

STEPPING OUT OF THE

Spiritual Closet



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by Anita Pettersen

*"Love is my religion...
you can take it or leave it,
and you don't have to believe it."
~Ziggy Marley*

Do you have a coming out story? A time when you have declared difference from your family, peer group or community? A moment when you have risked not belonging because part of you was screaming that you just could not stay quiet for one more second? Becoming our true selves is a perpetual coming out journey, and there can be gut-punching moments of revealing ourselves that shift the course of our lives forever. These are acts of bravery. While sometimes taken as declarations of war, our challenge is to maintain our inner peace, strength and resolve, even if our coming out creates discomfort for others. As we walk the path of spiritual growth, our belief systems are ever-evolving and push us to live our truth. And keep pushing us to step out of the spiritual closet.

The beginning of my story

*"Every life has its challenge. Every heart has an answer."
(HeartMath® Institute)*

I come out of the closet every day. Sometimes I just stick out a toe to test the waters... Always wondering, is it safe? But each little 'test' is worth it because I get to become a little more me with each rotation of the Earth. Parts of myself are out there, but so much more has yet to be revealed. It is scary. There is fear of judgement and rejection with each proclamation I make. But those voices of fear are getting quieter as my connection to our Creator grows. So I reflect back and think— was I always this way? No, of course not! As a child I was outspoken, chatting with everyone and telling them our family history. It was embarrassing for my big sisters. It was troublesome for my mother because she would lose me everywhere as I wandered spreading my news and seeking to quench my curiosities. And they all wondered what planet I had beamed in from! I had no fear. Fear had to be created for me so that I would stay 'safe' and stay close.

In my early years I was open and shared my thoughts with everyone. I also enjoyed listening to people's stories. In particular, I revelled in the magical stories that my mother would tell. One of my favourites was the miracle of the roses that originates from her birthplace of Thuringia in

Germany. I asked to hear that one again and again, each time elated when the bread would mysteriously turn into roses and save Elisabeth's life! We were not rooted in religion, but rather in the spiritual. And in the mystical. My mother would talk a little about many faiths. And provide interesting discussions and books to go along with our conversations. For a time, she would take us to Satsang as a holistic way of connecting with spiritual practice and be with thoughtful people promoting one-love. Instead of having to choose one set of religious or spiritual teachings, Satsang embraced all teachings and the common spiritual love in them. This evolved into formal spiritual studies by the time I was eleven years old. These were engagements with a spiritual community without the fear of being judged. It was an opportunity to ponder the mysteries of life while nurturing personal growth.

As a child, my inner life was terribly important to me. As well as my outer connections. Although, back then I knew there really was no distinction between inner and outer -- it is all one. I could read the energy of people, animals, plants and places, which was both fascinating and wearying. I would feel ill every morning before school with the foreboding of the empathic challenges ahead. But once at school, I was adept at transmuting the energy coming my way. I was a social butterfly, and friendly with everyone. And ever looking for more meaningful ways to connect with people. As an example of my efforts, when I was about seven years old I set up two stools in the garden and booked one on one meetings with everyone I could. My big sisters were resistant to partake, but my mother made them. I would sit on the stool opposite my invited guest and tell them that we were going to have a heart-to-heart conversation, and I would touch my heart and then their heart. I would look deeply into their eyes — even if they were rolling them — and philosophize about our connection to our world, to one another and our feelings about it all. Then at night, my mom would ensure that my sisters received the hugs that I wanted to give them before going to bed.

As we grew up, my mother kept providing such interesting and varied information to us, but always with the warning to be careful who we talked to about the mystical. She said that not everyone would understand and that people have their own belief systems. If I started talking about working with energy, reincarnation and miracles, then some people might be afraid, and that it was not up to us to decide who was ready to explore the supernatural. The vexing child that I was returned the favour to my mom by telling everyone that she was a witch. A good witch, mind you, who would heal us with plants from our garden and potions she would create. I wrote papers about energy and vibrations in elementary school and the teacher called my mom to tell her that she could not do my homework for me anymore. Bewildered by this suggestion, my mom had to explain to the teacher that she did not even understand what I was writing about so she could not have possibly written my papers for me. My exasperated mother would have many talks with me about how I was choosing to move through the world. And I rebelled against stepping into that spiritual closet for so long.

