

Just Ask Alice!

Guidance on Life and Living



ALICE INOUE

Dedication

To all whose questions have given me inspiration

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Also by Alice Inoue

Books

A Loving Guide to These Shifting Times
Be Happy! It's Your Choice
Feng Shui Your Life!

DVD's

Feng Shui Demystified
Office Feng Shui
Feng Shui Illuminated – FAQ's on Feng Shui

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The names of the readers who submitted questions for this book have been omitted for reasons of confidentiality. In some instances, I developed somewhat different scenarios to further protect their identities. In addition, I altered details such as gender, name, or city location when necessary. Therefore, any details or circumstantial similarity to someone you know is purely coincidental.

In some cases, I combined questions from more than one person to minimize redundancy. In all cases, the core concept and theme of the question are authentic.

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Introduction

For as long as I can remember, I have loved advice columns. When I was five years old, I got up early and immediately picked up the paper before my dad awoke, just so I could read Dear Abby. As the years went on, I remained fascinated with other people's problems and the advice that was given to solve them. I enjoyed agreeing or disagreeing with the advice and always had an opinion about what I would say if I were asked the same question. I learned much about adult life just by reading advice columns.

I liked to read about other people's lives so I didn't feel like I was the only one with challenges. As a child, I felt life was hard because my father was abusive emotionally and sometimes physically. Additionally, no one seemed to like me at school; I was excluded from social cliques and private gatherings. I think I received this treatment because I had skipped kindergarten and entered first grade at five years old, so I was much younger than my classmates. These experiences caused me to withdraw and become a loner.

Actually, the situation worked out perfectly because my parents were very private, and while we lived in San Francisco (before I moved to Taiwan), they did not allow me to interact with kids outside of school. I was not allowed to visit a classmate's house, even if the whole class was invited. Because I was an only child until I was ten, I had to think of creative things to do to pass the time when I was alone. One of the games I loved to play was "Alice, the Advice Columnist."

To begin, I wrote questions from make-believe kids my age who had challenging personal life situations and pretended that they were writing to me for advice. I patterned the game exactly like *Dear Abby* and followed the same signature protocol that *Dear Abby* used to keep the questions anonymous. I had fun making up names for the questioners like, *Lonely in Lebanon*, *Taunted in Toronto*, or *Sad in San Francisco*. I sealed the pretend letters in envelopes, going so far as to address them with made-up addresses and pasted-on stamps.

I wrote letter after letter and put them in an old cigar box I had found. Since I wanted to be a “popular” columnist, the box had to be full before I could move on to “advice day.” I spent a lot of time writing the letters.

On advice day, I selected some figurine we had in the house, one that resembled a human or an animal, and I pretended it was the “person” seeking advice. I placed it on the table near me, opened up the cigar box, ceremoniously opened an envelope, and started reading. I offered advice to the figurine based on the question in the letter. I usually didn’t feel like writing, so instead of an advice column, I pretended I was doing a talk show. I answered my own questions. In retrospect, I recognize that all of the questions the make-believe people asked were questions from my own life that I wanted answers for. I believe now that by asking myself questions, I was able to give myself advice as to how to handle the challenges I was facing because I didn’t have anyone to share them with. I remember that I really wanted to help the questioner not be so upset and that my answers actually helped me cope with what was going on. I always tried to find the bright side of the situation and offer them hope.

The questions were simple ones like, *Why don’t people like me? Why can’t I have friends? How come my dad screams at me even though I didn’t do anything bad? I hate my life, what should I do?* Although I created different background scenarios for each “writer,” the theme of the challenge was always from my personal experience. No wonder I could always relate to the writer’s problem! After reading the letter aloud, I looked at the figurine and started every advice session by saying, “I completely understand what you are going through.” At that time, I didn’t realize I was talking to myself!

Somewhere around the age of ten, I stopped playing “Alice, the Advice Columnist,” yet to this day, I continue to be fascinated by advice columns of all sorts. I love the idea that one person can help another see a new perspective on their situation and get answers that can help them.

“The answers lie in the questions you ask.”

