

Spirituality
A Very Short Introduction

By Philip Sheldrake

Questions for thought and discussion

- How would you define “spirituality”?
- Why do you think the idea of spirituality has become so popular these days?
- What does spirituality or spiritual practice add to the quality of our everyday lives?
- How do you view the distinction made by some people between “spirituality” and “religion”?
- Where would you place most emphasis – on spiritual experience or spiritual practices – and why?
- What issues or questions are raised by people of different religious traditions (e.g. Christianity and Islam) sharing together in spiritual practice? Similarly, what questions if any are raised by borrowing ideas or practices from a different faith tradition?
- In terms of the religious tradition with which you are most familiar, how would you summarise the main characteristics of its spiritual values?
- On reading the book, which aspect of the various spiritualities, religious and secular, did you find (a) most congenial, (b) most surprising, (c) most challenging, (d) most alien?
- Do you agree with André Comte-Sponville that the idea of a “spiritual dimension” to human life is perfectly compatible with atheism?
- What does attending to a “spiritual dimension” add to the world of psychology and/or psychotherapy?
- How would you outline and distinguish the particular characteristics of men’s and women’s approaches to spirituality?
- The book suggests four broad “types” of spirituality that can be applied across religious and secular spiritual traditions. Did you find this convincing and/or helpful? Can you think of other broad types?
- What do you think of the category of “saint”, religious or secular? What inspirational qualities would you highlight as most significant in a “saint” or “sage”?
- In terms of the arts, literature, music and/or sport-recreation, where have you found greatest spiritual inspiration and why?
- Given that some people still believe that science and religion are mutually incompatible, what was your reaction to the current interest in spirituality and science?
- What might the concept of “spirituality” add to our understanding of progressive human development and of ultimate destiny?
- What is your reaction to the increase of interest in “spirituality and the professional life”? In your own world of work, what do you see as the potential value of spirituality?
- Does spirituality add anything to our sense of personal ethics and ethical behaviour?
- Are “politics” and “spirituality” incompatible or might they enhance each other?
- How might a sense of spirituality enhance social and public values? In what areas of public-social life is a sense of spirituality most needed?

Other books by Philip Sheldrake

Images of Holiness: Explorations in Contemporary Spirituality, (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1987)

The Way of Ignatius Loyola: Contemporary Approaches to the Study of the Spiritual Exercises (Ed.) (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1991)

Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method (Orbis Books, 1998)
Living Between Worlds: Place and Journey in Celtic Christianity 2nd Ed. (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1997)
Spirituality and Theology: Christian Life and the Doctrine of God (Darton Longman & Todd, 1998)
Love Took My Hand: The Spirituality of George Herbert (Darton, Longman & Todd/Cowley Publications, 2000)
Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory & Identity. The Hulsean Lectures 2000. (SCM Press/Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001)
The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality (Ed.) (in North America, *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*) (SCM Press/John Knox Press, 2005)
A Brief History of Spirituality (Blackwell Publishers 2007) 2nd revised edition pending March 2013.
Heaven in Ordinary: A George Herbert Reader (SCM-Canterbury Press, 2009)
Explorations in Spirituality: History, Theology and Social Practice (Paulist Press, 2010)
Befriending our Desires (Desclee, 2000; Revised ed. Darton Longman & Todd/ Novalis Press, 2001)

Further Reading

Ursula King *The Search for Spirituality: Our Global Quest for a Spiritual Life* (BlueBridge, 2008)
Paul Heelas & Linda Woodhead *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Blackwell, 2005)
Pierre Hadot *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Blackwell, 2006)
John Hinnells, ed. *The Penguin Handbook of the World's Living Religions* (Penguin Books, 2010)
Robert Wuthnow *Creative Spirituality: The Way of the Artist* (University of California Press, 2001)
David Fontana *Psychology, Religion and Spirituality* (Blackwell, 2003)