

## Full Transcription: The Spiritual Practice of Self-Leadership

*This is IFS Talks, an audio series to deepen connection with the Internal Family Systems model through conversations with lead trainers, authors, practitioners, and users.*

**Tisha Shull:** Today on IFS Talks, we are speaking with Derek Scott on spirituality in IFS. Derek Scott is a registered social worker and certified IFS therapist. He has founded IFSCA, a Canadian organization dedicated to furthering the work of Dick Schwartz and offering online courses in IFS, as well as in-person courses at his beautiful retreat center outside of Toronto - Namaskar, meaning “I bow to the form you have taken”. Derek has been published multiple times and presents regularly at national and international conferences and other venues. His contributions to the spiritual aspects of the IFS include a 50-minute video; *Evolving Compassion, Personality and Spirituality*, which to date has had over 10,000 views. Also, he's contributed an article entitled [The Integration of Spiritual Experiences](#) available at the resources tab of his website.

**Tisha Shull:** Derek, thank you so much for speaking with us today on this exciting topic.

**Derek Scott:** My pleasure.

**Aníbal Henriques:** Thank you, Derek, for having us. Derek, this topic of spirituality is quite new and even scary for me. I have parts very curious, and parts in panic. It is an area of exploration and also of some misbelief in a way for me. And I feel quite polarized. I have parts wanting to explore and parts in disbelief and avoidance. You know, I was taught, as many of us, that spirituality is something above life on earth, above the body. And I was taught to avoid both emotions and body as a way of transcending life on earth. Meanwhile, I learned in my journey as a psychotherapist and a psychologist to embrace my body, my emotions, and I'm doing well, even better now. This being said, now, Derek, do you want me out from my body and the emotions back to the skies and the spirits?

**Derek:** How about if we bring the sky and the spirit through your body and your emotions, how would that be?

**Aníbal:** That feels good and interesting. Yes.

**Derek:** Good.

**Tisha:** It's so interesting to hear Anibal's take, because for me, my spiritual practice is what led me into IFS. So, you have a nice balanced set of interviewers here with you today.

**Derek:** Aníbal's presentation sounds like a very traditional Christian understanding and is the same for you Tisha or did you have a more Buddhistic?

**Tisha:** I really early on was introduced to yoga philosophy, Gurukula in a yoga tradition, which is very aligned with the model of Self. Finding that God dwells within you as you, is sort of a tenet of where my background was coming from.

**Derek:** Well, let's see if over the conversation, we can maybe integrate the two because I've been able to integrate the two quite well. So, let's see how that works for your polarization Aníbal.

**Tisha:** Do you think Aníbal and I will get along better?

**Aníbal:** Let's hope.

This is a difficult topic and nothing is written in stone, as Michi Rose would say. The use of guides in IFS is an unfolding adventure once we do not see nothing written in the IFS readings. I was checking, even with the last book, Dick's book, *Internal Family Systems Therapy, Second Edition*, and the word spiritual doesn't appear as many times in these recent editions. And 'guides', the word 'guides' only appears as a word for orientations from therapist to client. So, it looks like there is no reference in Dick's first book and this second edition, as to guides or spirituality. Even though the Self - there is a quote in this book that I would like to remind you of - Dick says the Self of IFS interacts with parts and is also transcendent as an entity, it's available to hear competing perspectives, to nurture and to problem solve. As a wave, it is one with the universe and other people as if at that level, all waves overlap in ultimate commonality. So, here the Self appears so close to spirituality, in many ways. So, my first question is how do you see Self-leadership as a spiritual practice?

**Derek:** Yeah, I like your quote from Dick, because that reminds me of some of the research I've done into quantum physics, which I'll come to a little later, but for me Self-leadership is a spiritual practice. They're not separate.

**Aníbal:** Okay.

**Derek:** I was also raised within European Christianity in England with the Church of England, Protestant religion. Fundamental to those teachings is that God is Love. Now, there were a lot of complexities added to that leading to in confusion and bewilderment. It has taken me a very long time to come back to that teaching. But if you take that as the basis of Christianity, that God is Love, that they are equivalent, then anywhere you see the word God, you can replace it with the word Love. And for people that get triggered by the word, God, that's actually very helpful.

So, if you look at the belief system that Love created us all, that love exists within me, that love is God, that God is Divine; therefore, Love is Divine. If we think of spirituality as being about the fundamentals of Love as an organizing principle, as the creative principle of the universe, I think it's a lot easier than all the trappings that go along with the word God. So, if Love created everything, then I get curious about when do I feel love? Because when I feel love, then I'm in the presence of the Divine. I'm in the presence of God.

