

Spirituality & Community

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www.spiritualityandcommunity.com

William Blake: Auguries of Innocence



Mahatma Gandhi

In His Own Words

**Spirituality:
The Third Way**

Poetry: Eclipse
By Kurt Venables

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Who We Are

www.spiritualityandcommunity.com

Origins

Spirituality & Community was founded in late 2003 by Kurt Venables to communicate with others who share an interest in spirituality and an appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.

Mission

We are dedicated to the spiritual development of our members and promoting spirituality and appreciation for the rich array of spiritual beliefs the world provides.

Foundations

Spirituality & Community is a magazine and online community for those seeking answers to life's deepest questions. We hold closely these fundamental truths:

- To find true happiness, one must open his or her heart to the pure goodness that lies deep within. We call this pure goodness the Good, the Light, and the Lord within.*
- The process of opening one's heart is a lifelong journey, which we call Spirituality.*

We distinguish between spirituality and religion. *Our focus is spirituality, which we view as an inner search for happiness and fulfillment.* We are concerned with what lies within the heart. In religion, metaphysical and supernatural concepts are inextricably linked to spirituality, and you will find such religious concepts discussed here to the extent that the writer believes them to be entwined with spiritual topics. However, you will not find material written for the sole purpose of asserting, denying, or debating supernatural religious phenomena, whether they be associated with traditional religions or new age religions. Examples of such phenomena might include the existence of God, reincarnation, or extraterrestrials. It's not that we don't consider these to be worthy subjects; it's just that we believe that spirituality, the inner journey, is important in its own right, and that is our focus here.

We believe that true spiritual development depends upon a genuine appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs. Among our highest values is open-mindedness. We do not require or expect others to accept the particular beliefs of any one of us. We believe that as we develop such an appreciation for diversity, our perspective shifts away from an "all or nothing" concept of spirituality, an approach that supposes that one must either wholly accept or utterly reject a particular set of spiritual beliefs. This perceptual shift allows us to view the beliefs of others from a fresh vantage point, take from each set of beliefs that which rings true, and synthesize a personal spirituality that makes sense for each of us. *We believe that spirituality may best be defined as a personal journey towards true happiness and spiritual fulfillment and that the beliefs of others serve to guide each of us on our own journey.* Our goals are the personal growth of each and every member and the promotion of spiritual values and respect for individuality.

We believe that when we view the spiritual beliefs of others with our hearts, we see truth shine through. Truth shines all around us if we know how to see it. The truth we see in the spiritual beliefs of others guides each of us. It is in this vein that we wish this organization to be viewed. *Through Spirituality & Community, we reveal our most intimate beliefs. We sincerely hope that some will find some truth within them, and we wish you only the best on your own personal journey!*

What We Do- Opportunities for Exploring Spirituality and Communication

Spirituality & Community produces a magazine and encompasses an online community. Both aspects serve as the basis for bringing together those who share our aspirations and beliefs, to meet each other and exchange ideas. We provide many opportunities for exploring spirituality and communicating with others:

- Spirituality & Community magazine*
- Features on the site*
- Online chats*
- Retreats* (as interest arises)

The magazine is based on a Reader's Digest® type model. It is comprised primarily of reader submitted material. It is the primary mechanism for a member to both explore spirituality and communicate his or her ideas to others. Features from the past several issues are also posted on the site. When interest is sufficiently high, we will hold chats online. An eventual goal is to organize retreats in major metropolitan areas to allow participants to meet each other and discuss issues face to face.

Membership in Spirituality & Community is free and may be withdrawn at any time. The magazine is also free. Level of participation in any aspect of Spirituality & Community is strictly voluntary.

The organization and site were launched only very recently. Currently, membership is very small- We are in growth mode right now. *If you would like to join, please visit our web site and click the Join Us! link.*

Spiritual Soup

By Kurt Venables

Spirituality: The Third Way

So, what is spirituality? A set of beliefs? A quest? A quest for knowledge? A quest for happiness? A full discussion of this question is beyond what can be laid out in this brief exposition. Here, I discuss spirituality in relation to two things from which I believe it may be distinguished- religion and science.

