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**Inner Peace Takes An Open Mind**  
By Oriah Mountain Dreamer

Recently at a conference on spirituality, I heard a speaker tell the audience that the road to a fulfilling life could only be found if the listeners realized that all of their interactions with others were about power. I admit I cringed a little, wondering if an audience exposed daily to American media and politics really needs to be urged to focus more exclusively on getting and retaining power. But what really struck me was the way this view of power as all-pervasive and all-important was offered with absolute authority. And the audience, understandably looking for clear direction in a complex world, responded with enthusiasm to the speaker's certainty, applauding the perspective on power that was offered as fact.

All this got me thinking about the places and people and ideas to which we sometimes unthinkingly grant authority in our lives. People assume that someone who has written a best seller or is standing before an audience of 2,000 people must have a level of expertise, and we give this assumed expertise a certain weight. We are particularly generous in giving authority to other people in guiding us on how to deepen the spiritual aspect of our lives. Of course, we can learn from others' knowledge and wisdom, but ultimately authority for our inner and outer lives lies within us. The trouble with this is that on a good day we are all too aware of how little we know even about ourselves and on a bad day we can fool ourselves into thinking we know far more than we do. How then can we trust our ability to access the wisdom we need? How can we grant ourselves authority and so take responsibility for our spirituality and our actions?

Recently I was reading an excerpt from an essay by famed religious teacher, Jiddu Krishnamurti, about not giving authority for our lives and choices to others. Just as I was beginning to feel a bit self-congratulatory about my refusal to give over authority for my spiritual life, my smugness was punctured by a warning not to give anything, including our own experience, authority in our lives. While experience may be useful for developing concrete skills such as driving, when we allow our experience to have absolute authority in our lives, it shapes how we see and it conditions our thinking about the present. Relying on the authority of our experience, we do not see clearly what is and so cannot find the right action that flows when we can see and be with what is within and around us.

Perhaps real authority is not dependent upon the certainty of our declaration but instead relies upon the cultivation of open inquiry, a willingness to clear, as the poet Rainer Maria Rilke advocated, to love the questions. This doesn't mean we will never be drawn to take decisive action. But perhaps real authority means allowing our choices to come from a place that starts with a willingness to be with not knowing, to find what the Buddhists call beginner's mind. Sitting with what is, cultivating a practice of deep contemplation, we find a wellspring of wisdom, touch a sense of the nameless and sacred

presence that is the very ground of our being. Finding the stillness needed to cultivate this kind of inner authority daily in a busy world is not easy and the consequences, the choices it will lead us to make, are unpredictable. What if regular and renewing stillness leads us to value the power of presence more than we value the presence of power? How might that change our lives and the world?