And I think all of us can relate to feeling love. If you have children, the first time you saw your baby, assuming it was an uncomplicated birth, my guess is you had a rush of something which I would call love. If people have animal companions, when you watch them sleep, you may feel a rush of love for them. And that's, that's pretty uncomplicated. So, to me, Self is present there. Self loves unconditionally. And of course, we can *manifest* that love at any time, as opposed to *seeking* it. The seeking of Self is a *part* that's *trying*, or a part to believes it needs to search for it. And as we know, when the parts soften back Self is just available and therefore Love is just available.

**Aníbal:** Makes sense. Yes.

**Tisha:** You bring up a question in me around the relationship between spirituality and religion. How would you describe that relationship?

**Derek:** So, if you look at the spiritual teachers themselves, if you look at Christ, Mohammad, the Buddha, all of these individuals had direct revelation, direct revelation of what may be called The All or Divine Love. They were mystics. All of these teachers were mystics. In Hinduism, as Tisha, you were talking about the yoga philosophies, the soul, or the Self is a spirit form or life force that only temporarily lives in the body. So, these teachings are consistent with direct revelation or a philosophical understanding of how Self, how Soul is manifested in the body. And then, of course these teachings became codified in religious teachings, right? And sometimes those religious teachers add their own... and that's where it all gets muddled up with power and control and teachings being manifested within a certain socio-cultural context.

So, you know, the understanding within a patriarchal culture is that God is therefore male, God is the father, right? And those understandings would be different in different contexts. For example, in First Nations beliefs in Canada, the language is around Great Spirit, Great Spirit does not have a gender. So, I think when the revelations of a teacher, of a master, get codified within a religion is when it becomes complex. And then the religion wants to offer rules, how to be, rules on how to become closer to that Master-like state. And many people like rules, there's a feeling of certainty, right? However, when those rules turn into critical managers telling you how you should be (and if you're not, bringing judgment and then shame), well, then you're in the territory of managers, right? And those critical managers, as with all protectors, now inadvertently create what they seek to avoid. So, insisting on having the truth and then condemning others, right, is like condemning our own parts. And it takes us further away from the Self-led compassion.

**Tisha:** Mm.

**Derek:** And then we have other managers that come in. So now we've got internal managers saying that's not a spiritual way to be. That's not a Christian or a Buddhist way to be in the world. And they adopt practices to make us "better people". What John Welwood would refer to as a spiritual bypass. Now this is predicated on the assumption that we are not okay at our core. And this belief is held by an exile and ironically can be reinforced by adopting so-called spiritual practices seeking to be redeemed from the unworthiness. And when those spiritual managers do that, they can be reinforcing the belief that the exile holds, that I'm unworthy, that I need to be redeemed.

So, I think that's why many seekers today are seeking that direct apprehension of spirituality that arguably Christ and Buddha and Muhammad and other masters, Abraham, experienced. I think that accounts for the interest emerging in ayahuasca and MDMA and ketamine and psilocybin and DMT, you know, the many medicine practices that people seeking spiritual experiences are engaging in because I think there's a, there's a deficit in many of the religions, you know, I don't need to be told by a religious teacher that there's something wrong with me. I don't need my homosexuality to be a fault or a flaw, right? So, it's a complex answer, but those are some of the ways I understand the relationship between spirituality and religion.

**Tisha:** So, spirituality through the IFS lens is direct experience of Self-energy...

**Derek:** Hum, I would say, yeah.

**Tisha:** Without locking by managers or having exiles pushing up.

**Derek:** Yeah. And I think, Anibal, to speak to what you were saying, this is where, you know, the notion of what belongs to the body is not sacred, not spiritual. And we need to, we need to transcend, right? That's a very common spiritual interpretation. But if you look at the word trans, trans can mean, you know, above, but it can also mean through. And I think with the separation of, in the West, the separation in Christianity of spirituality, which belongs to the church only, and then psychology, which had to be a science. I think that's an artificial split and what we have with IFS is a psycho-spiritual model.

You know, in psychology, of course, we've got the history of cognitive psychology, prior to that behaviorist psychology... very, very limiting models of the human being. Then with Abraham Maslow, we've got third-force psychology, the humanistic perspective, which looks at Self-actualization. And then with the transpersonal psychologists, you've got the consideration of us as psycho-spiritual beings. And for me, when we're opening our Self-energy, we're opening to that field. We're opening to the, in the quantum realm, what's called non-local consciousness. And it's from there that we draw on compassion, and we draw that through us as well as manifesting it.

