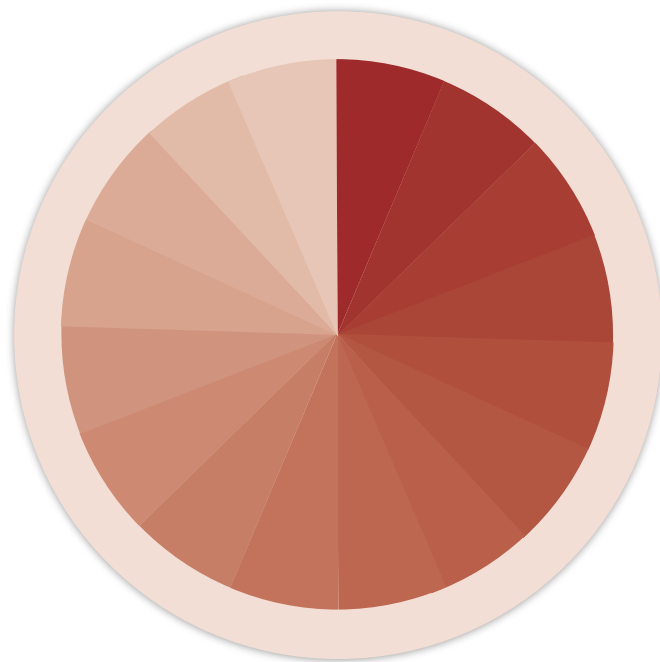


# THE CYCLIC NATURE OF THE INNER SELF



Andrew Marshall  
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In the darker part of the year, it is not always so easy to remain on the bright side; indeed, there is the clinical condition known as SAD in which many people are affected by the lack of light. Spiritually, too, there is an equivalent of the dark days of winter, although this does not necessarily occur at the same time as our geophysical period of winter.

What is not often realized is that everything has its season, not only in the outer world but in our inner one, too. So we may feel at one time that everything is going well, that we are close to nature or to God and, at another, the magic of that experience eludes us altogether. Then we might find that we become very self-critical and blame ourselves for failing to follow our spiritual path (whatever that may be) in some way. If, on the other hand, we can recognise that there are periods or seasons that affect our inner life, we will not wonder so much at the mystery of our apparent loss.

What causes these “seasons”? In the same way that there are cycles of rest and activity – yin and yang – *outwardly*, our *inner* experiences are felt through subtle aspects of our being which are also subject to cycles. Not only that, the world in which the spiritual side of life is felt is a world of energy that is also cyclic in nature. If we can understand that everything in our world of experiences is based on energy and is therefore subject

to movement, the appreciation may come that everything is subject to the waxing and waning of energy in one form or another.

The important thing for us is not so much to counter the cyclic activity and its effects – that would be going against the flow of life – but to learn to live with them and, indeed, to make the most of them. After all, a person who denied that the winter was cold and walked around in a tee-shirt and shorts in sub-zero temperatures or who insisted on wearing a scarf and jumper in the midst of a tropical summer would either be ill or crazy. In a similar way, if we are going through a period when our spiritual expression is quiet, it may well be that that is how we need to be as a person and to put on a false sense of jollity or to look for a source of excitement would be counterproductive.

The difficulty for us is to determine whether the highs and lows we experience are as a result of our innermost cycles or are due to something else such as a low physical or emotional response. Our vitality, for example, may be down but if our inner being is in an active or strong phase, we should be able to climb out of the low period by adjusting our life a little. But if our spirit wants or needs to be quiet, our emotions should also be reasonably quiet. If we are disturbed or easily excitable, it can make it more difficult to make the most of the phase we are in. Imagine for a moment that the body is a house and that the various aspects of our being – emotions, mind and inner self or spirit – form the household. In this scenario, our spirit or inner self is the head of the household, the mother or father, say, and our mind and emotions are like the young adults

and children. At times, the mother or father is very active in the household and everyone is energised. At certain times, however, the parent needs to rest. In those resting times, if the family is a close one, the younger members will get on with their lives quietly; but if there is a lack of harmony and the younger ones are chaotic and noisy, the parent may withdraw and close the door to create an inner sanctum. That is rather like when our spirit needs to go through a resting phase; if we co-operate, we know mother (our spirit or inner nature) can still hear us if we need her – she is still at home and we are safe. If, on the other hand, we are out of tune with her requirements, mother may shut the door and then we will feel lost. At that time we may feel inner guidance is lacking and we will probably think, speak and act unwisely.

So how do we know when our spirit or inner self needs to be quiet and is entering a period of rest? The major one for everybody at some stage is the approach of death; sensitive people can usually sense when that time is coming as the inner self, spirit or soul gradually withdraws to its own plane from outer expression. Throughout life there are many lesser cycles of rest and activity. Some are obvious, such as the need for rest and sleep or for exercise, and if those needs are ignored, we eventually suffer. The inner cycles, too, create needs which can make us uncomfortable when we ignore them. If we are out of tune with life, sometimes illness may come and force us to be quiet; but if we develop sensitivity, we may know or automatically respond to what our inner mechanisms are trying to communicate.

One of the best ways of becoming more sensitive, open and receptive to our inner

voice is to develop the practice and attitude of mindfulness. Just as the natural condition of water is to be clear, the natural state of the mind is clarity. Mindfulness involves slowing the mind down sufficiently so that our natural clarity returns to us; then we can bring the clear awareness of mind into every moment. Every second of every day, every thought, every word we speak and every movement that we make should be enjoyed and be accompanied by the clarity and light of full awareness. If we allow ourselves to become distracted or deliberately engage in distractions, we lose the moment and lose our inner contact. Deliberately cultivating quietness in our actions and thoughts, refraining from idle chatter and gossip as much as possible, being aware of the breath, being aware of every step – all of these will bring us in greater tune with our inner nature. When we do that, we can fully enjoy every season, both inner and outer.

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