Spirituality, in my view, is distinct from religion. The focus of religion involves supernatural or metaphysical elements, God and elements such as afterlife, heaven, hell, etc. The focus of religion revolves around understanding God and the other supernatural elements and how to make one's life (including one's afterlife) better by acting in concert with this understanding. The source of one's knowledge, the "way of knowing", is faith. Spirituality, in my view, is an inner search, an introspective journey to understand self and how to make one's life better by acting in concert with *this* understanding. I believe that one may achieve true happiness by cultivating feelings of goodness. Deep within every human heart is the capacity to feel pure goodness. I call this goodness the Light. The more one opens his or her heart to the Light, the closer one comes to true happiness. Many obstacles to this end exist, so opening one's heart is a difficult, lifelong journey. This journey, in my view, is spirituality. Thus, religion's focus is how to live a better life by understanding God; spirituality's focus is how to live a better life by understanding self. These are two distinct things, and they are not mutually exclusive. A spiritual person is free to believe in any religious phenomena or none at all.



“Spirituality, in my view, is an inner search, an introspective journey to understand self and how to make one's life better by acting in concert with this understanding.”

Spirituality is also distinct from science. Science acquires knowledge by making objective observations from an external viewpoint. Spirituality, as stated, utilizes the subjective viewpoint. One may study people, including what makes people happy, from an objective, external viewpoint. This is psychology. Science has been enormously successful in studying the world around us. It really is the only way to study the world around us. But there is one thing in the universe that we can study from a subjective viewpoint- ourselves. When it comes to ourselves, we have “inside” information. We have the opportunity to observe things that simply cannot be observed from the outside. We can measure the wavelength of blue light, for instance, but could anyone from an external vantage possibly understand what it's like to experience the color blue? Or what it's like to experience goodness or happiness? The infinitely richer information we glean from

the subjective viewpoint permits us, with great difficulty, to actually understand ourselves and, ultimately, to understand what will make us happy.

But there is a catch, one important caveat. We may gain information from the subjective viewpoint only by observing with the mind, not instruments of any kind. And each human mind is subject to its own imperfections. Thus, each of us may see slightly different things. I liken this to sunlight shining through a window pane onto the floor. The window pane may consist of perfect squares. Depending on the angle of the sun, however, the projection of the pane on the floor may be stretched or compressed. If there are objects on the floor (such as toys, as is usually the case in my house), the lines become distorted. The point is this: Because each of us sees different things from the subjective vantage, tolerance and appreciation for diversity of belief is critical.

So if it is not like religion and not like science, what is spirituality? Next to religion and science, it is *a third way of knowing*. Historically and in modern times, spirituality has been eclipsed by these first two ways of knowing. While not taking anything away from religion and science, we at Spirituality & Community believe that spirituality is important in its own right. We believe that spirituality is critical if humanity is to ever fulfill its potential and if any one is to ever be truly happy. I liken spirituality most to music. If I had made this assertion in the first paragraph in answer to the questions posed, no doubt many would have thought that very odd. Now, perhaps, the analogy may not seem so. One could not possibly understand or appreciate music by studying it from the outside. One must experience it to understand its beauty and to understand how to put sounds together to make it beautiful. Spirituality is like this. One must experience it to see its beauty, and

experience, the Journey, is how we come to see the ultimate beauty.

“I liken spirituality most to music.”

Mahatma Gandhi: In His Own Words

Mahatma Gandhi was born October 2, 1869 at Porbunder, a town on the west coast of India. At that time, Britain ruled India. Gandhi became a key spiritual and political leader in the cause of India's independence, and he was unwavering in his teaching that this goal must be achieved through non-violence. While not wholly responsible for India's freedom, he is widely regarded as contributing more to this cause than any other. India's independence was a great political achievement; however, he is perhaps even more widely revered for his spiritual leadership. He was a moral force that will not be forgotten. India became independent on August 15, 1947. Mahatma Gandhi died January 30, 1948 of injuries wrought from an assassin's bullets.