And I had a conversation with Dick Schwartz a few years ago about this. My interest in quantum physics led me to look at local and non-local consciousness, and local consciousness is where the parts can be considered to operate; non-local consciousness is the shared Self field. We all have Self-energy, we have the same Self-energy, and we all have different parts.

**Anibal:** Derek, you said that one of the qualities of Self is calm. How do you see calmness as important spirituality? Are there other qualities or Cs from Self that are also spiritual?

**Derek:** They probably all are. But calm, I think is, again, if you look at, you know, many, many religious and spiritual teachings, they teach about peace. Peace is the goal, right? And peace and calm, of course, are synonymous, right? So, when I was a young man, my seeker part was very curious, looking at these different religions and different spiritualities wanting to know answers to the big questions; Why are we here? What's our purpose? And if you look at again, in Christianity we have "may the peace of God" or the peace of love be with you. That's an offering in some Christian services.

In Judaism we have Shalom. It means peace. In Islam salaam alaikum, excuse my pronunciation, but that means peace be unto you. In Hinduism, stillness is the altar of the spirit. That's Paramahansa Yogananda. Lao-Tzu the founder of Taoism in the Tao Te Ching describes returning to the source of stillness, which is the way of nature. The Buddha is quoted as saying "resolutely train yourself to attain peace." So, peace seems to be foundational in spirituality and in teachings and calm is an aspect of Self and when we're in that place of peace and calm, then we can notice, we can notice the busyness of our parts, but we don't need to identify with them.

**Aníbal:** And also, Derek, on this video, this so much viewed video *Understanding the Personality System*, you mentioned Self as having the quality of joy, and that is not one of the eight C's we are used to normally associate with Self...

**Derek:** That's right.

**Aníbal:** Can you say more about that?

**Derek:** Sure. Again, a few years ago I was talking to Dick and I was actually, I was talking to him about gratitude. And I said, you know, when I'm in the experience of gratitude it feels very much like Self, but it's not one of the Cs. And he just chuckled. And he said, they don't all have to be Cs. I just like alliteration. And if you, if you look at *Introduction to Internal Family Systems*, joy is specifically mentioned as an aspect of Self. And, you know, I look to sacred music, music from around the world, which in celebration of love and in celebration of spirituality is very joyous. You know, there's a Christian hymn, you probably are familiar with at Christmas time, that sings "Joy to the world." There's a Zemirot, which is a hymn, if you would like, in Judaism. And it goes like this: <singing>.

**Aníbal:** Beautiful.

**Derek:** And then, as in many Jewish Zemirot, it builds, and it goes faster and there's handclapping. But the meaning of that, is we brought peace to you. There's a well-known Sikh singer, Snatam Kaur. In Sikh religion, God cannot be understood, but can be experienced through love, worship, and contemplation. One of her songs begins "We are light, we are loved, we are peace." Absolutely beautiful. And again, in celebration of spiritual truths. There's an Amazonian religion called the Santo Daime that has a hymn that sings: "Esta forca este poder, eu devo amar no meu coracao. Trabalhar no munci terra, a beneficio dos meus irmaos". Which means "this force, this power, I must love with all my heart. We work on this earth for the benefit of our brothers and our sisters." Again, you know, another spiritual truth. And that's a fascinating religion because all of their propositions of how to be with each other are channeled, these hymns are received by people that have no musical background, no musical training.

**Aníbal:** Can you imagine, Derek, how wonderful it is to hear you to sing in Portuguese?

**Derek:** Mm hmm!

**Aníbal:** So beautiful.

**Derek:** Brazilian Portuguese.

**Aníbal:** Brazilian Portuguese. Thank you so much.

**Derek:** You're welcome.

And it's another piece. When we look at, when we look at religion, we tend to think of the Abrahamic religions, and you know, the major (other ones) Hinduism, Buddhism. But if you look across shamanic

and tribal cultures in the Amazon, the heart of the Santo Daime religion is deep in the Amazon, a place called Mapiá. And there's a tendency in our Western overdeveloped world to look at shamanic and tribal cultures as primitive somehow. And that's the, largely the responsibility of academia, I think. When I studied social anthropology, I remember reading a text by an early anthropologist, Malinowski. He was an exiled Polish aristocrat. He was working in the Trobriand Islands and he published a book called *The Sexual Life of Savages* about the people he was working with.

