



# **SPIRITUALITY 101**

**A Straightforward Guide**

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## **Spirituality - The New Kid On The Block**

In the past, spirituality and spiritual principles were taught and found exclusively in religious books and places of worship. Today, spirituality is being embraced by thousands who are searching for fulfillment in life through an inner connection to a higher power, way from organized religion.

The growing popularity of yoga, meditation, spiritual retreats, the explosion in self-help and personal empowerment books, teachers, authors and leaders all point to this trend.

With spiritual concepts having a 'coming-out' and being sought out by large numbers of people from all backgrounds, traditions and cultures, there has been much confusion about the basics of spirituality.

My purpose in writing this guide is to present some basic spiritual concepts in a concise, straightforward way.

## **How Is Spirituality Different From Religion?**

I often hear people saying they are not religious but spiritual. What's the difference?

If you were to cook a vegetable dish, you would probably use these basic ingredients: vegetables, salt, herbs, spices, water and oil.

Based on the type of cuisine you are cooking, you would use these ingredients differently to cook up your favorite dish. For example, you could make an Italian stew, Indian curry or French soup.

No matter how we cook our food, we eat to end hunger and gain a sense of fullness or contentment that comes from eating the right quantity of nourishing food.

Using this food analogy, spiritual truth would represent the basic ingredients used for cooking and religions would be the many cuisines that use those ingredients to suit different people.

To put it another way, spirituality provides the theory of how to end sorrow and find fulfillment in life while religions provide the application of that theory. Both have the same goal.

The source of the material in this guide and my website comes from my on-going studies of *Vedanta*. *Vedanta* is a spiritual science of life and art of living. It explains the relationship between the source of creation, creation itself and man. It describes the true nature of each of these three aspects of life, the spiritual potential in man and how to unfold it so as to find true happiness.

Just as a science develops from the findings of the researchers of the past, the body of knowledge in *Vedanta* has grown and developed over literally thousands of years. It is a science and not a religion because it does not reflect the teachings of any particular master but the cumulative wisdom of generations of the highest spiritual masters of India.

Since Hinduism comes from India you may be wondering how, and if *Vedanta* is connected to it. Hinduism derives its tenets from the *Veda*-s, the great books of spiritual knowledge in which the science of Vedanta is found.

## **Does Spirituality Talk About God?**

Religion talks about God as the source of all creation, including man. Every religion gives God different names - *Heavenly Father, Lord, Allah, Krishna, Rama, Elohim* and many others.

Spirituality describes the same creator God in impersonal terms such as Ultimate Cause, Supreme Self, Truth or Reality, The Source, All-That-Is and Pure Consciousness.

The names may differ, but they point to the one and same God or Source.

## **Human Birth, A Rare And Precious Jewel**

To fully understand the significance of our human lives and the urgency to realize our spiritual potential, it is important to understand the rare privilege of being born as a human.

What if you own something really precious and rare but because you have no idea of its worth, you don't pay any attention to it, misuse it, give it away or worse, throw it out, thinking that it's junk?

Imagine how you would feel if you discovered that the ring that you sold at your garage sale was actually a precious heirloom?

The human life that we have now is an extremely rare jewel that is available to us for a limited time. We all know that when something is very rare, it is very valuable.

When we understand the rarity of a human birth, we will understand how precious it is. And once we know its value, we will naturally want to find out more about its purpose so as to make the best use of our lives.

## **Just How Rare Is A Human Birth?**

Have you ever wondered why you are a human being and not one of the other millions of other species of life on the planet?

Some years ago, I visited the Royal Ontario Museum in downtown Toronto with my son's Grade 5 class. There, I came across a display with a huge wheel that looked like the wheel you may have seen in the television program, 'Wheel of Fortune'. There were nails on the periphery that halted the wheel from spinning once the momentum of a spin was lost. It was called, 'The Wheel of Life'.

The wheel was sectioned into pie-like segments that represented different species of life. There were detailed scientific Latin listings of the various categories of species, most of which were unfamiliar to me.

