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Substance vs. form

One of life's maturational or personal growth experiences is that of discovering the difference between form and substance.

Form = the "outer" self

Substance = the "inner" self

A form - based life

As you reflect back on your life, what percentage of time, energy and effort do you think you've spent on your outer self – wearing the right clothes, driving the right car, having your hair styled "just so," living in the right house with the right furniture, having the right figure, shape, job or career, or having the right man/woman...? To what degree has form run your life, influenced your choices and decisions – at work, at home, at play, in relationship or in other life areas?

There's nothing inherently "bad" or "wrong" about form. Form is a sort of "ideal" about how we want to live our lives. We start out our life based on form. But, as we move from life stage to life stage, form often takes over, replacing substance. It becomes *the* point of our life.

Often we use form to fill the holes – emotional states of sadness, desperation, loneliness, anger, depression, deficiency, lack, worthlessness, fear, inferiority and the like - in our psyche. Why? Because we don't know what substance is or how to focus on it.

A substance - based life

Substance is the inner you. Substance is your true, real and authentic self. It's the "you" who shows up with the conscious intention of doing and being the very best you can be in every area and aspect of your life. Substance focuses on your feelings and emotions, *how* you are, not *who* or *what* you are or what you have. Substance focuses on how you are in relationship, not the trappings. Substance focuses on truth-telling, not elaborate stories, rationalizations and excuses for avoiding the truth. Substance focuses on integrity, not tap-dancing around honesty, sincerity and self-responsibility. Substance focuses on conscious self-management, not on controlling others.

The importance of substance is that the feelings and emotions part of the inner you, when allowed and explored, are the doorway into discovering why we are, or have been, obsessed with form. When we focus on substance we experience our feelings and emotions, allow them, embrace them and learn how to release them. We experience our frustration and anger, our fear and terror, sadness and loneliness – with others, with ourselves, with God (or the God your choosing). Why? To get to the root cause of our sadness, pain and suffering. This experience is necessary - what I call necessary suffering - in order to heal and grow emotionally, psychologically and spiritually.

When we "hit bottom," we then become more able and willing to release the emotions that have been driving our thoughts, beliefs, actions, choices and decisions for so long. We become more able and willing to surrender to what is. In the process, the feelings and emotions begin to dissipate, melt away. When they return they don't return as often and their charge is not as great. Our emotions and feelings no longer define us. We dis-identify with them. We have them but they are no longer "me."

In this place, we become more and more able to experience life from a place of equanimity, serenity, inner peace and OK-ness. We feel more grounded, centered and at peace with ourselves and the world. We become more trusting in the Universe; that all is working out for us, that we are guided in some way. In this place, we release our need to control or to blame.

Finally, in this place, our need for form grows less as our substance - our real, true and authentic self - takes precedence. What's "outside" doesn't seem to carry as much weight. The trappings of life become less and less significant. They lose their illusionary importance. With a new sense of lightness and freedom, we go through life directed from the inside out – from a place of substance.

Some questions for self-reflection:

How much of your life is form-directed?

How do you deal with your discomfort, your negative feelings and emotions? Resist them? Embrace them?

What's your greatest fear right now? How does it affect you?

Have you ever just surrender to what is? What was that like for you?

Do you own your feelings?

Do you ever talk about your feelings with others?

Someone or something might "trigger" your feelings; but the "cause" of your feelings is inside you. What do you think about that?

Do you ever feel powerless? How do you act when you feel powerless?

Did you have permission to feel and express your feelings when you were growing up? Did your parents or primary caregivers express their feelings?

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