

Work

This Article's Inspiration

This article is inspired by a person in group last Thursday. A 'no' came up. She said that she couldn't go there, that she wouldn't go there, that she had no energy to go there. She, as we all have, has been stopped like this many times in her life. I could see in her eyes that she was lost, tired, fatigued and felt unable to go further. We've all experienced this lethargy and, at the same time, we're in a terrible place.

Introduction

[G.I. Gurdjieff](#) called his way of spirituality as 'The Work.' [Byron Katie](#) calls her way 'The Work.' My teacher, Charles, also calls his way of spirituality 'The Work.' Many other people can also call their spiritual path as 'The Work.'

Charles says that he calls it the work because traveling the spiritual path is work. He doesn't call it 'the pleasant' or 'the easy.' He calls it the work because it's work, and we'll need to make effort at times when we don't want to make effort or when we say we cannot make an effort; that we're too overwhelmed or we're tired or we're stuck in fear. These times can be advancing moments on the spiritual path.

The Two Halves Of Spiritual Life

Currently the group is working with surrender; with what Richard Rohr calls 'the second half of spiritual life.' This concept of two halves of spiritual life is not unique to Richard Rohr. He does a very good job of describing the two halves of spiritual life in his book [Falling Upward](#). Richard wrote this book when he was 68 years old. He said he couldn't understand what was in the book until he was in his 60s.

Briefly, Richard says there are two halves of spiritual life. *The first half of spiritual life focuses on using our will.* The first half is being a good Christian, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim; to follow the rules of the religion, to go to services and to study the religious texts; to build ourselves into sincere and good followers of our

religion. He calls this first half of spiritual life 'building the container.' He says this is a necessary step in spiritual evolution. He also says that most people stop here and don't enter into the second half of spiritual life.

He further says that the Catholic Church reinforces a person to stay in the first half of spiritual life. He's saying this as a criticism. He's singling out the Catholic Church since he's a part of the Catholic Church and knows it well. He says that organized religions mainly focus on people developing in the first half of their spiritual life.

Our will is primarily used in the first half of spiritual life to become a better person. To move into the second half of spiritual life, we'll need to come to a crisis point where our life, as it is, is not working or is not satisfying enough. As long as our life is going well enough, we'll keep making the decisions; we'll keep using our will and our mind to go through life.

The second half of spiritual life is lived primarily through surrender. Surrender is most succinctly said by Jesus as: Thy will, not my will.¹ Surrender usually looks loving, though surrender may not look nice and neat. Surrender may look like we're not 'following the rules' of what it is to be a good follower of our faith.

Surrender is listening to God; not listening to our what our mind says. This way of living can be dangerous. What if the voice we're listening to is delusional and not the voice of God? We could do many bad things. This is why Richard says that building the container, being a good follower of our religion, is so necessary in order for us to be able to listen to God's guidance. When we have love in our heart and we sincerely ask for guidance, guidance can come. We can then become a living instrument of God on earth. Being a living instrument of God, living as an image of God,² is not done through any mental development; it's done by surrender to a Higher Power.

Everybody in the Thursday group has crossed into the second half of spiritual life. They've built themselves up in a very good way and they've become dissatisfied with themselves and in what they can do.

Will and Surrender

I was talking about will and surrender to a Self Realization Fellowship monk who has been a monk for about 45 years. He said that the longer he's on the spiritual path, the more that his life is about surrender. He said that in his early years (even decades) his path was primarily a path of using his will; going against his sluggishness, going against his resistance, going against the feeling of wanting to stop. He used his will to keep doing what he knew was good for him; to delve into spiritual study, to meditate even when he didn't feel like meditating and to temper his personal flaws.

He said that one of his current major spiritual questions is when to use his will and when to surrender. His current spiritual life is primarily, though not exclusively, surrender. He says there are times when he encounters resistance to doing what he knows would be beneficial for him to do. He specifically gave me two examples of when he uses his will. One example of using his will was when he didn't feel like meditating and he knew it would be beneficial. What got him into his chair to meditate was will. Another example of using his will was when a task needed to be done and he was tired. He used will to finish the task.

The right use of will is very important. Paramahansa Yogananda said this about will: "You possess the power of thought and the power of will. Utilize to the uttermost these divine gifts!"³ He also says: "Heavenly Father, I will reason; I will will; I will act; but guide Thou my reason, will, and activity to the right thing that I should do."⁴

As Richard wrote, will is needed to build the container. Then, he writes, in the second half of spiritual life, the container is emptied. This emptying, this letting go, allows God to enter. The saying 'Let go, let God' becomes a beacon for the second half of spiritual life. Paramahansa Yogananda also gave this same advice when he wrote: "What is important is to do the will of Him who sent you; that is what you want. While you do your part, think all the time that God is working through you."

Saying Yes

Charles asked me in group one time: "Phil, how do you say yes to God?" I know I was looking at him dumbly and was hoping that his question was a rhetorical

question; a question where he didn't expect an answer. So I sat there dumbly. I was waiting for an answer to arise in me. No answer came. After a minute or so, Charles said: "When a no comes up, you turn it into a yes."

Very quickly many instances came to mind when there was a 'no' inside me. When I felt stuck, when I felt stopped, when I was tired, when I was in resistance, when I was angry, when I was scared, when I was confused, when I was overwhelmed and when I plain old 'didn't give a shit.' As each of these times quickly came before me, I saw my 'no.' I saw how each time was an opportunity to go deeper, to gain more spiritual muscle, to use will and/or to surrender in the moment. I felt how I fell flat and how I stopped.

Spiritual Work In The Second Half Of Spiritual Life

Spiritual work is using will when needed and the rest of the time listening to God's guidance in what we're to see, say or do; desiring to live as an image of God. Spiritual work is not about persisting in our 'no,' in our resistance, in our stuckness.

Relaxation and gentleness toward ourselves are two key elements of spiritual work in the second half of spiritual life; knowing that when we're tense or in judgement, we're not living as an image of God.

When we feel into our 'no's,' we can be gentle at that time with ourselves, knowing that we're stuck, being receptive to help, to opening in that moment. The opening may be a release of emotion or we may be quiet. The opening can be relaxing our body more. The opening can be bringing a more full breath into our belly. The opening can be not believing what the mind is saying. The opening can be contacting the longing in us to be free. The opening can be willing to let go of our internal stance at that moment. The opening can be a prayer: 'please help me.' The opening can be surrendering to what is in the moment; not fighting; not resisting; not feeding the 'no.'

Spiritual work in the second half of spiritual life is surrender; even surrendering that now is a time to use our will; not being in the way to live in that moment as an image of God. Many times Charles has said to me: "Phil, all you have to do is get out of your own way."

We desire for God to live through us. The second half of spiritual life is exactly that: God coming through. A big dose of surrender mixed with the right use of will gets us out of the way, and God comes through.

May all beings live in Truth, Freedom and Love.

Footnotes:

- 1 'Thy will, not my will' is a shortened version of Luke 22:42 which says:
"Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me. Yet not my will but yours be done."
- 2 Genesis 1:27: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."
- 3 This quote is taken from: Paramahansa Yogananda, The Law of Success: Using the Power of Spirit to Create Health, Prosperity & Happiness.
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