My mom's history, and weaving our histories together

My mother would worry. She often wondered, could she continue to nurture her own spiritual growth, and that of her three daughters, and still keep us 'safe'? You see, my mother had been firmly planted in her spiritual closet and wanted to plant each of her children safely in our own spiritual closets as well. Fear. It was so very hard for my mother to do anything without fear. Fear was a sombre figure that had accompanied her for as long as she could remember. All of her early life had been a covert operation. She grew up during the oppressive Nazi rule of Germany, and any intuitive gifts she expressed were quickly shut down by her astute and protective father. It was a very dangerous time to expose one's true self. But her father, my grandfather, understood only too well as he studied the spiritual as well. My grandfather also had the courage to be an active member of an underground anti-Nazi movement. And one day he was found out. This put the family on the run, moving them from their small town in Thuringia to hide in the big city of Hamburg. Here they faced the onslaught of frequent terrifying air raids. And eventually the Nazi Gestapo caught up with my grandfather and he was sent to a concentration camp. My mother learned deep secrecy and fear as a result of up-close direct experience. It permeated her early years and shaped her outlook on the world.

Somewhere in all of our lineages, we each have oppressive histories. And possibly blurred yet viscerally potent past life memories of persecution. Stored and passed on through our DNA. The stories vary, but the effects are similar. These shadowy challenges create fear and keep us living small. And through her efforts to leave the past behind, my mother was torn. Unable to shake the deep programming and hurtful experiences. My mom had the yearnings of a spiritual seeker, and the fear of a child of war on the run.

Cautiously, my mother found ways to extend her spiritual knowledge and to bring us kids along for the ride. Our formal spiritual studies started in a similar vein to my grandfather's. Our spiritual mentor began his journey as a chiropractor and then branched out into energy theory and work. He called it 'white light' work. The pure white light of God (or Spirit, or Creator) that sometimes becomes visible energy, creating halos around living things, as well as around paranormal phenomena such as angels. We called it 'taking a class'. We had an adult class and a kids' class where we studied the spiritual. Our little mystery school. Everyone else in the kids' group were teenagers, and my mom had to advocate for me to be permitted to join. At age eleven I was determined to show everyone that I could keep up. The lessons we studied were practical and magical, heart-centred, philosophical and exploratory of our inner lives, as well as the world around us. Not about strict rules, nor about the judgement of right or wrong ways to think, but about endeavouring to understand ourselves and each other. We discussed our ideas, our dreams and our visions. We talked, wrote, drew and painted. We listened to music and spent time in nature together. There was a sense of oneness in our group, but also with everything in our world and beyond it. It was what I was searching for, and I never wanted our studies together to end.

But our short mystery school sessions would whisk by — we did not get to live there. And the majority of our lives were spent out in a world that seemed to see things so differently than our spiritual study discussions. We are shaped by our experiences, and even our best intentions to live otherwise can be derailed. Eventually, I stopped asking my sisters for hugs. I no longer booked heart-to-heart conversations in the garden. I allowed a distance to grow between my inner and outer self. I picked up the materials that my mom had passed to me and constructed my spiritual closet and put most of me inside it. I had heard about fear often enough to make the fear my own. For a long while, my spiritual side would only come out of the closet in increasingly briefer family conversations and during our formal spiritual studies (after the first decade or so, the adult and kids class had become one group). My childhood visions of limitlessness became shackled in something called ‘reality’. I was not very familiar with this thing called reality, but I gave it a try. A long try. But the confines of our ‘realities’ are crowded with limiting belief systems that we have each created and are attempting to coexist within.

Yet, this is what I came here for. To get the experience my soul ordered so that I could learn self-reliance and resilience. And as a rite of passage, it is in the distancing from family and community where new kinds of growth can happen. Like a rebelling teenager getting insight by investigating other ways of doing things in the world, even if they circle back to how they have been raised. Family and community shape us on a daily basis, providing us with the right challenges and circumstances for the journey we came here to experience. It was part of my life experience to learn to honour peoples’ boundaries and belief systems. And to learn to assert mine. But, as so often is the case, learning others’ boundaries happens at the expense of our own. Sometimes we relax a boundary in order to connect with someone or with a group, but then we stop being who we really are. And it is so much harder to declare our boundaries later. As I stopped honouring my own instinctual inclinations, I was also stepping further into my spiritual closet. My strong personal resolve faded into doubt and questioning.

