

Dealing With Life's Problems



Can you imagine how your problems might look from God's point of view, or envision how God might resolve them? Do you ever ask yourself what is the reason for the circumstances of your life? Have you ever considered the notion that those vexing dilemmas that plague your daily life are challenging you to open to new ways of thinking? Can you sense how these difficulties are the means through which something mysterious, perhaps even great, is struggling to be born through you?

One reason many of us have difficulty reconciling the spiritual dimension with the worldly stems from the misguided notion that the drama of life itself — the frustrations of earning a living, the suffering caused by ill health or the emotional roller coaster of intimate relationships — make it difficult to

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*These quotations are excerpts from Pir Vilayat's book,
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attain, or sustain, illumination. Yet it's just in the midst of such difficult situations that one can find illumination. Rather than prevent unfoldment, such stresses challenge us to develop heroism. Instead of permanent roadblocks on the spiritual path, the obstacles we face are creative catalysts for spiritual evolution. What had seemed a defeat avers itself in our new realization to be a victory. For as wonderful as meditation is, the true test of spiritual realization lies in how well we manage to deal with our day, and whether or not there is a difference in how we handle our problems.

For myself, I find that when faced with the onrush of urgent, compelling activities, it helps to keep in mind the deeper reality that lies concealed by overt appearances. In order to prevent overlooking my dedication to fulfilling higher ideals in order to meet my day-to-day commitments, I continuously ask myself, "What are you doing in life? Have you forgotten what it is all about?" Even more important, I question what is really at stake behind the drama that is being enacted.

According to the teachings of the ancient Sufis, what is at stake is giving birth to the Universe's unborn qualities. Like Divine genes that are latent within the psyche, attributes such as compassion, mercy, truth, power, forgiveness, and many other qualities are the fruits born of life's struggles. The crucible within which this alchemical process occurs is the arena of everyday decision making and problem solving.

Those difficult situations that we struggle to be free of are in reality the birth pangs through which God is being born in everyday life; and the means through which our soul evolves.

Whatever those deeply embedded habits and conditions are that prevent us from changing — whether our ancestral, educational, or cultural upbringing — they can be overcome only through a vision of how one "could be if one would be as one might be." That's spiritual creativity — seeing how the problems in our lives can be re-framed as catalysts for Divine artistry.

In Sufism, there is a strong sense of the uniqueness of each person. The body and the personality are important inasmuch as they are able to accurately reflect this

being-in-the-process-of-becoming. Thus, rather than trying to escape life because you are nothing more than the victim of circumstances, through your meditations you begin to discover instead that you are indeed a significant part of the overall plan — with an important mission and purpose to carry out.

You are descended from levels of reality other than the one you normally take for granted.

The first step in reclaiming our Divine heritage is to question those conventional conceptions of reality that close our eyes to the luminosity interlacing all of creation.

As transcendently blissful and peaceful as the state of *samadhi* may be, however, awakening beyond life can never be the final goal of spiritual practice. It has to be followed by awakening in life. This means seeing life through the eyes of God — the Universe — casting the light of your realization upon the intractable problems and emotional sufferings of a human being on planet earth. By realization, I mean the knowledge and innate wisdom that is already written into what is called your soul but which has been obscured by your reliance on circumstances in the outer world. It is the difference between what the Sufis describe as acquired knowledge and revealed knowledge.

It is through the insight conferred upon you by your spiritual realization that you are able to see the difference between those relationships and activities in everyday life that bring you in harmony with the Universe, and those things that cause you to fall out of step. And that is why it is so important to bring those insights gained from awakening beyond life into everyday life.

It is by learning through countless mistakes and wrong turns that individuals fulfill the Divine purpose for which they were born, thereby contributing to the ever-evolving destiny of all humankind.

Our private struggles are inextricably connected to our participation in the grand drama of the universe, and the setbacks and defeats we suffer are a reflection of the broader issues of our unique time and place in history.

If you want to know what your qualities are, ask yourself what your defects and problems are. Behind the everyday drama of life, deeper issues are being enacted — and these issues always have to do with an archetypal quality that is trying to manifest. Problems are devices that can lead to what is behind your problem — the goal is to unmask them through meditation. For if you judge your problems only at face value, then you're not listening to what they are trying to communicate to you.

Sufism's way of dealing with life's problems is to attempt to see the quality underlying the situation in them that is struggling to be born.

