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What is Spirituality & why does it matter?

Part 1





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Part 2





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What is Spirituality & why does it matter?

Part 3



Connection or Connectedness

A key aspect of spirituality is 'connection or connectedness'. Although spirituality (and religion) are often reduced simply to a belief in something greater than ourselves (a deity, the universe, the source of life etc), the idea of *connectedness* is broader.

Connection is a *feeling* - it is rooted in the body. It is the combination of what we believe AND how we experience it.

Connection and Connectedness can manifest in a number of ways



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Connection to the Universe, the Divine or Source of Life

The names can vary but spirituality often involves a sense of connection to a force greater than ourselves. That can represent a deity or more simply life itself. One of the largest themes in my research was 'embodied connection', people described this higher power as residing within them)

Regardless of your personal beliefs, taking the time to understand and make sense of your place in the universe enhances belonging in life and can reduce existential angst.

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Connection to Self

Spirituality provides a way for each individual to connect more deeply with all aspects of the *Self*. Contemplative practice associated with spirituality such as meditation, prayer, walking in nature etc provides the time and space to access all parts of who we are.

Any spiritual practice helps us on our journey towards greater wholeness and authenticity.

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Connection to Self

To be 'spiritually healthy', we need to be able to connect back to ourselves. The absence of connection to our spiritual self, often referred to as the soul, can leave us feeling 'untethered' or lacking a strong internal centre.

Carl Jung viewed spiritual hunger as the root cause of many problems in the world and believed it can leave individuals 'insecure and suggestible'.

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Connection to Others

Spiritual practice can increase self-awareness and help break down our ego and other internal barriers to connecting with others; both people in our life and humanity in general. As we develop greater understanding and compassion for ourselves, it helps to develop greater understanding and compassion for others.

A world with greater connection to others would not experience the levels of inequality, division and racism we witness today.

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Connection to Nature

Spending time in nature is a spiritual practice in itself. It grounds us in our bodies and brings us back into tune with the natural cycles of life rather than the linear focus of modern culture. Our bodies and their rhythms are mirrors of the larger body - Mother Nature.

Spending time in nature is recognised to be beneficial for our wellbeing. Benefits include positive emotions, higher feelings of connectedness to others and the experience of being 'alive'.

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Connection to Nature

The climate crisis is a spiritual crisis. It is rooted in disconnection from nature. We have become disconnected from the understanding that we, ourselves, are nature. This disconnection has facilitated the ongoing destruction of our planet.

Our ancestors understood the sacredness of nature, and many traditional acts of worship were focused on nature. For example, churches were often built on land containing a sacred tree. The original place and focus of worship was the tree (nature), not the church (man-made).

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Meaning & Purpose

Meaning and purpose are viewed as 'spiritual elements' in transpersonal psychology. Exhibiting higher levels of spirituality has been linked with higher levels of meaning in life.

Meaning is the narrative of your life. It is inherently linked to what you believe life to be about and the significance you ascribe personally to that. Purpose is how you use these beliefs to direct your attention and efforts towards what matters to you; relationships, work, a legacy etc.

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Meaning & Purpose

For both meaning and purpose to be evident you need to feel, yes you guessed it, 'connected' to your life and what you choose to have in it.

The fall in religious participation & spiritual practice in the last 50 years has created a vacuum of meaning and purpose in modern societies.

Regardless of whether you take a spiritual or secular approach, cultivating meaning in life is key to psychological wellbeing and the process of self-actualisation.

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Spirituality and Religion

A basic explanation is that spirituality and religion differ in how they are practiced. The following text is taken from my dissertation:

'Spirituality is perceived to share the concept of searching for the sacred in life (Hill & Pargament, 2003) with religion, but researchers differentiate between religion and spirituality primarily in terms of how they are practiced. Religion is considered to be this search within an organisational construct (Zinnbauer, 2009), while spirituality is 'something individuals define for themselves that is largely free of the rules, regulations and responsibilities associated with religion' (Koenig, 2009, p.281).'

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Spirituality and Religion

In some descriptions you may see spirituality referred to as 'alternative spirituality'. This is factually incorrect. Spirituality is innate and available to every individual in whatever way they choose to practice. Religion is, in fact, an alternative to spirituality in that you may choose one particular religion and organised set of beliefs to practice.

Describing spirituality as 'alternative' or 'woo woo' is a form of discrediting individual practice. This narrative is out of step with the growing cohort of people globally who consider themselves to be 'spiritual but not religious'.

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The Experience of Spirituality

Regardless of path, each individual must be 'connected' (yes that word again) to their beliefs and practice.

Abraham Maslow believed to feel the true impact of spiritual beliefs and practice, they must be 'experientially rooted, symbolically meaningful, archetypal, unitive' to the individual.

In my research, different modalities, beliefs and practices were described by each individual I interviewed. Yet, there appeared to be a universality to the **experience** of spirituality. Each person exhibited high levels of connectedness, meaning and purpose and authenticity.

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