

THE PULSE OF SPIRIT



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PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY: AN OPERATOR'S GUIDE TO BEING HUMAN

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From February 6th to 9th, Maureen Waller and I held a course for thirteen people at Glen Ivy, in Corona, California, entitled *Practical Spirituality: An Operator's Guide to Being Human*. As I told the participants, any good operator's guide has two main components to it. One is spatially oriented and the other oriented in time.

The spatially oriented part contains the diagrams—you know, the kind that shows all the various components of the product and, if you are lucky, maybe even an exploded diagram with the parts separated but in right relationship. It is important, if you have a piece of equipment that you're trying to operate, to know where all the parts are and how they fit together. And it might even be important to know the names of the various parts.

The spatially oriented part of the operator's guide is important, but it may not be enough. Because even if you know where all the parts are and how they fit together, you have to know the steps to take to operate the equipment. You have to know how the equipment operates over time. So there is probably step number one, step number two, and so on. The instructions take you through time and the process by which the piece of equipment works.

For us as human beings, there ought to be an operator's guide; an understanding of what our parts are and how they work together, and what the process is over time that leads to a creative life. The most significant parts of a human being are not all visible, at least not with physical sight, and that makes the process of identification more difficult. The processes that operate in the mind and in the emotions, and even in our spiritual capacity, cannot be seen with our physical eyes, even though we can observe the physical effects of those processes.

Have you ever ridden shotgun, in the passenger seat next to the driver of a car, and after riding to a certain place repeatedly, had to drive there by yourself? And then found that you didn't really know the way? The way looks different when you are sitting in the driver's seat than it does even if you are sitting in the seat right next to the driver. Of course, it looks like a whole other thing again from outside the car.

So many of the studies of the human experience prove to be close to worthless from the standpoint of the operator, because we are not operating our human capacity from the outside, looking in. We are operating it from the inside, looking out, so that any study that observes human behavior from the outside doesn't necessarily help very much.

Most people are not very articulate about life from the inside out, not just because they don't want to talk about it but because they don't have names for what is happening. They don't understand what's happening. They know they're impacted by their experience, they know something has happened—they may be in the same situation that they have been in countless times in their life. And while it may be familiar, and they may have a pet way to get through it, there is often a lack of a real depth of understanding of what is occurring. There is a lack of understanding of where the accelerator is, where the steering wheel is, and where the brakes are, too. So in the course we offered, *Practical Spirituality: An Operator's Guide to Being Human*, we assisted people to become more familiar with their own internal makeup and the processes at work within them.

In ancient times, there was a way of understanding the world that was more from the inside out than today. Some of the ancient stories, myths and legends served that purpose. That is also the purpose of poetry. Good poetry describes what is happening from the inside out. That is important, because that is how we live our life. So good poetry uses the forms of the physical world in which we live to speak about what's happening inside a person.

What flummoxes most people is the energy that is inside them. For the most part, they don't know what to do with it. We live in a world that tells them that virtually every natural urge that they have in their body and in every other part of them is wrong and should be stuffed back inside. And that they should live in a box that is prescribed by the world the way it is. That is an awful predicament, given that we are energetic beings. So when we talk about how we are made and how we operate, we are talking about the creative power of the universe running through us, and that really wasn't made to fit in a box. So what do we do now?

I had a discussion with a friend recently about addiction. It is difficult to get to the bottom of conversations about addiction. The biggest problem is all the shame the person is feeling. That is a problem, because it is the creative power within, translated in a particular way, that is making them addicted. The person finds themselves in a box that shames them for having the compulsion in the first place, and then finds a way to translate the compulsion that destroys them. It usually has something to do with being in a box, usually carefully constructed by one's elders in childhood, and maintained by the person and the culture they are in ever after. Under those conditions, the person

does their best to summon up sufficient willpower to be good for a while—which is usually what it is, just a while. And being good usually has to do with putting oneself back in the box.

What I said to my friend was that you have to distinguish between the passion within you that drove you to the addictive behavior, and the addictive behavior itself. Do you really want to shame yourself for being a passionate person? Do you really want to shame yourself for being a person that is full of desire? Good luck trying to send your desire back to whence it came. That sounds like hell. It is the translation of the passion that is the problem.

I am not suggesting that every urge from within us should be acted upon without thought. If you have powerful desire, what is the true creative fulfillment of that desire? It is good to know that the creative fulfillment of desire is based in two simple things.

Step 1: The urge to be consumed by the reality of spirit that we are, so that it overtake us, ego and all.

Step 2: The desire to have union with our world.

What does the operator's guide say about this process? Don't take *Step 2* before you take *Step 1*. Be consumed by the spirit that made you *before* you have union with your world. The operator's guide also carries a warning: If you mix the order of these two steps, the human instrument is subject to malfunction, and the manufacturer's warranty is voided.

If you have taken *Step 2* before *Step 1*, you have been seduced by whatever is your addiction of choice. And if you take *Step 1* first, you establish the basis for creative engagement with your world.

So what does it take to change that whole pattern around? It makes no sense to take the life force that's moving in us and try to send it back to wherever it came from. Not a good idea, not really possible, and doesn't make for a happy human being. Nonetheless, restraint is required, so that we don't act on our desires in a way that destroys us.

Without conscious restraint, we are destined to a life of knee-jerk reactions to our own subconscious urges. If you cannot stop in a moment when there is power moving in you and think consciously about how that power is best used, if you don't ponder the true desire within the desire, you will not be happy.

Have you ever had this remarkable experience? That something very challenging happened in your life, and still you exercised restraint in what you did about it? And then found that there was a volcano of energy that was exploding within you, which you chose to contain? Try it sometime. If you face a life circumstance that brings you great challenge and pressure, try letting an explosion go off within you instead of exploding on your world. Try exercising restraint long enough to know that you have a choice in how you use that energy. You could use it unconsciously, on a reactive basis, or you could stop and use it for good.

The operating manual for being human tells us that there has to be containment within a person. That is practical spirituality. The power does not have to be contained forever. But getting back to the analogy of the car, the cylinder within a gasoline engine has to have containment if the explosion within it is going to generate the power necessary for the operation of the car. An uncontained explosion simply blows up the car. It is a contained explosion that drives the car. So a key question for us as people is whether we have the capacity to hold the creative energy and power that is moving within us and let it be used on a controlled basis for good.

It is the same for any community of people. Any community has to be able to keep its peace if the power of creation is to be used for good. Otherwise, that power is frittered away in gossip, complaint and reactive emotion. No containment, no power.

There is a way we are made, and there is a way we are meant to operate. There can be no doubt that there is great power within us, and when we know what we are doing as masterful guides of the human capacity, that power is used for good. It creates joy, and brings the fulfillment that is natural to each of us.

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The course, Practical Spirituality: An Operator's Guide to Being Human, will be offered at Edenvale Retreat and Conference Center (<http://www.edenvaleretreat.ca/>) on November 9 to 12. Contact Maureen Waller at mwaller@emnet.org to find out more about the program.

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