

## Religion or spirituality?

Some of my readers will remember Sunday school. Although I found the imposition of two hours out of my precious weekend a total pain, I can't say I didn't appreciate some of the sessions. The essential outcomes of this experience were that I found Jesus and aspects of Christianity very appealing, yet the doctrinal, literal interpretation of the "Scriptures" was a turnoff. But maybe this is where I got my love of churches and cathedrals from.

Yes, I have met many people calling themselves Christians who are nothing of the sort but I have also met and got to know practising Christians for whom I have the highest regard. Given my upbringing in a very white, "traditional" neighbourhood I missed out on other religions. However I have always been impressed by Muslims who embrace many of the positives of their faith. My chosen path of personal development has introduced me to so many aspects of Buddhism and of course, spirituality, which I will discuss below.

Leaving aside the minority of hypocrites who masquerade as "devout" (superior to you) and people of faith, most churches contain the energies of compassion and the higher ideals of the vicar/priest/pastor and the "flock." I know it can be argued that religion is the opium of the people but I've covered in great depth my total rejection of atheism.

I've attended quite a few Spiritualist church services, which for the uninitiated contain the saying of prayers and singing. On a number of Christmases I have gone to carol services in traditional Church of England venues. Got to admit, I enjoy the carols, but not the prayers and the hymns. And I've never been a fan of rituals.

This piece is intended to shine a light on spirituality, and to encourage those who have been subjected to dogmatic nonsense about God to revisit their belief in a higher power. I have no wish to go down the route of condemning formal religion, except...

Most major religions are hierarchies and some (Catholicism) have appalling records of murder, genocide, (the Cathars for example, see the Church of Love) persecution and other heinous practices. The idea that there is a jealous, fire and brimstone dispensing bearded white man sat on a throne deciding who goes to heaven and who goes to hell is not for me. The Bible is an amazing book, not to be taken literally. It is full of metaphors and allegories. I'm sure the same applies to the Koran and the Torah, neither of which I'm familiar with.

In my world there is **one** God, **one** organising intelligence. The idea that one religion's God is better than another religion's God is anathema and the justification for many wars.

Here's hoping it is now obvious that I am reinforcing the idea that there is everything to be gained by belief in a higher power but little to be gained by following rigid, exclusive and primitive dogma. You will find many examples of real miracles in all faiths. The persecution of Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and indeed any religion by any government is genocide. It is not an accident that totalitarian regimes wish to banish religion and it is not an accident that the information war currently going on in the USA is a spiritual war and a war against faith. The US constitution allows churches to open during times of pandemics and wars. It has not stopped many states from persecuting pastors and religious leaders. I find the closing of churches in this country one of the most disturbing, distressing and totalitarian of all the actions carried out under the cloak of Covid 19. God doesn't wear a mask.

I have no wish to address the short-sightedness of a worldview that describes the wonders of creation as an accident. Even Darwin rejected his own thesis. I'm no fan of Richard Dawkins.

What's wrong with the 10 Commandments? The Beatitudes are incredible. I have them framed and hung on my wall. I've already mentioned the Cathar Church of Love. Here are just three lists of guiding principles that have been deliberately lost or ignored.

My next book after *Love Heals* is *You Are Gods*. Jesus said the same thing in a different way. My own experience with accessing a higher power to heal has been nothing short of phenomenal. I have been and still am very close to incredible healers, all of whom believe in God. Let go of the bearded man sat on a cloud. But keep it if it works for you!

Whilst there are many different definitions of spirituality the one I prefer is connectedness. Connectedness to all of life, past, present and future. Connectedness to the Divine/Source/Universe. You, dear viewer, are obviously someone who is searching for meaning. Anyone who searches for meaning will struggle if they limit their search to the material world. Survey after survey suggest that over 90% of the world's population believe in some form of higher power. Is that because of indoctrination, over-active missionaries or too many religious channels on television? For me it is because we have an unquenchable thirst wired in which drives us to understand this incarnation and to make sense of it.

I have to recommend *Man's Search for Meaning* by Victor Frankl, the Austrian psychiatrist who was imprisoned in, yet survived Auschwitz. Many books have the potential to change your life and this is one of them.

My scientific bias, scepticism and insatiable curiosity all conspire to weaken my belief in a loving God. Some of you will remember the R.E.M. song *Losing My Religion*; I would suggest a better title might be *Losing My Connection*. Yet I have a knowing about God, despite the dips. Life has a purpose, you have a purpose! "God" is not responsible for wars, famine, lack, disease and all the horrors that beset us. We have free will, otherwise what's the point? We might as well be injected with a microchip and function as robots.

Or maybe free will comes with a happy meal and a vaccine...

Many clues have been left throughout this video series that we might actually be Angels in human form. Jesus stated we could all do greater things than him, and he was the son of God. I've been blessed to see many miracles during my life and been party to some of them. When I write, most times I leave the computer, look back on what I've just written and know I'm a vehicle for the best stuff. Yes, I have spent many years honing my skills but I could never take credit for most of the inspired material. I'm going to leave you with a paragraph from my book **Love Heals**:

*"To repeat, your higher self is your eternal soul, is where Truth resides, where your connection to an organising intelligence dwells, is the source of Divine guidance, is the place from where all things are possible, is your escape route from your conditioning, your lifelong, hope and humanity-crushing programming, mediocrity, despair and predictability...and your connection to all sentient (living) beings."*

**Any takers?**

Namaste; love to you all. Jack Stewart, December 11, 2020.