

GO DEEPER

Week #5 of a 10-Week Series, "Your Spiritual Quest: The Adventure of Your Life!"

Sunday Feb. 11, 2024

So this single man was living with his father and working in the family business for a few years when he found out that he was going to inherit a fortune when his sickly father died. And he thought, well; he should probably get a wife to share his life and share his money with.

And so a couple of weeks later he was at an evening investment meeting and he spotted the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. I mean she took his breath away she was so beautiful. So he went up to her and said, "You know, I may look like an ordinary guy. but just in a few years, my father's going to die and I will inherit over \$20 million."

Impressed, the woman took his business card and three days later, she became a stepmother. [Rimshot drum roll – congregants laugh] All right. So clearly, clearly, she was better at estate planning than he was. [Congregants laugh]

So how many people have had a time where you felt like your life was happy, and that you had a great life, but you still felt like something was missing? Anybody ever have that? And how many people have ever wanted more, know your life was meant for more, but you weren't quite sure what more was?

And so, if I had to ask you to guess what you think that "more" for your life would be, what would it be? Would it be love? Would it be passion? Would it be adventure? Would it be laughter? Would it be friendship? Would it be community? Would it be money? Would it be success? Would it be balance? Would it be happiness?

You know, as good as all these things are, I would say none of them can fill that thing that is missing. None of them could be that "more" that we are yearning for. The actor Jim Carrey said, *"I wish everyone could get rich and famous and have everything they've ever dreamed of so they can see that that's not the answer. You can chase followers and money all you want -- and don't let me stop you -- but I hope you'll realize beyond your basic needs, they won't do much."*

Paramahansa Yogananda has the answer -- a three -word answer -- to what is missing in the "more" that we're all searching for, that maybe we don't even realize that we're searching for it. And those three words are, *"To know God."* To know God is our spiritual quest. To know God is what it takes to reach self-realization. To know God is what it takes for us to unify our mind with the mind of God, and to know our oneness with the Divine. You know, it is the "more" that we are all seeking that nothing else can be a substitute for.

You know, George Harrison -- everybody knows he was the guitarist for the Beatles. I mean, and this guy was living the life! Doing the thing that he enjoyed more than anything, that brought him great joy: music. And they were hugely successful; they were hugely wealthy and famous. And he said this. He said, *"Everything else can wait, but the search of God cannot wait."* Because he knew that that is the thing that makes everything else possible. That is the thing that makes us be able to enjoy all the other aspects of our lives. It is to know God.

So, I want you to think about your spiritual life. your spiritual practice. And I ask you: Are you going as deep to seek God and know God in your personal spiritual practices as you can? How many people know you can go deeper than your current level of spiritual practice?

Today we're in Week #5 of our 10-week series, "Your Spiritual Quest; The Adventure of Your Life." Week #1 was called "Bring It On!" And it is not to run or hide from experiences in life, knowing that everything in our lives is there to help us on our spiritual quest to know our oneness with God. Week #2 was called "Dream Big!" That we're not here to play small; we're here to dream big! That we live in an abundant universe and we are creators ... and dreams are what help open possibilities in our lives. Week #3 was called "Love Large." And it's not to close our hearts off; it is to open our hearts and love big, love large. It's to love the people in our lives more deeply and fully. It is to love those whom we may not see eye-to-eye with and send them love ... and also send love to ourselves.

Last week we looked at "Roll with the Changes." Because things are changing in our lives always. And sometimes we resist change and don't like it, but changes are renewing principle. And we've got to roll with those changes to gain the best from it, and to have those lift us to a higher place.

Today we're going to look at the importance of "Going Deeper." And so here we're going to look at the four stages of consciousness that we have to go deeper to process, to lift ourselves to our higher and spiritual quest. And so the first stage of consciousness is "TO ME." This is the victim consciousness where we think that everything's happened in "to me." People are doing this "to me." You know, we think that external factors beyond our control have more control over our own peace and happiness than we do.

You know, in this victimhood we can feel powerless; we can feel that other people play a greater role in our own success and happiness than we do. And we think things like, "*It's somebody else's fault.*" We always have excuses and reasons why we aren't as happy or as successful. And we tend to play the "blame game." You know, we blame our parents; we blame our lack of education; we blame the government; we blame the economy.

And the good thing about this stage is that it can be a stimulation for awakening us to think, "There's got to be a better way than this." But for us to go deeper into another level of consciousness, we've got to let go of something to free us to move forward. And we need to let go of blame and to accept responsibility for our lives.