Do we really want spiritual growth? AKA — We may think it feels more comfortable swaddled in the closet!

“Human beings have a great capacity for sticking to false beliefs with great passion and tenacity.” ~ Bruce Lipton

I have worked with many people like myself, who are on a path of seeking spiritual growth. And when we have a block in life, so often it comes down to what we are not letting ourselves see. As I grew up, I learned to play the game of ignorance that adults were teaching children. Ignore your intuition and follow the rules. Ignore that nudge of precognition and listen to your teachers. Let institutions be your moral compass. Do not question the system or the system will question you! An ongoing challenge of the human experience is to negotiate our passion for ignorance. We become so invested in our belief systems, that when new information enters our awareness and challenges our beliefs, we may pretend that we have not noticed it, or proclaim it to be wrong information. The issue is, that as we evolve, we outgrow our belief systems.

Known in Buddhism as one of the kleshas — or mind poisons — ignorance is a hindrance to our spiritual growth. Psychoanalyst and post-structuralist, Jacques Lacan worked with Buddhist thinking and explained that there are three fundamental and blinding passions — love, hate and, what he felt was the greatest passion of all, ignorance. This appears to be an extension of Lacan's field of psychoanalysis where purposefully ignoring something is known as a disavowal, which is the outright denial of something you know to be true. It is an old phenomenon. Along with Buddhism, Ancient Greek philosophers also toiled to understand our longstanding human characteristic of choosing to be ignorant. Choosing to follow customs over following senses in order to maintain belonging to a group. Often doing so to avoid persecution for contradicting those in power. Today, those same power dynamics continue to socially construct society and guide behaviour. It is part of our attempt to live in harmony with one another, but it can put us at war with ourselves when we feel forced to follow guidelines that do not match our personal belief systems. And when we find that we are holding two or more contradictory beliefs or values, modern psychology describes this as the stress of cognitive dissonance — where we choose to ignore the information that makes us feel uncomfortable. At least at first.

Belief systems and responsibility

*"We can disagree and still love each other,
unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression
and denial of my humanity and right to exist."*

@SonofBaldwin (Social Media Community founded by Robert Jones Jr.)

Did you ever think of yourself as passionately not wanting to know something? For some, it may initially seem counter-intuitive. But upon reflection, we may remember moments where we could sense that something was off, but we hoped it would balance itself out without us having to face the discomfort of learning an unwanted — or *inconvenient* — truth. And when we do not want to change our behaviours — we may choose to ignore or disbelieve the evidence. When we ignore our truths, anxious little persistent thoughts may come up as we experience the duality that this cognitive dissonance generates.

But ignoring something does not keep it from existing. Wayne Dyer's last solo publication is fittingly titled, "I Can See Clearly Now," and in it he weaves through the challenges from his life. Looking back he shows why each event needed to happen to give him the experiences he required, for his personal growth and for his successes. Dyer shows that sometimes it is only in hindsight that we can see what we have been unable to see, or even ignoring. We can also look back at human history and see the passion for not accepting information as true. A passion for holding on to what is viewed as safe and comfortable, or at least not disrupting the status quo. A passion to hold everyone in place and behaving according to a plan or shared belief systems. A passion for turning a blind eye to things that we think would make our lives harder: such as eating healthy, exercising, quiet reflection, and caring for the spaces around you. A passion to block change or progress. Yet part of the journey in our current era is that the spiritual veil is being lifted, which has allowed humans to reach a critical mass of new awarenesses. A couple of decades ago, my spiritual mentor would describe this approaching era of the veil lifting as a

time when all will be seen and there will be nowhere left to hide. This includes matters in our personal lives, as well as those big institutional paradigm strongholds created for purposeful misguidance to try to keep the general public in ignorance.