The words of Gandhi on various subjects follow. For more information, see the excellent book:

The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi

Compiled & Edited by : R. K. Prabhu & U. R. Rao

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Revised & Enlarged Edition, February 1967

Fourth Reprint, April 1996

ISBN 81-7229-149-3

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Navajivan Mudranalaya, Ahemadabad-380014 India

*Entire book online at: <http://www.mkgandhi.org/momg/encyclopedia.htm>

Truth

WHAT...is Truth? A difficult question; but I have solved it for myself by saying that it is what the voice within tells you. How then, you ask, [do] different people think of different and contrary truths? Well, seeing that the human mind works through innumerable media and that the evolution of the human mind is not the same for all, it follows that what may be truth for one may be untruth for another ...

It is because we have at the present moment everybody claiming the right of conscience without going through any discipline whatsoever, and there is so much untruth being delivered to a bewildered world. All that I can in true humility present to you is that Truth is not to be found by anybody who has not got an abundant sense of humility. If you would swim on the bosom of the ocean of Truth, you must reduce yourself to a zero. (YI, 31-12-1931, p428)

Truth and Love--ahimsa--is the only thing that counts. Where this is present, everything rights itself in the end. This is a law to which there is no exception. (YI, 18-8-1927, p265)

To see the universal and all-pervading spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. (A, p370-1)

Truth resides in every human heart, and one has to search for it there, and to be guided by truth as one sees it. But no one has a right to coerce others to act according to his own view of truth. (H, 24-11-1933, p6)

Truth and Love--ahimsa--is the only thing that counts. Where this is present, everything rights itself in the end.

Non-violence

I am not a visionary. I claim to be a practical idealist. The religion of non-violence is not meant merely for the rishis and saints. It is meant for the common people as well. Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute. The spirit lies dormant in the brute and he knows no law but that of physical might. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law--to the strength of the spirit....

The rishis who discovered the law of non-violence in the midst of violence were greater geniuses than Newton. They were themselves known the use of arms, they realized their uselessness, and taught a weary world that its salvation lay not through violence but through non-violence. (YI, 11-8-1920, p3)

Non-violence is the law of the human race and is infinitely greater than and superior to brute force.

...

Non-violence is a power which can be wielded equally by all--children, young men and women or grown-up people, provided they have a living faith in the God of Love and have therefore equal love for all mankind. When non-violence is accepted as the law of life, it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts. (H, 5-9-1936, p236)

The very first step in non-violence is that we cultivate in our daily life, as between ourselves, truthfulness, humility, tolerance, loving kindness. ... Non-violence is an unchangeable creed. It has to be pursued in face of violence raging around you. Non-violence with a non-violent man is no merit. In fact it becomes difficult to say whether it is non-violence at all. But when it is pitted against violence, then one realizes the difference between the two. This we cannot do unless we are ever wakeful, ever vigilant, ever striving. (H, 2-4-1938, p64)

God

To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheist of the atheist. For in His boundless love God permits the atheist to live. He is the searcher of hearts. He transcends speech and reason. He knows us and our hearts better than we do ourselves. (YI, 5-3-1925, p81)

The millionaires imagine that money can bring them anything in the world. But it is not so. At any moment death might come and snuff them out.... Losing one's life...is not the same thing as shedding 'self'. One has to learn to efface self or the ego voluntarily and as a sacrifice in order to find God. The spinning-wheel rules out exclusiveness. It stands for all inclusiveness. It stands for all including the poorest. It, therefore, requires us to be humble and to cast away pride completely. (H, 13-10-1946, p. 345)

I believe in the essential unity of man and, for that matter, of all that lives. Therefore, I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him and, if one man falls, the whole world falls to that extent.

Altruism

YAJNA MEANS an act directed to the welfare of others, done without desiring any return for it, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature. 'Act' here must be taken in its widest sense, and includes thought and word, as well as deed. 'Others' embraces not only humanity, but all life....

...