Roughly, here's what I understood: Insects made up about half of the wheel, plants one-quarter, fungi, mold, and algae about one-eighth, and vertebrates and invertebrates represented the last one-eighth.

There was an intriguing question beneath the title: *If we were born into a species entirely by chance, what chance would we have of being born a human?*

Visitors were asked to spin the wheel and see which segment they would land on. It was a fun game of chance to see which species you would likely be born in.

Not stopping to think, I casually spun the wheel and landed on the segment of insects. Smiling to myself, I spun it two more times. The first time, the pointer landed on the segment representing insects and the second time, on the plants segment.

I thought to myself, "If my birth was determined as randomly as a spin on this wheel, I would have had a far greater chance of being born a beetle or a weed than a human being!"

I started to wonder how I could spin the wheel so that it would land on the segment representing human beings. I looked carefully all around the wheel for the word, *Homo sapiens*. Interestingly, it was nowhere to be found. Next to the wheel was a display that explained why: Humans make up such a tiny sliver of the total number of species that we could not possibly be represented on this wheel.

To understand better just how rare the human species is, take a look at these facts: -

- There are more than 30 million known species on the planet and in the seas.
- Of that number, approximately only 58,000 species are vertebrates. (Vertebrates have backbones such as reptiles, birds, fish, amphibians and mammals.)
- Of the vertebrates, there are more than 5000 species of mammals.

- Of those 5000 mammal species, *Homo sapiens* is only one.

*Homo sapiens* is only one of over 30 million known species. What percentage is that of 30 million? If you get your calculator and crunch the numbers, you will be startled by the answer.

When compared to all the other species on the planet, our chances of being born as human beings is a shockingly minuscule 0.000003%!

*If we were born into a species entirely by chance, we would almost never be human beings.*

*Vedanta* tells us that attaining a human birth is indeed very, very rare and precious. The spiritual teachings tell us to wake up to this fact and seek out the purpose of our human existence.

## **Finding The Purpose Of Our Human Existence**

To find out what our purpose is, we can start by looking for what makes us different from all the other species.

It can be seen that the other species live and behave as dictated by their natural instincts and impulses. They have very little or no freedom to act outside of how nature has programmed them.

Only humans have the freedom to choose how to live, think and act. Our advanced mind allows us a wide range of intellectual and emotional responses.

Critical thinking, advanced logic, subtle discernment and imagination are not to be found in other species. We can express a wide range of noble virtues such as humility, non-violence, compassion, mercy and forgiveness. Also, prayer and meditation are not to be found in the other species.

Our sophisticated mental and emotional makeup allows us the freedom to choose our responses to life and grants us the ability to put in efforts for our own self-development.

Since we are so rare and have the most sophisticated equipment of all the species on Earth, surely we must have some special purpose to fulfill.

## **What Are We Doing With Our Lives?**

All of us, without exception, are seeking happiness in life. A little reflection will show us that our everyday activities and pursuits are ultimately futile. No worldly enjoyments, relationships, possessions, titles, fame and power are forever. Everything that we possess or gain in life is left behind when we die. In fact, we even leave our physical bodies behind.

We put in great efforts to study, get a job, earn a living; nurture, acquire, and protect relationships and material things in the face of great difficulties and challenges, only to leave them all behind when we die. What's the point of all this striving? Surely life must have a higher purpose than this.

The writings of the spiritual traditions of the world provide solace and meaning. The spiritual masters tell us that underlying the physical body and mind is the truth of who we really are - pure and eternal Spirit expressing in human form.

Right now, we have forgotten our essential spiritual nature and are living as mortal human beings with a finite existence. The masters tell us that we are like the pauper who does not know that he is the prince and thus suffer in life.

They tell us that our ultimate and true purpose in life lies in uncovering our spiritual essence. Only then will we find complete happiness.

## **What Is Spirit?**

To reclaim our spiritual essence, we have to first understand what Spirit is. Spirit is best understood when compared to matter.

A human being is made up of both matter and Spirit. Matter can be either gross or subtle.



