

The Monastery Name-Game: Its a Name Changer!

They shaved my head, gave me robes, and took my birth name. They called me Brother Adam. Adam isn't my real name.

I used to rise early in the mornings. There was something magical about being up before the sun rises and breathing yourself into the new day beneath a blanket sky of stars. It reminded me of how small and fragile we all are. I liked the peacefulness of it all. It helped me to connect with something bigger than myself and recall why I was there.

The trouble was, that—beneath that beautiful expansive sky, muddled in the dew of each precious new day—I began to feel like perhaps I wanted something different. I began to think that there was more to life than the monastery could offer.

There I was, having spent the first 25 years of my life serving God, now questioning my faith. Something was missing. The messy 'real' world called. At this point many people turn to religion. Not me.

I'd lived in a very structured faith community my whole life, attended Catholic school, studied to be a priest and even did a stint in a rural monastery where the life was very simple and basic.

I worked in the dairy. It was one my assigned daily tasks. I found something profoundly clarifying about cleaning the stalls, sweeping, keeping ones environment tidy. It helped to clear my mind.

And then one day I walked away, just like that- swept myself off into the sunset, knowing that the following morning the sunrise would mean something different. Life became less tidy, less clear.

It turned out that the unintended consequence of my new path was to cease believing in anything religious. It wasn't a choice. It just happened. I was choosing something different which was my new life.

I believe that we are each capable of being on our path, in fact it's almost impossible to stray off it. Life will deliver you to where you need to be—always. The only thing we need to do is to remain aware, looking for the lessons in it all.

Our spiritual journey is sadly an individual one. It can be hard to know what is going on – to make sense of our thoughts and feelings. It is difficult to discuss with others—the words never seem to approach the experience. But maybe we're not always meant to share this part of ourselves. Maybe we shouldn't want to share it.

One wise monk in the monastery told me “when talking about God, pay attention most to the people saying the least”. He usually said very little.

For almost 40 years I didn't take time for reflection. I didn't consider myself to be on a journey or path. I was just busy living. Nothing profound or special—it was the stuff of most lives. But spirituality has found its way back into my life unexpectedly or, perhaps, I'm just more receptive to it now that I'm growing older.

So, as I reflect on my path, I risk saying too much but I do want to share some thoughts. I see people going through transitions who might benefit from connecting with others who are feeling like there is more—out there. Sharing reminds us we're not alone and that actually being lost isn't a bad thing. It's just the path to a destination that's unknown.

This is how I'm finding my spiritual path again.

- I had to decide that I indeed do have a soul. Wow, a simple statement but it seems startling. I feel sad thinking that for nearly 40 years I really did not reflect on my soul. Maybe it has taken me all that time to see the difference between religion and spirituality. Disbelief in religion does not have to mean that we abandon the comfort of knowing we are soulful.
- I need to make my spiritual path real. Over time, religions cultivate a set of beliefs, rules and rituals that help to guide their faithful on their spiritual journey. But what about those of us who are going it alone? Yoga, meditation, nature surround me at Blue Osa and fundamentally support my intention to connect with my spiritual self. A consistent practice of meditation is my ultimate goal. Patience in getting to that goal is the biggest gift I am able to give myself as I reconnect with my path.

- I want to seek like-minded people who value their own spiritual journey. I find it so encouraging and uplifting to share my life and experience with others and am not surprised that, in seeking my spirituality, I want to share my journey with others. Conversation supports growth and understanding for me. I am blessed to be at Blue Osa where so many wonderful, insightful people come. I am nourished with their presence, insights, and laughter.
- I am trying to strip away the non-essentials. As I value my spirituality, it hardly seems surprising that it is necessary that I devalue materiality. I am prioritizing how I spend my time and resources. The great ascetics of the both the east and west limited what they indulged in as necessary for enlightenment. No way to get around this one.
- I am striving for goodness. This might be the least tangible part of my path but the most important for me. I am holding myself accountable for my thoughts and actions. I value this intention most since goodness for me is the basis of love. As I walk on my path, I am seeking goodness in myself and others.

If I had one piece of advice for anyone wanting to re-connect with their spiritual path, it would be this. Don't be afraid to go your own way, break away from the herd and figure it out on your own. Yes, it's scary and you might feel a bit lost for a while but keep going, be patient and take your time. Tune into your discontent and questioning –understand the motivational forces behind them. Let the answers come. Seek out the company of others that feel the same and remove yourself from people and situations that no longer serve to NOURISH you. Finally, trust you are never far from the path. It might just be a little foggy that day.

I don't know where I would be now if I hadn't listened to my heart. Oh, by the way, my real name is Daniel and I still like to star-gaze!