My partner, Alan Wong, has sayings his company has come to call “Wongisms.” One is, “The answers lie in the questions you ask.” True to this statement, I have found that the questions you ask in life are the starting point for new growth and evolution, and they are always the catalyst to your next step. Whether you are asking the question to yourself or to others, the answers give you information that can raise your awareness and your consciousness.

In the first quarter of 2011, Ron Nagasawa, publisher of *MidWeek* and vice president of the *Star-Advertiser* (Honolulu’s only daily newspaper), asked me to write a regular column on feng shui in the Sunday paper insert *Hawaii Renovations*. We named my column “Go Ask Alice.” Although it is not a traditional advice column,

it is based on commonly asked questions about feng shui. I see it as a step towards my goal.

I hold on to my vision of one day having a heart-centered advice column that is read by millions of people, a column that answers reader’s questions from a spiritual, astrological, and environmental perspective and addresses the body, mind, heart, and spirit. It will be called “Just Ask Alice,” the same as the title of this book. This book is the first step towards that vision.

About the book format

The book is divided into two parts. Part One, Guidance on Life, answers general questions on the broader picture of life, addressing topics such as life purpose, karma, spirituality, astrology, feng shui, the concept of time, and the 11:11 phenomenon. Part Two, Guidance on Living, answers reader’s questions on finding love, getting others to change, dealing with in-laws, procrastination, emotional affairs, dream interpretation, and more.

This book was developed from real questions posted on my website anonymously over the years, sent to me by email when I requested questions for this book, and collected from private sessions. Some topics were more popular than others: the question about what 11:11 means was so popular that I received dozens of queries on it, and this is the first time I am “officially” answering it.

I believe that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions asked. I simply offer a point of view outside the questioners’ immediate vision that can open them up to new possibilities and a new path of exploration. Just so, I hope this book can open you up to a new perspective on life.

Meanwhile, ask yourself questions. Ask others questions. Open yourself up to different ways of seeing things. Be flexible in your thinking. Both give and receive advice, and always do so with an open heart, never judging the question or the answer as “right” or “wrong.” By doing so, you can expand your life in ways you never dreamed possible.

Be curious and new vistas will open up before you!

PART ONE

Guidance on Life



Just Ask Alice!



Just Ask Alice!

Chapter One:

Life

LIFE PURPOSE

Dear Alice,

I have been on a spiritual journey recently and I want to learn more. I find myself asking so many questions during this process, such as “Who am I?” and “Am I fulfilling my life purpose?” There is a part of me that knows I am not, because I am uninspired by my life, and yet I wonder how to figure out what my purpose is. Does purpose show up in an astrology chart?

Can you give me some insight into this? Are there steps I can take to “find myself?” How do you know if you are living your purpose and if you are on the right path? How did you find your purpose and know you are on the right path?

—Inspired Seeker

Dear Inspired Seeker,

There is nothing better than to get inspired about your life. Getting to know yourself in a new way and getting clear about why you are here can open up new pathways for you to follow. Your dreams, desires, hopes, and wishes, as well as your purpose for being here on earth, are alive in the center of your heart. No one can tell you your purpose better than you can, because the answers lie deep within your own being.

The voices of others

Growing up, it's natural to follow what the voices outside us—parents, teachers, friends, and other authorities—say is important. But now, when you follow others' viewpoints without listening to your feelings, it's easy to get caught up in a life that is not authentic, one that lacks clarity about why we are here.

From the time I was about six years old, my father said I should be a doctor. He sat down and told me being a doctor was a good profession because I would get respect from others and earn a lot of money. However, he also said that if anyone should ask me why I want to be a doctor, I should tell them I wanted to help people, because that was the answer that would open doors for my future.

He bought me books and plastic models of the human body and made me read *Gray's Anatomy* daily, and every evening I had to report what I had learned. He introduced himself to doctors in the hospital near our home and told them about my "purpose," and they invited me to follow them around after school to get a head start on my life.

When I went off to college, I still intended to become a doctor because of my father's influence, but by then it felt like something I "had" to do versus something I wanted to do, even though I volunteered at the emergency room fifteen hours a week and took extra biology and science classes.

