

## **The Qualities of Spiritual Maturity, Part 10: Ordinariness**

### **Quality #10: Ordinariness**

Many of us come to a spiritual life battered and weary and in desperate need of a change. We have come to realize – often in the hardest way – that the purely secular life did not work out for us. We are urgently and intensely interested in an alternative.

Every serious spiritual practitioner undergoes some kind of conversion process. For some this commitment to a new way of life might be sudden and radical, while for others the transformation may occur much more gradually and over a relatively long period of time. But for every truly sincere seeker, at some point or another a sense of rebirth, of new beginnings, occurs.

We re-identify as a “practitioner” – as a “Buddhist” or “yogi” or “Christian” or maybe just a non-denominational “seeker of truth” or “searcher for happiness” – and make a turn in our life’s trajectory. The newness of it all is exciting and empowering. We might very well feel that we have, for some inexplicable reason, been blessed by some kind of “amazing grace.” For reasons that may not be entirely clear, we’ve been given a new lease on life, a second chance, an opportunity to begin again.

Many spiritual traditions also promise rewards for the conscientious and diligent practitioner – “realizations,” spiritual breakthroughs, even supernormal powers and altered states of consciousness. We direct our efforts of karmic management, meditation, and re-wiring our patterns of thought and action toward one or another of these penultimate goals, with an eye also on the big prize: enlightenment, sainthood, complete liberation, or some other conceptualization of future perfection.

And perhaps we even start to attain such special spiritual states of mind – experiences that give us a spike of bliss and clarity but which also, inevitably, dissipate and return us to the ordinariness of our day-to-day lives. Such ecstatic episodes give us such a high that the return to normality might feel like a crash. We can develop a craving and addiction to the extraordinary and then be disappointed when the euphoria and special “aha moments” fade and we are spat back into our ordinary and not-so-blissful-all-the-time everyday routine.

A mature spiritual practitioner recognizes that grasping to the extraordinary, the mystical and magical, is still a grasping; that the craving for exceptional experiences can lead to dissatisfaction with ordinary reality; and that what Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche famously deemed “spiritual materialism” can entail not only more discontentment with what is but also to a pride that leads us to believe in our own “specialness” in relation to others who are bereft of these spiritual peak experiences.

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Extraordinary states of mind and amazing occurrences should lead us not to feelings of superiority over others nor to disaffection with ordinary life. Rather, they should make us more humble, more awestruck in the face of the great mysteries and the transcendent dimensions of reality, more aware of our connection to others and disintegrative of our sense of isolation and difference.

Such realizations should point us to a recognition that the extraordinary lies as a potential within the ordinary, not apart from it. It is here and now. . . always, if we pay attention.

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At the end of his modern spiritual classic, *A Path With Heart*, Jack Kornfield reviews ten qualities that he thinks characterize someone who has “come of age” in their spiritual life. The ten traits Kornfield identifies have inspired me to write down some of my own thoughts about each of them.

Realizing that what we regard as ordinary is actually quite extraordinary is covered in Chapter Two (“Waking Up: Recognizing the Miraculous Nature of Our Lives”) of *A Spiritual Renegade’s Guide to the Good Life*.