

Staying on the Old Track

By

Tylluan Penry



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This book is dedicated with love to my daughter,
SHJP, a weaver of tales and singer of songs...



Other Titles by Tylluan Penry :

Magic on the Breath (published by The Wolfenhowle Press 2011)

The Essential Guide to Psychic Self Defence (published by Capall Bann 2010)

The Magical Properties of Plants - and How to Find Them (published by Capall Bann, 2009)

Seeking the Green (published by Capall Bann, 2008)



A note about references....

Much of the information in this book, *Staying on the Old Track*, comes from my own experiences and thoughts. However, I do sometimes quote specific works. These have been placed within the text using the Harvard style of referencing, i.e. Author, Year and, where appropriate, page number. This is much neater and easier than struggling to find endnotes after each chapter.

If you wish to consult the referenced work for yourself, just go to the Bibliography at the end of this book and look up the cited author; you will find the full reference set out there.

Introduction

I wrote this book in response to a question I've often been asked in the past two years, 'How do I keep the magic and enthusiasm alive on my path? It felt so right once, but now I just don't know how to get that feeling back.'

After a while I decided to sit down and work out exactly what it is that goes wrong and why, and more importantly what we can do about it. Personally I always found it a comfort whenever I stalled on my path to realise that the problem – and the solution – lay with me. We are the ones who need re-energising, not our path. Our path is always there, whether we're actively walking along it or sitting down for a breather. It's our approach that changes.

The impetus on any spiritual path must come from within. Without it, then no matter how active we try to be, or how many rituals we perform, essentially it is hollow and empty. If there is an obstacle we have to get around or over it. If there is a problem it must be solved somehow. If we are tired we should rest. And if we are bored then we must find something to interest us again.

Something I've noticed over the years is that we all seem to share many of the same problems no matter what path we're following. Although *Staying on the Old Track* is something of a sequel to *Seeking the Green*, you don't have to read both. This book can apply to just about any path, because although paths may differ, our problems are remarkably similar!

The main reason we feel our path has lost its charm is because there's an obstacle up ahead and we haven't a clue how to deal with it. Instead we simply flop down, unable to continue. However there *are* ways of getting back on track, and I hope this book will show you some creative and imaginative solutions.

Nothing in these pages is speculation about hypothetical problems. Instead it's the product of working through many of my own spiritual difficulties. All the solutions I suggest have been tried, tested and

found to work, both for me and others and I sincerely hope they will work for you too.

I've intended *Staying on the Old Track* should be regarded as a guide. Think of it as drawing up a chair beside the fire and having a good chat together. Work through it, or dip into when necessary, the choice is yours.

I really hope this book will help kick-start you on your path again. Even if you aren't having problems at the moment, being aware of potential pitfalls can be useful in helping you avoid problems later on.

There's no reason anyone should feel blocked on our path, or unable to continue if we want to. The tracks are there, all we have to do is get moving again. One step at a time.

Because the path - whichever track you happen to prefer - belongs to everyone.

Brightest blessings,

Tylluan Penry 2012



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CHAPTER ONE

Recapturing the initial enthusiasm....

Part of the problem with any spiritual path is that the initial excitement tends to fade after a few months or years. It happens to most of us. If we are lucky, we find we are left with a sense of gentle companionship. Of course there's absolutely nothing wrong with that provided that we look for a little variety now and then. A quiet, gentle path may be very rewarding – after all who wants to sail in a stormy sea all the time? But it can mask something much more dangerous. Routine.

Now on the face of it there is nothing wrong with routine. It can and should help us to get things done. When I was younger, routine was thought to be the answer to just about any problem. Find a routine and stick to it and the baby would be potty trained, the home would be spotlessly clean and all would be well. All this is true - up to a point. After all, without some sort of routine meals would never be cooked, clothes would never be washed, studies would never be completed. However, there is one thing we must never forget:

Routine makes an excellent servant, but a truly terrible master.

This is how something that begins as an aid to organising one's life can suddenly take over until it dominates our every moment. In the end you find yourself saying things like, 'No I can't come out this evening (much as I would like to) because on Tuesdays I always...'

Perhaps it isn't quite that bad for you at the moment, but rest assured it soon will be if you're not careful. And routine, that seemingly comforting, oh-so-practical routine, is the sworn enemy of spirituality because it encourages us to settle for so little while making us believe that we're actually achieving so much.

So at this stage I suggest taking a long hard look at your life. Even if you don't feel you are stuck in a rut at the moment, it can be a very informative exercise. It can also pinpoint potential problems so you

can avoid them in future. In particular you should look closely at anything you have made part of your routine. How essential is it really? Do you have to do it? More importantly, do you actually *enjoy* doing it?

I once knew someone whose aunt made a point of visiting every Christmas time, whether or not she was invited. She was not a particularly pleasant woman; she always managed to upset either my friend or his family in some way. But nobody would ever say 'No' to her. Nobody would even attempt to tell her that she couldn't come to visit because they were doing something else. It was a perfect example of routine becoming a monster. And it was making everyone (except possibly the aunt) totally wretched. From October onwards they were all nervous wrecks, dreading the festive season.

After one too many wretched Christmases my friend finally realised this couldn't continue. It wasn't easy because by now the aunt regarded the visit not as a treat but as her right. Efforts to put her off failed miserably. She was determined to arrive in all her spiteful glory even though it must have been clear even to her that she wasn't really welcome.

In the end my friend lied and told his aunt that he and his family had rented a cottage in Devon for Christmas week. Of course they hadn't. What they did was to stay indoors with the curtains shut and the phone off the hook. And believe it or not, they all reckoned it was the best Christmas they'd had in years! This might be a rather extreme example, but it shows how easily things can change into a deadening routine before we're even aware what's happening.

