

# Be True to Your Nature

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**Bradford:** I've been doing inquiry for about two years since I learned about The Work of Byron Katie and other methods of inquiry from other "enlightened" people. So far, the majority of the judgments that I had of the world and of myself are gone and I am more at peace with reality, and I am very grateful for that. I am obsessed with happiness/peace more than anything and I know that it is through seeing the truth that I will experience it.

But I feel stuck with one thing in particular that's been affecting every area of my life and it's preventing me from expressing myself and living in authenticity. I was raised in a Christian family and I am afraid that if I express my truth and start living in a way that feels good to me, they will believe that I'm going to hell and worry and suffer because of it. I don't want my mother to suffer, so I live a lie and pretend to believe what she believes. I know it sounds like a stupid thing to do, but I think you understand how fear works.

I have questioned the thought "I don't want my mother to suffer" and so far I have realized that I can't really know if her suffering now is not ultimately going to work out for her best. I have also realized that if I let her suffer because of me living honestly, I'm giving her the opportunity to grow out of her limiting beliefs. But I feel that is not enough, I still don't want her to suffer, but then I don't live the life that I like and I suffer. How can I live my truth without been affected by other people's suffering? Especially since their suffering depends on my actions (I know they suffer because of their own beliefs, but in this case if I don't say anything they won't worry)?

**Rory:** I also found the Byron Katie method extremely helpful when I discovered it, probably about 10 years ago now, and I'm glad it's been helping you so much. Our suffering is largely just created by thought cages, and by taking the bars off those cages, bit by bit, we experience so much more freedom - the freedom of our own essential nature.

I can definitely relate to your situation. First of all, I think it shows character and integrity on your part to care about how your actions impact others. It can be very tricky when your family all think and behave a certain way and you simply don't/can't buy into that line of thinking. I'm certain Christianity can have a good side, but it can also unfortunately create a great deal of suffering for people, with its rigidity and outmoded doctrines and belief systems that haven't been re-evaluated since mediaeval times. I once had a friend who was a devout Christian, and it used to terrify her that I even meditated! She was convinced that anything which wasn't explicitly "Christian" was the work of the devil, which I find enormously sad! Goodness knows what she would make of the Vedanta. :-)

Ultimately, we all have to follow our own *dharma* in life. We were all made to be a certain way, and given our own personal *dharma* (this manifests as our basic nature, our natural interests, passions and values, etc.).

We have no choice but to be what we are. It says in the *Bhagavad Gita*: "It is better

to do your own *dharma* imperfectly than to do the *dharma* of another well.”

It can be hard when we think differently to most other people in our culture, when we see things that they don't and have different values and perspectives. But we pay a heavy price when we fail to honour who we are. We experience a continual, gnawing inner conflict and unrest. When I was growing up, I learned this many times.

Ultimately, we can only ever be responsible for our own actions, and not other people's reactions. It's always good to try to avoid hurting people's feelings. However, no matter what you do, it's impossible to please everybody all the time. No matter how kind, compassionate and loving you are, there will always be someone out there who finds fault with you in some way! Such is life.

When it comes to expressing truth, with some people it's best to say nothing. I generally only share my thoughts now if someone asks explicitly, and I know they are open to hearing it. With Christians or overtly religious people or people who hold certain political views I don't agree with – I usually don't bother. It's important to choose our battles wisely, so sometimes I just nod and change the conversation, because it's pointless to share different perspectives or words of wisdom with people who don't have the capacity to understand or accept it. When someone's sole argument is “because the Bible says so!” there's not much you can really say to that, alas.

However, if it's something that must be said, then there are ways to express it with love, in a gentle and non-challenging/non-confrontational way. We can never control how someone else will respond. But when we conduct ourselves with kindness, authenticity and love, I believe that helps even if other people have problems due to their own thought constructs.

Whatever the potential issue is with your mother, I'd say weigh it up in your heart. If it's just something like you don't agree with her Christian views, maybe it's just best to avoid that topic, without getting into an argument. Only you can know what's right. Sometimes the secret in life is knowing when to speak and when not to speak – and also, whenever we do speak, to remember to do it with love.

**Bradford:** To be more specific, I don't really have an issue with their religious beliefs. I understand that they believe what they believe because of their conditioning and it hasn't come to them to question those beliefs. I can also see the relief that those beliefs can bring to people with a very dualistic mindset. I'm okay with that, I understand.

I also don't mind their efforts to try to change me, because I know that they do it from a place of love. They are offering me what they think would be the best for me according to their beliefs.

I just have this attachment to my mother, and she to me, probably because I'm the youngest child in my family. I just worry about the hurt that she must feel when she imagines her youngest son betraying God and go down what she believes is a destructive path. Every time I imagine her pain, I feel pain, so I avoid letting her know that I don't have the same beliefs as her.

**Rory:** You have a very mature outlook with regard to your family's religious beliefs. It can be surprisingly rare for people to be able to see things like that from another's

perspective. Most people are generally stuck seeing things from their own personal narrative, which is why the world is so full of conflict, sadly.

I'd say follow your own *dharma*, while also observing situational *dharma*. As I said, I don't often share my thinking and perspective with others unless they ask and are open to hearing it. Most the time I just connect with people on the level they're happy with. With non-spiritual friends, we just chat about mundane stuff, the usual kind of everyday conversations. With family, just engage with them about family things we have in common. There's another *Gita* quote which says, "The wise should not unsettle the minds of the ignorant." The word "ignorant" isn't meant in an insulting way, it just means those who aren't open to spiritual truth. So there's a situational *dharma* regarding who you are with too.

Also, *karma yoga* is essential. Do your best, follow *dharma*, act with integrity and then hand up the results to *Isvara*, and – realising that you're never in control of the results of actions – accept what comes, knowing that there's a greater force at work, dispensing the appropriate results.

That might help ease the fears you have with regards to your mother/other people's suffering. I've always been very sensitive to other people's emotions and suffering, and always wished I could remove other people's pain. Ultimately though, we can't. We can be there but we can't take other people's *karma* for them. We can only live our own lives, being the best we can, following our *dharma* and developing dispassion, which is one of Vedanta's primary mental qualifications. Dispassion grants us a certain immunity to other people's thoughts/opinions because, as we know, no matter how much you might try to please everyone, you can't all the time.

Keep up with the self-inquiry because it reveals our problems to largely just consist of thought. Dropping the thought and coming back to the present moment, we slip out of what Vedanta calls *pratibhasika* (the subjective reality of our thoughts and imaginings) and come back to *vyavaharika*, which is the objective reality.

**Bradford:** Thank you so much, Rory! I'll continue doing self-inquiry and I'll just let things unfold. Maybe I just need to let the new realizations settle in and allow my body and mind to keep up them.

**Rory:** That sounds like the best option. Sometimes the mind gallops ahead, trying to figure everything out in advance, whereas daily life is just about being present, living each moment as it comes, following your *dharma*, being clear about your values and using a discriminating/discerning mind to keep you on the right path.