

Oh, the contradictions!

There are two kinds of truth, small truth and great truth. You can recognize a small truth because its opposite is falsehood. The opposite of a great truth is another great truth.

—Niels Bohr

Spirituality encourages you to approach life with more responsibility and respect for the deeper meanings behind even the smallest details of life. At the same time, spirituality also gives you an awareness that everything is running quite well without your having to feel anxious or responsible for it all.

The spiritual journey is filled with these sorts of seemingly opposite viewpoints. Here are a few more:

- **Effort is of utmost importance, but you have to stop trying.** If you don't put effort into attaining the great benefits of spiritual life, these attainments will probably not fall right into your lap. However, there comes a time when your trying must lose its sense of effort, wanting, and striving for something that you don't have. You make the efforts, yet the attainments come as a gift, like when someone who has worked hard to become famous for years or decades is called an "overnight success."
- **You're a work in progress that's already done.** You may have a whole list of improvements you'd like to make in your self. Maybe you're unhappy with how you act at times, or with certain self-defeating habits or thought patterns you may have gathered along the way. In this way, you're still a work in progress, with great room and potential for change, growth, and improvement. On the other hand — and this is a big spiritual hand I'm talking about — after you glimpse the amazing beauty and perfection of this eternal universe, you also recognize that your deepest spiritual essence is ultimately eternal and perfectly complete.
- **Love thy neighbor, but not too much!** A love for humanity is paramount for spiritual growth, but this love doesn't mean you have to spend a lot of time with all kinds of people all the time. The company you keep affects your thoughts and life in ways you may not even imagine (see Chapter 11). Some spiritual seekers find that a certain amount of solitude allows them to explore the inner realms and become clearer about what they really feel and believe. Even while opening your heart to fellow human beings, tap into the invaluable spiritual freedom and growth that comes when you don't feel obliged to fit your expanding beliefs into the concepts of too many other people's belief systems.

- **You have to take care of your body, even though you're not really the body.** You know how all these spiritual teachers say that you aren't really the body, you are pure spirit and all that? Still, you can bet that most of them eat when they're hungry and sleep when they're tired and probably moan and groan like everyone else when their own bodies go through a painful experience. This discrepancy doesn't mean they were lying about this "not the body, but pure spirit" thing. Rather, it's one more dichotomy on the spiritual path: You are in the body, but not of it.
- **You are supreme consciousness, but you still have to wash the dishes.** In the depths of spiritual practices such as meditation, you begin to experience greater realms of thought. You may feel completely free, expansive, and powerful — even one with the whole universe. Then, you come out of meditation, and that pile of bills is still sitting there waiting to be paid, the house needs cleaning, or the phone is ringing and your boss, a creditor, or a relative wants to have an aggressive chat with you. Where did all that freedom and expansion go?