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# Heal to become whole

To pursue meditative bliss without healing the wounds of the heart is going nowhere in a hurry, muses **Bhaavin Shah**

**A**s a friend of mine puts it, the spiritual world involves two perpendicular trajectories: transformation and transcendence. The former is horizontal, the latter is vertical. All healing modalities belong to the former. All meditation movements belong to the latter.

To put it simply, transformation is about resolving yourself; transcendence is about going beyond yourself. It is possible to be transformed without having transcended yet, and also vice versa. Both these states are valid as long as one doesn't pitch one's tent there. The art lies in reconciling the two journeys, though they may sometimes seem anti-theti-

cal. Says John Welwood, a Buddhist practitioner and psychotherapist: 'We are not just humans learning to become Buddhas but also Buddhas waking up in human form, learning to become fully human'. So, the journey involves two often paradoxical dimensions - waking up as well as growing up.

## **Transcendence without transformation**

What happens when you transcend but do not transform, when you wake up but do not grow up? We have heard of many realised masters who were later found to have feet of clay. We also often meet many spiritual practitioners who are peaceful in their heads, but callous in their hearts. Ever wondered why the dissonance? Here is the reason.

The all-important trinity that most spiritual practi-

tioners talk about is that of body, mind and spirit. We leave the 'heart' out from the scheme of things and that's a major mistake. All types of yoga - be it raja yoga, ashtanga yoga or hatha yoga - also seem to be guilty of that. Some spiritual traditions have also happily left the body and the mind out.

### **East Vs West**

The East has many esoteric technologies to transcend the mind and rest in the spirit. To be active in the world, and yet be able to transcend the travails of daily life by stationing one's mind in stillness, is of supreme worth. It's a great starting point but not the end-all. This is because in an attempt to still the mind, the practitioner often, if not every time, pushes life issues deeper into the subconscious.

Meditation is often used to 'escape' life rather than 'embrace' it. Through stilling the mind, the pain-body (a sum total of your unresolved emotions) has been temporarily pushed under the rug. But the dormant pain-body will stick its head out sooner or later. Either directly in the form of body pains or ailments, or indirectly in the form of difficult relationships or money issues that further nourish the pain body. All of this will happen in spite of your exalted meditative states. That's because meditation is not designed to heal the human experience. Its only purpose is to get you in touch with your innate joy. No wonder even meditators have relationship and prosperity issues, often more than others!

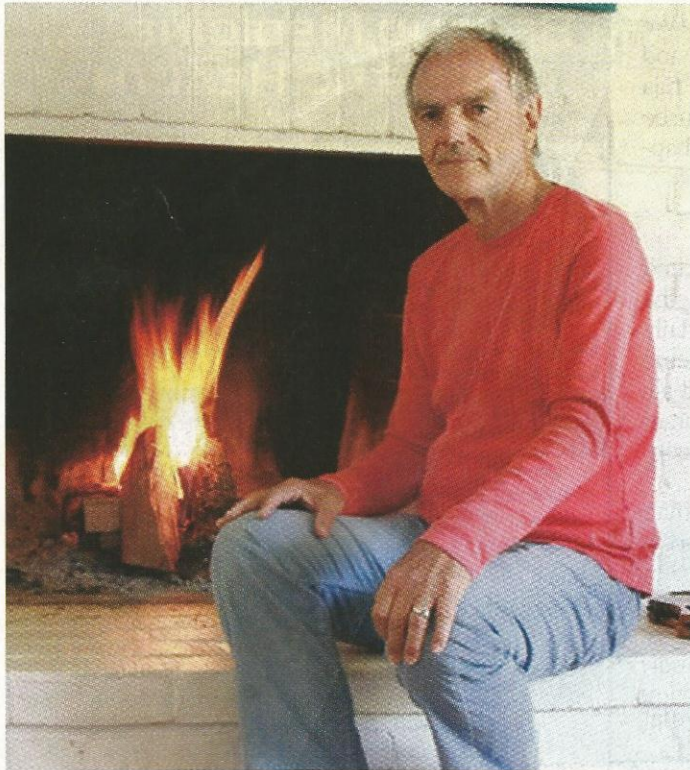
Giving a cold shoulder to these issues in the name of witnessing or detachment doesn't help either. It is better to take the bull by the horns and heal the life experience. Healing should always ride shotgun with meditation. Unless you have done that, you can't fully embody your bliss 'in the bones'.

