

THE BIG QUESTION

What does it mean to be spiritual?



B.K. ASHA

What constitutes spirituality? A large number of people in the world confuse spirituality with religiosity. They believe that to observe religious practices such as praying, reading scriptures, fasting, and going on pilgrimage is spirituality. There are also those who are not religiously inclined but think that having good wishes for others, being kind and charitable is what it means to be spiritual.

True spirituality, as the word suggests, has to do with the spirit or soul. The foundation of spirituality is the awareness that we are souls, not bodies. It is not enough to merely know this fact. Millions who have read the Bhagvad Gita know about the soul and its immortality, but how many of them are conscious of being a soul while going about their daily lives?

Do they act with the awareness that the soul is performing actions through the body? Do they look at fellow human beings as souls and interact with them with that awareness? That is what it means to be spiritual.

Recognising the fact that one is a soul, and knowing the innate qualities of the soul and the role it plays, completely changes one's perspective on life. It is the soul, the sentient entity, that feels the happiness and pain we experience. The body is the medium through which the soul has these experiences. As the soul goes through the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, it gets the fruit of the actions it performs, whether good or bad. The soul carries a record of every action performed by it in each birth. Its good deeds may not necessarily be rewarded in the same life, nor may it suffer the consequences of its mistakes immediately. But, as per the law of karma, it surely gets its due at some point of time. This knowledge makes a spiritual person careful about their thoughts, words and actions.

Such a person knows that it is wiser to acquire



virtues and the good wishes of others than to amass wealth that one will leave behind at the time of death. Spiritual assets such as honesty, peace, courage, and tolerance remain with the soul life after life, and they come in handy when one is confronted by difficult situations. A spiritual person does not hanker for physical pleasures, which are always short-lived and dependent on sense organs that are subject to decay. Knowing that the soul is immortal, they are

also free from the fear of death, which, they understand, is not the end of everything but just a change of roles.

On the other hand, most of what is achieved by someone with a materialistic outlook is transitory. They spend their life acquiring money, status and objects of physical comfort, all of which they leave behind on death. Excessive indulgence in physical pleasures enslaves them to the senses, and this brings misery when the body decays with age. More-

over, a materialist believes that they will lose everything with death, which can occur any time, because of which they live in fear and worry.

Even religious practices do not bring lasting peace of mind to materialists because they seek only worldly things in worship. They ask for wealth, physical health, a good job, a child, a grandchild and so on. Their desires do not subside when they get all that they want; instead, they get more entangled in their relationships and

finances.

Without spiritual awareness it is not possible to have a link with God, the Supreme Soul, who is the Father of all souls and the only one who can liberate His children from suffering. He does that by sharing His wisdom, power and virtues with souls who remember Him, so that they can overcome their weaknesses and become pure and whole again.

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DISCOURSE

HAVING FAITH IN OTHERS



DADI JANKI

How can we serve those around us? By making our lives inspirational and interacting with tact and wisdom.

Even if there is not the chance for actual conversation, we can learn to take in each other's presence in a positive way. This creates an atmosphere of love and regard, which makes it easy to share spiritual experiences. We should be so cheerful, and

our lives such examples, that they say, 'Here is an angel!'.

If there is a need to take responsibility for something then of course, you should. However, if a situation is not your business, or someone else is in charge, then do not get caught up in it. If you want to help, you can still involve yourself in a more subtle way - through faith.

Faith in others does a lot of work. It means to remain alert to what is going on, and then to fill another with the strength of your faith to such an extent that they feel able to do whatever needs to be done. This means having faith, but also donating the power of your faith. If the other person is honest and truthful, your faith will work for them. In this way we can learn to truly help each other.

A THOUGHT FOR TODAY

My conscience keeps me on the straight and narrow. It can discern the rightness or wrongness of something as well as its true-ness or falseness. Studies have shown that we go against our conscience several times each day. Usually in small matters such as doing something we know is not good for us. When I regularly go against my conscience, it ceases to function. When my conscience stops speaking to me, I experience confusion and make mistakes I will later regret. Today let me listen to my conscience.

BEYOND WORLDLY NOISE

DO YOU HEAR THE CALL?



JUDY JOHNSON

Do you hear the call of the world? The headlines shout at us about environmental calamities, the pandemic, the constancy of war, struggle, and injustice. It can be overwhelming to look and really see the unhappiness, anxiety and fear in which people are living in our world today.

But do you hear the call of what is beneath the headlines?

Do you hear the hearts calling for peace and harmony? Do you hear people calling for the simple pleasures of a walk in nature, a meal with friends or a grandparent's hug? This past year and a half have called humanity to unify beyond borders. As we discover the subtle threads that connect us, there is a call to put an end to being labelled in limited ways.