In his famous story, *Tom Sawyer*, (Chapter 2) Mark Twain remarked, 'Work consists of whatever a body is OBLIGED to do, and... Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do.' Well, now is a good time to examine our lives and weed out the things we are being forced to do for no really good reason because these have such a suffocating effect on our spirituality.

To do this we have to begin really looking at our life and relationships. Of course, the practice of self examination is nothing new. Plato (Apology, 38b) records Socrates' remark, 'An unexamined life is not worth living,' during his trial in ancient Athens.

I have to admit I'm very fond of quotations, maxims, epigrams etc. They are often the easiest way to understand a complex concept within very few words. In fact, I like them so much that every year I pick a quotation that 'speaks' to me and allow it to inform much of my thinking for the coming twelve months. I will often write down the quote at the front of my diary just so I don't forget. It's a good practice and I strongly recommend it.

The first quotation I would like to share with you comes from the nineteenth century American author, Henry David Thoreau who wrote, 'Not until we are lost...do we begin to understand ourselves' (1995 Chapter 8). This is so true and yet so obvious, we're often in danger of forgetting it.

Getting lost – like so many things that appear disastrous at first – is not something to be feared. Rather it is a lesson. An opportunity. It is up to us to make the most of it.

So to begin with, write this quotation somewhere you will see it regularly, every day if possible. This could be in your diary, your magical journal, Book of Shadows or even scribbled across the top of a calendar or kitchen blackboard. Where you put it doesn't matter. What matters is that you read it often allow yourself to absorb its wisdom.

Sometimes we forget that in order for any sort of communication to be effective two things are essential. Firstly, whatever is said must be clear and simple. Secondly, there must be an audience that is able and willing to understand the message. Once you have read Thoreau's quote you become the audience, and it becomes your task to understand and eventually act upon that understanding.

Your list of the things that have become routine in your life should make interesting reading. Big things, little things, they all add up. Some might seem really trivial but list them anyway because often it's the collective effect of petty things that does the most damage. Big things we can spot. Small things have a habit of slipping under the radar!

When you start looking at your list, you'll probably be surprised how much of your time is taken up with things you don't need – or want – to do. Of course, there is nothing wrong with helping others when they need it. It is quite a different matter to place yourself permanently at the disposal of people who feel they have the right to drain you physically, emotionally and psychically for no good reason. Therefore it's essential for your physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing to learn to say no to them. As quickly as possible.

The next stage is deciding what you can do to improve the situation generally.

Begin slowly. First get rid of those things you really do not enjoy and do not need. Yes, there will always be things we have to do that we don't like but which are necessary. Those you will have to learn to deal with, but once you have streamlined your life, you should find that putting up with things you just cannot get rid of (for the moment, anyway) will be that little bit easier because so much other pressure has been lifted.

While you are clearing out this time-consuming and unnecessary clutter, you will notice how good some people are at spending our time for you. They are also often the very people who will try to make you feel guilty for saying 'no' to them. Remember there is only one person who has the right to decide how your time should be spent - YOU.

A wise man once told me that in order to produce a beautiful garden it is necessary to plant as many flowers as possible in order to stifle all the weeds. Personally I don't actually have much of a problem with weeds, most of which are beautiful in their own right (at least until they begin to set seeds). I do think though, that once you've begun to

make a little time for yourself, you should begin to fill some of the gaps with things you really want to do. This is as good a time as any to have a go at realising some of your dreams and ambitions.

Unfortunately, we often make monsters of our dreams. We plan things so vast, so unattainable that we will always be doomed to failure. This is not the way to do it. Keep dreams simple. Divide them into segments and tackle just one at a time. That way we can enjoy some success as we go along. And it is this success – no matter how small – that then propels us onwards to greater things.

For example, a friend of mine once complained that she would love to paint but simply didn't have the time. Once she examined how her time was spent however, she realised she spent ages every day on her computer and phone. I advised her to allow herself two hours per week when the computer was shut down and her phone turned off. In those two hours she was to do nothing but paint.

After a few months she found herself spending more and more time painting and less time online or on the phone. She sent texts out before her painting time was due to start, warning that she wasn't going to be available for the next two hours. Then she switched the phone off and got on with what she really wanted to do. It was amazing how much happier she became once she spent her time in a way that pleased her. Also her friends gained a new respect because she was showing them that she respected herself.

We all encounter this type of problem from time to time. Often we're so busy worrying about friends, family, the environment, and about trying to be good people (and there is nothing intrinsically wrong with any of those things) that we forget to be good to ourselves. Unfortunately once other people see we are not respecting ourselves, they will see no need to respect us either.

So when you look over your list, aim to free up *at least* two hours per week of time you can spend entirely on your own pleasures. It doesn't have to be a single block of two hours; you can break it down into more

manageable chunks if you prefer. It's surprising what you can achieve in two hours of uninterrupted time!

Now - before your first chunk of time is due to start - begin planning how you would like to spend that time. Perhaps you feel that you are somehow not 'doing' enough about your spirituality and would like to focus on that. But how do we do this? What do we need to do?

For many people, spirituality and the practical side of having any sort of spiritual path, consists of study, ritual and meditation. Of the three, ritual is probably the most difficult to fit into our daily lives. It feels alien somehow, as though we are putting on a show. But it really doesn't have to be that way.

One of our problems is that although we feel we should be 'doing something' we don't realise that consciously walking our path *is* doing something. However, the key word here is 'consciously.' For us to get the most out of our path, we need to be aware of it. It's a bit like our relationships. Sometimes we don't realise how much they mean to us until they are no longer in our lives. And often the very reason they are no longer in our lives is because they thought we didn't appreciate them!

At the end of the day, it's up to us. Our choice. Conscious awareness or blissful ignorance. Just remember that whatever we choose is likely to have consequences...

