

SPIRITUAL ESSENCE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

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ABSTRACT

All of us come across people, occasionally though, who have an inexplicable glow on their faces, regardless of their age, an aura that abounds in sheer positivity and a healing touch in their words and deeds. They are empathetic, humble, simple, nonjudgemental and considerate. Be sure, they are spiritual. The journey on the path to spirituality ushers from within. It takes a great lot of courage, persistent effort as well as enlightenment to be truly spiritual. It is a quest for personal growth with a concern for sacred meaning, beyond mundane concerns. While religion says that God is outside you; spirituality believes He is within us all. There is manifestation of spirituality in all objects of nature. Among all plants and animals, the universal rhythm is to 'give' lovingly and not to demand from others. We eat food to sustain ourselves. We drink crystal clear, colorless and tasteless water to be alive. We need air which is invisible yet more important than food and water to live. We can only feel it. The more subtle a thing; the higher its significance. We can neither eat, nor drink, nor touch our thoughts yet they are unstoppable even when we are asleep. Thoughts are indeed more powerful than food, water and air. So, we must pay great attention to our thoughts. Spirituality has three stages culminating into a pure, joyful soul_ self-discovery, self-improvement and selfless service. Silence and meditation are the most effective tools to discover self. Self-examination, done in an objective manner, leads to self-improvement. Once we imbibe the idea that same soul pervades all living things; our soul is set free of all kind of negativity. Spirituality opens up the gates to humanism. It is the doorway to live a more rewarding, fulfilling and enlightened life.

Keywords: Enlightenment, Silence, Meditation, Self-discovery, Self-improvement and Selfless service.

Introduction

All of us come across people, occasionally though, who have an inexplicable glow, regardless of their age, and a serene smile on their faces, an aura which abounds in sheer positivity and a healing touch in their words and deeds. They are humble yet in a dignified way; considerate and empathetic to the core; nonjudgemental; 'simple and chaste- as all good things should be'- to put it more succinctly in O Henry's words. Be sure, they are spiritual.

The journey on the path to spirituality ushers from within. It takes a lot of courage, persistent effort as well as awakening to be truly spiritual. An atheist can be spiritual too. It is something separate from organized religious institutions. It is a realization of one's inner dimension. It is a belief in a supernatural realm beyond the ordinarily perceivable world. It is a quest for personal growth with a concern for sacred meaning, beyond profane, mundane concerns.

Objectives

- To define and demystify spirituality
- To distinguish spirituality from religion
- To present a three-stage path to spiritual growth
- To emphasize the role of silence, meditation and thought power
- To promote universal compassion and inner divinity
- To encourage practical spirituality in everyday life.

India – The Spiritual Hub

If this world is a large house; India is its temple. This country has always been the religious and spiritual hub with thousands of sages, saints, mahatmas and spiritual gurus proclaiming millions of followers and

devotees. People from across the world come to India for spiritual solace and inner enlightenment. Spiritual gurus like Sadguru, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Gaud Gopal Das, Baba Ramdev and many more reign supreme in modern India, thanks to the far-reaching impacts of social media and the internet. Each one of them has a unique way of motivating people toward self-awareness and ultimate redemption. But just like every light has its shadow, some self-proclaimed gods do more harm than help to society as they have turned their entire modus operandi into a money business. They exploit the religious sentiments of people for their vested interests and loot innocents in the name of salvation. Many missionaries and dharmik gurus have truly been committed to humanitarian endeavors but how many people get enlightened in the real sense of the term is another matter.

India is a land where dharma runs in the veins of its inhabitants from times immemorial. It is so deeply rooted that we can't imagine life and its different phases without it. Our very being and way of life with all its joys and sorrows remain inextricably intertwined with religion.

Religion vs. Spirituality

Being religious and being spiritual is considered the same by many. Yet there is a sharp divide between the two. While religion says that God is outside you; spirituality believes He is within us all. The former worships God and the latter becomes one with God. Religion sometimes separates people who have different beliefs, while spirituality includes all in its compass. When one believes in someone else's experience, with only limited things to explore, this is called being religious. And, when one is having one's own experience, it is like having the entire ocean to explore without any limit, this is called being spiritual. Spirituality is something very subjective and personal. It focuses on experiencing internal divinity, which subsequently promotes joy, spontaneity and compassion. Its goals are love and freedom, freedom from all negativity whether external or internal. It is more experiential and less of belief-based. On the other hand, being religious means being formal, which centers around obeying or devotion to an external divinity. It emphasizes knowledge not intuition. Religion promotes devotion, service to others and self-sacrifice. It is thought-based and not feeling-based. It aims at obedience or salvation. Religious people are duality-oriented, and discern between good and evil, heaven and hell, and right and wrong. They are not 'present-oriented' like spiritual people who believe that heaven is within you now. They are more or less 'future-oriented' and think that heaven is where you go when you die.

