

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.

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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.

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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.