

Are You Addicted to Spiritual Escapism?

wakeup-world.com/2021/02/08/are-you-addicted-to-spiritual-escapism/

February 7, 2021



February 8th, 2021

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Aren't you sick and tired of running?

As a species, we're always running and hiding from everything, whether we know it or not. We run from love, forgiveness, mental ideas, other people, beliefs, inner fears ... but above all else, we run from ourselves.



We are always running AWAY from something and running TOWARDS something else. But what happens when we manage to catch up to that thing we've been running towards? Usually, the "finish line" that we've been working so hard to reach is a mirage. This "magical" special place we've wanted to reach ends up disintegrating before us, leaving us empty again.

As we progress through life, we always feel restless. How often have you sat down and just felt needlessly happy ... not because you finished a goal, were complemented by another or bought something cool ... but for no reason whatsoever? Just for the joy and honor of being alive?

Blaise Pascal once said, "All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room." Pay attention to this sentence; it is overflowing with wisdom. This simple, but unspeakably powerful observation, points to the heart of our problem: restlessness that comes from a fear of meeting ourselves.

Why are we so afraid to meet ourselves as we are? Why are we terrified to sit down with the thoughts and emotions that cause us great pain?

We are forever aiming for something else. We are forever trying to BE someone else. We can never quite be happy with us, as we are, right now.

How long do you think it would take for you to get restless by just sitting down, and embracing it all as it is – all the messiness of you and your life? I know that for me it doesn't take very long. I frequently feel the urge to pace up and down, to run, to fill the empty space inside with some form of addiction.

Why are we so restless? And what can we do? Or not do?

How Everything Around You Triggers Your Inner Restlessness

Society is built on running.

By running, I mean emotional, psychological, and spiritual running. Without movement, society would collapse. Without consumers, there would be no one to buy, and consequently, no one to sell. With no one to sell, everything crumbles. Do we need a new social structure? I don't know – that is not the scope of this article.

What I do want to point out – or remind you of – is how the surrounding world perpetuates the desire to run and hide. This is not a “bad” thing or a “good” thing; it simply is the way life is right now.

We have social media, magazines, TV shows, movies, education systems, legal structures, and even social reinforcement which constantly instills within us the desire to run. We are told that we're not attractive enough, young enough, thin enough, smart enough, healthy enough, respected enough, educated enough – and in the spiritual society, healed enough, “transcendent” enough, and even good enough.

We are constantly striving to be “enough” according to OTHER people's standards. Innocently, we forget that other people profit from our vulnerability, our confusion, and our insecurities. But they wouldn't be able to profit from us if we firmly believed, within ourselves, that we *are* enough.

I will repeat that again: *society cannot make us feel lacking or in “need” of something if we already feel enough unto ourselves.*

But why is it so hard for us to simply feel enough? Why do so few of us truly feel “enough”?

How All of Us Are Addicted to Emotional, Mental, and Spiritual Escapism

Running is a form of escapism.

It feels good to run away from things that scare us – that's a simple fact. When we run, we fool ourselves into believing that we have somehow “lost” whatever was disturbing us.

Not only that, but running is a great distraction. All of the effort put into running exhausts us so that we don't have time to face what is truly causing us fear or pain.

Running also makes us feel "productive." Since childhood, we are conditioned by society to believe that life is about "productivity" and getting things done. Being a "good member of society" is really only about using your time and energy to run towards some kind of ideal. That ideal might be a nice job, big paychecks, fancy status, good house, sexy partner, or even something as seemingly benign as finding your soulmate or having a big family.

There is nothing wrong with ideals in and of themselves. The problems arise when we invest all of our hope and happiness into these ideals. Anything that can be taken away from you that you attach to, is a source of pain. Anything outside of yourself that is a source of "happiness" will soon perish. Yet many of us don't stop to realize that. We are too tired from running.

Even the spiritual path is a form of escapism, especially when it is used to bypass painful elements of life and sugar coat them with fanciful ideas.

In the traditional spiritual path, there is the spiritual seeker who is constantly chasing after enlightenment. But the moment he/she thinks he/she has obtained enlightenment is the moment self-realization dissolves. Inner emptiness emerges again, and the chase starts all over from square one.

Chasing for more happiness, fulfillment, love, transcendence, is still chasing. And I must stress, there is nothing *wrong* with chasing. Running is a natural part of life. But if you are exhausted and sick of running from and to something like me, listen up:

There is deep and immense wisdom in your exhaustion.

Your exhaustion is trying to tell you something.

Your exhaustion is teaching you a lesson that perhaps you cannot grasp right now.

It's time to slow down and listen.

How to Embrace Your Inner Emptiness and Restlessness

We are so used to running that the moment we stop ... we are restless, agitated, and irritable.

The deep conditioning within us to pursue, pursue, pursue, scrapes against our minds. An urge within us arises to find something, run towards something, become someone, or even, lapse back into one of our addictions.

What is restlessness?

Restlessness is the feeling that arises when your Heart and Soul has awakened, but your mind and body are still trying to slow down. In this way, restlessness is kind of like jet lag. The mind and body are still trying to acclimatize to the new reality.