This is an area where the West has done a lot of work by bringing in psychotherapy and other integration tools. It has honoured the human experience by considering it worthy of healing, unlike the East which has often, if not always, dishonoured it by being in a rush to transcend it.

### **Embracing the heart**

Every genuine healing modality, from the West or East, actually works with the heart, while it apparently appears to work with energies (say Reiki) or thoughts (say Ho'oponopono). Each of us has fragments of our energetic self that have become estranged from our mainstream energy currents owing to emotionally troublesome experiences. This process began in our early childhood when our nervous system was not developed enough to withstand any trauma. Let alone rejection, even the slightest lack of validation or attunement with the caregiver is trauma for the young child. These wounds of the heart leak as painful experiences for the rest of adult life.

All genuine healing or shadow work involves the resurfacing of these childhood episodes as painful con-



Leonard Orr: Breathwork integrates the shadow self

scious experiences in the present moment so that the pain-body is felt, witnessed, held, healed and thereby transcended. The work of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and others has essentially been about this. Leonard Orr and Michael Brown are two modern-day spiritual teachers who I find to be masters in shadow work. Adept healers address the broken aspects of the human experience that many spiritual masters generally don't.

Pursuing spirituality (working with the mind and spirit) without healing the heart is counterproductive. It's like putting whipped cream over garbage. It is hard for the conscious mind to immerse itself in philosophical debate or starry-eyed bliss, when the subconscious mind is boiling over with turmoil. I personally suggest meditation to help my students calm their minds and abide in the blissful spirit, while I use breathwork and the five elements to help them heal the psychic dirt in their hearts and bodies.

### Embracing the world

Besides embracing the heart, embracing the world is equally important. This is possible only when you see the world as sacred, not mundane. It is most enticing to be immersed in nondual awareness while one's house is in shambles. Spirituality is often used as a way to bypass one's duties and responsibilities,

rather than embracing life and resolving its challenges head-on. We should use the peace that we gather through our spiritual practices to dive deeper into the world with all its challenges rather than escape from it. Let spirituality be in service of life, and not the other way round.

### Embracing myself

Along the same lines, while gathering bliss from the upper chakras, reinhabiting life through one's lower chakras is equally important. The relative human in us with its needs and desires is as important as the absolute divine in us who is beyond both. We should make peace with our needs and desires and honour them even while we understand that in the larger context, it all amounts to a nought. We should be masters in alternating between these two paradoxical states. I sometimes wonder at the skill with which kids navigate through paradoxes. For a few months now, my daughter, who is four and a half, absolutely knows that the many fairy tales we concoct together are totally fake, but she inhabits those stories with such seriousness and gusto that one just can't doubt her total faith in them.

### Embracing others

As I embrace myself, so I embrace the other. Aloneness is beautiful, but so is togetherness. In fact, one's capacity for togetherness is the test of one's spiritual maturity. Can we move deeper into our relationships rather than considering them to be samsaric bondages? Can the inner detachment we develop help us to attach more and more to people around us? Only then is it a life fully lived and a path fully tested. What use is a divine experience unless it's brought to the human realm by embracing my heart, embracing the world I live in, embracing my so-called lower self and embracing other souls in my life? The real trick lies in drawing the nectar from the beyond and employing it in our daily life, a domain that has never been anything short of sacred, no matter what the preachers exhort us to believe. This is what I call integrated spirituality. Anything less is a lopsided approach, and a half-hearted life.



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