

Our Closeness is This

by Tim Boyd

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There is a principle that functions as a sort of touchstone for many of us. It is an understanding that we are intimately connected in some way to a greater life – an abiding presence that, when allowed, informs our awareness in profound ways, heightening our understanding and quieting our obsessive thinking process. A great deal of what constitutes our “spiritual life” is involved in creating conditions for a fuller experience of this inner richness. To call this experience addictive would be inaccurate, but, once experienced, everything else seems to pale in comparison.

Ask yourself a question: when have I felt safe, calm, peaceful, overflowing with love, warm, kind, expansive? Certainly there have been times when we have had each of these feelings. A variety of circumstances may call them out in us, but there is a common experience that draws them all out. All are things we experience in the presence of a true friend. A friend calls these things out in us. In Buddhism there is a special category of friendship reserved for those people who help us to experience the deepest qualities of our inner nature – peace, joy, equanimity, compassion. These special people are called “spiritual friends”. Sometimes they are teachers. Sometimes they are just people who are simply more aware of and connected to an inner source. We love being around them because they seem to bring out the best in us. What is the source of the energy we feel flowing out from them? If you ask them, they would express it in a variety of ways, but the essence of it would be the same. They would say that they have cultivated a friendship of their own. In the terminology of the world's various spiritual traditions that friend might be called Buddhamind, Jesus, God, Krishna, Higher Self, higher power, or a host of other tradition specific names.

Some would say, as Shakespeare did, that the particular name is not important - “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet”. I disagree. In the realm of the inner life all names are not equal. The particular name one uses when speaking to, or even thinking about this most intimate of friends is extremely