Long considered a powerful spiritual attribute in the lives of holy men and women, receptivity is a revered act in nearly every spiritual tradition. Roots of receptivity have origins in the earliest human civilizations. When we look closely, we discover being receptive to possibility, to mystery, to the known and the unknown in every manifestation of life. Even atoms and subatomic particles can reveal a story of ongoing receptivity resulting in new life.

Why is the practice of being open and receptive an important spiritual practice for men and women, the young to the aged? It’s simple. A receptive person tunes in, opens up, and becomes vulnerable to reality—risking growth and transformation. When we are willing to learn and grow, we experience harmony, compassion, and a willingness to suffer for others. Paradoxically, the stillness experienced in the heart of receptivity is also distilled attention. From this state of poised centering, the woman or man of prayer becomes interrelated with possibility, potential, and reality.

Quite often we turn off our receptivity and openness, choosing instead to busy ourselves with tasks. We become distracted and miss the gift of the hummingbird, the temple bell, the teapot, the incarnate world. Could it be that fear, mindlessness, and antipathy stifle the receptivity that can lead to our healing, creativity, and transformation? Thomas Merton writes, “The contemplative life must provide an area, a space of liberty, of silence, in which possibilities are allowed to surface and new choices—beyond routine choice—become manifest.”

As a spiritual practice, receptivity teaches us to be open to shadow and light, polarities and perplexing oppositions, and our own inner and outer landscapes. With practice, we are unburdened and unbound from the tyranny of unhealthy action and thoughts. The spiritual quality of receptivity is a powerful gateway to presence and ongoing revelation of Mystery. Receptivity offers feathers of possibility and healing for our lives, and the insight that we are invited here and now to live on behalf of the world community. When we choose receptivity we allow Holiness room to rest and grow within our inner landscape.

Notice if these questions help you become more open and receptive ...

- In what situations and places do I best practice receptivity?
- When I encounter a child, stranger, lover, tree, or busy city street do I believe that the act of receptivity can guide me into deeper presence and gratitude for what is?
- How can receptivity to trauma, illness, or pleasure in my body teach me?
- Why is my own practice of receptivity valuable for the life of the world?
- How might the receptivity offered to me by a spiritual director or guide allow my own story to unfold more completely?

SEEDS OF INTEREST:
- The Great Story
- Field Guide: Spirituality for Extroverts
- Global Resources
- Ask Owl
Fifteen billion years ago—
Bursting out of stillness,
Billowing forth,
Radiating out,
Dust gathers,
stars form.

Light
cartwheels,
somersaults,
traces its own trajectory
across the expanding universe.

Eventually—
The forests sing with the wind,
The oceans dance with the moon,
The stars blink their cosmic code.

I was there!
Every element in my body
radiated out with the fireball.

As were all my fellows—
the four-leggeds,
the winged ones,
the finned and the furred.

We all began in radiance
and are meant to live together
in mutually enhancing fellowship.

I was made from radiance.
Made to shine.
Made to burst forth.

This day among fifteen
billion years
might seem as nothing.
But for me it is everything—
twenty-four hours of potency!

Bless this day,
and all the days of our lives
as they unfurl from your
Gracious hand,
O Creator God!

In general, where do you focus your attention and energy? Extroverts find their focus is most often on the outer world of people and things. Introverts are more liable to turn their focus inward to thoughts and ideas. Both extroverts and introverts have specific gifts and challenges on the spiritual path.

An abundance of spirituality books, courses, and retreats encourage an introverted focus. In fact, many extroverts believe a maturing spirituality is an introvert spirituality! They view their own way as inferior or shallow.

Extroverts tend to be gregarious, comfortable in groups, like to be actively involved, and enjoy meeting new people. Extrovert spirituality is a beautiful thing. While writing Spirituality for Extroverts, I completed research to explore the ways a mature extrovert faith is developed. As a spiritual director, I speak to many extroverts who do not think they do any spiritual practices—simply because they do not sit silently to pray. Instead, they sing, or dance, or walk in the woods expressing gratitude. All of these are spiritual practices!

Extrovert spiritual practices may be done by extroverts or by introverts. And any practice can be done in an extroverted or introverted manner. Take group singing, for example. Some singers may be turned mainly inward, with enough attention directed outward to stay with, and enjoy the other voices. Others experience a heightened sense of the spiritual as their attention and energy very consciously connects and interacts with the other singers. Singing is a favorite spiritual practice of extroverts. The next time you sing in a group, be aware of where your attention and energy is directed. It’s possible that you even experience a shift between an inner and outward direction.

Another favorite spiritual practice is prayer or meditation. Many extroverts like to pray with others, feeling their own experience is deepened by attuning with the group energy. Solitary prayer or meditation can be done in either an introverted way, or as extroverted contemplative prayer, a type many of my respondents engaged in.

Cultivating spiritual friendships is also popular.

Extroverts like to process and explore experiences with another person, and found formal or informal discussions contributed to their spiritual growth.

Are your favored spiritual practices extroverted or introverted? I hope you can experience your own inclination to either the outer world or people and things, or the inward world of thoughts and ideas as inferior to no one. I invite you to expand your prayer and try the inclination that is not your usual way of being in the world. You may have a delightful experience!

—Nancy Reeves is a clinical psychologist, spiritual director, and author who presents workshops in eight countries. Her most recent book is Spirituality for Extroverts (And Tips For Those Who Love Them), Abingdon Press, March 2008. She is currently on a North American tour, and can be reached through her Web site.
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Question: Have you ever heard of spiritual awakenings occurring during sleep?

My entire body seems to light up whenever Spirit descends in the dark. The experiences are so vivid that they trump dreams, infusing my body with electric wonder and my soul with reverent gratitude.

Hoot Hoot: There are many ways that we wake up to Spirit, or that Spirit or Presence wake us up. A precious touch of Spirit normally arrives unannounced, at unexpected times. Human beings are embodied and incarnate, so it should not be a surprise that energy, heat, electric tingling, or some type of movement may be felt and experienced in the body.

Describe your energy story with your spiritual director or guide, particularly if the experience infuses wonder and reverent gratitude within you. For some people this might be an extraordinary experience, for others, it could be normal. It is important for you to discern what this experience means to you, not what it might mean for someone else. And, try not to become too attached to the actual experience itself, but allow the experience to be transformational. Some spiritual directors have training in energywork; all should be able to explore your personal story with you. If you are seeking a spiritual director or guide, and you experience sensations of energy in your body as prayer or a curiosity, make sure to talk about this topic during your exploratory interview. This will aid in your mutual discernment process. Perhaps you have an invitation to be a night owl person of prayer!

—If you have a question for Owl, please e-mail Listen@sdiworld.org.

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