Although I did not become a doctor, it took me about twenty-five years and dozens of significant life experiences to find my purpose. In fact, I didn't even know there was such a thing as a "purpose" until I began to feel inspired and happy about what I was doing. At that point, I wanted to help others discover what inspires them so they could live meaningful lives. I realized that the ultimate path involves understanding yourself from a deeper level and living with purpose.

You are here for a purpose

The more meaningful your life is, the more inspired you are. When you know what your purpose is and are committed to yourself, you will grow. Those who do not live from purpose and commitment tend to lose energy physically, mentally, and emotionally and live a quiet life of internal desperation.

You are here on earth for a defined purpose. You are a unique individual with a spirit that wants to express itself in its unique way. When you know your purpose, you will discover that you can make a contribution to humanity in a manner that is uniquely yours, as well as create a foundation for the path you know you want to travel.

It takes a lot of time, commitment, focus, and determination to discover your purpose, but there will never be a better time to start than now.

Step One: Answer these questions

Get a notebook and dedicate it to yourself. Spend hours writing in it and answering the following questions:

"What do I want to be?"

Write at the top of the page, "What do I want to be?" At first, you may say, "I don't know." Stay with it. Don't judge yourself or what you're thinking. Write whatever comes to mind. Be creative, daring, and bold. Jot down everything that feels good, regardless of whether you think it is possible.

You can express an emotion that you desire to have, a state of mind, or a profession—anything! For example, "I want to be inspired, happy, smart, and peaceful." What are some things you wanted to be when you were a child? "I want to be a fireman, a ballerina, a singer, a professional horseback rider." There are no right or wrong answers. You can write down anything that feels inspiring. Listen to your heart.

"What would I love to do?"

Now, ask yourself what you would love to do. Devote another page or two to this question. Again, there are no right or wrong answers, no ridiculous responses. If your answer comes from a place within your heart, acknowledging it will in some way make a difference. Whether what you would love to do is in business, at home, or part of a spiritual quest doesn't matter. Anything you write down may be a piece of the puzzle of your life, and if pieces are missing, you will not have the whole picture. Write down everything.

"What would I love to have?"

Finally, ask yourself what you would love to have. Write whatever comes to mind without filtering your answers. Don't give yourself messages like, "That's not possible because I don't have enough money." When you do, you immediately create a mindset that assumes what you would love to have is not possible.

Take some time with Step One. Write to your heart's content. Allow a few pages for each question and explore every nook and cranny of your heart. What do you want to be, do, and have in all areas of your life? If you knew that you couldn't fail and listened to your heart, what would your answers be?

Step Two: Create a different reality

Step Two is powerful. As Dr. John Demartini has taught me, the quality of your life is determined by the quality of the questions you ask yourself. So, instead of saying, "I'd like to be a professional astrologer, but there's no way I can learn all the symbols, get good at it, and get enough clients to make money," ask yourself, "How can I learn astrology, become a professional astrologer, get lots of clients, and make a

living from doing so?” The questions you ask yourself will open up new possibilities and a whole new path so that you can live a life of purpose.

Don’t stop asking questions and looking at how you can make things happen until you find your answer. When desires in your heart are not being expressed in your life, you stagnate. When you start to look for ways to bring those possibilities into your life, you are “on the path” to a life of purpose.

Use more pages in your notebook to ask yourself how you can make these desires a reality. Create action steps to take. For example, if one of your desires was very broad, such as “to be happy,” ask yourself what is keeping you from your happiness and make a list of all the situations in your life, both simple and complex. Next, ask what one thing you could do today to make a change. Mark it on your to-do list and schedule it.

No matter what step you take, whether it seems significant or insignificant, you move closer to your heart’s desire and to living an inspired life. Do not give up even if you cannot see how the situation can possibly work itself out. Just keep moving forward with intention, step-by-step, in the direction of your heart.