This need not frighten anyone. He who devotes himself to service with a clear conscience will day by day grasp the necessity for it in greater measure, and will continually grow richer in faith. The path of service can hardly be trodden by one who is not prepared to renounce self-interest, If we cultivate the habit of doing this service deliberately, our desire for service will steadily grow stronger, and will make not only for our own happiness, but that of the world at large. (FYM, pp. 53-56)

Spirituality

I DO not believe...that an individual may gain spiritually and those who surround him suffer. I believe in advaita, I believe in the essential unity of man and, for that matter, of all that lives. Therefore, I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him and, if one man falls, the whole world falls to that extent. (YI, 4-12-1924, p. 398)

Sources

A

An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth: *M.K. Gandhi* : translated from Gujarati by Mahadev Desai : Navajivan Publishing House. Ahmedabad; vol. I, 1927; Vol. II, 1929; edition used: 1959

FYM

From Yeravda Mandir: Ashram Observance: *M.K. Gandhi*; translated by V.G.Desai ; Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1933; edition used:1957.

H

Harijan :(1933-1956) English weekly journal founded by Gandhiji and published under the auspices of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, Poona, and from 1942, by the Navajivan Trust, Ahmadabad. T he weekly suspended publication in 1940 during the "Individual Satyagraha"; resumed in January 1942, but stopped appearing during the Quit India Struggle. It reappeared in 1946.

YI

Young India:(1919-1932) English weekly journal, published from Bombay as a bi-weekly, under Gandhiji's supervision from May 7, 1919, and as a weekly from Ahmedabad, with Gandhiji as editor from October 8, 1919.

William Blake

Auguries of Innocence

(excerpt)



To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.

A robin redbreast in a cage
Puts all Heaven in a rage.
A dove house fill'd with doves and pigeons
Shudders Hell thro' all its regions.
A dog starv'd at his master's gate
Predicts the ruin of the state.
A horse misus'd upon the road
Calls to Heaven for human blood.
Each outcry of the hunted hare
A fibre from the brain does tear.
A skylark wounded in the wing,
A Cherubim does cease to sing.
The game cock clipp'd and arm'd for fight
Does the rising Sun affright.
Every wolf's and lion's howl
Raises from Hell a human soul.

...

He who respects the infant's faith
Triumphs over Hell and Death.
The child's toys and the old man's reasons
Are the fruits of the two seasons.
The questioner, who sits so sly,
Shall never know how to reply.
He who replies to words of doubt
Doth put the light of Knowledge out.
The strongest poison ever known
Came from Caesar's laurel crown,
Nought can deform the human race
Like to the armour's iron brace.
When gold and gems adorn the plow
To peaceful arts shall Envy bow.
A riddle or the cricket's cry
Is to doubt a fit reply.
The emmet's inch and eagle's mile
Make lame Philosophy to smile.
He who doubts from what he sees
Will ne'er believe, do what you please.
If the Sun and Moon should doubt,
They'd immediately go out.
To be in a passion you good may do,
But no good if a passion is in you.
The whore and gambler, by the state
Licens'd, build that nation's fate.
The harlot's cry from street to street,
Shall weave Old England's winding sheet.
The winner's shout, the loser's curse,
Dance before dead England's hearse.
Every night and every morn
Some to misery are born.
Every morn and every night
Some are born to sweet delight.
Some are born to sweet delight,
Some are born to endless night.
We are led to believe a lie
When we see not thro' the eye
Which was born in a night to perish in a night,
When the Soul slept in beams of light.
God appears and God is light
To those poor souls who dwell in night,
But does a human form display
To those who dwell in realms of day.

Note: Blake probably wrote this poem during the period from 1800 – 1803.

Eclipse

by Kurt Venables

The sun is Light
Uncorrupting, true gold
The eye that gives vision
Ichor of the soul

The moon is mood
Full, crescent, joy, vanity
In our world gone mad
Moonlight strains sanity

A world denied Light
Soft as wine's sweet sips
The moon's ill-fated pace
Yields a total eclipse

But today, a soft face
A jewel, heaven sent
Sunshine at the dawn
Of enlightenment