

Asking for Help

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Whether we know it or not, when we undertake a spiritual practice we are implicitly asking for help. Something at the very center of our being recognizes that there is an essential dimension to our life that is missing. The external things we are taking refuge in do not satisfy the deepest longing of our heart.

In responding to this cry of the heart we realize that we are making a journey into an unknown (or forgotten) land and need orientation and guidance. We seek out a group of fellow travelers who help us just by sharing this journey with us. And, ideally, we find a guide who has been walking the spiritual Path before us and can help us get back on it if we wander off.

The help of others is needed to get on, and stay on, the Path. Ultimately, though, our deepest spiritual need can only be met by the help of Something greater than ourselves, which is what we are really longing for. This...*Something* is described by various names like the Eternal, the Unborn, Cosmic Buddha, God. It does not force Its help on us but waits patiently with Its pure, unconditional Love without judgment for us to turn our hearts to It and cry, "I cannot do this on my own! I need Your help!!" And, as one of the Buddhist scriptures assures us, "Whenever we pray, we receive, without fail, a sympathetic response."

This cry of the heart was wrenched out of me one night on a beach in Florida. I was in despair, at the lowest point in my life and, as I walked on that beach, I found myself literally yelling to the universe, "Help!" My cry was heard, and over the next few months help came.

Over my years of training I have learned that the help rarely comes in a way that I expect, or that is easy to follow. Other trainees have assured me that it is the same for them as well. The Eternal does not magically remove our suffering; instead, the help is usually in the form of making us finally understand that the way we are living or acting is causing our suffering and that we need to change.

At the time of my cry on the beach I was one of the most unstill, uncentered people around. The unexpected answer to my cry for help on the beach was that I needed to learn to meditate. This really seemed to come out of left field and meditation seemed really alien to me. Thankfully, I listened to that answer, even though it was very difficult for me. I constantly fidgeted during meditation and my mind was all over the place. It seemed that meditation was just not my "cup of tea." But I had intuitive faith that this was going to help me, and I found the will to keep going.

At that time of my life I would spend the winters in Miami Beach working as a waiter. Another unexpected answer to my cry was that I should instead go to a temple in the mountains and train with a teacher. Again, there was just nothing in my life experience that made this make sense. And, as I did with the direction to learn to meditate, I ignored the voice of my-ego self that tried to convince me that this path was a mistake. I needed to grab my will and be willing to keep going, which is essential to training. Instead, I listened to the "still, small voice" of faith that this was the help I needed. And it was: it set me on this path of training that saved my spiritual life.

My teacher, Rev. Master Koshin, succinctly describes this process of asking for help and listening to the answer in a teaching he calls, "**The Five Aspects of Meditation:**"

Ask sincerely

Offer whole-heartedly

Wait patiently

Listen carefully

Follow gladly

My own experience over my years of training is that when I do this, “I receive, without fail, a sympathetic response.”