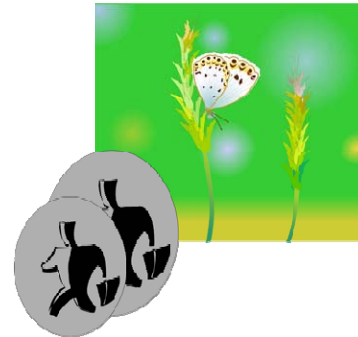


## Obstacles to Inner Guidance

There are numerous obstacles to inner guidance which in the short run, may block one's ability to connect with spiritual reality, and in the long run, may limit one's ability to feel really connected with oneself and the world.

Major obstacles to Inner Guidance include:

1. **Distracting environment**
2. **Unmet basic needs, such as rest, food, water**
3. **Tension, stress, inability to relax**
4. **Wrong question or wrong time**
5. **Wishful thinking (Attachment to illusion, escape, or flattery)**
6. **Hostile core beliefs**
7. **Strong emotions**
8. **Fears, projections, feeling unsafe**
9. **Not present in one's body (dissociation)**
10. **Lack of gratitude**
11. **Lack of follow-through**



It is important to practice inner guidance in an environment with few distractions, especially when you are first learning how to do it. If your home situation is particularly noisy, chaotic and distracting, it is important to make an effort to change that, at least for 30 minutes to an hour at a time. This is important not only for your spiritual growth, but your mental and emotional health as well. You can use headphones with ambient music or sound effects such as ocean waves or gentle rainfall. (You can also ask others to use headphones with their TV's and videogames.) Be sure that you have a comfortable place to sit that is not visually distracting. Don't try to do inner guidance with unfinished projects, bills, advertisements and newspapers lying around in plain view. If necessary, turn in a different direction where you can see something calming and beautiful, like a tree, a plant, an altar of special objects or a pleasant picture. The work that you do making a quiet time and place for yourself will be very beneficial even if you never get very far with the inner guidance work at all.

Many people in our culture make a daily habit of pushing themselves to function without taking care of their **basic needs**. As soon as you begin to quiet yourself and find your center, you are likely to become aware of any basic needs you have been ignoring. This awareness IS THE GUIDANCE THAT YOU NEED TO FOLLOW FIRST. So check in to be sure that you are getting enough rest, food and water and take care of those things before proceeding further.

**Tension and stress** can be serious obstacles to inner guidance. However, as with basic needs, your awareness of stresses in your life is an important kind of guidance in and of itself. And certainly, our need for inner guidance is never stronger than when we are feeling stressed. If you find it difficult to calm down and get centered, tune in to what is going on emotionally and energetically inside you as best you can. Notice

where you are feeling energy in your body, where it is stuck and what direction it is trying to move. Ask yourself if you might be feeling overwhelmed, disappointed, sad, irritable, angry, lonely, needy, frustrated, anxious, fearful or any other distracting or negative emotions. Acknowledge the feelings with compassion and acceptance and then direct your attention once again to finding your center. If this is not sufficient to allow you to proceed with inner guidance work, then you may need to do more intensive energy clearing. See **Energy Clearing Basics**.

Another obstacle to inner guidance is simply **asking the wrong question or asking at the wrong time**. Once you have developed a basic ability to ask for and receive guidance, then whenever a question draws a blank, you can simply ask if it is the right question for this time. If not, then you can ask Guidance to tell you what question or topic is most important right now.

In order to address many of the obstacles to inner guidance and the practices needed to deal with them, it seems useful to think of these issues in terms of the larger goal of spiritual growth and personal empowerment.

## **POINTS OF POWER**

In the quest for spiritual growth and personal empowerment, following certain basic principles will speed you on your way and assist you in avoiding much grief and aggravation. These same basic principles are essential to a path that includes the development of inner guidance skills. Another way to say this, which may be more to the point, is that if any of your usual attitudes and behaviors are contrary to these points of power, you will find your progress on the path significantly impaired. So it's important to take some time to consider these things.