You can help a person only if you've gone through the same problems that they have gone through, and even if you have not solved them, you have found a way of living with them. Thus, what you find in the end of searching for solutions to your problems is really love, because love breaks your heart — and that is the only power that can truly expand your consciousness.

This kind of breakthrough in perspective cannot happen either through your will or your realization but through your emotional attunement. This means

Contact Information

Sufi Order of Toronto

% R. K. Carell
605—1603 Bathurst St.
Toronto, Ontario M5P 3J2
Phone: Khusrau (Bob) (416) 653-6787
Email: khusrau @ SufiOrder.toronto.on.ca
Website: SufiOrder.Toronto.on.ca

Sufi Order of Brampton

% Terry Wedge
37 Chapel Street
Brampton, Ontario L6W 2H5
Phone: Sirdar (Terry) (905) 452-6358

Universal Worship

Leslie Gabriel Mezei
Phone: (416) 226-2869
Email: interfaithunity@cs.com

first allowing yourself to open up to the miracle of life, to be overcome by wonder at how extraordinary and amazing the phenomenon of existence is.

The inner work of meditation and reflection must be followed by an outer action that reinforces your commitment to a certain quality. Like a knight who kneels within a sacred sanctuary and who then places his left hand on his heart, his right hand forward, and proclaims aloud his vow to serve the people of his ailing kingdom, so too, can you make a solemn pledge to adjust the standard of your behaviour so that it manifests the Divine Quality that is seeking to come into existence through you.

Every time you make a move to break old habits and move forward into the future, you are created anew. Like the mythical phoenix reborn from the flames, your new being has emerged out of the fiery pit of life's difficulties.

In order to contribute to the self-organizing faculty of the Universe, however, you must be able to let go of your old self.

As the Sufi mystic al Hallaj uttered, "O take away this 'I am' between Thou and me that so irks me." In Sufi mysticism this is called *fana*, which means annihilation, as there can be no rebirth without a dark night of the soul, a total annihilation of all that you believed in and thought that you were. It is similar to the stage in the alchemical process called *solve et coagule*, dissolve and coagulate. On the most day-to-day level, it corresponds to a time of complete breakdown when everything goes wrong: your relationship ends; you have an accident; your health breaks down; you lose your job. Locating these seemingly horrendous events within the context of a spiritual transformation helps you to know that you are not just a helpless victim at the mercy of random forces, but that the Universe is guiding you through a mystical process of rebirthing. By trusting in this transformative process, aligning yourself with it rather than forcefully resisting it, breakdown can become breakthrough. Or, as Hazrat Inayat Khan says, "A defeat can aver itself to be a victory." It helps to keep this in mind whenever you are going through a crisis — because in the end, you will see that what you had

thought was a complete reversal of fortune turned out to be the dawn of a new self more aligned with the purpose for which you were born.

Coming Events

June 2-5, Rochester, NY: A four-day dance camp with **Shahabuddin Less**. This is the only Dance Camp he will be doing and it will feature Dances and Walks of Murshid Sam. For more information, please contact Zaynab: zaynab@frontiernet.net or (716) 248-0427

Activities

The Message Class: provides an opportunity to experience the teachings and practices of the Sufi Order on an ongoing basis. These classes, based on teachings given by Hazrat Inayat Khan and Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, are deepened through the use of complementary meditation practices which may use the breath, light, Dhikr (remembrance of God) and Wazifa (mantra).

Classes in the Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan are held, in **Toronto**, each **Wednesday at 8:30 pm** and, in **Brampton**, every **Thursday at 8:00 pm**. The last meeting of each month is dedicated to the practice of Dhikr. For this evening only, no instruction is offered.

Dhikr: means remembrance of God. Participants unite in intensive exploration and experience of this central practice of the Sufis. **If you have never been to Dhikr, please call in advance.**

Healing Circle: Open to members of the Sufi Healing Order. The Healing Circle is held in Brampton, at 9:30 am, on Saturdays. If you wish to attend, please phone Sirdar at (905) 452-6358.

Universal Worship Service: Universal Worship Services are held at 1:30 pm on the second Sunday of the month, except July and August, at the Gallery Arcturus, 80 Gerrard Street East. For information, please contact Leslie Mezei at (416) 226-2869 or interfaithunity@cs.com