So how can we see through our blind-spots in the heat of the moment? How do we remain present and out of the paralyzing hold of overwhelm? While it seems an impossible task for humans to be free of all ignorance, since we as humans do not yet know everything there is to know and we all know different things in different ways, we can still counteract the human passion for ignorance. Quiet reflection helps us integrate knowledge, fine-tune our intuition and can ease our resistance to knowing something. At some point we each experience a form of incongruity as our old beliefs do not completely disappear — they are layered in with our new beliefs and experiences. This is perpetually in action as new information is received each day and our belief systems are shaped accordingly. And this is also why expanding our perception can be so powerful; it allows us to bring clarity to our own views while beginning to understand someone else's outlook.

What can be even harder to accept than the belief systems of others that we have been indoctrinated into, is the realization that we have outright *chosen* to ignore information. As the ancient Hawaiian art of practicing Ho'oponopono shows us, now is the time of taking responsibility for all that is us — the things we are conscious of, and things we are not. It is when we take full responsibility for our lives that we open our eyes to new perspectives. Our past experiences shape us, but we are still responsible for who we become. And we are responsible for how we treat others. We are responsible for our thoughts. If we do not like our thoughts, then we can change them. Or try to. And seek support for those thought patterns that are hard to break. If we stay in the place of pain it is hard to see a different perspective. When we bring our heart into coherence with our mind, as is taught in HeartMath® studies¹, we can find a peace that allows us to see other viewpoints. In helping ourselves do our inner work and self-care, we really are doing the best for everyone.

However, if you keep dismissing the nudges from Source to be your true self, those nudges become shouts. Ignored still and they become pushes. Like getting fired from a job that you continually complained about. Realize when it is time for action, or action will be taken for you. And when you have stepped out of the driver's seat of your life, the action taken may be harsh. Staying in ignorance can be a form of avoidance that we might choose because we feel it will 'keep the peace'. But your soul wants you to stay on purpose, notice the signs early and take steps that may require courage, but are really kinder and gentler for all involved.

¹ The HeartMath® Institute is founded upon the scientific research of creating coherency between the mind and the heart, and ultimately creating holistic and healthy balance between all of our mind, body and spirit systems. Finding this balance allows us to reduce stress and anxiety, and access our heart's guiding intuition. It is where science meets spirituality, with the science measuring our physiological responses and the practicing of HeartMath® techniques brings about a calm yet alert state that is optimal for our health and spiritual growth.

Be brave, but be understanding too

“Regardless of who we are, how we were raised or what we believe, all of us fight hidden, silent battles against not being good enough, not having enough and not belonging enough. When we find the courage to share our experiences and the compassion to hear others tell their stories, we force shame out of hiding, and end the silence.” ~ Brene Brown

It does not matter who you are, or what type of closet of oppression that you are in; if you are closeting your truth or your True Self, your self-esteem is going to tumble. There are numerous types of closets to be concealed in, such as the addict closet, the mental health issue closet, the sexual orientation closet, and, of course, the spiritual closet. Needless to say, there are differences in what that entails for each person, but there are also overlapping similarities. Fear of being oneself, fear of oppression and fear of not fitting in or belonging. These are powerful fears that may impede someone's coming out. Yet, not coming out can be painful and disempowering. We are all meant to be our true selves, and not be living someone else's idea of who we should be.

I walk the line of both worlds, while aiming for them to merge together. Trying to completely step out of the closet that I have felt forced into so I can fully be my true, holistic and spiritual self. Yet as time goes on, you start to realize the intricacies and complexities of responsibility for our choices that have kept us cloistered. There comes a time for us all to question everything. This is how we find out what is really ours and what is not. Over the years we collect information and guidance from others, and it may all be 'ours' in the sense of we were given the energetic exchange we were looking for at the time we received the input: Everything is energy, and we connect with things that are vibrating at our frequency. But we begin to realize that not all of our parents' beliefs work for us. Not all of the guidance or feedback a friend, teacher or mentor has given us works for us.

