

Following imagination

“I just don’t get what you’re proposing. Specifically, what does spirituality have to do with ‘fascinated questioning’? In my experience, those who are really spiritual convey understanding, knowledge and an obvious contentment that comes from them. Are you sure you’re not taking on more than you can handle?”

Well, let me walk you through the maze of spiritual evolution. But first, please remember that I’m not selling or even promoting spirituality. I’m trying to make a clear distinction between essential human spirit and the conceptual schools of thought that have tried to design a program to get to it.

True passionate curiosity is at the core of everything we perceive or experience as the external signs of spirituality. That is, spirituality is a category, mainly recognizable by the various disciplines that try to articulate a language through which we can understand it. Each of these languages has its strengths and weaknesses, just like real languages. (French is a beautiful language, for example, but has failed to come up with a precise word for *wit*; which, by the way, parallels a number of spiritual languages that have failed to come up with that quality.)

Actuality precedes language. Apples existed before we created a word for them. They also existed before we knew to eat them, or to grow trees that would allow us to eat more of them. The total body of conceptualization around apples—what they are, why to grow different types, how to make pies from them, identifying the vitamins within them, the benefits of apple puree for babies, etc.—would, no doubt, make an impressive document that would help in the understanding of apples. Then again, it still wouldn’t be an apple.

Your understanding of spirituality comes from one or more languages that place a great importance on understanding, knowledge and contentment. These are the key concepts through which you look to identify spirituality. These concepts are particular; they are not universal. For example, they are not on the top of the list of definitions of spirituality from the perspectives of Christianity, Judaism or a number of other religions. And you can easily find spiritual disciplines that would place a higher importance on their opposites —non-understanding, innocence and discontentment.

So, you have different languages pointing to an event or experience from different directions. You may very well be right in looking toward that event or experience from the angle you're looking, but it's for sure that for someone else that angle is not correct. For someone else, understanding, knowledge and contentment will not lead to the event or experience, what you call spirituality. Now, if you were to have some understanding, knowledge and contentment with that fact, you would eventually become curious about someone completely different from you. That would then begin a process of discovery in which what you already believe, understand and are content with would have to be tossed. If you had enough true passionate curiosity.

There are, however, some universal concepts or experiences that appear to be at the foundation of each spiritual language. There is a music or tone of engagement. But, again, if you look closely and notice, you can also find this music in a lot of other places and languages. In other words, you don't need a spiritual language to perceive or to get to the core experience. That's available to anyone anywhere, at any age, with any or no education.

In any case, let's settle for now on the idea of true passionate curiosity as the musicality within all languages. Okay? In your spiritual language, what happens then? The ripening of that curiosity becomes the fruit of genuine interest: concern becomes compassion, discipline becomes devotion, care becomes integrity, creative experimentation become brilliance and mastery. This ripening is the natural process of opinions, prejudice and concepts falling away to reveal direct perception, and of agitated self-consciousness dissolving into contentment and freedom.

As we develop experience with the transition of curiosity into real interest, we begin to notice that personal fulfillment and harmony hinge entirely on the ability to be fascinated by something other than ourselves. Fear and self-satisfaction shrink as motivators and context for choice as we discover that there are more interesting things to do. Discernment expands and refines as we realize that there are certain things that are essential, others that are relatively important, and a lot of others that are irrelevant. Such discernment requires an enormous range of qualities and skills to back it up for it to really become spiritual, for one to recognize and engage the essential things in one's life according to their real value. But the primary dynamic that determines how deep this spirituality goes, how far it will evolve, is absolutely dependent on our ability to keep true curiosity alive in the face of every temptation to kill it.

“Personal fulfillment and harmony hinge entirely on the ability to be fascinated by something other than ourselves”

So, yes, one can get a sense of someone having succeeded with all this through the expression of knowledge (direct perception) and internal peace (release of self-consciousness). But once those become stagnant, become a repetition of the same knowledge and peace, that's the end of the evolution; you could almost say that it's the end of the spirituality. The answers that replace the questioning produce a product that goes out onto the assembly line. One may then teach what one already knows, and do that well, but invention, creation and real discovery are over.

