

The Wholeness of You by Swamini Saralananda

This is the fifth part of the serial article, continuation from September 2021 newsletter.

Lack Of Self-Knowledge

So, this extraordinary self-ignorance is our only problem and the process of self-discovery is no ordinary path. The wisest of the wise, say that we need to expose ourselves to the teachings. We can never get free of this on our own because it is not a process of gaining a new knowledge, but rather of shedding the habitual, heavy conditioning of the mistaken identity, the ignorance. It is a spell! In the rope-snake example he did not need to learn details of what kind of a rope or what kind of a snake was there; he needed the right person to come along at the right time, someone who had the 'enlightened' knowledge of the mistake happening there. That one, who had earlier 'seen' the rope in sufficient light was the only one in that moment who could remedy the situation. He was the guru. Nothing new was produced, created, attained or practiced. All it took was that the *deluded man was willing to stay nearby and trust enough to take another look*. There is a need to totally depend on someone who knows the truth to help us come out from under the spell. Eastern gurus are trusted and respected so much because they are able to shine the light at just the right time, for the student to see.

It is not an easy job but when the guru has done enough, he sends you on your way hoping that you may share whatever knowledge he has blessed you with to share with others. And he expects you to live with it and assimilate it so it becomes totally clear that you "own" this appreciation within yourself.

A Revealing Paradigm

There is another 'handy' paradigm that fits in nicely here when we are talking about which one is the rope and which one is the snake in terms of my everyday life. The 'mechanics of my wrongful identities (of which Eckhart Tolle is so good at talking extensively about in his book, *A New Earth*.) Picture a black board: On one side of it at the top I write –

"I am _____

Now fill in the blanks with various labels of who you think you are. "Ms. So and So, a nurse, female, black, overweight, tired today, busy stock broker etc., etc....." This list can go on endlessly and all of it will be ever changing. You may not always be overweight,

or tired, or a nurse and you could change your name or even lose your entire family. So, all the labels and roles are ever changing and not any one of them is the exclusive, total you. Now look at the other side of the page, the “I am....”

Under the “I am...” add in ditto marks as you go down the page to hook to every label you have for yourself. It is unchanging, constantly, absolutely one you. That is the core, inner Being. All the labels are just changing conditions of a real you. So what? In the following chapters we will be moving in deeper to look at that profound center of Being from which all the changing aspects of you borrow their seemingly real life. Tighten your seat belt and we will look at all the implications of just how profound and wondrous and full and free that Central Being You are. If you take only all the conditionings and roles as your real self then you are suffering needlessly.

Spirituality and Religion

In many of today's discussions and debates there seems to be a need to make a clearer distinction between spirituality and religion. We can take the word "spirit" as indicating something formless, intangible, and used synonymously with the word "soul". Religions talk a lot about spirit and soul, yet they have no clear explanations or consensus, if any at all, regarding spirituality. For the discussion here, let us say that spirituality looks to a/the formless realm, which often requires being comfortable with 'living in the questions' while a religious life is founded on definite forms for which blind, unverifiable belief is expected.

In contrast, I offer here a definition for the word “spirituality”: *A self-reflective life committed to one's own inner growth seeking to fulfill itself in a completion of self-inquiry.*

A Useful Comparison

This distinction serves a useful purpose in the larger discussion. Spirituality refers to something entirely different than mere religiosity. It is about challenging myself to stretch beyond and reach outside of my comfort zones of any handed down dogma and beliefs. It is an exploration to know and understand, rather than merely believe. Someone on a spiritual journey is seeking ways to grow into a more mature and loving human being. A definition of a spiritual life, I propose, is along these lines: “A self-reflective life committed to one's own inner growth, leading to fulfillment in a clear knowledge of who I am and my relationship to the world and All-That-Is”. This means I live a more sensitive and inward life, making my best efforts to gain more and better wisdom, so that I can be the most decent and kind person that I can be. I seek to understand what God is, what this universe I find myself in is and what my relationship with both should be so that there is wisdom, free of negative emotional interference. Having a real understanding of these topics, the more wisdom I gain, the more I will enjoy a better maturity, because

only such wisdom makes one mature. In my maturity, I will be more objective, magnanimous and compassionate in how I relate to people and all living creatures.

