

The Higher Self Doesn't Give You the Answer

It gives you the motive. That is a smaller gift than you wanted, and a far more useful one.

People come to a practice like this hoping it will function as an oracle. Get quiet enough, go deep enough, and the correct choice will be handed to you — take the job or don't, stay or go, say the hard thing on Tuesday or let it pass. We want the inner life to work like a very good consultant. And when it doesn't produce the answer on schedule, we conclude we are doing it wrong, or that there was nothing in there to begin with.

I understand the hope, because I had it. Early on I would sit with a decision and turn it over and over, laying out this path and then that path, and I could genuinely drive myself a little crazy doing it. Underneath the deliberation was a belief I had never examined: that one option had been ordained as the golden one, and if I picked the other I was finished. That God was that critical. That there was a right door and a wrong door and my job was to guess.

What I actually found was different. When two options are truly balanced, there is no wrong choice — the balance is the message. Get as quiet as you can, and then pick one, and go. Spirituality is not supposed to leave you bogged down and paralyzed in the name of discernment. We are energy. Energy moves.

“To go to the higher self isn't to have the answer, but it's to have the right motivation.”

TIM DAVIS

So if the deeper part of you is not in the business of picking doors, what is it doing? It is setting the motive. That is the whole function, and it is not a consolation prize.

Consider what a situation looks like when the motive is off. Someone crosses you. There are four or five ways you could respond and any of them could be defended out loud. But somewhere in your chest a case is being built, a villain is being cast, a hero is being cast — usually you — and a story is going up around the whole thing. Whatever you choose from inside that construction will carry the construction with it. You can pick the technically correct action and still poison the room, because the room does not read your action. It reads what you were doing underneath it.

Now run the same situation with the motive clean. The options do not change. The information does not improve. But the question you are holding while you act is different: what is

really in my heart while I do this? Am I coming from fear, or from love? And the strange practical result is that once the motive is settled, the choice usually stops being agonizing. Half the options quietly fall away, not because you analyzed them but because they were only ever there to serve the fear.

This is why I keep saying the work is not behavioral. Behavior is downstream. You can manage behavior for a long time — many capable people run entire careers on managed behavior — and the energy underneath goes on doing exactly what it was doing. Then something gets tight, a deadline or a diagnosis or a betrayal, and the managed layer comes off in about four seconds and what was underneath is what shows up in the room.

So the practice is smaller and more repetitive than the oracle version. It is not one great descent that returns with instructions. It is remembering, ten or fifteen times a day, that there is a place to come from. That is most of it: simply remembering to access it, because we get distracted, and difficult things happen, and we forget who we actually are for hours at a time. Then something reminds us and we come back and we come from there again.

And there is one more piece of information available in this, which people miss because it looks like a health tip. When you check the motive and find fear, look at your body before you look at your character. Have you slept. Have you eaten. Have you been going too hard for three weeks straight. Awareness is not only good for spotting your defects; it is good for knowing when the personality needs a rest rather than a reckoning. A great deal of what we take for spiritual failure is a tired animal that has not been fed.

You may not get the answer today. You will very likely get the motive, if you sit long enough to check. And the motive is the part that will still be true after the decision is made, after the plan is wrong, after the circumstances change into something no oracle could have predicted anyway.

Which leaves one honest question for the next hard thing on your calendar. Not what is the right move. What am I coming from?

THE PRACTICE

Before the next hard call, ask the only question that reliably changes the outcome: am I coming from fear, or from love?