Do you hear the call of your own heart? To be still and silent, to live simply and sustainably and to be free? Our hearts are calling to be free from all that binds and restricts, including those internal habits that steal our peace. Our hearts are calling for the freedom to be the best we can be, to reach our highest aspirations, to fly. And our hearts are calling out to help others experience free-



dom and peace.

Malcolm Gladwell wrote a book, titled *The Tipping Point*, in which he describes how the collective consciousness shifts slowly at first, beginning with

one or two people thinking in a new way. When enough people adopt the same mindset, the scales reach a 'tipping point' and human consciousness rises and is changed for-

ever. With each contribution made to the new call of the world, the closer we get to the 'tipping point'.

It takes courage to listen for the call and even more courage

to truly hear it. Given the negativity that surrounds us, it also takes courage to have faith in a positive outcome. It takes courage to trust the law of positive return (karma) and truly know that any giving on my part will ensure that I receive support when needed.

It takes courage to keep my feelings clean and prevent myself from sinking into negativity and complaints, or cynicism and bitterness. It takes courage to go to God at the first sign of struggle and clear away the noise of the world. Through silence and meditation, we can become beacons of peace and hope in the world. Do you hear the call?

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

IT MAKES SENSE TO HAVE A VEGETARIAN DIET



B.K. MRUTHYUNJAYA

Over the past few decades vegetarian diets have rapidly gained in popularity, with millions of people becoming vegetarian the world over.

Still, the debate about the advantages of a vegetarian diet continues. Research studies continue to show that a vegetarian diet is good not only for human health but also makes economic

and ecological sense, besides being ethically sound.

That a vegetarian diet is good for the heart is well-known. Studies suggest that a vegetarian diet may have beneficial effects for kidney and nerve function in diabetics, as well as for weight loss; that eating more fruits and vegetables can slow, and even reverse, age-related declines in brain function and in cognitive performance; and that the vegetarian seniors have a lower death rate and use less medication than those who eat meat.

Eating meat is a wasteful way of feeding ourselves. Grain-fed livestock consumes about 50 times as much water as soybeans for every kilo of food it produc-

es. Information compiled by the US Department of Agriculture shows that more than 90 per cent of all grain produced in America goes to feed livestock that winds up on dinner tables. According to estimates, bringing down meat production by just ten per cent would release enough grain to feed 60 million people.

Then, there is the ethical aspect of vegetarianism. Centuries ago, Pythagoras, known for his contributions to geometry and mathematics, said, "The earth affords a lavish supply of riches of innocent foods, and offers you banquets that involve no bloodshed or slaughter, only beasts satisfy their hunger with flesh, and not even all of those, because



horses, cattle, and sheep live on grass."

In an essay titled *On Eating Flesh*, the Roman author Plutarch wrote: "I rather wonder both by what accident and in what

state of mind the first man touched his mouth to gore and brought his lips to the flesh of a dead creature, set forth tables of dead, stale bodies, and ventured to call food and nourishment the

pets that had a little before belloved and cried, moved and lived...."

Research suggests that a vegetarian diet has a positive effect on the mind. A study conducted by Arizona State University psychology professors Richard Stein and Carol Nemeroff reported that salad eaters were rated more moral, virtuous and considerate than steak eaters.

In Britain, a study on prison inmates found that vegetarians were less violent and unruly than those who ate meat.

Some people argue that the killing of animals for meat is now more scientific and 'humane', so such slaughter is not all that bad.

But the life of an animal

bred for meat is an unnatural one of artificial breeding, castration and/or hormone stimulation, feeding of an abnormal diet for fattening purposes, and ultimately, slaughter. Screaming animals are stunned by hammer blows or electric shock. They are hoisted into the air by their feet and moved through the meat factories on mechanised conveyor systems. Still alive, their throats are sliced and their flesh is cut off while they bleed to death.

Leo Tolstoy wrote that by killing animals for food, "Man suppresses in himself, unnecessarily, the highest spiritual capacity - that of sympathy and pity toward living creatures like himself - and by violating his own

feelings becomes cruel." He also warned, "While our bodies are the living graves of murdered animals, how can we expect any ideal conditions on earth?"

When we lose respect for animal life, we lose respect for human life as well. Pythagoras had said, "Those that kill animals to eat their flesh tend to massacre their own."

Whether for ethical, environmental, or economic reasons, it is increasingly becoming clear that adopting a vegetarian diet is a sensible choice. The sooner we recognise this the better it will be for us and the planet.

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