**Aníbal:** Oh, wow. That must be interesting.

**Derek:** Yeah. And it was the beginning of the 20th century. It wasn't that long ago. So, this view of other 20th century cultures as somehow being primitive is pervasive, right? And yet, if you come to any of the Aboriginal cultures in Canada, the First Nations people understand that the red people, which is how they identify, have particular gifts, the white people have particular gifts. The brown people, the yellow people all have particular gifts. The red people in Canada have the gift of looking seven generations back and planning seven generations forward, the Aboriginal people in Australia and any indigenous cultures know about the weather. They know about how that impacts the animals. They know about how that impacts farming. There's so much wisdom and understanding, and that's an integrated spirituality. And their understanding of worship, their understanding of celebration, you know, all can be considered spiritual paths and spiritual truths, which all have the same root. You all have the same root of love, of peace, of caring for each other, or the desire for peace.

**Aníbal:** Derek, you are talking of love, calmness, peace. And, what is your understanding of how Self heals? Is it not Self-compassion that heals? The healing element in many models like IFS?

**Derek:** So, here's my understanding of how Self heals. So, for me, you know, Self comes into the world of the parts. And if I do that in my system, I'll look around and I can say: who's up? Oh, my planning part that was up this morning, planning what to do for this podcast. So, if I say to the planning, how are you doing? He gives me a high five, because he's doing great. He loves his job. That's great. And then I might come to my part that's planning a meal for tonight, my cooking part. How are you doing? Thumbs up! We've got the ingredients, we're good. My dog walking part. How are you? Yep. Great. We took the dogs for 90 minutes today. They're great. If we come to a part who is a perfectionist? How are you doing? Oh, I'm okay. Oh, you don't sound okay. What's up? And this is the, you know, the Self-lead curiosity, it's that simple.

You know, we want our parts to be happy, if they're not, we get curious about them. And if I do, if I bring my curiosity to this perfectionist part and I ask how come you're not so happy? "I'm really busy." Okay. Well, tell me about yourself. And as you know, we do the Self-led inquiry. Let's flip it. Let's look at this from the perspective of the part.

So, let's say I discover that this part starts off in my system when he's 12 years old. So, he's busy, he's doing his thing, right? He's a busy perfectionist part. And then suddenly I appear, and he might say to me,

"Why are you here?"

“Well, because you got my attention, you got my attention with your unhappiness and I care about you.”

And he might be suspicious. “Well, I’m really busy right now.”

“Oh,” I might say, “what are you up to?”

“Well, I’m trying to get everything right. I have to do my best in school to please the teachers, but be careful not to be a teacher’s pet because then the kids won’t like me and I have to figure out who to hang out with so I’m cool. And then I’ve got to make both of my parents happy, even though they sometimes want different things from me.”

I might say “that sounds like a lot.”

“Yeah, it is. That’s why I’m too busy to talk to you.”

“Oh, got it. Okay. Sounds really important to do all this for you. How come?” I might say.

“Well, if I don’t then my little brother over there, (he’s pointing to another part) he’s seven. He’ll get really upset. He thinks he’s really bad. And he hates it when we get stuff wrong and people are mean to us. And when he gets really upset, sometimes the scary one comes in and it says, maybe we should just kill ourselves.”

“Well, that does sound scary, I would say.”

“Yes,” says the little part.

So, of course, as we know, as we bring Self into the parts and we get to know them, we can offer them, Self can offer them healing. And from the perspective of the parts world, that’s a miracle, that’s actually miraculous, right? If you wanted to define a miracle as a surprising and welcome event, that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore considered to be the work of a Divine agency, you can look at a miracle in that way.

And if you’re in the world of the parts, suddenly Self comes in, that little seven-year-old that hates to be blamed Self can listen to, Self can take somewhere else in the world. Self can come in and intervene with anyone that’s been unkind to that little part. If, for example, you were coming into the world of the parts and you found out that you couldn’t get to that seven-year-old because there was a big sea in between you and the seven-year-old. Well, how could we get to the seven-year-old? We could part the seas. So, we could just push the sea apart in the internal world and create a pathway. That’s Old Testament, miraculous stuff.

And in the world of the parts, that’s what can happen. As you know, this is what happens when we come in, when we bring our compassion and when we facilitate the transformation of the parts and the roles they’ve been holding. The analogy to me of Christ’s coming into the external world and teaching compassion, and the stories of the miracles and the stories of the miracles in the Old

Testament, is a fascinating parallel to me. And this is what Dick calls the laws of inner physics, how we can do these incredible things in the internal world

**Tisha:** Derek, Aníbal and I just came from an incredible level 1 training in Portugal, and a lot of the participants debated, you know, in smaller groups over the question, what is the Self and how do we access it? And so, I know this is maybe backtracking a little bit, but how do you respond to that question? What is the Self and how do we access it?

