

Thoughts on Spirituality

by Alexander May

The term “spirituality” is becoming more popular and mainstreamed every day. Even though this term is widely used, for many the question still remains, “What exactly is spirituality?” To answer this, I would like to share my point of view, at the age of twenty-one, on what I think spirituality is, why I think it is important to try and integrate being spiritual into one’s life, and how spirituality has affected my life. I fully admit that I am not an expert and my views are only opinion, but nevertheless it is my hope that my words will carry some meaning that can be useful for anyone.

To begin simply, I think spirituality is a way for people to find a deeper meaning in their life. There comes a point in one’s life where questions like “Why am I here?” start to surface into our everyday thoughts, and these thoughts create disruptions in our normal routines. When I turned eighteen, I started asking myself things like “Was I only on this earth by chance or for a purpose?” These types of questions helped me start evaluating my lifestyle: “Was I really happy and fulfilled? If not, then what else did I need?” I began feeling an emptiness and thought that there must be something more to life than what I was currently experiencing. This time in my life became a turning point because, as human beings, I believe that when something disrupts our lives, we try to remedy that disruption. This remedy can be either to suppress the feelings that create the disruption—through drugs or other ways to occupy one’s consciousness—or to face the disruption head on and search for an answer. I was lucky to realize early on that this feeling would not leave, and any form of denial would only prolong my dealing with it. So I chose the latter choice of searching for deeper meaning.

I believe this search is what leads people to religion or spirituality. I am immediately separating the two because I have experienced that usually people say they are religious or spiritual, not both. I believe here is where the meaning of spirituality starts to unfold. If someone says he or she is religious, I assume he or she is dedicated to following a certain religion. If someone says he or she is spiritual, I assume that he or she is either not part of a religion but

believes in something beyond the physical world, such as a higher power, or is part of a religion but also finds meaning in other religions or philosophies pertaining to a higher power. To conclude more specifically on my interpretation of spirituality, I believe it is an awareness that there is, or might be, something beyond the human understanding such as a god or higher power. I also believe that to live a spiritual life is to have dedication to searching and trying to become closer to that deeper understanding. I don't think I have ever met someone who calls him- or herself spiritual and is an atheist or who doesn't care about a deeper meaning in his or her life.

So now, why do I think spirituality is important? First I think it is important because the initial questioning that leads one to become spiritual is like a seed that is planted in the ground. This seed, once planted, is very strong and usually will push someone to never stop trying to find deeper meaning in his or her life. The second reason, and the most important, is when one is searching for deeper meaning, the path he or she usually takes is one that makes him or her strive to become a better person. I will use myself as an example. After I began questioning my life and searching for a deeper meaning, I turned toward the teachings of spiritual and religious teachers because I equated them with having answers to my questions on the deeper meaning of life. What first became awakened in me was that all religions and spiritual practices called for a level of moral discipline that was greater than the one I practiced. It made sense to me that in order to have any greater understanding of life, I must first start with changing myself. I developed a greater sensitivity to my conscience and could no longer brush off feelings of guilt or wrongdoing. Many spiritual people I meet have more compassion and concern for the well-being of others than non-spiritual people. I believe this is because living a spiritual life provides a strong moral guidepost, and as a human race we need something beyond our individual selves to inspire our lives. For example, if I do not expose myself to spiritual material or material that connects with the part of myself that wants to excel and be the best person I can be, I feel myself slowly sinking into a more decadent lifestyle. But, conversely, if I go to church and hear teachings that inspire me, I feel a part of myself become awakened and have the motivation to become more righteous.

Three years after those seeds of questioning were initially planted, I realize I have not found a concrete answer pertaining to questions like "What is the meaning of life?" But I realize, that wasn't necessarily the question I really wanted to know. I believe that something inside of me awakened and communicated to me that it was time to change, and that if I kept living my

life the way I was, I would never be really happy or joyful. I am grateful that I had the knowledge of spiritual and religious leaders because they had things to say about life that were not superficial or pointless, but profound and wise. I can say firmly that because of those initial disruptions I had when I was eighteen, I am a completely different person today. I treat others with more respect, I see beauty in the world that I was unaware of before, and I have faced fears that I wouldn't have if I did not have the strength to grow. I am still a seeker and I am still questioning, but I will be forever grateful for spirituality, the awakening of the human spirit.