

## Spirituality comes in many forms, not just religious

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Recently spirituality has become an over-used, and sometimes misunderstood, concept. It is an extension of the word *spirit*, which has multiple meanings, both secular and religious, but in religion it often refers to a soul that survives death. Religious spirituality suggests an emotional uplifting felt by devout believers or the act of worship in a church or designated holy site, usually augmented by the power of Christian music, magnificent architecture, art and icons. Spiritual feelings thus aroused, serve to sustain and strengthen the faith of believers.

A broader definition of spirituality can be found in Richard Taylor's book, *Good and Evil*, which discusses spirituality in both religious and secular terms. Taylor describes spirituality as a quality not bestowed from without, but originating within giving human lives richness and meaning exceeding in both beauty and permanence any heaven of which humans have ever dreamed.

Many people, not finding spiritual fulfilment through traditional religions, have looked elsewhere, such as into *new age* enticements or religious fundamentalism. Although evangelists claim that spiritual fulfilment can be attained by being born again, it can also be experienced through an openness and acceptance of people and events in everyday living. Many experiences evoke elation and spiritual feelings, such as falling in love, observing and contemplating the wonders and beauty of nature, discovering or creating something new, helping others or watching a baby learn to walk or talk. To these can be added the wonder of birth and the sheer joy of being alive. None of these experiences needs to be related to religion or to the expectation of an afterlife. Furthermore, any person who possesses a great appreciation and love of life is unlikely to do evil against others or to seek drugs or other stimulants to add spice to their lives.

Spiritual experiences are sometimes manifested through music; for example, the Choir's *Gloria* from Mozart's Twelfth Mass--or even Mozart's secular music. In fact, lovers of jazz often report spiritual feelings while listening to New Orleans jazz, an effect suggesting that spirituality is not the sole domain of religion.

The wonders of nature, too, are capable of producing spiritual experiences as for instance, in the exhilaration that bathes one standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon or looking skyward among towering centuries-old Douglas firs in Cathedral Grove, Vancouver Island. It is commonly thought that spirituality belongs only in the religious domain. Surely the whole world should be considered a holy place, and we should respect and preserve every aspect of the environment that we have been fortunate enough to inherit.

The late Canadian sociologist Pat Duffy Hutcheon, in her essay, "A Humanist Perspective on Spirituality," regrets that spirituality is associated by many only with religion and suggests that we should speak more often of the human capacity for awe and wonder. She states that for a non-religious or secular point of view spirituality is about the very essence of being human. No life is complete without it.

It is not my intent to detract from the spirituality and the comfort that Christians receive through

church worship, but rather to point out that spirituality, far from being the sole property of religion, can be a component of many aspects of life. As Northrop Frye has stated, there are many whose spirituality is not theistic or tied to reward and punishment, for they believe as Omar Khayyam did, "True devotion is for itself; not to desire heaven; nor to fear hell."