**Derek:** I would probably respond which parts are asking that question?

**Tisha:** These are confusing, big, heady figure-it-out parts

**Derek:** Yeah. There you go.

**Tisha:** For sure. That want to kind of debate and grapple.

**Derek:** So, if I have those parts in myself, Tisha, not to trivialize what you're saying, but what I noticed that I can just bring my love. They're amazing parts. I actually, I, of course I have those parts. They're amazing. They're beautiful. I can love them. The moment I'm doing that I'm in Self. I have a lot of Self-energy and the questions become almost irrelevant. You know? So, somebody once said to me, I like this, because we were debating, I had my debating part up, "Oh, what does Self, blah, blah, blah." And they said, it's the one who breathes. And I liked that, you know, from a meditative perspective, I like that. Who am I? I am the one who breathes.

**Aníbal:** Coming back to this video of yours *Evolving Compassion, Personality and Spirituality*, two questions around this wonderful video. One is why, what made you pick that title? And the other is, you said at the beginning of this video that we are spirits with a human experience, and not humans wanting a spiritual experience. What exactly did you mean?

**Derek:** That's a quote from Teilhard de Chardin who was the spiritual teacher, a Jesuit priest from the 1950s and his teaching is that we are spiritual beings having a human experience. We are not human beings seeking a spiritual experience, we were incarnated as spiritual beings. And the title for me about evolving compassion, when I first came across the model, I commented to Dick that it seems both revolutionary and evolutionary. It's revolutionary in terms of psychology, because it brings in Self and it starts on the premise that there's nothing wrong with us or with any of us. So completely non-pathological, and evolutionary in terms of consciousness, right? Pierre de Chardin said that evolution is an ascent towards consciousness.

And if we're raising Self-lead children who become Self-lead parents who welcome their children and all of their parts into the world, that looks very good for us as an evolving species, I think, when we're not raising our children from shaming parts that have been internalized from our own parents and passing down those, those wounds, right? So, my belief is that we're all tender, tender souls manifesting through this human experience.

At a level 3, one time I was asking Dick Schwartz about guides and he said, he's interviewed many over the years. And consistently they say the earth, this earth is a hard school. And so it makes me

wonder, you know, perhaps we were given our parts to learn how to love them, because once you, once you love them, as you know, there's more peace inside and there's more love and compassion available for the outside as well. I think particularly these days, you know, in North America, there's a lot of people referring to our global crisis as the end times, which I understand, but I also consider it more as a catalyst or a call to evolve. And whatever is going to happen in the next 10, 20, 30 years, our capacity to meet each other with greater compassion will help us all to get through it. So, these may be beginning times. The author, Richard Bach says what the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly.

**Aníbal:** You just said that IFS is a non-pathologizing model. How would you comment that from a spiritual perspective?

**Derek:** I think when we start to look at what's right about us, I think that opens us up to a different consideration of a human experience. So, we start from the basis of there's nothing wrong with us. And we look at parts that are having extreme behaviors. We get curious about them. We help them to heal. So, they no longer have to engage in those extreme behaviors. And then when we open to the inner world, as you know, we find guides sometimes, unattached burdens, intergenerational legacy burdens, sometimes malevolent entities presenting. My friend Robert Falconer will be presenting an online workshop in April, Friday, April 17th. If people are interested in that they can come to my site, it's going to be three hours looking at some of these aspects of the model of what happens when we go inside.

And these understandings of, you know, spiritual forces interfacing with us, they're not new. If you've ever read or seen the play Macbeth, Shakespeare's Macbeth, there's a line from lady Macbeth she's asking to be made so that she does not feel, because she has to support her husband in his desires. But the line she says is: "Come, ye spirits that do tend on mortal thoughts, and unsex me here". So, she's asking to be made less of a woman, but she's calling on spirits. She's calling on the spirits that are present to help her do that. So, when Shakespeare was writing, this was a common understanding, which was sort of lost, but it still seems to be present when we go into the internal world, the non-pathologizing aspect too, when we look at connection, another of those Cs, were connected to all.

And when we have a lot of Self-energy, and I'm sure you two know this from your own experiences, we feel that connection to everyone or Thich Nhat Hanh called interbeing, you know, and that can bring its challenges because then from that felt sense place, you know, your starving children are my starving children, those families being turned back at a border and left to die, are my family members being turned back at that border and left to die. And that can bring a whole bunch of parts, empathy, powerlessness, despair, and it's important to attend to all of those parts so that we can also take Self-led action. We know from the place of Self, we know when things are out of balance, we know when things are unfair, internally and externally, and we're motivated to fix that balance. And again, from a spiritual perspective, if you look at this model, Dick describes it as a fractal model because parts have parts as you go in. As you come out, well, what if I'm a part? Tisha what if you're a part? Aníbal what if you're a part? What if every human being is a part?