So we go from "to me" and then we go to "BY ME." This is the empowerment stage where we realize that our words and thoughts and actions have an impact on what I create in my life. That we all have the power to shape our lives, to improve our lives and change our lives. We all have the power to fulfill our goals and dreams; that we can overcome. And we begin to learn that there's spiritual laws that we can use and activate to fulfill our dreams and desires. And we realize that we are powerful spiritual beings.

And so this is the Creator consciousness. And as good as this one is, there's something we need to let go if we want to grow and go deeper in our consciousness evolution and development. And what we need to let go of is the need to be in control and think we always have to have everything "my way."

And then we move from "by me" to "THROUGH ME." This is where we go from "my way" to "God's way." This is when we allow God to flow through us and move through us. And you remember when St. Francis said, "*Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace*"? That is what "through me" is; It is being a channel and a conduit for God. And not trying to force and make things our way, but to open ourselves and ask God to move through us. To bring more light or joy or peace or whatever it is that we are meant to open ourselves to.

And as great and wonderful as this level is, what we need to let go to grow and to go deeper is any sense of separation. That God isn't separate from me, and I'm just a vehicle. We go to the next phase, which is

"AS ME." This is the stage of consciousness of oneness. Remember when Jesus said. *"The Father and I are one"*? It is the full embodiment of the Christ; the full embodiment of the mind of God within us. That we are ultimately one, and it is when we reach self-realization.

So those four stages are "to me"; and we evolve to "by me"; then we evolved to "through me"; and then we evolve to "as me." That is the God consciousness.

And so we're going to look at four things we can do to deepen our spiritual practice and our relationship with God to reach our spiritual quest.

The first one is to **SEEK GOD SINCERELY**. You know, in the book of Jeremiah 29:13, it says one of my favorite scriptures that I use a lot in the prosperity class. And it says, *"If you seek me, you will find me if you seek me with all your heart."* And that is telling us the only thing we need to do. That anyone can find God if we seek God with all of our hearts. And that is to seek God with a sincere desire: a sincere desire to know the Source that created the sun and the stars, and the Intelligence behind all good in our lives. That it is a sincere desire to know God, to make that our highest desire.

And it's not just the payoff; it is to actually know and feel God, the Creator, ourselves. It's not about what we're seeking; it's about the Source that we are connecting with. And to make it a priority in our lives. That's why it says, *"Seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you."*

So you ask you: How much of a priority is God in your life? How much of a priority is prayer and daily prayer and meditation in your life? *"If you seek me, you will find me if you seek me with all your heart."* If you make that the focus and priority of your life.

The second thing about seeking God with all our hearts means our hearts need to be clean and our hearts need to be pure. You know, we can't seek God with a heart that thinks, *"I hate that guy's guts and I can't stand his face ... but Lord, I want to know the fullness of your holy presence."* [Congregants laugh] And so what that is saying is that, for us to deepen our spiritual practice, we need to check in with ourselves when our heart isn't pure, when our heart isn't clean.

So I ask you right now: Is there anyone in your life you're holding any resistance or resentment towards? Anyone in your life you're holding a grudge? Anyone in your life that you need to forgive and release and let go? Because every time we hold on to that, guess what? We make it very difficult to seek God with all of our hearts, because sometimes our hearts are clouded with hurt and pain and resentment.

And so we must get into a place where we recognize it regularly and then say to ourselves, *"Create in me a clean heart, O, Lord."* Or, *"God, help me forgive and release this negative pain to purify my heart again."* And it is an important practice for us if we want to deepen our deeper connection to God.

Another important thing when we say, *"Seek God with all of our heart,"* it means we need to open our hearts and we need to connect and have a desire to feel God with our hearts. You know, heart math talks about heart coherence. You know, and there are times we consciously close our hearts. Anybody ever been conscious of a time that you closed your heart off to somebody? Okay, one lady and myself; that's okay. [Congregation laughs]

But in the same way we can consciously close our hearts, we can actually consciously open our hearts. So everybody close your eyes; take a deep breath. Go to your heart. And I just want you to take a deep breath and just open your heart. Feel your heart open. Again, deep breath again. And consciously open your heart. And with your heart filled in love, I want you to seek God with all your heart. Not for any

payoff, but just to know and feel. the loving presence of the living spirit of God in you. One more time: deep breath, and seek God with all your heart. Just feel God and experience God in your heart. Amen.

You can open your eyes. Helen Keller said this. She said, *"I believe that God is in me as the sun is in the color and fragrance of a flower – the Light in my darkness, the Voice in my silence."* What I loved about that when I read that; I thought, *"My God, that felt so sincere."* Didn't it? Didn't it feel so pure and sincere? And every one of us has in us to have a sincere and pure desire to know the fullness and the goodness of God.

How many people ever had a waiter or a waitress kind of serve you half-heartedly and just went through the motions. Did anybody ever have that? And everybody, anybody ever been half-hearted in something you did? And then how about when someone's full-hearted? When they put their full heart into serving you? And when you've done that, it is a world of difference.

