

## The Qualities of Spiritual Maturity, Part 5: Integrated and Personal

### Quality #5: Integrated and Personal

When we first adopt a new spiritual practice, it's an exciting and innovative thing in our life. Having lived for years without a real clue as to how to attain the happiness we all seek, connecting to a spiritual path appears as a ray of hope in our dark skies.

But the old habits linger; we are still mostly enveloped in the shadows of our old ways. Our newfound spirituality seems so special, so different, in contrast to the rest of our lives. It sticks out as a beacon, but it is not the norm.

And because it is so fresh and provides us with such hope for change, we tend to treat our new spiritual life – the exciting new texts we're studying, the new teacher we've encountered, the new practices we've learned – as exceptional, remarkable, set apart from the usual. . . as, in a word, *sacred* in opposition to the profane nature of our ordinary lives.

And accompanying this understanding of the newly discovered spiritual dimension of our lives, we may regard the purpose of our practice to achieve extraordinary experiences. We may hope for, or perhaps even get a taste of, what we might regard as remarkable insights, meditational attainments, surreal encounters with the divine, and mystical adventures in consciousness expansion.

All of which turns on a fundamental assumption: that there is a strict division between the profane world of the ordinary life we are living, and an idealized vision of a sacred potentiality that we desperately wish to realize.

But over time, our understanding of the place and function of our practice shifts. As we deepen our comprehension of the purpose and power of the spiritual life, we begin to integrate it into more and more of our daily, and formerly “non-spiritual,” life.

The division between what we regard as “spiritual” and “special” and what we think of as “secular” and “ordinary” progressively breaks down, and we begin to realize that spirituality must infuse and be integrated into every part of our life – our family, our relationships, our job, even our recreation and hobbies – if it is to be truly transformative.

Zen Master Lin-Chi said, “If you live the sacred and despise the ordinary, you are still bobbing in the ocean of delusion.” A spiritually mature practitioner no longer makes such distinctions, but infuses the sacred into the profane such that they are indistinguishable.

He or she comes to realize that what once seemed so ordinary is actually the true locus of what is really extraordinary.

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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*.