Gross matter: The physical body is made up of gross matter. It is perceptible by the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin (five senses).

Subtle matter: The mind, which is made up of thoughts, is subtle matter and thus, beyond the perceiving limits of the five senses.

### **Characteristics of Matter**

**Matter is:**

- **Inert.** This means that it has no capacity to move or function on its own.
- **Insentient.** It has no consciousness. Matter doesn't know itself or anything else.

Our bodies move and function, and our minds feel and know things. How can they be inert and insentient matter?

The body and mind appear to be alive and functioning because of the presence of Spirit.

This can be easily explained with an everyday example. Spirit can be compared to electricity that makes gadgets function. A toaster, a fan or a microwave oven all function because of electricity, which we do not see. Similarly, Spirit remains unseen behind the body and mind and makes them function.

### **Characteristics of Spirit**

**Spirit is: -**

- **Alive and Dynamic.** It has the capacity to move and function on its own.
- **Conscious.** Spirit knows itself and everything else.

Matter cannot function, feel or know. When Spirit comes into contact with matter, it transfers life and sentiency onto matter, making it *appear* as though it is alive and conscious.

## **Spirit, The Enlivening Factor**

How does Spirit bring matter to life?

Let's use a jacket as an example. A jacket is made up of matter that neither moves nor functions on its own. If you hold it up, it simply hangs, limp and lifeless. The jacket is not conscious of itself. If you call out to it, 'Hi Jacket', it doesn't respond because it has no consciousness.

Now, imagine your body and mind to be the jacket; and you to be Spirit. When Spirit comes into contact with matter (Put on the jacket and zip it up completely), the jacket appears to come to life. Now, it can move, bend and turn. If someone tapped on the shoulder of the jacket and said, 'Hi Jacket' it would turn around and respond. "Hi!"

Like the jacket, the body and mind appear to be alive and functioning because they are animated by Spirit. The instant Spirit leaves the body it drops down dead.

Spirit is the life-giving factor, which enables the physical body to function and the mind to feel emotions and think thoughts.

## **Why We Cannot See Spirit**

You are probably wondering if we are Spirit, why we cannot see or know it directly. We cannot experience Spirit directly because:

1. It is present behind matter just as electricity is present behind the gadgets it functions through.
2. Since matter has no consciousness, it has no ability to know what enlivens it. For example, a flashlight cannot see the batteries that enable it to shine light. In the same way, Spirit is beyond the scope of our mental abilities.

We can only know Spirit exists and is present when we view it through its expressions. A functioning and living body and mind are expressions of Spirit. If your body and mind are now functioning, know that Spirit is animating them.

To explain this, let's go back to the example of the toaster, fan and microwave oven. We know that electricity is present when the toaster warms bread, the fan circulates air or the microwave oven cooks. Toasting, circulating air and cooking are the expressions of electricity. We can't see electricity directly, but we know it's there because the gadgets are functioning. Electricity itself lies behind the equipment that it operates through.

In the same way, the body is able to function, the mind to think and feel because of the presence of invisible Spirit that animates them.

## **Are We Spiritual Beings Or Human Beings?**

So, now you may be thinking - are you a human being or a spiritual being?

The French Philosopher, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881 - 1955), said:

*We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.*

Which is true? Are we human beings or spiritual beings? The answer depends on whether we look at ourselves from the perspective of Science or Spirituality

Looking at the human body from the standpoint of Science, we are said to be human beings, the species called *Homo sapiens* that is distinguished by its superior intellect and upright posture.

But Spirituality looks at us beyond our bodies and minds to our spiritual essence. From this view, we are said to be spiritual beings.

So, depending on which standpoint we view ourselves, both answers are correct. However, what is important to note is that although we appear to be human

beings, the ultimate truth is that we are pure Spirit functioning through the body and mind.

## **If We Are Spiritual Beings, Why Don't We Know It Or Live It?**

We have come to identify so closely with the appearance and characteristics of our matter aspects (the body and mind), that we don't see or experience ourselves as spiritual beings.