All the comments and criticism given to us, we tend to take them all in and to take them all on – especially as children. Even if we consciously reject the notion that we are not good at math (or sports or science), if everyone keeps telling us we are not good at math, often we take it on as our story. As our truth. When all that was true was that there was a time when we struggled with a concept, that a teacher said we were not good at and we took it to heart. It was not a good idea for the teacher to speak in absolutes like that, saying that we were not good at something. Maybe we just had not slept well the night before. Maybe our parents were in the middle of a divorce and our ability to process information was a little hampered at that time. And the same is true for the teacher; they might not have slept well or they might have been going through a divorce. Or they were speaking the way that their teachers and other adults spoke to them. But since everything shapes our beliefs, there comes a time when we need to purge our systems. *Tabula rasa*: A clean slate. And then add back in the things that make our hearts sing. Such as, loving flowers and dancing in the rain, and allowing ourselves to cry when we feel moved to do so. That maybe, some of us do not like the taste of watermelon and we are not sure why everyone thinks we should. That we can figure out math. That one might not believe in God in the churchgoing way their parents do, but instead believe in a higher power that created life and

the cosmos. Being open to allowing our beliefs to expand. All we have is this moment, right here and now, and this moment is filled with opportunities for growth and change that further our evolution.

What do you allow for yourself?

Self-care: It's an inside job!

"Belonging is belonging to yourself first. Speaking your truth, telling your story and never betraying yourself for other people. True belonging doesn't require you to change who you are; it requires you to be who you are. And that's vulnerable." ~ Brené Brown (2019)

For years, I felt I was tasked with holding energetic space for the people I worked with. I viewed my clients as esteemed guests and fellow seekers that I was honoured to collaborate with. We would sit together and triangulate with Source. People would share some of the most intimate private moments of their lives, and I hold them sacred. In my paper, *Angels: a bridge to a spiritual pedagogy?* (2015), I held space and discussed with young children about their experiences with the mystic realm. Once opening up the conversation, children are often only too happy to share their mysterious stories and encounters. This was also made clear to me through my experience of raising my own kids. Young children are some of the most honest people on the planet as they have not yet been completely programmed by the social constructs of the world around them -- as illustrated above in the recounting of my own emboldened early years.

When you create 'allowing spaces' for such existential conversations, many children open up and let their stories flow out. Upon hearing about my work, their parents, like so many adults I meet, would take me aside and speak to me in hushed voices, like we were spies on a secret mission. Initially, I would be nervous that they were upset by the work I was doing with the children. Then they would say things to me like, "Don't you dare tell anyone...but this is what I have experienced...", and would go on to divulge that they too have encountered angels, or have experienced some type of mysterious paranormal phenomena. If those people were ready to step out of the spiritual closet, I could have published an intriguing book of those stories alone. But those private and sacred sharings will remain that way. Because the timing that we reveal ourselves to others in is also sacred. And only we have the right to 'out' ourselves.

Like the receptive culture we created during my research, we all need allowing spaces to express ourselves without worry or judgement. Education researchers Affrica Taylor and Miriam Giugni wrote about creating common worlds, and to "take up the ethical and political challenge of learning how to live well together and to flourish with difference" (p.109, 2012). How beautiful and straightforwardly brilliant to propose this ideal of our differences actually *benefiting* one another in this world that has been known to be so dichotomous. To realize it is not about getting someone else to think like you, but rather about respectfully listening to one another and

creating the paths of allowing spaces. This is what I endeavoured to provide during the supportive sessions that I offered. Ideally, through a session we would be able to gather strength and feel encouraged to be our authentic selves. To try stepping out of our spiritual closets. It is freeing! Even if some days, you just stick out a toe...

STARTING STEPS

“Authenticity is a collection of choices that we have to make every day. It's about the choice to show up and be real. The choice to be honest. The choice to let our true selves be seen.”

~ Brené Brown (2010)

Find the spiritual circles and safe places to tell your story, so that you hear yourself saying it and start to understand yourself better. And those respectful people hearing it have the opportunity to reflect back to you with their perspectives and understandings and with their own similar experiences. This is what those uncomfortable conversations of stepping out of the spiritual closet do for us; they are forward action on our path of purpose. But it is risky. Even when you open up in what you perceive to be a safe and allowing space, you cannot control the responses of your listeners. And your listeners may be reactive if they are triggered. They may feel threatened. Your stepping out of your spiritual closet may set off the alarm systems in the spiritual closets of those that feel vulnerable. Stay calm. Their reaction is part of *their* journey.

