

"Spirituality exists wherever we struggle with the issues of how our lives fit into the greater cosmic scheme of things. This is true when our questions never give way to specific answers or give rise to specific practices such as prayer or meditation. We encounter spiritual issues every time we wonder where the universe comes from, why we are here, or what happens when we die. We also become spiritual when we become moved by values such as beauty, love, or creativity that seem to reveal a meaning or power beyond our visible world. An idea or practice is "spiritual" when it reveals our personal desire to establish a felt-relationship with the deepest meanings or powers governing life." These are the words of Robert C Fuller, professor of Religious Studies at Bradley University.

Spirituality then, has to do with the big issues in life and how they fit with the greater scheme of things about which we do not have explicit answers, knowledge or understanding. Spirituality requires that we become moved. We are not the movers in the realm of spirituality. Something moves us. Fuller says what moves us is a meaning or power beyond the visible world. What moves us is something we can not see or grab and hold in our hand.

This is not the stuff of intelligence or knowledge or rational thought. Spirituality exists in a different realm. He calls it the realm of beauty, love and creativity. And we all know these things exist in our lives and the lives of others, even if we can't quite say what they are or what exactly they mean. And even if we try, we can not create these things.

Fuller tells us "An idea or practice is "spiritual" when it reveals our personal desire to establish a felt-relationship with the deepest meanings or powers governing life." So a spiritual practice, first and foremost, has to reflect a desire. It has to be something we seek, something we want, maybe even long for. It has to be built on, driven by desire.

Secondly, according to Fuller, a spiritual practice has to seek a felt-relationship. In other words, a spiritual practice is not something I can do all by my lonesome. I need to be in relationship with something else. He says that something else is "the deepest meanings or powers governing life". Others term that God, while others still might call it grace, mother earth, the ancients, prana, chi, Buddha mind or nature. I don't know that it matters what we call it, but we must be *in* relationship with it. We must seek it; desire to interact with the deepest meanings or powers governing life.

Being in relationship is an active process. Seeking to interact with, desiring, is an active process. A spiritual practice requires a pro-active approach. We can not just sit on a path and expect the deepest meanings or powers governing life to come sit with us. I suspect they are much too busy for that kind of thing. And running down a path calling out your preferred name is also not likely to work. That's not what I mean when I talk in terms of an active process.

The kind of active I'm talking about is more akin to inviting. It's about being intentional, focused, committed. It's about being open and receptive. It's in the realm of "preparing the table before me", as the Psalmist says. The key is intentionality.

Some people light incense as a way to begin their spiritual practice, others ring a bell. Some get down on their knees, others change into the appropriate attire, or paint their faces. All these are ways people are intentional, ways to shift away from the everyday normal to something particular.

Walking the spiritual path is a metaphor for having a spiritual practice, practicing a particular discipline. And I like the concept. The term makes plain that one must extend an effort, that there is action taking place. It makes plain the process is rather slow, walking speed. It's not a race. And the term tells us there is a route to follow, it is not an aimless finding our way in the dark. And importantly it names no destination. It is not a path to a destination, or a path away from someplace. It's simply a path that represents a journey that unfolds before us.

All these then, are important component parts of a Spiritual practice. But how do we know what our spiritual path is or looks like? How do we find our spiritual path? I don't know that I know the answer. More over, I suspect there are numerous answers to the question. Ultimately, I suspect we each need to find our own answers to these questions.

But, perhaps not surprisingly, I have some thoughts on the subject. Be open. Be open to discovering what works for you. Experiment, explore possibilities. Take note of what works for people you know. I believe where there is a will, there is a way. If you are sincere in a search for a spiritual practice you can find one that works for you.

I think there are two major difficulties in finding a spiritual path. One is "knowing" and the other is a lack of faith or trust. So many of us enter into the realm of the spirit knowing exactly what we want. I want a spiritual practice that makes me happy. Or I want serenity, or a practice that will answer the questions that perplex me. Or one that will fix the problems in my life.

In my view, this is a wrong approach and the odds are very high for disappointment. The approach that is built on knowing what it is we want, takes us in the wrong direction. It uses self as the prime reference point. The more fruitful reference point, I think, is the cosmic scheme of things, the deepest meanings or powers governing life. The question then becomes, how do I fit into that? The that, the cosmic scheme of things, becomes the reference point.

The lack of faith, or trust is the other major hurdle for many of us. I can't tell you how many times I sat on the floor in a yoga posture...and nothing happened. I'd try it a few more times and conclude it doesn't work. Years later, it would come into my awareness that all these people are practicing yoga every week or every day. So I'd get into my yoga position again... two maybe three times...and I'd give up. After a grand total of an hour or two of practice, I had convinced myself it didn't work for me.

I suspect this may be the single greatest deterrent to finding a spiritual path. Lack of commitment, faith or trust. We dabble in this, then we dabble in something else and spend much of our lives moving on to audition one more spiritual practice or one more faith community.

If you seek to find a spiritual practice, stick with it for a while. Be willing to walk the path for a distance. The best views are seldom at the very beginning of a path. If that was not the case, there would be no reason for the path. The spiritual path is a journey. I believe it is ultimately a journey to a deeper sense of self, a journey inward. It has been said that prayer is a conversation with one's higher self.

Each of us can find a spiritual path that feeds us, that takes us deeper into a different kind of knowing than exists in the material world. But a word of caution: don't try to create your own path. It may work, but much too often it turns out to be bush-whacking through the woods. In other words, we may spend lots of time trying to find a path where there is none.

It seems much more prudent that we should attempt to follow a path that has been trod before, a path that already has markers and guide posts, and may even have guides. It makes it much less likely we will lose our way and become lost...in our heads, in knowing or requiring answers.

Any good spiritual path is long, maybe life-long. There will be times when we feel lost or unsure of what comes next. There will be times when we grow weary of only having questions and feeling great need for answers we can rest on. Know that this is an unavoidable part of any significant journey. Know that it is ok to stop and rest. Know that it's ok to be angry with God.

And know too that if you have a spiritual practice that you are committed to, it will change you. Others are more likely to notice the changes before you do. But at some point, you too will know that you have been changed. And there is no turning the clock back. You can not return awareness, it has a no return policy. You can't even exchange for a different kind of awareness.

Now I have gone on for this long without naming particular types of spiritual practices. That's been intentional. I don't want to endorse any one over another. It ultimately becomes a question of what works for you. But the array of options is pretty amazing.

Have you considered that writing poetry can be a spiritual practice? Listening to or playing music can serve as a spiritual practice. The I Ching, meditation, prayer, reading the bible. Regularly attending a Sunday morning faith service is a form of spiritual practice. Active engagement with a faith community can serve as a spiritual practice, but only if you are intentional about it. It doesn't just happen by showing up.

I fear that all too often, the grass is seen as greener in another pasture. A spiritual practice does not need to be esoteric. It's intentionality that matters. Its having a helpful reference point that matters. It's being open, focused on the questions, not the answers that matters. It's a willingness, a desire in fact, to be in relationship with what matters most, and a willingness to be touched by the powers governing life.

I want to close with a favorite reading from Letters to a Young Poet, by Rainer Maria Rilke, 1903

...I would like to beg you dear Sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.

And may we too have patience as we live into our answers.