

Don't Go Looking for Things to Clean Up

On the achiever's habit of turning inner work into another project — and why, when the day is good, the most spiritual thing you can do is enjoy it.

There is a particular kind of person who finds the inner work and immediately turns it into a project. I say that with a great deal of affection, because I recognize it. You discover that there are old patterns, stored fears, knots of energy from years ago, and the part of you that built a career thinks: *good, a list*. Let's find them all. Let's get them handled.

So on a perfectly good day, you go searching. You poke at your childhood. You look for the trigger underneath the trigger. You sit down to meditate and treat the quiet as an audit, scanning for what might still be wrong. If nothing is coming up, you wonder whether you are avoiding something.

I understand the impulse. It looks like diligence. It looks like taking your growth seriously. But I think it is the same achievement machinery, simply pointed inward, and it tends to make the work harder, not easier.

Here is why. When I notice something stirring in me — a discomfort I don't understand, a mood that comes up around certain ideas — my inclination now is not to grab it. If I put my hands on it and start manipulating it, it gets weird. It starts changing shape according to my ego, or my fear, or my need to have it solved by Thursday. What was a natural process becomes a performance.

So at first I just want to watch. I want to be present with it and notice when it comes up, what is happening around it, what thoughts are running through, what I am feeling in the body. I collect data. I relax. And my experience is that when it is time to know, you will know. When something deep is ready to open, it opens. Until then, relaxing and breathing is not a lesser form of the work. It is strong work.

Michael Singer used to say something I come back to often: make hay while the sun shines. If you are in a period of life where you are not struggling, where you are following your guidance and doing what you are here to

do, then do that. Some discomfort may come up around certain things, and it may not be its time yet.

“Maybe it comes up later, maybe it doesn't, but I wouldn't go seeking for places to clean up.”

TIM O. DAVIS, FRIDAY GROUP CALL

That is not denial. Denial is refusing to look at what is in front of you. This is refusing to go digging for what is not.

There is a trust underneath it. Life is a very good teacher, and it does not need your help writing the curriculum. The places that need cleaning will be shown to you, usually at inconvenient moments and in ordinary circumstances — a conversation that lands hard, a change you did not choose. When that comes, you meet it. You breathe, you stay open, you let it move. You do not need to go out hunting for it in between.

And in between, something else matters just as much. We come with nothing and we leave with nothing. All we really have are the experiences between birth and death. At the same time that we are growing, we are here to have fun too. To enjoy ourselves, make art, be with beautiful people, become beautiful in our own way, and share love.

There is a lot more to life than the pain of growth. If the only relationship you have with yourself is repair, you will miss the thing all the repair was supposed to make room for — the simple inner enjoyment of being alive.

So if today is a good day, let it be a good day. Enjoy it fully. That is not skipping the work. On some days, that is the work.

THE PRACTICE

On your next good day, notice the urge to go looking for what is still wrong. Name it gently — there's the project manager — and set it down. Spend ten minutes doing something purely for the enjoyment of it. Trust that whatever needs your attention will find you.