Think about a lump of clay. If that lump is shaped and fired into a jug, you don't call it clay. You identify with its appearance and call it a jug. What is the reality of the jug? It is nothing but clay. The name and shape of the jug 'hide' the appearance of clay.

In the same way, we experience only our bodily appearance and the characteristics of our mental and emotional personalities. Our true spiritual essence is invisible and lies hidden behind these layers of matter. We have forgotten we are pure Spirit, just as we forget that the jug is nothing but clay.

## **Proof That We Are Spiritual Beings**

Having read all this, you probably have many questions and doubts. Can we prove we are spiritual beings?

### **Proof # 1: Spirit Keeps Us Alive And Not Our Vital Organs**

Science tells us that when our vital organs, such as the brain or heart stop functioning, we stop functioning and die. Likewise, those who have failing organs and receive donations, live. Therefore, it must be our organs that keep us alive and not Spirit.

To prove that Spirit keeps us alive and not our vital organs, let's think about this question: Do the heart and brain have the ability to stay alive and function independently when they are removed from a human body?

We all know this is not possible. The cells of the organs begin to die away as soon as a person has died. A successful transplant into someone else's body can occur only if a living donor organ is speedily transplanted into an *already living* body.

If the recipient dies soon after surgery because of some complications, the donated organ dies away too.

While our vital organs are necessary for the running of our bodies, their existence depends on some other enlivening factor. That other life-giving factor is Spirit.

### **Proof #2: Spirit Never Dies When The Body Dies**

Not convinced? Let's go deeper and talk about death.

Have you ever been to a funeral, looked at a dead body and wondered what happened to the person who was there before? It's hard to believe that he or she no longer exists. The body is there but the real person has disappeared without a trace.

As long as the person was alive, we addressed him or her by name. Now we say, 'the body'.

Notice the language we use to describe the dead. We say, "He's passed *away*," "He's dead and *gone*," or, "The deceased has *departed* leaving behind his mortal remains".

Who is the real person whom we knew while he or she was alive? The real person was pure Spirit that was merely functioning in the body.

### **Proof #3: Spirit, The Silent Witness Of Our Lives**

There is yet another way to prove that we are spiritual beings. Take a few quiet minutes alone and reflect on this...

In your mind's eye, picture yourself at the various stages of your life: preschooler, child, teenager, young adult and fully-grown adult at every decade of your life until now. At every stage, try to remember what you looked like and what you were doing, thinking and feeling as you experienced life.

Looking back at the various periods of your life, notice the presence of an 'I' that has remained the same throughout all the changes and experiences you have been through. This is who you really are. You are that unchanging Spirit who knows all your experiences.

When you go to sleep and experience a dream, you wake up and say, "I had a dream." Who is this 'I' who had a dream? Obviously, you were the knower of your dream. The knower is always different from the known. That's why you say that you "had" a dream.

The dream was merely an unreal and changing collage of ephemeral experiences. When you woke up, you realized that you were different from the dream experience. But while you were in the dream, you forgot your waking state reality and lost yourself in the experience of it.

This is exactly what happens in our waking lives. We have lost the memory of who we really are through our complete identification with our waking world of experiences.

Spirit you is the unchanging conscious presence that is the knower of all the changing experiences of your life.

## **Only One Spirit**

So far, I've only talked about Spirit being the real you. But Spirit is far more than that.

When looked at from the macrocosmic level of the entire universe of names and forms, Spirit is called variously as God, All-That-Is or Source. When looked at

the microcosmic level, Spirit expresses as me, you and every other being in creation.

The truth of life is that there is only one spiritual essence everywhere. There is only one Spirit. There is no difference between your essence and the essence of every thing and being in all of creation. Recognizing this and living as spiritual beings instead of human beings is the ultimate goal of our lives.

This is what will take us beyond the sorrows and limitations of our human existence and bring us the ultimate peace and fulfillment in life that we are all searching for.

## **Growing Spiritually**

How do we recognize our spiritual essence? Coming back to the example of a human birth being a rare jewel, think of the jewel as having yet to undergo precise cutting and polishing to bring out the innate beauty within.