The purpose of this paper is not to admonish religion. Religion provides a sense of purpose, and promotes social unity and stability. It motivates people to work for positive social change. Our scriptures are a storehouse of ethical and moral teachings. It also imparts a sense of belonging. Along with boosting our psychological and physical well-being, it also determines the values we accept or reject. "The problem with religion lies within its followers and not with the religion itself. All religions call for compassion, respect, equity, generosity and peace." [1] Some critics sum up the problem by saying_ religion is a noun, not a verb- adherents are more interested in the status of their faith, rather than acting on it.

Universal Spirituality

Goodness can be defined in two ways_ one can be very religious, morally upright and leading a pious life. Such a person is indeed very good, but for themselves only. Then, there is another, who does not believe in idol worship, but, is generous, kind, considerate, full of integrity and works for the downtrodden. This is the difference between being religious and being spiritual. Though many religious people work for the community too and are great social reformers, thus they are both religious as well as spiritual.

Swami Vivekananda and APJ Abdul Kalam are the two titans of spirituality. Who can forget the momentous words spoken by Swami Vivekananda during his historical speech at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893? He united all the religions into a single entity as he embraced them all in the universal being. He called for accepting and understanding one another. Thus, he unleashed a new era of universal brotherhood. He quoted two beautiful statements from sacred books_

“Whoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him” &

“All men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to Me” [2]

Next, no better example of spirituality can be seen than in the message Kalam gives to millions of people in his autobiography ‘Wings of Fire’, when he quotes his father who had told him- “In his own time, in his own place, in what he really is, and in the stage, he has reached-good or bad- every human being is a specific element within the whole of the manifest divine being. Each individual creature on this beautiful planet is created by God to fulfill a particular role.” He further says, “Whatever I have achieved in life is through His help and an expression of His will. All these rockets and missiles are His work through a small person called Kalam, in order to tell the several million, mass of India, to never feel small or helpless. We are all born with a divine fire in us. Our efforts should be to give wings to this fire and fill the world with the glow of its goodness.” [3]

Nature: Manifestation of Spirituality

There is in fact a manifestation of spirituality in all objects of nature. Though having a short lifespan, a flower spreads cheer and joy with its fragrance and color. A tree, perpetual and deep-rooted provides shade in heat, gives us fruit and cool air, and life to all without expecting anything in return. The sun gives and demands nothing. Everywhere in the world of nature, among all plants and animals, the universal rhythm is to ‘give’ lovingly and not to demand anything from others. How true Wordsworth was when he quipped, ‘The child is the father of man.’ Little children promptly smile back at strangers who smile at them. They are so spirited, so full of zest for life, harbor no ill will, live in the present, enjoy life to its fullest, are truthful and make no pretence. Their innocence and purity define their proximity to divinity. And as they advance in years, the innocence gets replaced by deliberation. Very few are able to save the child within them as they grow.

The Power of Thoughts

We eat food to sustain ourselves. We drink crystal clear, colorless and tasteless water to be alive. We need air which is invisible yet more important than food and water to live. We can only feel it. The more subtle a thing; the higher its significance. We can neither eat nor drink nor touch our thoughts yet they are unstoppable even when we are asleep. They are indeed more powerful than food, water and air. Yet we hardly pay attention to the quality of our thoughts. There is no denying the fact that everything manifests itself twice- at first in our thoughts and then in our actions. We imagine things before putting them into action. It has been proven that according to the law of attraction, all universal forces conspire to fulfil whatever we think. Still, we harbor so many negative thoughts and emotions which are the cause of most of the suffering.

The Three Stages of Spiritual Growth

Nature has designed our soul to be blissful whatever may happen. To be joyful is the inherent nature of our soul. Only spirituality can make it possible as life has become so unpredictable in today’s turbulent times. It has three significant stages culminating in a pure, joyful soul- self-discovery, self-improvement and selfless service.

1. Self- discovery

The first step i.e. of self-discovery envisions an inner path enabling a person to discover the essence of his/her being. The questions like- What is your real self? What is the purpose or significance of your life? To where do you belong? What do you truly want from life? - find their answers after self-realization. But it is easier said than done. It demands a lot of consistent effort, keen desire, enthusiasm and quality time with one's own self. Silence and meditation are the most effective tools to discover self. Mahatma Gandhi, too, had talked about the value of silence in his autobiography 'My Experiments with Truth.' He believed that silence was a physical and spiritual necessity. People cannot hear the voice of the soul, which he referred to as divine radio, if they speak continuously. He further said that we can prepare our minds to listen to the voice of great silence by retiring to ourselves for a couple of hours each day. The second tool for self-discovery is meditation or we can say- quiet contemplation. The methods to concentrate the mind may vary from person to person. Some chant mantras, many perform pranayama, while others focus on their breathing. Whatever method one prefers, the important thing is to free the mind from unnecessary noise and harmful rubbish for at least half an hour daily. Self-knowledge is the stepping stone to self-mastery.

