



Building Your Spiritual Toolbox:

What is Spirituality?

Spirituality is deeply connected to our emotions and questions about purpose, direction, and identity. It is a personal, religious or mystical experience that reflects beliefs and actions towards others. Spirituality is about seeking inspiration and transcendence in everyday life, symbolizing a person's quest for meaning, depth, personal values, and relationship with the Divine. The Gnostic Gospel of Thomas encourages discovering the inside and attempting to make it the outside, often starting with meditation for spiritual purposes.

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Before we can develop a toolbox for developing our spirituality, we must first understand what spirituality is, or at the very least, what it may be. Spirituality, at its deepest level and its deepest connection to religion, is tied to our emotions. We all ask the same questions. What is my purpose? Where am I going? Who am I? The answers we find, when we endeavor to resolve these questions, are remarkably diverse from one to another. The spiritual experience, also known as the religious or mystical experience, is very personal. These experiences reflect our beliefs and our actions towards others. ¹ One might say spirituality is about searching for inspiration and transcendence in everyday life. Spirituality may be a symbol of a person's quest for meaning, depth, personal values, and their relationship with what they call the Divine, God, Universe, or some other term that implies an intelligence or being beyond their understanding. As you can see, spirituality is something that is within us. In the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, Jesus tells us to make the inside, the outside. That is what spirituality is about. First, we must discover the inside, our inside, and then we must endeavor to make the inside the outside. For many this endeavor begins with meditation, which people have been doing for spiritual purposes for over 30,000 years. ²

¹ (van der Walt & Potgieter, 2012)

² (Mishlove, 1975)

Why Spirituality?

The question you should ask is, why is spiritual exploration or spirituality so important? The answer may be that spiritual exploration is a fundamental aspect of human nature. We seem to be guided towards developing our own spirituality rather than relying on institutions, ³ groups, or people like myself who spout its principles hoping to aid you in developing a life experience that is unique and conducive to your personal growth. True spirituality, or what we are attempting to develop, is an awareness of our interdependence, ⁴ of our actions and thoughts, and the consequences they may have upon others. It is not about being an individual or any kind of separation. Only your experience is individualized, but you remain in symbiosis with nature. Spirituality possesses a quality that religion simply does not have. The higher applications of spirituality require your imagination and intuition, which play a significant role in your development as a wholistic being rather than just your intellect. The route to spiritual enlightenment is tied to your pursuit for the ultimate meaning of your life.

Why is it different from religion?

What we have been calling the spiritual experience, or the essence of spirituality, is better known as the religious or mystical experience, and they are more common than one would think. The reason we associate ourselves with religion is to gain an understanding of what we call God or the Divine. For many of us, this desire began with some type of experience. Mystical experiences have been recorded by all cultures throughout, all time, ⁵ suggesting these experiences are part of our evolution or desire to be more. Many of these experiences appear to be connected to our anxiety about death. ⁶ We have a tough time fathoming the concept of simply ceasing to exist. Thus, sometimes these experiences leave impressions about a continued life in another form, in another place. Hence the development of Heaven, Nirvana, or Paradise. These beliefs are often at the center of

³ (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2016)

⁴ (Rinpoche, 1992)

⁵ (Murphy, 2010)

⁶ (Murphy, 2010)

religion itself, and because of this many of them prey upon people's fear, encouraging them to continue experiencing calamities, bending them to their will that such experiences are for their benefit. The religions we are familiar with prey on our fears and upon our anxieties. The proper goal of religion should be to eliminate doubt. ⁷ Therefore, when our religion, when your religion causes doubt, you must examine it, and possibly revise your philosophy despite your beliefs. All religion is based on some type of philosophy. ⁸ If you have no philosophy, then you are not spiritual, you are religious.

Many of today's religions teach exclusivity. ⁹ You do not see one group mingling with another. You do not see amicable comparisons of doctrines unless you are the one comparing them, and even then, the information may be biased. You do not see a Fatherhood or a Brotherhood because their focus is upon separation. You see these brotherhoods within the respective organization, not outside of them. Spirituality is inclusive. Spirituality is about developing bonds, relationships, communications, and experiences with others. Whatever religious belief a person may subscribe to, it often dictates how the world should be viewed. These dictations of doctrine have caused so much bloodshed; that has caused so much human displacement; that has caused so much suffering.

One of the most significant problems of religion is value. ¹⁰ What is the value or worth of religion, of its doctrines, of its creeds, and its dogma? The value of religion is often reduced to an oversimplification of good and evil, which are values. What determines what is good and what is evil? Doctrines make this determination, and if not questioned, they become those of others. Doctrine describes what is considered evil and the good we are to achieve under threat. It is not the role of religion to ease your suffering. It is not the role of religion to instill hope. The role of religion is to convince you that God is active in your

⁷ (Bahm, 1964)

⁸ (Bahm, 1964)

⁹ (Bahm, 1964)

¹⁰ (Bahm, 1964)

suffering.¹¹ Religion accomplishes this by convincing you that you are no good,¹² that you are evil and shall remain evil until you follow their doctrine, their creed, their dogma. This is false. There is only one who can determine what is evil and that is the person upon whom the act has been perpetrated. Therefore, you cannot be evil unless you choose to believe you are.

Conclusion

A prominent Evangelist said, ‘You can know all about God, but the question is, do you know God?’¹³ By this he is referring to experiencing God. This is what spirituality is about. It is about seeking. Spirituality is not just about seeking the Divine; it is also about experiencing the Divine, and through the experience we find the answers to the questions we ask. Spirituality is experiential. Therefore, it cannot have a doctrine, or a dogma, or a creed. Consider this. Seven in ten people in the United States consider themselves spiritual, but not religious.¹⁴ That is a large number of people seeking a spirituality that is free of the history and tradition of our mainstream religions.¹⁵ It is not that there is a problem with religion itself, because there is not. The problem with today’s religion does not rest with doctrine. The problem with religion today stems from those who are spouting their beliefs and their interpretations of the doctrines they read as being the only truth. In essence, these people have taken away the responsibilities of others. The success of people discovering some alternate religious pursuit is keyed towards finding a religion that is empowering.¹⁶ That is what spirituality is about, empowering you to be; to simply be who you are without criticism. This is not something we must condition ourselves to because our brain is prewired for mystical or spiritual experiences. Only a small portion of the population experience the required triggers for these events to occur. The balance of people must endeavor to develop these spiritual qualities that reside within,¹⁷ waiting for

¹¹ (Leins, 2021)

¹² (Bahm, 1964)

¹³ (Adler, 2005)

¹⁴ (DeRose, 2023)

¹⁵ (Luhmann, 2012)

¹⁶ (Adler, 2005)

¹⁷ (Murphy, 2010)

something to trigger them, waiting for something to happen that will bring them to the forefront. It is not about knowing about God but experiencing God.

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