See, we all pray every day. We all meditate every day. day. But are we doing it at the level of going deeper? Deeper with sincerely seeking God with all our heart when we pray? To sincerely making sure our heart is clean? And to opening our heart to feel the love of God in our own hearts? It makes a huge difference in our spiritual quest to seek God with all our hearts.

The second thing about going deeper is to **SURRENDER TO GOD FULLY**. Surrendering sounds like giving up. And the reason it sounds like giving up -- because it is. [Congregants laugh] We're giving up our ego when we surrender. We're giving up our own limited beliefs and our fears. We're giving that all up to surrender to the fullness and the goodness and the allness of God.

I've shared a few times -- when I was a kid, the statement that scared me the most was *"To surrender my will and my life to God."* I was like, *"Oh, my God; suppose He picks something hard for me!"* You know, and that whole idea. And I used to think, *"Well, I mostly surrender my will and my life to God."* [Congregants laugh]

And when you look at surrender, you know what it is? It is based in faith and trust. That God has a plan for our lives – to bless us, not harm us. But to give us hope, to give us a future, to give greater possibilities. When I think of surrender, here's what helps me: *"I surrender to love. I surrender to peace. I surrender my life to wisdom and guidance. I surrender my life to joy."* That helps me let go more. Because the more we're able to surrender, guess what? We open our lives to be a greater channel for God's light and joy and goodness. We open greater channels to allow God to flow through us.

And what happens is: the more we surrender, guess what? We can go deeper into silence. The more we surrender, we can go deeper into being still. The more we surrender, we can go deeper into listening to the still, small voice of God. The more we are able to surrender, the more we can know God.

Eric Butterworth -- in his book, *Discover the Power Within You* – says when a battery is plugged into an outlet, the current just comes in and recharges it. The battery doesn't need to say, *"Hey, electricity, come over here and do this. Give me an extra shot over here!"* Don't need any of that; it just actually flows in and recharges. And so we really say that the battery surrenders to the current and it gets charged.

And could you imagine in our lives if we just surrendered to God? And knowing we will be fully charged, we don't have to direct God to do this or do that. That our lives will be charged and filled with the current of God's presence. No need to resist or hate or bargain or beg. You just plug in and surrender to God and you will be filled. You will be recharged in amazing and wonderful ways. You know,

surrendering is about trusting God enough that you're willing to let go and open your life to a fuller and richer experience. And it is a powerful thing. Are you willing to let go? Are you willing to go deeper by surrendering your heart and your life fully to God?

The next thing about going deeper is to **INVEST TIME DAILY WITH GOD**. So how many people here have ever been too busy to pray? And you just didn't have enough time to pray? Anybody here not have enough time to pray?

You know, sometimes we can be like the guy who had this huge library and one whole wall was devoted to books about how to pray. And he was giving his friend a tour one day, and his friend said, *"Oh, my God, you must have so much knowledge and wisdom and insight about meditation that you must have some deep and powerful and mystical experiences!"* And the owner of the book said, *"Oh, no; I'm too busy reading the books on how to meditate to actually have time to meditate."* [Congregants laugh]

And that sounds ridiculous, but I bet we all do it in some form ourselves. You know, time is an important thing in a relationship. It helps nurture and bring a sense of intimacy and closeness. And same in our relationship with God: time, time, time.

When I was in Kansas City, I got there and an elderly gentleman named Eugene Cross said to me, *"I'm going to help you with your retirement plan."* I said, *"I don't have a retirement plan."* He said, *"Exactly."* [Congregants laugh] He said, *"I helped the founding minister, because he didn't have one. I helped the second minister. And I had a feeling I was going to be helping you."* And so anyway, he taught me about investing in stuff and dollar cost averaging and all these kind of things.

And one thing Sam said that stuck out and he kept repeating; he said, *"Richard, it's not a matter of timing. It's a matter of the amount of time in the fund ... the amount of time in the market."* He said there are going to be fluctuations up and down. But by consistently investing and letting time take place, he said there will be interest; there will be compounding interest. I mean, things will grow. Your wealth will grow because of the amount of time spent invested in the fund.

And really, I think what he was saying is also true about God. The amount of time we invest in meditation will give us interest -- compounding interest -- and produce dividends like breakthroughs and insights and mystical and wonderful spiritual moments. Time is a factor of helping us go deeper. It is something that can help us if we're willing to use it.