2. Self- improvement

The second stage calls for self-improvement. It requires objective self-analysis of all the merits and demerits that are integral to the character- personality of a person. A true Yogi detoxifies his heart and mind from all sorts of negativity. After evaluating all the strengths and weaknesses, he is courageous enough to improve each day. One has to ponder deeply over their thoughts and actions before going to sleep every night. If we want to manage our life; we shall have to manage our minds first. We shall have to strive to be the best version of ourselves. Consistent focused reflection will rid the mind of worry, and other impure thoughts. All the undesirable thoughts should be replaced with uplifting ones. One shall have to guard the mind all the time and not allow even a single negative thought to enter it. Again, it is not so easy to practice. Once we imbibe the idea that the same soul pervades all living things; all our grudges and resentments will fade away. We have to remind ourselves of the transience of life time and again. We must compete with our own self by overcoming all the negativity in any form. "All success in life, whether material or spiritual, starts with that twelve-pound mass sitting between your shoulders. Or more specifically, with the thoughts that you put into your mind every second of every minute of every day. Your outer world reflects the state of your inner world. By controlling the thoughts that you think and the way you respond to the events of your life, you begin to control your destiny." [4]

3. Selfless Service

Once one has realized the divinity within, the time comes for the gates to open for the third stage to enter which is of selfless service towards all around you. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "What is faith worth if it is not translated into action?" 'Manav Seva: Madhav Seva' becomes the motto of a self-realized person. Spiritually enlightened people work for universal welfare, without expecting anything from others. Their benevolent actions are driven by self-satisfaction. They do not seek approval from others. Nor do they compare themselves with others. Ever happy and contented, their bliss remains unaffected by others or by material objectives. They look at all living beings as one and accept them as they are without feeling superior or inferior or trying to change them as they have already reinvented themselves through self-discovery.

Universal Compassion

We visit temples at regular intervals, with rich offerings, as if trying to bribe the greatest benefactor to meet our wishes, while behaving indifferently to some needy person living next door. Undoubtedly, a temple is a storehouse of positive vibes and divine energy that makes one feel at peace with oneself and

get rejuvenated. But, then, that energy should be channeled in a way that contributes to the wellbeing of all and thus leads to social welfare at the macroscopic level. We fast, vow, and pray twice daily; but do not want to look after old parents. We keep our eyes shut to the miseries that take place around us. We have become impassive and indifferent. Very few people realize that to hurt a soul is to hurt the divine. How much dissimilar we may be in caste, color and creed yet the same soul resides in all of us. God doesn't come to help us in person when we are in need. He creates some or the other medium to reach us. He has created us to be embodiments of His virtues: mercy, empathy, peace and love. He wants us to be His messengers of love, kindness and compassion. Mother Teresa too has said, "Holiness is not the luxury of a few. It is everyone's duty, yours and mine."

Conclusion

In the final analysis, there can be little doubt that anyone can follow the path towards spirituality. In fact, everybody needs 'spiritual nourishment' as this is the food for our soul. It can dawn upon each one of us anywhere and everywhere. The only conditions are true longing and sincere effort for spiritual quest. "We have only to open the windows of our house to get the fresh air and the sunshine. So is true with spiritual truth. When we open the windows of our soul, Atma, recognize it as the image of the eternal soul, Paramatma, we realize self and get the eternal bliss." [5]

When you see life in every leaf, in every object perceivable; when you feel that same soul pervades all objects of nature; whether it is an animal, an insect or a tree; when you become empathetic towards the sufferings of others; when you begin to enjoy the little pleasures of life; when you have no hate or feeling of revenge against anyone; be sure, you have paved the way towards spirituality- the doorway to live a more rewarding, fulfilling and enlightened life.

They bathe, clothe and feed
Love, worship no matter what creed
Beautiful, static, stone images
Of every shape and every hue.
Fast, vow, move to far-off places
With rich offerings, expectant faces
To have a glimpse
Of shiny, metallic idols.

But let me say a word or two
For those who serve
The images real and true
Of ailing, helpless and of old,
They surely have a heart of gold.

If your loving hand smooths
The dishevelled snowy hair
And you give an ear to the same tale
For the hundredth time with a beam
Believe me you don't need
To adorn cold impassive images.

If you hold a shrivelled hand

With your warm reassuring hands
And wipe the tears of your mother
As she drifts in the ocean
Of her long-lost days,
Trust me you don't need
To fast or make a vow.

If you do your duty
With a joyful cheer,
Lend a hand to those who sneer
Have faith you don't need
To clamber barefoot
To the perched-up shrines.

Win the blessings of images true
These blessings will ever shield you
From every blast and every rain
Do not worry, do not strain
For pilgrimage, as you age
Your home is your temple
And you surely are-
A true image of God
This must be told.

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