

Article 150: Religion vs. Spirituality

In response to our asking about the difference between religion and spirituality, here are several of the replies: "Religion is a system ...while spirituality is a knowing"; "Religion is relying on someone else's beliefs, spirituality is I am." How is religion relying on someone else's beliefs? ...for if you accept the beliefs of a religion, aren't those beliefs yours? And if you do not accept the beliefs, the religion is not yours. And while we're on the subject, are any beliefs "all yours"? Aren't most, if not all, beliefs based on and dependent upon other beliefs? If spirituality is a "knowing", ...isn't that knowing founded upon your own and others' beliefs? Humm.

Maybe this next response will help. "I think of religion as an organized church with certain beliefs. I think of spirituality as more individual ...[with] personal beliefs perhaps derived from a variety of religions." Though individual religions have particular beliefs, it seems that you can follow a religion and also have other beliefs; ...we've never met anyone in any religion who didn't also have other beliefs. All three of these responses seem to consider religion from the standpoint of an organization ...without much regard for the meaning and purpose underlying the system or organization, ...but, when people speak of "spirituality or a spiritual path", isn't this "ality or path" based on some philosophical or religious teaching? ...on some system of beliefs which define or awaken you to spirituality? ...or to your path? I'm not sure we're getting any closer to an understanding; ...after all, if there is a difference between religion and spirituality, then it seems there must be spiritual "stuff" and non-spiritual "stuff", ...and if we're going to speak of "doing spiritual work", "on a spiritual path", "being spiritual", "having spiritual insights or experiences", ...how can we ever know what is spiritual ...and what is not? What is spiritual? ...and what is so special? Or could it be that spirituality is ordinary?

And if you want to bring spirituality into your life, what do you do? ...and how do you do it? If spirituality is "a knowing", what do you know? ...and if it is a "belief", what do you believe? Is there "something special" you must believe and know and do?

We started this query because so many people declare that they do not follow a "particular religion" ...and certainly not the religion(s) they were raised in. They firmly declare their spirituality ...and spiritual beliefs, but just can't seem to define them ...or speak clearly about them ...or see how they are different from other beliefs. And they frequently declare their "freedom from" their old religious beliefs, ...yet those beliefs seem so obvious in their life and beliefs today ...and certainly in their problems, illnesses, pains, diseases, personal hurts and unpleasant relationships, and unhappiness, ...sooo, it seems that religion and spirituality are important issues to think more deeply about.

Let's consider some other responses. "Religion is an organized expression of a belief in and reverence for a creator and controller of the universe, while spirituality reveals the personal emotions and attitudes which result from recognition of a greater power." This response combines religion and spirituality ...while the previous responses seem to separate them ...and put them into conflict. Does this next response help? "Religion is an extreme system of faith in and adherence to a greater power ...whether man or God, ...while spirituality is the acknowledgement of spirit, which is the vital principle or animating force of all living things." We're not certain how reducing spirituality to a "vital principle or animating force" or to "personal emotions and attitudes: will resolve your beliefs, improve or expand your knowing, or guide your actions, ...besides, how can you know what is and what is not animated in life?

How about this response? "Religion is a physical system. Spirituality is beyond what is tangible or material ...and their limitations." That doesn't seem to help, for it only separates tangible or material from spiritual ...but says nothing about either. What about soul? Does that exist? ...and what is soul? It certainly seems tangible and material in our lives, ...does that mean that soul is religious not spiritual?

Well, let's consider one final response. "Since all things are spiritual ...and your religion is the self and life you are living, religion is the particularized expression of spirituality you are constantly living (your declared expression of spirit), while spirituality is the state of or fact of being spiritual." This is very good! ...but it brings us full circle to the beginning which defined spirituality as "I am" or "individual" ...and reverses this to make religion the personal expression. Is it any wonder that religion and spirituality seem to be in constant conflict?

Could it be that how you live your desired life is your religion ...and in living that you are religious? ...and spirituality is the life you desire to live ...and in living that you are spiritual? Does this help any? Probably not! We'll keep the discussion open, ...so chime in when you're ready, ...unless of course you feel that this is all a waste, because you are on your spiritual path ...and you know what that is! If so, write and tell us about **your** spiritual path.