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Look Well Within

Week Two

Overcoming Obstacles

*Guilt has no power, shame cannot hide,
All the beauty that lives inside.
Open your eyes, to realize
The wonder of your soul.*

None of us can make it through our human life without doing some things we wish we hadn't done, and not doing some things we wish we had done. Even though we know this is true for every single person on earth, we often find it difficult to give ourselves space to be human. We set up extraordinary and unrealistic expectations of ourselves and when we fail to live up to those expectations we heap guilt and shame on ourselves. Over a period of months and years, this guilt and shame can cause various reactions in us.

Sometimes we turn it inward and become morose and depressed. Sometimes we turn it outward and become angry, or even, violent toward ourselves or others. Sometimes, we avoid or deny the reality of the feelings and find that we are 'numbed' in our emotional and spiritual life. Sometimes the pain of our own failures is so great that our self-esteem diminishes and we no longer recognize the wonder of our own souls.

We can develop nervous habits, find ourselves distracted every time we want to focus on something really important, develop dependencies on drugs, alcohol, food, shopping, gaming, or sex, or find that life is less full and meaningful than we had hoped.

All the while, our soul sits quietly in the corner, as beautiful as ever. Shining like the finest ruby in the brightest silver. Waiting for us to step away from the slave masters of guilt and shame that keep us in the shadows of life, so that we can have our breath taken away at the beauty of the soul inside us that is beyond all corruption and imperfection.

Imagine believing in the beauty of your soul, even when life has left you feeling like you've failed. Imagine knowing that that beauty is untouchable and that no matter what you do or don't do, you are beautiful and you are loved. It's a hard concept to take in because the inner censor is strong. Instead of freely accepting your own beauty, you may find you start defending guilt and shame as being a just reward for your behavior or lack of it. Even when you try to 'move on,' so to speak, or try to 'act' positive and bouncy, there remains a nagging sense inside that you are not all that you should be.

This insistence on claiming your imperfection, even in the midst of trying to continue to be perfect in all things, creates inner conflict and agitation. There is a way to calm this agitation, but it is not by becoming more perfect. It consists in opening your eyes to realize the beauty and wonder of your soul. It requires a willingness to take a very courageous step. It requires that you go hunting for that fine ruby shining in the brightest silver. It takes courage because guilt and shame are so powerful. They are relentless in judgment, and will keep you tethered to their power unless and until you proclaim your freedom from them.

So, how do you proclaim that freedom? How do you find the fine ruby in the shining silver? Fortunately, although it demands courage, it is not hard, in itself, to do. You can start with three simple steps:

1. **Consider your birth.** Think about that first moment when you were seen by your parent, your doctor, a mid-wife, a sibling, a grandparent. See yourself through their eyes. Think about the awe that was present in that moment. That was the fine ruby in

the shining silver! Nothing has changed from that moment. Life has unfolded, mistakes have been made, accomplishments have been achieved, money has been made and lost, love has been made and lost, death of dreams and anger at betrayal have scooted across the stage. Still, that first moment of awe has remained. Returning to that truth will help you see again the beauty of your own soul.

2. Affirm full life. Identify what the Sacred had in mind when you were created as a human being. If you don't believe in a Creator, or Prime Initiator, identify what ideal you have for your life on this earth. This original plan or thought is still in place, despite anything that has occurred in life to make you think otherwise. This is not some grand, encoded, unknown plan that you have to try and decipher. Rather, it's the simple truth that you were created to enjoy your human life and delight in the wonder of being alive. You were created to be in relationship with your world around you and to find, in that world, the possibility and opportunity to experience life to its fullest.

3. Imagine the moment of your death. Think about who might be with you at that moment, what their first reaction will be as you take your last breath, how they will weep because your presence is no longer visible to them, how their lives will be diminished without your presence. Death, like birth, is the moment when the fine ruby in shining silver is unmistakable. At the moment of death, when those who love you most are feeling the sadness of your loss, they will not be recounting your failures. They will be telling stories about you and what you did in this world, and how you made a difference in their lives. They won't be heaping guilt and shame on you. They will be remembering you with love on their lips.

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