

## Spiritual Bypassing

Robert Augustus Masters, Ph.D., defines [Spiritual Bypassing](#) as "the use of spiritual practices/beliefs to avoid dealing with painful feelings, unresolved wounds, and developmental needs." Masters suggests spiritual bypassing is so common "that it goes largely unnoticed." In his book, [Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism](#), Chögyam Trungpa, focuses on our deeply entrenched misuse of spirituality, and how we use (and abuse) spirituality.

My curiosity is how and why folks use spirituality as a means to evade, deny, avoid and otherwise detour around their unresolved psycho-emotional issues.

[Aletheia Luna](#) explores ten of the most common forms of spiritual bypassing (summarized here):

### 1. The Optimistic Bypass

They...love to laugh and smile, (and) seem to be forcefully optimistic. "Focus on the positive!" "See the glass as half full!" "Don't let a frown get you down!" are some of their common phraseology; they view optimism as a way of avoiding the more somber and troublesome realities of their life. The optimistic bypass is often a side product of anger-phobia, or the inability to deal with their negative emotions.

### 2. The Aggrandizement Bypass

This is a type of self-delusion that some spiritual seekers use as a way of masking their perceived deficiencies and insecurities. The aggrandizement bypass is adopted by those who seek to feel enlightened, superior or having reached higher planes of existence. It is sometimes used by self-proclaimed masters, leaders, [awakened souls](#), and gurus.

### 3. The Victim Bypass

When one becomes a victim of their gifts, or of other people, this takes away the pressure of responsibility for shaping a satisfying life and taking responsibility for one's happiness – such is the case with the Victim Bypass. This type of spiritual bypassing is often used by spiritual seekers who believe they have extrasensory gifts of some kind, but due to their gifts they are unable to feel happy or healthy. Identifying as an [Empath](#) is sometimes a good example of this type of bypassing, as it can be interpreted as the fault of other people and their emotions for behaving in self-destructive and volatile ways.

### 4. The Psychonaut Bypass

Many spiritual seekers explore the frontiers of the mind, the soul and reality through the use of psychedelic drugs such as LSD, DMT, psilocybin mushrooms, mescaline and other entheogens that expand the mind and perception of existence. While this is a fascinating way of exploring reality, entheogens, like any other drug, can sometimes be used as a way of escaping reality and avoiding committing to personal development and [soulful refinement](#).

### 5. The Horoscope Bypass

When we frequently look outside of ourselves for help and guidance, as is with the case with Horoscopes and Psychics, we are failing to tap into our inner wellsprings of wisdom and strength and are

allowing external predictions to control the outcome of our lives. The Horoscope Bypass is derived from a fear and mistrust of ourselves, our inability to make decisions, and our inability to deal with anything tough that comes our way.

### **6. The Saint Bypass**

Since we were little we were taught that spiritual people were kind, compassionate and saintly. We continued to repeat this story to ourselves when we ripened into adulthood, and for some of us it turned into our biggest nightmare. The Saint Bypass is a reflection of extreme [“black or white” thinking](#), promoting the underlying belief that spiritual people can’t have dark sides because that would make them “unspiritual”. This type of bypassing is essentially an avoidance of one’s own [Shadow Self](#) by overcompensating with the guise of a sweet, heavenly, exterior. Self-sacrifice is a major symptom of this type of bypassing.

### **7. The Spirit Guide Bypass**

“I have an angel called Raphael who protects me.” In some spiritual traditions it is a God who protects, in others an angel, an animal or an ascended being. No matter who the [Spirit Guide](#) is, the belief that they are there to “protect” us is pleasing to the mind, but harmful to the soul. When we place our faith in another being’s power to ward off danger and keep us safe, we are committing a classic spiritual bypass: that being avoiding responsibility for ourselves and our lives, and sidestepping the tough development of courage and resilience. We are not children, but when we think of ourselves as being so we mold our lives in such a way that we fail to develop strength of spiritual character. Spirit guides serve to teach us rather than to babysit us.

### **8. The Praying Bypass**

Similar to the Spirit Guide Bypass, the Praying Bypass circumvents personal responsibility by putting faith in a higher being to solve all of our problems and issues. While praying can be a healthy practice, it can easily become limiting and destructive.

### **9. The Guru Bypass**

Often it is beneficial to latch onto a particular guru, shaman or spiritual teacher to learn and grow from, however, too much attachment can serve as another form of spiritual bypassing. While not everyone has the ability to independently follow the path of spirituality, when we begin to worship another living being, we fall in love with the rose-colored illusory image we have of the teacher rather than the essence of their teachings. Not thinking or discovering truth for ourselves by treating the words of a guru or master as scripture subtracts from our growth and our own [mastery](#) on our personal spiritual journeys.