- 1. Pay attention.**
- 2. Speak the truth.**
- 3. Ask for what you want.**
- 4. Take responsibility for your experience.**
- 5. Keep your agreements.**
- 6. Hold an attitude of gratitude.**

**Pay attention.** So many of our difficulties in life arise because we have failed to notice something directly in front of us. The journey of personal and spiritual growth and the development of inner guidance begins with the details of everyday life. More importantly, inner guidance work is very much about bringing awareness to the patterns, messages and lessons that constantly present themselves in the events and relationships in our lives. We are profoundly interconnected with all of life. Our inner and outer worlds mirror and influence each other in ways that would require lifetimes to understand. But within the vast mystery and also the fundamental simplicity of it all, the simple act of paying attention helps us understanding what to do and where to go.

In our society these days information overload is a big problem, and certainly a major challenge for those on a spiritual journey. In order to bring our lives into greater harmony, we must find ways to limit our exposure to the endless pounding of our mass media and the sheer quantity of information that finds its way in the door. When we are overwhelmed, we cannot perceive or think clearly. We may find ourselves sleep walking through our lives without a corner of our own consciousness to call our own.

When I am trying to focus on a goal to get certain things done within a time frame, I often create for myself a kind of tunnel-vision that blocks out extraneous things. Unfortunately, this way of operating easily becomes habitual and problematic.

Paying attention is both an inner and outer practice that requires stillness and receptivity. A daily practice of meditation, journal-writing or simply walking in silence can help us clear our minds and notice the major headlines in our own feelings and thoughts. Then we are also in a better position to understand and deal with what is going on around us.

Be sure you are getting enough sleep on a regular basis. Set aside one day in seven for rest and spiritual renewal. Take time regularly for recreation and vacation. It's important to find a healthy rhythm, engaging ourselves in the business of our lives and stepping back from our everyday concerns. Inner guidance is a practice that helps us expand our level of awareness and the wisdom of our interpretation, but we must build on a solid foundation of healthy habits.



**Speak the truth.** Practicing deceit with others is so inimicable to the spiritual journey that it shouldn't need to be mentioned. Every single lie, distortion or half-truth that you allow to pass from your lips creates distortions and obstructions for receiving guidance. Inner guidance is about seeking truth. We can't see what is true if we have surrounded ourselves with walls of lies. We can easily fall into destructive habits of deceiving others and ourselves, especially if we are around other people who do the same thing. If your life circumstances seem to require some significant level of deceit, then you will probably need to change those circumstances before you will be able to progress spiritually.

Honesty and integrity are easier when we can offer ourselves compassion and forgiveness. None of us is perfect, we all make mistakes. It is important to acknowledge our mistakes and get on with the life work of bringing our actions and our selves into alignment with what we know is true and ethical.

One measure of spiritual growth is our capacity to think of ourselves honestly and compassionately, with all our blemishes and shortcomings. When we refuse to acknowledge major patterns in our behavior and thinking, denying things others may observe plainly every day, our ignorance and blindness may create real dangers for us. We become very vulnerable to painful surprises when these patterns trigger reactions from the people and events in our lives. So we must not only resolve to speak the truth, but take the time to pay attention to see and know the truth, especially about ourselves.

**Ask for what you want.** It's easy to complain about what we don't like, telling ourselves we are isolated and helpless. Yet so often we fail to create a vision of what it is that we really want and fail to ask others to help make it so. When we ask, we may get a "yes" or a "no," but in either case, we have stepped away from the helpless victim role and stepped out of patterns of isolation.

In inner guidance work, asking questions and asking for help are basic to the whole process. Maybe you don't even know what you want or what you need. That's not a bad place to begin inner guidance work. Ask the question, "What do I really want?" "What do I need right now?" Those questions may bring similar or very different answers, so ask both and listen carefully to the answers. Developing a clear vision of important life goals is an important empowerment activity and well worth devoting a significant amount of time and energy. Inner guidance can be extremely helpful here.

Some of us have been over-schooled in the philosophy of self-reliance, independence, competition and even a basic mistrust of others. We may look at every exchange in terms of narrow self-interest, missing out on the pleasure of helping another, and the long term benefits of generosity and caring. Our health and wellbeing require a positive exchange of energy, assistance and good relations with our fellow human beings. Habits of separation and isolation can certainly interfere with our health and happiness. And we may find it very difficult to ask another for help.

