the differing levels of awareness that can determine how we will experience life:

Levels of Consciousness Through Which We View the World

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Level Seven — Christ Consciousness — I am the Holy Child of God, one with the Creator. I have accepted that my nature is one of self-referral, and that all things are lessons that God would have me learn. I respond to every situation from a place of love. I am awake and observe, rather than judge, all things. Spirit comes before matter. I have awakened to find that the mind, body, and spirit are unified and are experienced as dimensions of the totality of what I am. My desires are met effortlessly in the instant that I become aware of them. At this level, my desires generally seek to reflect love, and love's presence.

Six — I am a reflection of my Creator. I am innocent and still as God created me, but sometimes I forget that I am the creator of my experience. For the most part, I have clarity of mind, and my needs are met both spiritually and physically. The relationship between my desires and the experience of those desires is almost instant. I drift between dreaming and wakeful consciousness. My experiences reflect both.

Five — I have recognized that miracles are both natural and possible and have begun calling on a power higher than myself to guide my life. I have begun to love myself because I am learning to release the belief that I am guilty. I regularly pray or meditate and have begun to recognize that both my will and God's will are one. My desires are accomplished through synchronicities. Through authentic identity, I have begun to bend the rules of time and space. Forgiveness has become a way of life.

Four — I believe in a power greater than myself, but have not found it to be constant and reliable because I confuse the roles of cause and effect. I feel guilty for past mistakes and therefore still have a tendency to judge and get angry. I still view God as a spirit or intelligence outside and apart from myself. I project my faults and feelings of guilt onto others. I am beginning to understand that forgiveness is a source of healing, yet am still afraid to look like a doormat for practicing it.

Three — For the most part, I feel as though I am always responding to the unkind actions of others. I feel that I am a good person most of the time, but life does not reflect my goodness. I try diligently to adhere to the rules of the family and social dictates, in order to feel safe. I am often judging others to feel better inside. I am afraid of God, or do not believe in Him because He has abandoned

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me. I do not correlate my thoughts with my experience and with the fact that my thinking creates my reality; in fact, I have not even paid attention to what I think about. I have a hidden victim-consciousness that propels me to seek safety from the ego. My desires are attained only through "hard work."

Two — I believe myself to be a sinner. I am not worthy of a creator's love, if in fact there is a creator. I have a cynical outlook, and I believe only in what I can experience with my five senses. I have a rational mind that does not leave room for the unknown; in fact, the unknown terrifies me so much that I deny being afraid by equating the unknown with the absurd. I am highly judgmental and believe that my happiness comes from others' conforming to my will. I am ignorant about the relationship of thought and experience; therefore, I completely confuse the levels of cause and effect. I am only able to attain my desires through aggressively "taking the bull by the horns," and to some degree believe that what one person attains is then no longer available to others.

One — I am a master of denial. I identify with my ego. I may or may not believe in God and if I do, I will not believe in a loving God but rather in a God of vengeance. In fact, I find the idea of God to be a good tool with which to manipulate others. What I perceive in myself to be negative characteristics is what I project onto God, and through this action, I feel justified to take actions into my own hands. I am still reliving my past and feel exonerated in judging and attacking others based on that past pain. I am almost totally ego-driven and use chemical or pharmaceutical substances to avoid having to deal with my deep yet unconscious feelings of guilt. I anger easily and try to escape my own pain by attacking others. I am almost capable of acting cruelly without conscience. Because of my own antagonistic nature, I assume that others are going to attack me, so I continually seek protection from the ego.

If part of my soul's journey towards enlightenment includes the experience of being arrested for a crime I did not commit, then each of these levels of thought will provoke very different responses to that same experience.

At Level Seven, I will trust that this incident is to experience and demonstrate my understanding of the power of love. I will not in any way perceive myself as a victim of the accuser.

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At Level Six, I will see this incident as a final step towards my awakening. I will trust that I have a karmic agreement with the souls involved, and that the event is meant to test and reveal my faith in God. Forgiveness will be immediate as I recognize that only love is real.

At Level Five, the recognition that forgiveness is required in order to find peace will be entertained and embraced. The strength to forgive will come from calling on a power higher than myself.

At Level Four, the arrest for a crime I did not commit will be perceived as an assault on my identity. I will, at first, be overrun by fear, but then will begin to consider another way to deal with the situation, such as prayer and meditation for achieving clarity of mind. I will begin to assess areas in my life where I have falsely accused another, which will open the way to my practicing forgiveness someday.

At Level Three, I will feel tormented and believe that I am a victim of circumstance. I will look to blame others for the incident. I will find it extremely difficult to forgive. I will think that it is natural for me to respond to the incident. I will not entertain the idea that there might be reasons why this is happening to me because I fear facing the partial responsibility that I may have.

At Level Two of consciousness, I will respond with outrage. I will completely deny that there is a God. I will therefore not have a place to turn to for a deeper understanding. The situation will trigger the memory of all previous incidents and situations in which I have been a victim, and I will feel justified in seeking revenge in almost any form. Finally, at **Level One**, this incident will be seen as just another kick in the teeth! I will believe myself to be justified in my rage. I will continually seek to find a person other than myself to attack, in order to cope with my deep feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness. I will tend to be violent, and feel justified in being so, because life has dealt me such a bad hand! I am a total victim of life, reversing cause and effect.

Within each of these levels of awareness, we can find ourselves. We will have enacted all of them in differing experiences. Our goal, however, is to eventually remain in the top three levels depicted here.

These foundational levels of awareness engender specific experiences so that the soul may become aware of its thinking. The

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Course teaches that the purpose of the world is to reflect our thoughts back to us. From this premise, we are permitted to become the active participant and witness of the challenging events in our life, rather than being the helpless sleeping actor, who would otherwise have perceived the event to be both random and painful. Through spiritual thinking, we allow our faith to begin navigating us through particular life experiences that will increase our understanding of who we are, and ultimately of where our power lies. It means we understand that we are the conscious actors in the play called life, fulfilling our part. Consequently, we come to trust that our higher self is the director.

Spiritually minded people use their five senses to interact with their perceptual reality, but they also use intuitive senses to define and experience their authentic reality. These intuitive abilities are intrinsic in all of us — natural extensions of our authentic self with which we were created. Living spiritually means we have discovered that there is both an inner and an outer world in which we interact. Through prayer and meditation, we explore and discover that the inner world is more reliable in truth than the outer. This applies because we are not so reliant on what our physical senses report as reality. We recognize that the outer is reflective of the inner and that therefore the cause is within. We learn to trust our gut feeling and our heart's wisdom. We confidently move forward, absolute in our ability to affect our world as we act through love.

To trust this inner world takes faith and confidence in one's identity as a spiritual being. When we are spiritual, we do not necessarily operate by the laws of time and space — instead, we become free to bend the rules that no longer seem to make moral sense. We recognize that, to some degree, we have become collectively hypnotized by social expectations and rules, but that escape is always an option. Escape then becomes defined as leading our lives only by the cosmic laws of love. To live our lives spiritually means that we have accepted and established that Mind, Spirit, Love, and Light are interchangeable words, all describing who we truly are.