Another analogy is drug withdrawal. You are so used to feeling a certain way, that when you are taken off that drug, you crave to get back on it immediately. Or perhaps, think of a treadmill. You've been running for so long, that when you power down the treadmill and stop, your body is still full of adrenaline, and you're still breathing heavily. It takes a while for you to readjust to a slower, more natural way of living.

If you are feeling restless and exhausted, you are almost certainly experiencing what I have just explained. Your Soul has awakened, but your mental body is trying to slow down and acclimatize.

Not only that, but everything you have been running from is starting to emerge again – and this can be an extremely difficult and disturbing experience. Once you realize how easy it will be for you, in this period of your life, to become addicted to the “search for happiness” again, you will see how important meeting this restlessness is.

Restlessness and emptiness, while unnerving and disturbing, are great gifts. Many of the greatest “enlightened” souls have gone through this experience. Take three living teachers today: Gangaji, Unmani, and Adyashanti. For a large period of her life Gangaji had been seeking for awakening, until one day, her teacher told her to simply “STOP.” This single word awoke her. Unmani, on the other hand, was an intense seeker who broke her leg during a fierce catharsis session. Recovering in hospital for weeks, she became extremely depressed and restless, until she had her moment of ultimate awakening. Adyashanti also experienced intense restlessness and defeat after trying to meditate for many years. Once he accepted defeat and the ensuing emptiness, a whole new world opened.

As we can see, restlessness was a catalyst or precursor of a deeper spiritual awakening. The moment we begin to get tired by the search to become someone special, attain some special state or get more things is the moment a sacred DOOR opens.

If you have the courage to walk through this doorway, or even just the willingness to face this pain, here are some ways to approach it:

1. Ask yourself, “What am I running away from?”

Beneath your discomfort, what are you running away from? What is triggering your desire to escape? What have you not faced? Spend time sincerely asking this question. Write down your thoughts and observations. Pay attention to your feelings.

2. Explore the question, “What am I running towards?”

What is the proposed “solution” to your inner feelings or fears? What form of escapism or addiction do you usually fall into to get away from your emptiness? What feeling, behind the name, object or experience are you pursuing?

3. Spend time alone

Solitude and silence are essential for this time of deep inner work. This is a time of withdrawing from the world and finding out what you are trying to escape from. If you can manage to figure out what you are hiding from and avoiding, you can begin to disassemble it so that the Light can break through again.

4. Openly express any emotions that arise

What feelings accompany this restlessness? Do you feel angry, frustrated, grieved, terrified, depressed or sick? Express these emotions and get them out of your body. If you need to cry, cry. If you want to scream, scream, even silently. If you need to punch, kick, laugh or moan, do so in a healthy way in private. If you need to express yourself through art, song or dance, do so.

5. Say a Soul Prayer

Your Soul is the ultimate source of wisdom, love, and guidance. In each moment, your Soul is present and watching carefully. Pray to your Soul for guidance through this tough time. Ask for strength, inner clarity, courage, support, and the willingness to face the truth.

6. Practice unconditional presence

Yes, this is hard. Harder than I can possibly express through words. But sitting down, and allowing the sensation to envelop you will help you to process what you're running from. Not only that, but meeting your fears allows them to be honored, seen, heard, and surrendered.

Asking for the strength of your Soul and the Love of your Heart to support you, sit down and close your eyes. Become aware of all sensations coming and going through your body through mindful attention. What and how do you feel? Become curious. Locate the pressure, tingling, itching, heaviness, hollowness, and other sensations emerge in your body. Breathe deeply and gently, allowing these feelings to be felt. Allow these sensations to stay as long as they like. This openness to experience is known as unconditional presence.

7. Go slowly and get lots of rest

Become aware of the urge to go quickly. In whatever ways you can, slow down. We are so used to rushing everything: our eating, our sleeping, our walking, our speech, our presence with others, our work. Tune into your body and ask it what it needs, and how quickly it can go. You will feel the response.

You also need a lot of rest at this time. Your body, mind, and heart are all processing this shift in your consciousness.

8. Reward your willpower

Once you are committed to stopping and facing whatever you've been running from, you'll realize that willpower plays a big role. It takes a lot of self-restraint, or abstinence, to get past the addiction to running. At times, such abstinence can make life feel dry, heavy, and difficult. Removing the source of empty transient pleasure in place of the eternal ecstasy of the Soul to emerge can sometimes be a long process.

Don't forget to reward yourself. Take care of yourself and find healthy ways to enjoy life (that won't feed the addiction to escapism). Learning how to find balanced pleasure again is paramount to rediscovering your wholeness.

Tell me, are you a runner? Are you struggling with mental, emotional or spiritual escapism? I know how difficult this addiction can be. Please feel welcome to share your story, or advice, below.

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About the author:

Aletheia Luna is an influential spiritual writer whose work has changed the lives of thousands of people worldwide. After escaping the religious sect she was raised in, Luna experienced a profound existential crisis that led to her spiritual awakening. As a psychospiritual counselor, tarot reader, and professional writer, Luna's mission is to help others become conscious of their entrapment and find joy, empowerment, and liberation in any circumstance. See more of her work at lonerwolf.com.



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