### **10. The Finger-Pointing Bypass**

On our spiritual quests we begin to see through the lies, delusions and crazy behaviors committed by our fellow human beings and this can make us angry, downhearted and greatly frustrated. However, when we get caught up in “everything that is wrong” with the outside world and other people, dedicating our lives to the self-righteous quest of finger-pointing, this can be another form of spiritual bypassing. Finger-pointing instills us with a false sense of righteousness, taking away our responsibility of looking inside and working on ourselves. At its roots, the Finger-Pointing bypass is sourced from fear

and avoidance, and is a powerful form of procrastination.

Author [Linda-Ann Stewart](#) says, "I've known many people who've used spirituality and meditation as a way of avoiding dealing with their issues. Since they feel good when they're pursuing a spiritual path, guru, or new technique, they think that will make all the uncomfortable stuff dissolve and go away. Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. Spirituality is no more a magic bullet than anything else."

[Lawrence LaShan](#), author, psychotherapist and meditation teachers, furthers, "...meditation can help strengthen the structure of our personality, making us better able to deal with our challenges. And it may give us more insight into our issues, but meditation doesn't do away with them. It may reduce overall anxiety, make us feel safe, therefore better able to face ourselves, but we still need to do the internal work needed to bring about change."

Whatever supports us to feel joy, or bliss or euphoria – alcohol, drugs, food, sex, spirituality, meditation... - can become addicting. We cling to the feeling and effort to experience it as often as possible. It makes our bad feelings go away. True, spirituality is a "healthier" escape than any of the others, but it still can be an escape. We need to ask ourselves, "What am I trying to escape from or avoid?"

"There needs to be a balance and a grounding at the same time. Getting carried away with bliss can mean not attending to day to day affairs, such as paying the bills, eating right, and having healthy relationships...The euphoria from spirituality and meditation doesn't erase our personal responsibilities.... But as long as it's being used to avoid our feelings and deep issues, we can't move forward. We're either resisting discomfort or moving toward wholeness. We can't do both"

Truth be told, we need to be able to balance our spiritual practices with our everyday and emotional lives and responsibilities. Spirituality and meditation can provide a sense of connection that we can then take into the rest of our experience. When we are able to acknowledge our issues, work through them, and accept all of ourselves, we're honoring our spiritual essence.

**"What gives light must endure burning." Viktor Frankl - [Man's Search for Meaning](#)**

Life is not easy. A life worth living is hard. The pursuit of harmony, balance, meaning, integrity, authenticity, love and all the rest...takes "work" ...work that is uncomfortable, scary and damn challenging. It requires honesty, truth-telling (to our self to others). It requires exploring our shadow self, our illusions, our fears, "stories," biases, prejudices, self-limiting and self-sabotaging beliefs, even our fake and phony spiritually-bypassing self.

Life is choices. Even a spiritual life.

**Questions for self-reflection:**

Do you ever use "spirituality" as a defense mechanism or a drug - a way to escape, avoid or deny painful aspects of your life?

Do you ever allow yourself to be walked all over, used, or disrespected in the name of "being spiritual," or being "loving," or "compassionate?" How so? What does your behavior get you?"

Do you ever immerse yourself in spirituality" as a way to avoid painful emotions - your anger, sadness, depression...? How so?

Do you ever use spiritual terminology, labels and the like to mask the shadows of your personality? How so?

What do you feel it would take to move from a place of self-deception to self-liberation, or from a place of [idiot compassion](#) to honest self-awareness and personal accountability in your interactions with others and with yourself?

Can you say with honesty, sincerity and self-responsibility, you are taking responsibility for your life – physically, mentally, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually?

Do you engage in **addictive** behaviors such as over-exercising, hyperactivity or workaholism, eating, watching/reading porn, other internet activity, material obsessions? How so?

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I'm grateful for the opportunity to share this reading with you and I hope you find it insightful and useful.

Perhaps you'll share this with others, post it on a bulletin board, and use it to generate rich and rewarding discussion.

What is the one thing that is keeping you from feeling successful, happy, confident, in control or at peace as you live your life - at work, at home, at play or in relationship? Maybe you know what that "thing" is...maybe you don't. You just have a feeling that something has to change, whether or not you embrace that change. And how would that change support you to show up as a "better you?"

I'm available to guide you to create relationships that reflect honesty, integrity, authenticity, trust, and respect whether at work or outside of work. I support you to focus on the interpersonal skills that enable you to relate to others with a high level of personal and professional satisfaction - unhampered by personal inconsistencies, beliefs, "stories," and behaviors that create barriers to a harmonious, pleasant, conscious, compatible, healthy and productive relationship.

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