And after a while, you will realize that your closet has a leak! Again, you need not worry. No repair crew is necessary. All spiritual closets have leaks. Because while we might deny our prophetic dreams and encounters with angels while out in the ‘real’ world, we can never really cut ourselves off from Source. We still go outside and feel our heartbeat and see trees or feel the breeze or hear birds chirping. As per my ethic of body-mind-spirit that refers to to our indivisible enmeshment of ourselves and with our world, there is no “separating out of Spirit” (Pettersen 2015 p.2). This we all know, but sometimes let ourselves forget. When I have studied and written about the knowledges of Indigenous peoples (Pettersen 2016), I have found beautiful reminders that describe our oneness on Earth and with the beyond. This is Indigenous wisdom that has been passed down through time immemorial. While western world thinking has embraced Newtonian laws that separate out the body and mind for examination, Indigenous peoples bring a holistic approach to our human existence. And the rest of the world is starting to catch up with Indigenous wisdom, if not through how it resonates with our hearts, then through the modern science of quantum physics -- which confirms that everything is connected and we are all one. Even when we are in the spiritual closet, our spirituality seeps out everywhere. And as we find our courage, we can step out to show the world who we really are.

SELF-CARE ACTION STEPS: Because we need to fill our own tanks first!

"Takes tremendous discipline, takes tremendous courage to think for yourself, to examine yourself. The Socratic imperative of examining yourself requires courage.

William Butler Yeats used to say, it takes more courage to examine the dark corners of your own soul than it does for a soldier to fight on the battlefield. Courage to think critically.

Courage is the enabling virtue for any philosopher, for any human being, I think in the end.

Courage to think. Courage to love. Courage to hope." ~ Cornel West (2008)

And I would add, the courage to step out of the spiritual closet.

Treating yourself to a self-care session:

We often look for guidance during challenging times. If that is the case for you right now, then taking the first step of *deciding to take action* may be the hardest part. Please know that you can do it!

Before you start, decide what kind of self-care you are resonating with at the moment. A walk in nature? Self-reflection time, perhaps with some journalling? Creating a peaceful place to rest?

The following is a possible HeartMath® meditation that you can try...

1. Create peace.

If possible, find a quiet space where you are not likely to be interrupted. We can all learn to peacefully self-reflect in the middle of a crowded room, but if you can arrange your time and find a little tranquil spot, then create it! When I have needed to, I have even created space in a literal closet for myself while my young kids were noisily playing in their rooms.

Lay out any boosts of other items that bring you a joyful feeling of connection with your heart and with God. I like to light candles and bring out some of my many treasured crystals, especially my smooth selenite and my clear quartz point. But all you need is you!

2. Create a mindset, and bring in white light.

In your peaceful space, imagine the bright white light of God shining through and around you.

3. Heart Expansion.

It is simple and powerful:

Gather all the busyness of your mind and let it funnel down into your heart. Your heart is a gentle place, yet it is more powerful than your mind. Your heart knows. Let your heart hold all of your thoughts and feelings. Now imagine your breath going in and out through your heart, as it does, while the white light brings you peace. The white light surrounds and protects you.

Hold this calm and neutral space for as long as you feel you need to, or have time for. Notice any thoughts that may be coming to you.

4. Reflect upon your downloads.

You could write this guidance down in your journal or wherever you like to take life notes. Later you may see how some new innerstandings have been formed. Deeper reflection and investigation allow you to discover the things that you did not initially notice as relevant; like revisiting a dream.

Allow your quiet reflection time to help evolve and expand your personal belief system, that is unique to you, to your journey and to your experiences.

