



What I Learned at the Inner Journey *Four lessons on living spiritually*

by Elizabeth J. Agnew, MS

My work ranges from a highly strategic business focus to a highly personal, integrative, spiritual focus. Twice a year my mentor and I host a retreat called The Inner Journey which falls on the latter end of that spectrum, teaching about and offering time for finding the connection between spirituality and psychology.

As a “holder of the space” at this retreat, I don’t get a chance to do my own personal exploration in real time. I take what I learn intellectually and integrate it later. This article is a place for me to share my personal learning with you. As you read this, remember that you can take any of my personal lessons and make them your own.

I am so much more

The great myth of the ego, Pittman says, is that it thinks it is all there is. I am so much more than my thoughts, my persona, my feelings, even. This has helped me get curious about the parts of myself that my ego either a) denies or b) is unaware of. What else is possible for me?

For myself, I am going to be intentional about noticing when my ego denies parts of myself. I expect that it will arise through thoughts like “I am not a flake” or “I would never ignore an email like that” or “how could he be so selfish!” This part of ourselves we deny is called the shadow. Shadow work is powerful stuff.

The importance of analysis

We have the resources we need within ourselves to learn from every single experience thrown our way. We just have to be willing to do the hard work of analyzing the experience and drawing healthy connections back to our sense of self. We can do that through reflection, through journaling, or through talking with someone who can listen without judgment.

No matter how you work with your experiences, you must be analyzing them. That is to say, expanding your understanding and making new connections in your mind. You could also do any of these suggested activities and not learn from them if you do them with judgment and close-mindedness. My lesson from the Inner Journey was to recommit to reflecting on my experiences so I can integrate them and expand the totality of who I am. That is to say, so I can pull out more of what’s in my soul.

Creativity

Creativity is one way we human beings can practice our spirituality. To create something is to express what it means to be human. This could mean creating anything. I have begun the process of reconnecting to my creative identity.

I just bought 25 colored pens at FLAX (an awesome art store in San Francisco). I spent about 30 minutes (testing the patience of my partner, Andy) choosing the perfect pens. Experiencing the smoothness and precision of these pens as I put words to paper are some of my most satisfying moments (you pen snobs out there will understand). Writing just one word with an awesome new pen allows me to see myself in a new and bigger way than I had before.

Look for symbolism in the mundane

Part of my inspiration for purchasing the pens was life coach Jennifer Lee. I ran into her at a workshop and we landed in adjacent seats on the first day. She is a creativity coach and founder of Artizen Coaching, and I looked on with envy as she got out her pen set to take notes. I realized in that moment that my envy was a personal message: I was seeing a part of myself in Jenn that had let go of. I let this moment have symbolic meaning: I was receiving a message that I needed to reconnect with my own creativity. The final lesson I'll share with you from my Inner Journey is a renewed vigilance for finding the bigger meaning in ordinary everyday occurrences. And the cool thing is that you get to make up what this bigger meaning is. It's whatever you want it to be that you can believe.

We are all always on an Inner Journey – in every single moment. Stay awake, look around, find meaning in the mundane, and let your life be one hell of a ride!



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