

How do we define Spirituality?

By Heiné de Waal – 1 July 2014

A friend recently visited us, accompanied by one of his friends with whom we are not acquainted. This stranger in our house made an interesting comment about the Buddhas in our home: *"I see you are spiritual people. I have a friend who is also spiritual."*

This made me think about the definition of spirituality. The word is nowadays very prominent in the media and the term is used widely. What does it really mean and how would so-called "spiritual" people behave?

According to Wikipedia, *"Spirituality can refer to an ultimate or immaterial reality, an inner path enabling a person to discover the essence of their being; or the "deepest values and meanings by which people live."* I have browsed Google to see what the internet might know. I have even found a new term - "new age spirituality"! It was a total overload of information, jargon and vague concepts and I was still not any closer to a generally accepted definition. Therefore I have decided to create a definition through my own understanding of this concept.

The following is what I believe spirituality to be and what it means for me to be a spiritual person.

Let's start with what it is not. Being spiritual is not necessarily being religious. What I have discovered is that many people do think it is the same or that the concepts are connected. I think it is possible to become spiritual through the practise of religion, but in most cases highly unlikely. I would even go as far as to say that most religions can cause people not to be spiritual.

Let me explain...

Spirituality to me is about expanding our awareness, in other words it relates to the level of our consciousness. It is not about burning incense, reading the tarot, learning Reiki, doing yoga or going to church. It is about how aware we become when doing these rituals. We can use it as tools to become spiritual, but it is not necessarily inclusive. We can use these techniques and still be relatively unconscious when it comes to our emotions, thoughts and the world we live in. To become aware we need to expand our knowledge, listen to our intuition and learn from our mistakes. Awareness starts when we acknowledge new information and accept that it has now become part of our reality.

The more aware we become of our emotions, feelings and thoughts, the more conscious we become. We will then become more sensitive to the world we live in. We will become aware of other people's pain and joy. We will become aware of the "souls" of the animals on this planet. We will become aware of the energies of plants, minerals and mother earth. Thus we become conscious what we do to animals, plants, the earth and ourselves. If we look at the state of the world at the moment, then I would say most of us are extremely unconscious - very unaware and definitely not living a spiritual life (according to my definition) - in spite of all the different religious options.

A huge part of what defines us as being spiritual, is our behaviour. We do things either from love or as a result of fear. Behaviour due to fear is of a lower vibration and makes the body sick. Behaviour from a point of love and pure intention will elevate the vibration of the body and we will be healthier, we will age slower and attract a life of joy and abundance. Unspiritual (or less spiritual) behaviour can be due to the fear of being out of control, fear of change or fear of not been liked. Interacting with people with a pure intention defines a spiritual behaviour and will have a win-win outcome. The behaviour most seen is a fear-behaviour, which is modelled to our children who adopt this and carry this through into their future. For the world to change we need courageous people to change their behaviour. We cannot expect governments to change the world; they are merely an extension of the population.

There is a dynamic relationship between our thoughts, feelings and behaviour. What we think will affect how we feel and how we behave. By changing our thoughts, we change our behaviour and therefore we change how we interact with the world. This manifests as a different experience of the world. If this is in a positive way, we will change and become of higher vibration. A higher vibration will attract more positive experiences which will give us joy and peace. Who does not want that?

Religion promotes a God "outside" of us whom we need to fear and obey. How can we love someone that we also fear? How can we love someone that will judge and punish us even when he says he loves us unconditionally? How can we trust such a God?

An external God is not able to give us spirituality; spirituality derives from within. We need to connect with the Self within to experience authentic spirituality. Religion is ego based and therefore can easily program people to be irrational. Religion enables a contracted awareness.

When we live a more aware life, we will experience less fear and more joy. We will be able to make decisions which are beneficial to our growth rather than adding to our suffering. We

will be able to know intuitively what to eat, drink and do that which will add value to our lives. There will be no need to adhere to a specific lifestyle such as been a Christian, Muslim, Jew, Buddhist or even a vegetarian to proclaim we are truly spiritual – that is merely feeding the ego.

So how do we become more aware or how do we lift our vibration?

I think the most important and first step is to become educated with regards to what a healthy life-style looks like. Then apply it in such a way that it works for us and in a way that gives us joy.

Then we need to work at our issues, our interpersonal intelligence and develop a healthy thought-system. The more we become aware of our irrational thoughts, the more we can work at it and change it. In this process we will change our experiences and our reality of life. Our vibration will lift and we will become healthier, vibrant and joyful.

I think organised religion is cleverly designed to disempower its "clients" so they will keep on coming back. The church "sells" faith, which the "buyers" do not get, thus they leave after a service feeling unsatisfied, hence coming back for more. The reason I think why they come back is due to a lack of faith - faith in life, faith in others and faith in themselves. It is important to have faith in something because it gives us hope. Unfortunately God cannot give us faith. Faith is something we just do and then blindly trust the outcome. We need to learn how to trust ourselves and the processes of life. Through that we will discover the Self (God for some) within us and the whole Universe we reside in.

In his book *A New Earth*, Eckhart Tolle speaks of the three modalities of awakened doing. He says: *"The modalities of awakened doing are acceptance, enjoyment and enthusiasm. Each one represents a certain vibrational frequency of consciousness. You need to be vigilant to make sure that one of them operates whenever you are engaged in doing anything at all – from the most simple task to the most complex. If you are not in the state of either acceptance, enjoyment, or enthusiasm, look closely and you will find that you are creating suffering for yourself and others."*

What I have discovered is that spirituality is a process. It is about developing self awareness, accepting reality as it happens and lovingly connecting with our environment and other life forms. In a way it is about becoming the observer of life. In short, spirituality is the process during which we expand our awareness of thinking and doing differently.