



## **Spiritual Life Begins Within The Heart, by Joan Chittister**

The truth is that we spend our lives in the centrifuge of paradox. What seems certainly true on the one hand seems just as false on the other. Life is made up of incongruities: Life ends in death; what brings us joy will surely bring us an equal and equivalent amount of sorrow; perfection is a very imperfect concept; fidelities of every ilk promise support but also often end.

How can we account for these things? How can we deal with them? How can we find as much comfort in them as there is confusion? These are the queries that will not go away but which, the spiritual giants of every age knew, need to be faced if we are ever to rise above the agitation of them. There is a point in life when its paradoxes must be not only considered but laid to rest.

The great truth of early monastic spirituality, for instance, lies in the awareness that only when life is lived in the aura of the transcendent, in the discovery of the Spirit present to us in the commonplaces of life, where the paradoxes lie, can we possibly live life to its fullness, plumb life to its depths. [...]

To the average person whose life is exemplary most of all for its ordinariness—to people like you and me, for instance—it is what goes on inside of us that matters for the healthy life and real spirituality.

Clearly, the spiritual life begins within the heart of a person. And when the storms within recede, the world around us will still and stabilize as well. Or to put it another way, it was greed that broke Wall Street, not the lack of financial algorithms. Whatever it is that we harbor in the soul throughout the nights of our lives is what we will live out during the hours of the day.

This single-minded concentration on the essence and purpose of life, along with a focus on inner quietude and composure, makes for a life lived in white light and deep heat at the very core of the soul. Centering on the spirits within us, rather than being obsessed with the vicissitudes and petty imperfections of life gives the soul its stability, whatever the kinds or degrees of turbulence to be dealt with around it. [...]

It is the paradoxes of our own times that skulk within us, that confuse us, sap our energy, and, in the end, tax our strength for the dailiness of life. They call us to the depth of ourselves. They require us to see Life behind life. Confronting the paradoxes of life around us and in us, contemplating the meaning of them for ourselves,

eventually and finally, leads to our giving place to the work of the Spirit in our own lives.

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