You could think of this as the difference between a teacher and an artist, in any field, including spirituality. Generally, it is true that a teacher is someone who disengages from the creative process so as to comfortably give what he is already good at, what he already knows. He lowers his own personal bar so that he can show others how to jump over it. Certainly that has value. For example, it sets a context for others to evolve toward the level of the teacher. But it does not display the act of creation. It shows how others have done that, or how the teacher once did it, or how you could do it. Each of these, though, is abstract. For the teacher to return to creating, he would have to go back to the drawing board, as a questioning beginner, and take on a challenge he is not already familiar with. The spirit that would drive him to do that is what I'm referring to as true passionate curiosity.

Unless you believe that the human race and yourself have achieved an ultimate level of evolution, there is a need to reconsider the existing knowledge and contentment that's out there. In each spiritual discipline, there are answers given out that, as a whole, have not succeeded in producing what they were meant to produce. They're good answers. But, like the answers of any great physicist throughout history, the answers given must then be used to ask better questions. The bar is raised with $E=MC^2$, but that's not the end of the game, it's not ultimate salvation or resolution for physics.

All great minds, and spirits, understand that any answer is the birth of another question. That comes from an intuitive sense of how to position questions and answers relative to each other. Every answer is a beginning, not the end. To live according to that truth requires a depth of fascination that is itself the ultimate expression of knowledge and contentment. Not an understanding and contentment as the result of completing the game, after everything has been answered, but as a state of dynamic harmony while within it. That's not conceptual spirituality; it's just human spirit.

*“Every answer is
a beginning,
not the end.”*

It's a great joke: our struggles in evolution are not caused by what we don't know; they're caused by what we know. We tend to sit back and try to force reality into the concepts we hold as true and beyond question. All the clues for how to crack this joke are present. Those who succeed all follow the same principle. They all live from their curiosity. That is, they tenaciously, playfully follow their deeper imagination, which is born from a fascination for the unknown, for mystery.

As to your question, am I taking on more than I can handle? Yes. That's the point.

Darrell Calkins
March 2005

Comments

Thank you for your comments about the February issue of CobaltSaffron. Excerpts from a few we received:

“The Mokens are the nomadic gypsies of the Andaman sea (think Thailand). I find it particularly fascinating that they don't have words for a lot of concepts that we take for granted such as *want* and *when*. They survived the big tsunami with no casualties. Speaking of (the lack of) peripheral vision in some Burmese fisherman... ‘They were collecting squid, they were not looking at anything. They saw nothing, they looked at nothing. They don't know how to look,’ says the Moken man. ‘Suddenly, everything rose up, their boats were thrown up in the air. The violence was unbelievable.’”

J.M., California.

“Thank you so much for taking the time to put out this newsletter. It's a great idea, and such a gift. My own ability to stay awake, aware, curious and engaged feels like it has been improving. However, the numbing fog banks of apathy, boredom, inertia and too much me-me-me are always lurking nearby. Anything which continues to encourage me to dispel that fog is so welcome, as is your newsletter.”

C.A., California.

“A finding on my internet surfing... It goes your way I believe and it will reassure those who don't get exactly what you are doing. If Einstein said it, it must be valuable no? ‘The perception of mystery is the source of every learning and discovery.’”

G.M., France.

“I remember when I was a kid I was tremendously curious. As I grew older I felt I had to hide it, knowing was more important than the curiosity. So when a question was asked, the reply was usually, ‘Why are you always asking stupid questions?’ I would love to have this gnawing, can't sleep because of it, questioning as when I was that age. The simple fact that you've written these two newsletters on the subject, that which has been sitting there in the background of my life has been brought forward into full view. Thank you.”

G.L., Belgium.

Upcoming event:

RETREAT TO THE SOURCE

17 - 24 April 2005, Gascony - France

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