**Aníbal:** Of a larger system?

**Derek:** Well, maybe, and then maybe Self is coming in to help us all in our world of parts.

**Tisha:** That explains it all.

**Derek:** Doesn't it? Isn't it a nice way to get it?

**Tisha:** Derek, with these more progressive, if I could put it that way, ideas around spirituality, the guides, the legacy burdens, the malevolent entities, where do you stand, or where does past lifetime experiences or burdens fit into your concept?

**Derek:** Well, I've worked with a number of people that have parts that present that seem a little out of sync with their present-day reality. And so, when I invite it to get curious, so sometimes a part, you know, how long is that part been around? If it's a part it will often say, since I was five or my whole life, or sometimes in utero, you know, if you've got an unwanted pregnancy, there's often that feeling of not belonging, we'll track back to in utero. The sense of that, that part has that consciousness, but sometimes forever.

Well, what does it mean by forever? Hundreds of years? Oh, isn't that interesting? So, let's stay curious. Let's get curious about that. What was happening hundreds of years ago? And it may present as a past life part. It may present as what I call a passenger, just a being who's got the attention of this person and for some reason is still connected, or has become connected to this person's system. I was working with someone once and we tracked a part. It was cold. Its initial presentation was that it was cold. And then it turned out to be a part that was older than the woman I was working with. And it was a woman who was dying, and she was freezing in the desert overnight. And she was so cold. She wrapped herself around herself, shivering right in an attempt to keep warm. And she was so bitter. She was so bitter that she was dying that way, that she turned her back on God, in her language. And what felt unresolved for her was that she turned her back on God. And as my client was listening to her with her compassion, the last piece of that was that the sun came up in the desert. And started to shine on the woman's back, and as she was dying now, she had the insight that when she turned her back on God, God warmed her back. And then she was able to be released from my client's system. And she flowed wherever she flowed to as a consciousness, as a soul, as a spirit, back into the universe, it was a remarkably beautiful session to witness.

**Tisha:** Wow. It impresses on me the power of the need to heal.

**Derek:** Yes.

**Tisha:** It's incredible.

**Derek:** Yeah, yeah. And it seems, it seems that what can be unresolved, just sort of hangs around or may attach to another human being until it gets resolved. And we have the capacity as human beings to do that. When we open to that compassion flow.

**Aníbal:** Derek, I understood that you need to build on Self. You need to build the most Self possible to connect and find guides. And I'm wondering, I need a radar for parts and a radar for Self and a radar for guides, but I understood that there is some opportunity for guides when we have the most Self

possible. How do you differentiate guides and Self? How much do they differentiate, because somehow Self leads us in many ways, but the guides also can lead us. So, there is some difference between guides and Self for you?

**Derek:** Yes, there is. Well first let me just backtrack a little bit. There is an assumption and it occurs in various forms. There's an assumption that we somehow need to build more Self-energy, like it's a muscle, right? And you know, a lot of Buddhist practices, a particular form of Buddhist practice, for example Metta practice, is wanting to build more and more compassion. An IFS understanding is that as soon as the parts soften back Self is there. It's available at any moment for anyone. It doesn't need to be built. And again, that sense of needing to build more compassion can be predicated on a sense of, "Oh, I'm not good enough yet."

**Aníbal:** Yes, it's tricky, yes.

**Derek:** So it can, that thinking can be informed by an exile, so, I just wanted to speak to that piece. And in my experience when guides show up in working with clients, there's no rhyme or reason that there's not a client that's particularly more "spiritual" than anybody else. We're all equally spiritual. And when they show up, I just give the session over to the guides because I'm humbled and my assumption is that these beings have shown up with their own wisdom because they inevitably have something to offer. So, I just pull back and ask the client, usually, how come the guide is here? What's it here to do? What other information does it have for you? Does it want to be available for you in any other form? It's a very helpful way to help clients to integrate when guide, show up.

Now that said, I just want to be clear that we're not talking about some sort of new age belief system where, you know, Oh, I ask my guide every morning, you know what I should have for breakfast. There's a lot of false teachings, particularly in the new age movement, and I don't want it to confuse those two things, right? So, my experience of guides when they show up in a client system is that they're clear, they have something to offer often. There's a sense of warmth, of love, of letting the client know that you're doing great, all is well or shall be well, and often some specific healing that they bring in.

