

# Spiritual Discipline

When our editor gave me notice of this magazine's theme, she commented that it wouldn't make me jump for joy. She was right, of course. I have been wrestling with the topic ever since.

How can I possibly make sense of the term spiritual discipline? It feels as though the words collide; they're an oxymoron, a contradiction of each other. There's the spiritual bit, all floaty and wafty, to do with that nebulous thing, the soul, the vital aspect of self, and then there's the discipline bit, all hard work, diligence and endeavour. How on earth do we bring them together? And I say 'on earth' advisedly. I assume it's somewhat easier in other realms.

As a child I nourished my spiritual self on a daily basis. I spent hours staring at pink blossom against a blue sky, or contemplating tadpoles wriggling in a pond, or watching the painstaking emergence of a dragonfly from its larval case. I created mud pies and flower gardens, pictures and stories. But slowly and surely, society got hold of me and taught me how to use my time in a more disciplined way. I learned to go to school, to do my homework, to study hard, to absolutely ignore the contemplative, creative side of myself by putting in the work. And that discipline has carried over into my adult life. I learned how to work, fast and furiously, spending myself in my encounters with my patients. Even now, when I am old enough and surely wise enough to know better, I can spend days on end completely depleting my batteries.

I can drive miles, see several children, field calls and queries, use my brain and heart to problem solve in a variety of ways, and come home late with notes and emails and hospital statistics to complete for each child and every query. At the end of a day like that I can feel drained. Usually I am both bad-tempered and hungry – a poisonous combination. The hunger often prevents me doing what I need to do most, which is to give myself some Reiki. The bad-temper flickers around the house. And yet, all the day, I have been disciplined. I have worked both hard and usefully, but what I haven't done is found the time to refresh my spirit.

So now the challenge for me is to weave the spiritual side of myself back into that disciplined life. Yes, I must do my work honestly – what a permission that is for the workaholics amongst us – but I must also work on myself. That means, for me, stopping

on a busy day to see the sea or the moor, to listen to the birds and enjoy the flowers, to replenish my spirit. That means taking time to be grateful for the progress the children are making, instead of always thinking about what steps they are to take next. There's a lot of enjoyment to be had, if I stop to notice: A chat with a little boy, talking about how his hands go "bumpily" when he "stays them in the water". When I first met that child he was both deaf and silent. A laugh with a little girl, telling me with great vigour about getting stuck in the mud. When I first met her she was furious with life. There's cause for celebration, right now, even before we take the next steps.

Above all, I must learn not to worry. If there was a degree in worry I could achieve first class honours without any effort. I worry about everything, about my family and friends, about the children I work with and the situation at work, about the way bits keep falling off the house and I have no time to write. Every day, when I sit quietly and bring my attention onto the Principles, I agree not to worry. The next day, I try again. Lately I have taken a tip from Paul Mitchell. He argues that the antidote to worry is prayer. As I wrote that, a shaft of sunlight hit the page, blessing the thought. So now, instead of worrying, I try to pray, or to send Reiki. Worry gets us nowhere. It's of no benefit to anyone at all. It just fills the world, our own most beautiful world, with negative, anxious thought. Prayer or Reiki, on the other hand, make a direct link with the divine, with universal life force energy.

So now I see I need to be disciplined in a different way. Into the daily grind of work and worry I need to spread some spiritual sunshine. If I don't, I'll wear myself out anyway and be no use to anyone. It's a laudable aim, but how will I do it? I guess by remembering to weave the principles into my daily life, not just in the morning when I sit quietly in contemplation of them, although that's a good start, but in the middle of all the hurly burly and chaos that hits me as soon as I step out of that quiet space.

Better still, I need to carry that quiet space with me, having the discipline to link into spirit as I go about my work. That'll take a bit of practice. That'll take discipline, spiritual discipline. □

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