**Take responsibility for your experience.** The choices that we make have a profound effect on our experience of events. We may not always like the choices available to us at any point in time, but when we take responsibility for the choosing, then we retain personal power. This is not about blaming ourselves when tragedy comes our way or we are laid low by circumstances or health challenges which are beyond our control. This is about knowing that regardless of what situation we find ourselves in, there is nearly always the possibility of choosing our response and the attitude that we take.

The sincere seeker of personal and spiritual growth and empowerment looks for the choices available in every circumstance. Even in the face of great evil or tragedy, there is a hidden blessing to be received or a valuable lesson to be learned. This does not mean that we should not grieve our losses or fail to support others who are hurting. And it is definitely not a recommendation to view the past with anything less than compassion. Seek a deep understanding of the relationships between people, attitudes and events and seek always to find a way through circumstances that is true to your highest self and purest source of guidance.

**Keep your agreements.** This is another point of power that speaks to the issue of personal integrity. When we are careless about what we say to others in casual conversation or in formal business agreements, when we make promises that we fail to keep, we damage a part of ourselves that is very fundamental. The failure to keep agreements will certainly bring adverse consequences in the outer world, but it will also make it very difficult to make and keep agreements within ourselves. This will greatly limit our inner development and inner peace. Circumstances do change, and we must often renegotiate agreements with others and with ourselves. It's important to take the time for these renegotiations when they are needed so that we may keep our actions in alignment with our words and agreements.

**Hold an attitude of gratitude.**

Complaining is quite the American pastime. It has its upside in a desire and a vision for something better and an awareness of the problems around us. But a habitual focus on what is wrong is as much a distortion of reality as a Pollyanna-like cheerfulness that fails to acknowledge or deal with real problems<sup>1</sup>.

Life around us is a swirl of events that doesn't necessarily revolve around our own needs and desires. This can come as quite a shock to the adolescent who has grown up in a child-centered family that did, in fact, revolve around them. The problem has been exacerbated, I think, by the hidden assumptions communicated through American television, especially family-oriented situation comedies that seem to tell us how things ought to be. On top of that we have endless commercials telling us that we deserve instant gratification and that such a thing is available to us if we buy the right toys, drugs or whatever else they are selling.

Some of us have held grudges and resentments for decades against the people and institutions that let us down, that failed to provide what we needed and "deserved." Yet the process of healing from old wounds requires taking time and attention to acknowledge the hurts visited upon us that perhaps we spent decades denying or minimizing. We don't want to stay stuck either way, denying what was wrong and hurtful, or holding on to the anger, resentment and blame.

From the point of view of our own needs and desires, we can experience life as an endless source of disappointment and frustration if not outright suffering. Our assumptions and beliefs create our experience of life to a large extent. If we hold the intention of developing a greater attitude of gratitude, we will begin to notice how often we have a choice about experiencing life in a more negative or positive manner.

Inner Guidance is very much about our relationship with the powers that be in the world outside of our own individual ego. For many, this is about a relationship with God. This

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<sup>1</sup> I recommend watching the movie Pollyanna if you haven't seen it or can't remember it well. The little girl in that movie had more wisdom than we usually give her credit and we can learn a thing or two from her approach to life.

may feel like a relationship with a very large and powerful father figure, and this may or may not work for you. Sometimes in order to open fully to a relationship with God or Guidance, we need to take a look and do some healing of our relationship with our own parents.

Your own path in dialoguing with Inner Guidance might do better with a less traditional framework. Consider viewing Guidance more as your own “Highest Self,” “Deepest Wisdom,” or simply “Spirit.”

Along the way, you may discover that the world “outside” is sending gifts and blessings, if that is not already your experience. And that more often than one might suppose, you can discover that you are lovingly held as you move through the world, whether you are moving in Nature or interacting with other people. Try looking for the beauty, goodness and love in the world. They may sometimes be hard to find, but they are there and seems to increase the more we look for them. If you are on a spiritual path and tuned in to Guidance, you will find yourself becoming more and more an agent for increasing the beauty, goodness and love in the world.