In closing, be encouraged

If you are having a hard time being your true spiritual self, I wish I had all the answers for you on how to step out of your spiritual closet to let your light shine. But each of our journeys are exceedingly unique. The best I can do is tell you my story. And my story is not over. There is so much more for me to learn. And so much of myself that I have not yet chosen to reveal. What we can take from sharing the stories of our ongoing journeys is the diverse and rich ways we can each fortify our spiritual lives. And while we are doing that, we find those moments where we can step out of our spiritual closets and feel the joy of doing so. Each of us travels our path in our own way, but here are a few ideas to guide you:

1. **Remember that our journeys are not formulaic**, yet as we connect with the oneness of Source, there may be some patterns and similarities in the steps we go through.
2. **Know your truths and act from them, but also be flexible** with your ever-changing path. Like the wise ancient text of the Tao Te Ching says, “**be like water**” (p.8) and continue to flow with the changes of your own personal evolution.
3. **Recognize that when your heart is open, and your intuition is guiding you** with peace and joy, then you are on your path.
4. **Choose the places that you feel safe to take your steps out of the closet.** You have probably already been doing so. But our journeys are never over. Keep stepping out. Keep embracing who you are meant to be. If you are not finding those safe spaces, then try creating them.
5. **Stay calm and find your neutrality.** If you experience criticism when speaking your truth, try to remain neutral. Appreciating that we each have our own belief systems also means holding allowing space for all of us to have our own beliefs at different times on our journey towards oneness. But, if someone is being hateful or oppressive then walk away. It is not your job to ‘condemn’ or ‘convert’, as musical poet Ziggy Marley reminds us.

6. Let your light shine for the world to see.

7. Trust that you are Divinely guided.

8. Have faith in yourself and your path. You are part of your own trinity of your body, your mind and your spiritual work. Not on the outside of it all, but rather engaged and agentic in each step of your life. Each thought you have, each feeling you experience and each action you take are all part of the path you are creating for yourself.

9. As you go deeper, surrender to Source. Let go of your need to be right, because things are always shifting, and we are human and we are fallible. Trust in your divine timing, and have faith that God is with you, working for the greatest good and highest interest for all.

10. Change is only a perspective shift away. While breaking old patterns and trying new things -- like stepping out of our spiritual closets -- can be hard, through the self care of things like journaling and self-reflection, we create new neural pathways in our brain that help shift our perspectives. And *magically*, somehow the things around us start to shift. Whether we see it is as our perspective that has shifted, or the behaviour of people around us changing, or both, energy has been moved and we can experience things in a way we could not before. We are at a new resonance frequency.

Always be looking for your next step of action, whatever that might be for you. Making time for self-care and self-reflection. Being in nature. Writing down your thoughts to gain mental clarity. Speaking your truth when someone has crossed your boundary. Allowing your belief systems to evolve. Finding moments to have heart-to-heart conversations that nurture your soul, and that help you find peaceful balance while you weather the storms of change. And again, please be brave and find the moments to step out of your spiritual closet!

Epilogue

"Whatever your challenge is now, look at it. Face it, do not avoid it. Bravery is called for.

Breathe deep, and leap in. As a wise elder once said, 'the only way out...is through.'

You got this. You're not alone. Ask for advice.

Keep an eye on the horizon, and an eye on the steps ahead."

~Waylon H. Lewis (2019)

My mother passed away at the beginning of 2019, and one of my sisters and I sat talking about our mom with a consultant in preparation for her memorial service. The consultant had her mouth open and her eyes wide, listening to the journey of our mother. After a while she said to us, "Do you know how lucky you are?" My sister and I looked at each other as we sniffled and wiped our eyes. Then we nodded. We know that we are pretty lucky indeed, that despite all the challenges we faced together, our mom still made sure that our spiritual lives were rich. She may have taught us to be cautious about stepping out of our spiritual closets, but she made sure our closets were stuffed full of spiritual potential!

Even if my mom wanted me to be tucked safely in my spiritual closet, I am grateful that her cautiousness gave me the awareness to be respectful when I do step out of my spiritual closet in a world full of diverse beliefs. Whatever your spiritual journey has looked like so far -- whether you are just starting out on the spiritual path, or feel that you have not had spiritual support, or the support you have had so far has not resonated with your heart and you have expertly crafted a deluxe spiritual closet for yourself and filled it to the brim, you will discover that you are journeying alongside many others on a similar road to freedom to be their true selves. Find your kindred spirits! If you have been working on stepping out of the spiritual closet, then I am holding a space of love for you on your own unique journey. And right here on this page is the energetic support for you to continue doing so. Stepping out of the spiritual closet allows you to shine and for the whole world to benefit from the energy that you were born to contribute.

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