

Spiritual Bypassing: Trying To “Love And Light” Your Way To Healing

BY LINDSAY CARRICARTE-JONES

These days everyone is a spiritual guru, and they all want to tell us how to live and heal our lives.

And don't get me wrong, I think it's beautiful that so many people want to help others on their paths to healing, but we need to be careful of whom we are choosing to listen.

One of the most significant red flag behaviors I've seen pervasively arising amongst some of my fellow “spiritual” practitioners is spiritual bypassing. And I won't even lie; I've been guilty of it myself!

What we need to remember is that, believe it or not, not everyone has our highest good in mind. And not all of these teachers are doing the work they claim to be doing. Many charismatic and seductive people are hiding behind an identity of “spiritual teacher” who are happy to take our money, hook us in energetically, and take advantage of us.

There's something to remember...

The most important thing to keep in mind is that we are each already spiritual beings. We already know how to be spiritual. What we need to focus on is being more human. And the most prominent part of being human that we need to reconnect with is feeling the pain of our experience.

We're meant to walk through darkness,

feel sadness, rage, anger, jealousy, and so on.

Feeling anger, pain, rage, sadness, jealousy, envy, fear, or any other “negative” emotion doesn’t make us less spiritual than the Zen monk who has mastered his emotional observation and mindfulness practice. It just means we’re at a different stage of our journey.

And yes, even the evil among us are spiritual by nature. I know that’s a tough one to swallow, but it is true.

How much more arrogant can we get than defining what is and isn’t spiritual based on our limited human intellect and understanding?

So what is spiritual bypassing?

Spiritual bypassing is a term first coined by psychologist John Welwood in 1984. It is the use of spiritual practices and beliefs to avoid dealing with our painful feelings, unresolved wounds, and developmental needs. It is much more common than we might think.

Considering our culture shuns negative emotions, it’s no surprise many of us respond to those feelings with repression. While repression is disguised in an appearance of wholeness and wisdom, spiritual bypassing, seemingly more benign, is much more difficult to notice.

For example, perhaps we subscribe to the belief that everything happens for a reason. And that’s wonderful. I believe this. However, just because I think everything happens for a reason doesn’t mean that I won’t have some authentic human emotions over said events when they occur.

For example, if I get robbed at gunpoint tomorrow, I may accept that there is a reason for it. However, I will still

need to process my grief, anger, sadness, and any other emotions attached to the event. If I were to write it off as “a spiritual lesson” and just immediately go directly to forgiveness for the person who violated me, I would be doing my human self a massive disservice, aka spiritual bypassing.

That’s just a primary example of how spiritual bypassing can show up. It can also show up as any of the following:

- Detachment
- Emotional disassociation
- Premature forgiveness
- Suppression of anger
- Labeling anger as aggression to write it off
- Weak boundaries
- Overemphasis on the positive
- Anger-phobia
- Blind or overly tolerant compassion
- Devaluation of the physical as opposed to the spiritual

Let’s discuss a few of these more deeply.

Overemphasis on the positive

I’m all for positive thinking, but not when it’s used to bypass our much-needed processes. It is a sign of bypassing when we want to discuss our anger, and someone tells us we need to “be more positive.” There is a way to talk about our emotions without getting all wrapped up in the negativity of them or becoming victim to them. We just need to learn what that is! And if we need to yell, rant, rave, and cry to process something – go for it! We’re only human after all.

Blind or overly tolerant compassion

I continuously hear “Don’t you do yoga? Why are you so angry?” and I can’t help but chuckle. Where did we ever get the idea that anger is wrong and bad? Or that because I do yoga I’m not going to have regular human emotions?

It's what we do with the anger that mucks things up, not the feeling itself.

When we find ourselves grabbing onto compassion for someone who has just done something that violates everything we believe in, we skip right over our anger, wholly invalidating a genuine aspect of us. This pattern allows some highly unacceptable behaviors to go on.

Anger-phobia

This belief, that by being more spiritual we can somehow make the anger go away, is so harmful. The more anger that we suppress out of fear of being "un-spiritual," the more harm we do to ourselves. It's just the spiritual ego that gets in the way of accepting our darkness and our light as our perfection.

Not taking responsibility

Now this one we see so often, but it can be tough to identify. We are guilty of this when someone presents something we've done or behavior they see in us, and we immediately write it off as that person projecting their unhealed stuff onto us. For example, I once pointed out that perhaps fear and greed were getting in the way of someone close to me. And in all their spiritual ego and arrogance, they told me in a passive-aggressive way that I was just jealous of their success.

It was a bit of a punch in the face to me because this person was someone I looked up to in a way. That was a tough one to swallow. It hurt me and had I immediately jumped to premature forgiveness instead of honoring my process; I too would have been bypassing.

Society adds to the problem. Robert Augustus Masters says:

"Part of the reason for [spiritual bypassing] is that we tend not to have very much tolerance, either personally or

collectively, for facing, entering, and working through our pain, strongly preferring pain-numbing “solutions,” regardless of how much suffering such “remedies” may catalyze. Because this preference has so profoundly and thoroughly infiltrated our culture that it has become all but normalized, spiritual bypassing fits almost seamlessly into our collective habit of turning away from what is painful, as a kind of higher analgesic with seemingly minimal side effects. It is a spiritualized strategy not only for avoiding pain but also for legitimizing such avoidance, in ways ranging from the blatantly obvious to the extremely subtle.”

So what’s the solution? The key is to remember that we all must take responsibility for where we are at any given moment.

When we are grounded in reality and honest with ourselves, we will know if we are suppressing our feelings. When we are stuck in ego and bypassing, we suppress in favor of what we think is the more “spiritual” way of being.

Spiritual practice doesn’t wipe out our human experiences, hurts, traumas, and losses. If we choose to walk the path of growth and healing, then we must dig into the psychoemotional elements of our experiences as well. Anyone who tells you otherwise is doing you more harm than good.

Perhaps the next time someone tells you to “love and light” your way to healing from your traumas, you can tell them to go f*ck themselves.

Namaste and many blessings, beautiful one. The light and the shadows in me honors the light and the shadows in you!

For more self-study, [The Urban Howl](#) recommends [Courage: The Joy of Living Dangerously](#) .

Sip a little more:

***Don't Wait For Permission To Be Who You
Are***

***I Will F*ck Up & Disappoint People—So
Will You & It's OK***

{You are meant to be here}
This is the only story
the ancient story
the only story that needs
telling—so find your way out
of the fray and into the marrow
of living, for tomorrow
will always bring another
new beginning

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