To grow spiritually is to gradually chisel away our habits of thinking as limited human beings. We have to outgrow our preoccupation with our selfish concerns.

Since there is only one Spirit, striving to live the vision of Oneness is the goal of all spiritual seekers. A spiritual person understands that everything in creation is essentially one and thus intricately interconnected. So, living the Golden Rule of life is the simple way to growing spiritually. The Golden Rule tells us to treat others the way we ourselves would like to be treated. This applies not only to people but animals, plants and in fact, the whole planet.

To begin to grow spiritually, you don't have to do different things but rather, do things differently. This means doing your everyday duties while trying your best to remember that we are all One.

The best way to start is to commit to being more generous in giving love to yourself and others. Forgiving, letting go, being kind, helpful, considerate, accepting and respectful are some simple expressions of loving responses to life.

Changing your life this way is not something you can rush as it involves a total re-patterning of your ways of thinking and living. Growing spiritually is not an activity that you can fit into a time-slot in your schedule. A spiritual vision has to color your entire life. It doesn't matter that outer circumstances and people are difficult or troublesome. Inner peace should be kept as your highest priority as you strive to live a more open and giving life.

As you move along this path, you will gain a greater sensitivity to your own behavior and responses to life. You will come to expect only exemplary responses from yourself. This will gradually bring out the spiritual shine from within and your greatest spiritual growth.

## **When A Spiritual Seeker Is Born**

Your spiritual journey begins when you start seeking answers to the deeper questions of life.

You may find that your usual things and activities no longer bring the same joy and excitement as before. Maybe, you have experienced great difficulties, loss or setbacks. You feel a growing sense of dissatisfaction with life. You are tired of the endless striving to be happy in an exasperatingly frustrating life full of limitations, tension, pain, unfulfilled desires and flimsy joys. You start to look for deeper meaning and purpose in life.

You find yourself asking - "Will I ever find permanent happiness?" and "What's the purpose of my life?"

Once you start thinking in this way, your life will take an irreversible turn. Now, instead of looking for happiness outside, your mind will begin to look inwards for deeper meaning and fulfillment in life.

This is when the spiritual seeker in you is born.



## Your Spiritual Journey

The spiritual concepts that I have shared with you here may not seem clear or obvious to you unless you take some time to personally reflect on what you have read. To allow the truth to come to the surface, you have to keep an open mind and heart.

The worldly-minded person says: *I'll believe it when I see it.*

The spiritually minded person says: *I'll see it when I believe it.*

The spiritually oriented person realizes that the world we live in is an ordered, intelligent system that is overseen and controlled by a higher intelligence. Knowing this, he or she believes that just because things are not perceptible or measurable, it does not mean they don't exist or are untrue.

Here's Einstein's view on the world we live in:

*The human mind is not capable of grasping the Universe. We are like a little child entering a huge library. The walls are covered to the ceilings with books in many different tongues. The child knows that someone must have written these books. It does not know who or how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. But the child notes a definite plan in the arrangement of the books - a mysterious order which it does not comprehend, but only dimly suspects.*

The world is full of mysteries. If you take the time to slow down, keep an open mind and sincerely look for deeper meaning in life, Spirit will subtly guide you to your highest fulfillment as you uncover the beauty of your own divine essence.

I regularly post blog articles on my website to help you on your spiritual journey. There are articles on meditation, how to gain peace of mind and happiness, living and growing spiritually, the law of karma and many others. Connect with me there.

I wish you well on your spiritual journey!

## About Manisha Melwani



Manisha Melwani is a Teacher and Guide offering spiritual solutions for life and stress management. She is passionate about helping spiritually-open, Conscious Evolvers gain a deeper understanding of life that will empower them with the tools to live with greater peace, purpose and fulfillment. For over 10 years, her main focus has been the study and sharing of the knowledge of Vedanta, which is the spiritual science of life. Vedanta is found in the ancient Veda-s, the sourcebooks of spiritual teachings from India.

To find out more, please visit: <http://www.SpiritualSolutions.ca>