Several years ago, I went to the Soka Gakkai Buddhist facility at Coulter. And you know that chant they do? *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo? Nam-myoho-renge-kyo?* They just repeat it, you know, 20, 30 minutes. I mean, it's long. And so I did it, and I'm going, *"Nam-myoho-renge-kyo; nam-myoho-renge-kyo; nam-myoho-renge-kyo."* And it's just mechanical. But after about 20 minutes, something happened, and I dropped in to a place of calmness and peace that I hadn't felt before. It was one of the most mystical and beautiful experiences of my life, where everything just slowed down and I literally just felt at one. It was amazing!

And I would tell you: it was a function of time. After a minute or two, that wouldn't have happened. I had to go in the 20 minutes to get beyond my intellect and to go deeper, where I could connect on a more profound level of awareness and my consciousness.

And that's why time is such an important thing: to spend more time in the silence. To spend more time going deep -- in the moment of the practice, but also over a period of time, it absolutely makes a difference.

How many people know that you could and would be blessed by spending more time in prayer? I mean, every one of us knows that.

So I ask you: How many minutes a day do you pray? And how many minutes a day do you think it would be good for you to pray? [Congregants laugh] Like, do you pray for 10 minutes and maybe it'd be good to do a prayer for about 20 minutes? Or how about this question: How much do you think God is worthy of you taking time every day to pray? And how worthy are you to take time to sit and pray every day? A part of going deep is time. Let your mind have the time to go a little bit deeper, a little bit deeper.

I had a karate instructor years ago who was really more of a mentor than he was a karate instructor. His name was Louis Price and one thing he told me was, "*When you get one of those mountaintop experiences where you're feeling high; you're feeling joyful and positive ...*" He said, "*Don't just waste it in that moment.*" He said, "*Take a deep breath and let that go deep into your body. Just feel your entire being of that powerful feeling, whether it's joy, love, enthusiasm. Whatever it is, feel it and then say to yourself, 'This feeling is God. I am one with this God and I am one with this feeling.'*"

Or you could say, "*This love is God. I am one with God; I am one with love.*"

And he would say the more you could deepen those mountaintop experiences, the more they will sink into every cell of your being, and the more it will radiate from you ... even just walking into a room or whatever you do. It is a way to go deeper: to consciously take that high energy we've got and deepen it in us and claim it: our oneness with it and our oneness with God.

Paramahansa Yogananda says, "*God, bless me that I may find You in the temple of each thought and activity. Finding You within, I shall find You without -- in all people and in all conditions.*" And what he's saying is: when you see God with all your heart and go deep, you will see God in anything and everything. But you've got to be willing to go deeper.

Last thing I want to mention is not about prayer and meditation, but I think it's important in helping us go deeper on our spiritual path. And that is to **BE IN SERVICE TO OTHERS**. Albert Schweitzer said, "*I know one thing: the only ones among you who will truly be happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.*"

And he's saying that serving is such an important thing, because it helps us express and connect with our true nature, which is love. That serving in those forms is a way of expressing love. It's about moving that cycle of giving and receiving. That, as we give, the receiver is blessed and so are we. And even observers of acts of kindness and service are blessed by it, as well.

Studies show that, when people are in service, that they tend to feel happier or a greater sense of purpose. And the truth is that, no matter how much money or success we have, that when we're in service to others -- with no expectation of being paid or having anything but purely serving to help another human being -- it gives us a level of joy and fulfillment that nothing else can. That nothing else can!

And so at the lowest point in my life, you know, one of the things I did -- because I thought I could do nothing -- I started volunteering everywhere. I volunteered in prisons and halfway houses. I was a literacy volunteer. I served on board of directors. I volunteered at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. I was everywhere! And I'll tell you, for the for the amount of serving I did, I got probably 20 times of whatever good I possibly put out. It gave me direction and meaning and purpose at a time I was absolutely lost.

And I think anyone at any time in service adds to the depth of our spiritual path and our spiritual connection. If I were to say one thing, I'd say seek a way to serve. Seek a way to serve as a course of your spiritual path. And whether it's here as an usher or greeter; or serving in the children's church; or helping in the courtyard; or anywhere out in your life, being of service will deepen your connection with God.

If you want a fuller life, where you're not feeling like something's missing or you're wishing you had something more, I think it's to focus on our relationship with God. It is to focus our spiritual practice: first, by seeking God sincerely; surrendering to God fully; investing time in meditation with God daily; and to seek a way to serve.

A fuller, richer and more meaningful life awaits all of us, if we are willing to go deeper. God bless you all!

And let's do our affirmation. [Congregants applaud]

All right, here we go, gang! Together: *"God is my source. I open myself to the fullness, goodness, and allness of God by turning within. I, [Richard Maraj], make a commitment to daily prayer and meditation, seeking God with all my heart and always desiring to go deeper."*

God bless you all. Whoo! [Congregants applaud]

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