Step Three: Maintain a state of constant appreciation

Being appreciative and filled with gratitude for life is a key component for your success. If you constantly complain about your life, you diminish the possibility for the greatest fulfillment. Appreciation is a simple principle, yet it has the power to change your life. Look at the things that are going well, the things that are giving you joy and inspiration. Let those pieces of the puzzle help you find the other missing pieces in your life.

Astrological aspect

To address your question about astrology, your birth chart (which is a map of the sky created from the time, day, and location of your birth) does not necessarily show your purpose in the way you are asking. It does, however, offer you “pieces” in the form of insights about your character, your nature, your expressions, your personality, your potential, and even your strengths and weaknesses. It also can take you to new levels by showing you the timing of how events unfold.

Most important is to know what the chart does not determine. It does not determine who you are; it does not rule your life; it does not govern how you express yourself or make decisions. It is more like a reflection of your soul and your potential. You can gain a lot of insight by knowing your chart, but you can get to know yourself at a deeper level just as well by spending time with yourself and listening to your heart.

Ninety-nine percent of those who come for an astrology session with me can relate to the majority of what I say about them and what they are experiencing. For the most part, my interpretation of a chart serves as an uncanny confirmation and reflection of the bigger picture of who they are and what they are going through in their lives.

However, in a case where the person has been living so far from their hearts and their purpose, birth chart interpretation can be extremely useful as a catalyst for awareness and change. The following story shows how I learned this.

Client story: Completely off the radar

The most extreme case I have ever encountered was a woman in her thirties who came for a session and did not relate to even one characteristic that I described from her chart. It baffled me so much that I insisted she had given me the wrong birth information, but she had her birth certificate with her and it matched the birth chart perfectly. The friend who accompanied her affirmed that the person I described in the chart was nothing like her friend. In fact, she said, “She is the complete opposite.”

This was quite early in my career. I had worked on only a couple of hundred charts by then, and it was my first encounter with someone who didn’t relate at all to my interpretation. Until then, the feedback I got from chart interpretations was that they were “spot on.” I didn’t know what to make of this. She neither related to the personality description nor to the life cycles she was going through.

I didn’t feel right about charging her for the session because I did not think that she gained any insight, and needless to say, she left unsatisfied. It not only shook up my confidence in my skills at chart reading, but also in astrology as a discipline. I was troubled; I had a lot of unanswered questions. My teacher at the time told me to trust that I had helped her in some way. I was embarrassed and hoped never to see that client again.

Four years later

Life went on. I continued to work on charts, anyway, and the incident faded to the back of my mind as I rebuilt my confidence in astrology. I did not figure out why she couldn’t relate to her chart until four years later when she came back. By then, I had opened an office and had my assistant Judy booking all my appointments. I was shocked to see her name on the calendar. I was curious as to why she would come back after all these years in light of the “failed” session we’d had.

When I greeted her in the waiting area, she immediately said, “Do you remember me?”

“Of course! I thought I would never see you again,” I said. “Why are you here?” I led her into my office where she told me that the session I had labeled an “embarrassment” was a big changing point in her life and had served as a wake-up call.

Awakening to self

She explained that when I “described her” based on her birth chart, it woke something up in her. Deep down, she knew that she was the person I described. At some level, she recognized what I was saying, but she was not expressing herself and living her life that way.

She told me she was a twin, born at the exact time as her sister, and that her twin expressed all the traits I had described (talkative, inquisitive, creative, bold, revolutionary, intuitive). She said that she had completely repressed who she was until she saw me. It was only then that she realized she had “her own chart” and did not have to be disempowered by her twin by living in her shadow. It was as if she had been living life disengaged from her own spirit by not recognizing that she had her own energy. She said my session was like a voice calling her to herself.

So much awareness came up for her during our session that immediately after, and over time, she got more in tune with the flow of her life. She made drastic changes, reclaimed her power, and felt happier than she ever had. She said that our first session helped her to see herself for who she was instead of as a “nobody,” and she felt “reborn.”

Client story: Creative potential in the chart

Another example worth mentioning is a client whose chart showed an extremely strong creative emphasis. She was in her mid-fifties at the time. When preparing her chart, I expected that I would hear stories from her during our session about how creative and free she was and how she dislikes anything mundane. I thought perhaps she was a designer, an artist, or had some fun, “out there” hobbies.