**Tisha:** Do you ever intentionally invite them, or is it that they show up when there's space?

**Derek:** In my experience is that when they show up, I bow to them and give the work over to them. I'm not in the habit of inviting guides in. If I have clients who are aware of their guides, we may start a session just by inviting the client to invite their guides. If that fits within their cosmology.

**Aníbal:** Derek, you are organizing this workshop with Robert Falconer on guides and spirituality, do you want to tell us more? And I will be assisting because I have so, so many questions around guides, how many types of guides there are, and then what for can we use them, who should guide us, the Self or guides? How much do guides and Self overlap? You know, I can imagine, I have so, so, so, many questions around this, but tell us more about this interesting workshop with Falconer.

**Derek:** Well, it's his area of specialty, so I don't have a lot more to say, but I'm not quite sure what he's going to be presenting, but what I will speak to is early on in the IFS work, Dick Schwartz and Michi Rose were leading the work and Michi was the one who still has a lot of expertise on guides.

She often presents at the conference, the annual conference, and some of their early discussions were around this. Do we want Self to be doing the work? Or do we want guides to be doing the work? And Dick's preference is that Self is doing the work because Self is available and accessible within everyone. Guides, maybe, I'm not sure, but certainly Self is. And the whole understanding of Self-leadership is that we are leading from our best place. We are leading from our compassion. We are leading from our connection to what we can call spirituality, and we do call spirituality. And yet, perhaps it's no more than just who we are.

**Aníbal:** Yes. Makes sense.

**Tisha:** I wanted to ask you about a few paragraphs I read on your amazing article, *The Integration of Spiritual Experiences*, which is on your website. I wanted to ask about spiritual emergencies, just a little bit about what they are and how you came to understand them. If you've had one yourself or...

**Derek:** The term is Stanislav Grof's, who pioneered a lot of work with LSD. And then when LSD became unavailable, it was made illegal, he continued to work with breathwork, with holotropic breath work. And what he noticed was that people would have experiences that were clearly out of the ordinary consensual reality realms. And he coined the term with two meanings, a sense of emergency, urgency, what is this? Worry, fear, anxiety? What does this mean? How do I integrate it? As well as an emergence of sometimes very powerful immediacy of a connection to spirituality.

So, as I mentioned earlier, seekers that are using Ayahuasca, MDMA, DMT, ketamine are often taken into the transpersonal realms. And in those transpersonal realms, they have experiences. You might, for example, in a transpersonal realm, have an experience that you're perfect. You're perfect. And everything is perfect. And the universe is unfolding perfectly as it is. And then when you're no longer in the transpersonal realm, the managers might come in, the critical managers, and that doesn't fit there. That doesn't fit that perspective at all. So that's where they can invalidate what can feel very much like truths that are coming through. "Oh, you're not perfect. Look at these horrible things you do, look at how mean you were to your mum last week. You know, that's just the drugs talking. You shouldn't be taking drugs anyway. What's wrong with you."

So, you know, if there's an understanding from a spiritual or a cosmological place, if teachings are received, it's helpful to be aware that our managers can come in with these invalidating responses, these kind of contracted responses so that we can then come to our managers and say, "What's the worry? What's the worry? You know, if I do hold that my being, my nature in the world is perfect what's the worry about that?" And the managers will tell us what the worry is, and now we're working from the place of compassion with our managers. So, it's a very helpful model, the IFS model. So, facilitating the integration of transpersonal experiences I believe, and what we might call spiritual emergencies.

**Tisha:** Aha. So, like a conduit from the maybe traumatic nature or the intense nature of those experiences into something that we can synthesize and use.

**Derek:** Yes. As opposed to when Grof was writing his book, *Spiritual Emergency*. At the time people would have these experiences and they go to a psychologist or a psychiatrist, and they'd be told "You're hallucinating", they'd be pathologized. You know, "Why were you taking drugs in the first

place?” Which didn't help, did not help with the integration of these experiences. Right. Whereas IFS offers us an understanding of how to integrate higher truths, if you like.