When she walked in, she was dressed quite simply and conservatively and didn’t strike me as the “creative type.” When I mentioned the incredible creative emphasis I saw in her chart, she looked at me as if I had gone mad.

She insisted that there was nothing creative about her or the life she lives. She had worked for the State in the same 9-5 job for decades, doing the same thing; she had the same husband for thirty years; and her daily routine didn’t vary—she came home after work, cooked dinner, and watched TV. She didn’t have any hobbies that she was pursuing at the time, although she said she enjoyed painting and arts and crafts.

After ascertaining that she had given me the correct birth time, and because I had learned a lot about reading charts by then, I knew that her creativity was repressed

and not yet expressed to its full potential. I explained this, and she responded that she felt restless, as if she needed a “change,” but she didn’t know what to do. I encouraged her to take an art class or some other class in which she could “be creative.”

The timing was right. One class led to another, and soon she had converted an extra room into an art room. She began making art projects to sell at craft fairs and did so well that it became a business. Eventually, she went part-time with the State and part-time with her art. She took workshops, and when she got to a higher level, she started teaching classes locally.

One day, she told me she made over two thousand dollars in sales at a craft fair, and she planned to retire from the State. She had unlocked her creative potential and felt inspired about her abilities. In her case, the chart didn’t tell her what her purpose was; it helped her to find what she was looking for.

To find yourself, it is most important that you take time to get to know yourself, beginning with wherever you are. Your astrological chart can give you a hint, but the journey is up to you. The first step is to have a firm intention and make the effort by setting aside time for yourself—just as you would for a cherished friend.

Choose discipline over regret

The pain of regret always outweighs the pain of discipline. It may seem there is a lot to do in order to get your life on track and headed resolutely towards your heart-centered desires. However, I want to encourage you to start today. Discover what is magnificent in you and just waiting to find a new expression. There is nothing more inspiring than to be living the life you are here to lead.

WORLD TRAGEDIES

Dear Alice,

Can you address the world tragedies we have seen recently? What disasters! What is going on? Will the world ever balance itself out? Sometimes it all seems so unfair...

—Craving Balance

Dear Craving Balance,

Many people I talk to have the same questions you do. If we just look at one side of the picture, the events occurring in the world today are undeniably “disasters.” Unless we look deeper, we fail to see the bigger picture and how these events serve to raise our personal and global consciousness on many levels.

It’s hard to see what is fair about a whole village getting wiped out in a hurricane, thousands dying in an earthquake, or tens of thousands of innocent people living on the coast of Japan getting washed out by a tsunami.

Why do tragic things happen? Looking at life from a one-sided perspective, it can seem unfair and cause us to question God, the universe, and karma and wonder what kind of world we live in. If we focus only on the tragedy and challenges we see, not only do we become pessimistic about life, we let our incomplete perceptions rule our reactions.

Look at both sides

As hard as it is to believe, situations in life, including recent, tragic world events, always have two sides to consider; when these are integrated, they will guide you to seeing a more balanced perspective. We tend to see one side as the “negative” aspect, but its complementary opposite always exists as a hidden positive or a benefit that emerges later.

An “other side” to tragedy?

So, what could be the other side to tragedy? Beyond the suffering and challenges that are apparent, notice how amazing the global and local relief efforts were, the creative ways people came together to help each other, and the strong awareness many now feel about the importance of life. Not only has there been an upswing in family reunions, but also a great many people have returned to basics and rediscovered their true priorities, and people are giving greater assistance to one another in new ways.

In addition, these events have had global impact by opening people up to realizing the importance of love and the oneness of humanity, and many now see life in a new way. The more we look, the more benefits we can find.

Leveling the playing field

Sometimes it’s necessary for nature to level the playing field so as to readjust the game of life. When disastrous events occur, remember to look at both sides of the situation rather than make a judgment based on ignorance, which we so often do. When we are truly open, we search for, discover, and appreciate both sides of every event. When we initially see an event as “bad,” there is still an equal amount of “good” associated with it. In many tragedy-struck regions, people are discovering who their neighbors are, and families that remain after the natural disasters are closer. Gratitude is emerging for life that was being taken partly for granted.

It is unquestionably sad when we think of all the people who suffered and the challenges that ensued. However, by taking time to look at the bigger picture and

different aspects that have come from these events, it helps to dissipate some of the negative charge we have and brings our focus to a more balanced understanding.

THE UNFAIRNESS OF LIFE

Dear Alice,

Life seems so unfair. Bad things always seem to happen to good people. I not only see it in my life, but also in the lives of others. It is just so depressing when I think about it. What is your take on it?

—*Life Sucks*

Dear Life Sucks,

You didn’t give me any details about what has happened in your life and the lives of others, so I will answer your question in a way that I hope will help you see things from a different perspective.

The first thing I want to address is the common categorization of people and events into “good” and “bad” and see if you can shift your focus to a different perspective.

“Good” and “bad” are merely judgments

As easy as it is to think of people as good and bad, in reality they are neither. These are simply judgments you make about others based on a personal belief that causes you to label them as such.

The reality is that people have both good and bad aspects to their natures, so, objectively, people are both “good” and “bad,” if you want to use that terminology. It is impossible to find either a person who is only good or a person who is only bad. You think of them that way due to how you judge what they have or have not done.

However, if you were to take a person you see as having only negative traits and ask someone who likes them to list the person’s positive traits, their list would be just as long as yours. You just don’t see the positive because you have a lopsided perception of people you resent or have emotionally charged relationships with and are therefore blind to the bigger picture of who they are.

The same principle goes for people you see as all “good.” If you look deeply enough, you will find that they also have “negative” traits. Every person can be nice and mean, supportive and challenging, happy and sad, sincere and insincere, polite and rude, and honest and dishonest.

Every situation has both good and bad

Similarly, every situation in life, whether significant or insignificant, has two sides to it: a challenging side and a beneficial side. Challenges are necessary. They help us evolve to our next level, find our hidden power, and develop our innate potential.

Anything that you are still suffering from has a benefit you may have yet to recognize and a lesson you may have yet to embrace. There is a hidden order to the universe, and nothing happens randomly or by mistake. Every challenge serves us, whether or not we can see it in the moment.

When you focus only on the challenging or negative aspects and see occurrences as “bad,” the benefit—the “positive” side—remains out of sight. In every crisis, there is a blessing. The key here is not to wait to discover the benefit, otherwise you end up living with an incomplete perspective and can feel quite bitter and beaten down.

Challenges bring out our potential

Here’s a true story that helps to illustrate my point about challenges serving us and bringing out our potential. There once was an eight-year-old girl from a poor black family. She was repeatedly molested and raped by her mother’s boyfriend. Because of the psychological trauma she endured, she became mute. When she was seventeen, she was raped again and became pregnant. Later, as a single mother, she worked as an exotic dancer to support herself and her child. This certainly seems like an unfair start to life.

Eventually, she moved into the fields of writing, poetry, theater, and music. Now, decades later, millions have read her words, and she has inspired generations of people. She’s been nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award and has been on two presidential committees.

Do you know who this person is? It is Maya Angelou. In an interview, she said that all challenges she experienced as a child and young adult opened her up to be the person she is today. She was not bitter about the “unfairness” of her life, but completely thankful for her experiences because she recognized she would not be the person who she is today without them.

Challenges are necessary to bring out the greatness within us. If we see that challenges serve us, they will guide us towards our highest potential.

How do you choose to see life?

The bottom line is that everyone chooses how to perceive what happens. In reality, everything is balanced, and it is up to you to take responsibility and make the effort to see the benefit of your challenges, otherwise you will always see life as unfair.

There are two choices when it comes to how we perceive life. We can just say, “Life isn’t fair. It’s never been fair, and it never will be” and fall into depression as we wait for the world to change to match our ideal (which it never will). The other choice is to change our focus and make the effort to see things from a higher vantage point.