**Tisha:** Beautiful. Good, well put. And have you, did you have a spiritual emergency experience?

**Derek:** I wouldn't say an experience which felt like it was an emergency in terms of a panic or crisis, but certainly I've had experiences of... I mentioned earlier, years ago, I asked Dick, you know, what, what about gratitude is that part of Self, you know, my good learning student part, but what informed that was, I've been working with my parts for years and this particular period in my life I remember I was walking my dogs in the park and just saying thank you, thank you to my parts. And then thank you to my creator, and just thank you for my life. Thank you for my child. Thank you for my parts. Thank you for my animals. And I felt very overcome, and had to look around because I began to stumble and I had to hold myself up on the gate post and I was just sobbing and sobbing and sobbing, with an experience of gratitude that filled my being, and it felt like it went through and beyond. And there was this wave of gratitude, and this particle of gratitude at the same time. So that felt like an emergent understanding.

And it's become a practice. My parts love to be thanked and I love thanking them. And when I thank them, they thank me back. And, you know, riding this wave of gratitude is a lovely way to engage with life. You know, and it's not always present. I don't want to offer this false, potentially false assumption that, you know, you hit this peak of Self-energy and you stay there forever. That's not the model. You know, I could be riding along with gratitude for a while and then I'll get scared, and I'll be scared for a bit. And it takes me a little while to realize, “Oh, that's a part holding fear. Good. Thank you for letting me know about yourself.” And then I'm back in the gratitude. “How come you're frightened? What else did you want me to know?” But prior to that recognition that it's a part, *I'm* frightened. It feels like I'm frightened, I'm blended with a scared part or I'm angry and blended with an angry part. And then once I get curious about it, I've got it back in the saddle again, I've got more Self-energy again. So, it seems to be as a process of Self-leadership, I have more Self-leadership for a period of time. Whoops, trip over, part gets my attention. I'll bring my attention to it, more Self-energy. And so, it goes, so it feels more like an undulation or an expansion contraction or a pulse or something like that. But I don't want to get this false assumption that we strive to reach a plateau of Self-energy and that I've achieved it. And you know, it's not that at all.

**Aníbal:** And then you stay there.

**Derek:** And then you stay there. When we have those moments, those moments of, what Maslow would call Self-actualization, of gratitude, of joy, of looking at our child and almost feeling overcome, that I think is a state of our true nature. Self-lead humanity.

**Aníbal:** Yes. Derek, this is such an interesting and exciting conversation, but we are coming to a close. Are there any final words that you'd like to say?

**Derek:** Well, here's something fun to consider, right? So, as we know, we've got all these parts that have to play as **I**, you know, “I'm scared”, “I'm angry”, “I'm a perfectionist”. But if we shift our **I** to the place of Self, if that's our identity, well, then Self doesn't die, right? Self is eternal. You know, if Self is having this human experience and then moves on, then I don't die. That's kind of nice.

And there are parts that are fearful of death and transitioning from this form. Self can attend to those, but if Self doesn't die, if *I* am immortal, Tisha if you're immortal, Aníbal if you're immortal, a lot of those worries and all that death anxiety that Ernest Becker has spoken so well about, doesn't need to be present. It's held by a part. And if you look at terror management theory, I don't know if you're familiar with that, but it's the understanding that our biggest fear, it's a Neo-Freudian view, our biggest fear is death anxiety. And when we look at immortality systems that we create to mediate that fear, if you have a different immortality system to me, then that's a threat to my mortality system. And this is the basis of jihads.

The firefighters want to eradicate the other belief system because it's a threat. Well, if I'm immortal, and you are immortal, and your religion has a different take on all of that, there is no threat. So that's fun. Yeah. And you know, this is where, you know, fundamentalism is so connected to fear, right? And connected to firefighter activity. And we see that in any kind of fundamentalism. I was talking with Dick about the experience of a guide coming back, who was a deceased mother. And he tells me that, you know, post-death, we leave our burdens behind. And if we're available to return, we do so as pure Self and often can come as a guide.

But what I would like to leave you with is my favorite quote is an Indian philosopher, Sri Aurobindo, who was born in 1872. And one of his books is called: *The colors of infinity*. And this is my favorite quote. *What? You ask, was the beginning of it all. And it is this, existence that multiplied itself for sheer delight of being and plunged into numberless, trillions of forms so that it might find itself innumerable.*

**Aníbal:** Beautiful way to end this episode Derek.

**Derek:** Thank you.

**Tisha:** Thank you for sharing all of your insights. It makes me just have more and more questions and want to hear more, but hopefully there'll be time for that.

**Aníbal:** It was a joy, hear the word, a joy to be here with you and Tisha again, and I hope we can keep meeting and sharing this model, our work and our lives.

**Derek:** Thank you. It's been a pleasure. Remember, “Esta forca, este poder...”

*This was an IFS Talks episode, an audio series to deepen connections with the Internal Family Systems model through conversations with lead trainers, authors, practitioners, and users.*