When you search for the hidden benefits in everything you find unfair, your perception of life will change quickly.

SEEING LIFE AS POSITIVE

Dear Alice,

What is your secret to always being so happy? In your classes, you are so upbeat and positive about life—it’s as if you don’t have any hardships, but I know that it is not possible.

I try to think positive, but it just doesn’t work for me. Do you have any advice? How do you do it?

—Secretly Negative

Dear Secretly Negative,

People have a hard time believing me when I say that I wasn’t always like I am now. Actually, I used to cry a lot in private because I felt that life was so difficult. I constantly wished that my life were different. I always wanted to “find happiness,” and I know it was this desire and the challenges I faced that led me to my current path.

I think the key to being happy inside and out is to recognize that, at all times, life is both “positive” and “negative” and not expect it to be any other way. I don’t expect life to bring me only good things, nor do I expect life to bring me only challenges. I know that life will bring me both in equal shares and that I will grow because of that. That is how I stay balanced and centered.

Look for the benefit in every challenge

When something challenges me, I consciously look for the benefit. To dissipate its charge, I seek to discover how it is serving me. When something positive happens or things are going extremely well, I try not to get over-elated and form expectations about how everything will turn out. This practice keeps me present with my life. I do not sit around and wish that life were different. I do not crash emotionally when it doesn’t meet my expectations.

This allows me to be in a space that is balanced and poised. In this space, I find happiness. This is not to say that I don’t have ever have depressed negative

thinking about something or get over-elated about other things, however I strive to consciously remain aware that bi-polar thinking doesn't serve me.

Both “positive” and “negative” are necessary

I practice positive thinking when my life is challenging. When things are going extremely well, I practice healthy skepticism. In other words, I am both a “negative” thinker and a “positive” thinker. From my perspective, this is the “secret.”

No one can get rid of the positive and negative balance that is necessary to life. If you strive for positivity in everything, the negativity will show up somewhere to balance you.

I know that if I try to act positively towards everyone about everything I end up finding something negative in myself to complain about. If I put on a front for the world about how positive and upbeat I am, personal chaos and challenges will arise to balance me out. The key is to walk in the center.

Take responsibility for your happiness

Remember, you are never a victim of your circumstances. No matter what is happening in your life, you determine how long it takes to come to a point of balance by how quickly you get the lesson. The more challenging a circumstance is, the more you need to find the positives and benefits of that circumstance. The more beneficial and “good” a circumstance is, the more important it is to curb your over-elation and move towards the center.

The collective myth of positivity

There is a huge collective myth about positivity, a belief that if we just keep thinking positively, one day all the negative will go away, and we will be peaceful, happy, and balanced. It will never happen.

Although today's paradigm tells us that we are supposed to be upbeat and positive, it is literally impossible to do so because we are, by nature, two-sided beings. Remember to embrace the two poles of life at all times, and you will have greater ease in life and be able to stay centered with minimal effort.

I believe that happiness lies smack-dab in the middle of left and right, up and down, and negative and positive.



Spirituality

RELIGION VERSUS SPIRITUALITY

Dear Alice,

I see you as a very spiritual person, and I think of myself as a spiritual person, as well, but I don't know how to easily explain that to others when people ask me what I mean, because it's more like something I feel. Some people say that I am more religious than spiritual because I go to church every so often, but I really don't like to be called religious.

I was wondering if you could tell me what you see as the difference between religion and spirituality, and what makes a person spiritual rather than religious? Can one be both spiritual and religious at the same time? How do you respond to people when they ask you what it means to be spiritual?

Also, at times I wonder if I really am spiritual because I have a lot of negative thoughts about myself and others. I would appreciate anything you can share on this topic. Thank you. —Spiritual or Religious?

Dear Spiritual or Religious,

This is quite a common question. In recent years, I've noticed that people seem to look at religion as limiting and repressive and see spirituality as liberating and inspiring. One may seem better than the other, or religion and spirituality may seem mutually exclusive. In reality, however, you can be part of a religious institution and be spiritual or you can be religious without belonging to a church. These words are just labels that represent different ways of focusing on God and what God means.