Spiritual life **at its best** means I am ready for an inquiry into what is the purpose of my being here on this earth. A spiritual person does not consider religious forms a priority, even though he/she may enjoy some of them, he/she puts verifiable truth before anything else. To live a spiritual life, means I always look to live from the standpoint of the bigger picture of wholeness and so I value inclusiveness and avoid discrimination based on individual differences. As a spiritual person I seek to be free from judgments and any ill wishing towards others.

It is said that Jesus said: " Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Let us not simply look at our own church, temple, synagogue or mosque but from a worldwide perspective. We can see, that it is rare to find this profound simple teaching alive and well in any culture at large. Yet this simple teaching could be held up as the most harmoniously kind and big picture principle that every human being could aspire to live by.

Even just such a simple principle that Jesus taught, can be a guiding light for me to find my purpose. Yet, it is something I must discover on my own. No one should commandingly, directly feed it to me, lest it become an empty conditioning of mere words. However, I seem to need, to take the help and guidance of others who have gone before me and are examples for living higher spiritual values and truths. Many are there who say that we get exactly what we need at just the right time, a book, a teacher, or just simple people passing through our life. Carl Jung, the famous psychiatrist and mystic talked so much about these synchronicities, meaningful 'meetings' and how significant they are.

All of this has little to do with blind faith; we could say that spirituality is a journey without a path towards our ultimate wholeness. There is no clear cut "follow this", "God is only this one," or "this is The Goal you must strive for and will gain at such and such time".

Again, it is a quest to discover the truth of is there a God, who I am, what this world is, and what the relationship between the three is. There is nothing linear about it, because it is of the whole, the big picture that will involve every aspect of my life. We need to have our own intimate relationship to the big-picture-reality, which some may choose to call God. It is very difficult and maybe impossible for this to happen if I am committed to and bound by readymade, handed down forms of religion. Forms are symbols and when those are not understood as such -they can often amount to mere superstition. Discovering what the bigger picture is, requires one to be wide open; it requires a freedom in one's thinking.

This is a very **sensitive issue**. Our religious beliefs and spiritual commitments reach into

the deepest part of our being. The word 'God' is always a huge problem to discuss, simply because anytime we say it, it carries its own specific connotations for each person. Even two Christians will not have the exact same idea of or relationship with God. Unless we are totally clear, that we have arrived at a definite common meaning for using any word in any discussion, there will always be the probability of misunderstanding, miscommunication and argumentation.

A strict black and white distinction made between religion and spirituality is not totally necessary, because one can find some overlap here and there between the two. There are some religious people who are also spiritually inclined and vice versa. However, I am stating here, unequivocally, that it is never correct to say that religion and spirituality are the same thing; we use the two words and they are not synonyms. Spirituality is about an individual's inquiry into God and not a blind faith.

I need to state here that I do not believe that God is 'de-finite-able'. Mostly all religions say that they accept that God is 'Infinite' and so to de-fine what and who God is, is to de-limit and imply God is 'not infinite.' When we can allow ourselves to come to our own heartfelt understanding of what that word means, it is the beginning of a blessingfull intimacy. It is free from fear, doctrines and conditioning, because the individual arrived here after enough questioning. I would say that this is at the heart of a 'spiritual life.'

If I choose a path of self-inquiry, wanting to realize that I am a whole and loving being, not separate from God and everything else then I am aligned with the most blessingful spiritual goal. It is a goal of gaining the highest understanding possible of everything. It is The Biggest Picture, and the spiritual aspirant should not settle for less. There will always be far fewer people, who bother to ask these questions: "Who am I really, at all levels of my being? Are there levels of my being? Why should I bother to know? What, if anything, is there to do, if I do find out the answers to all these questions? What do I get out of it... this self-knowledge? What exactly does it have to do with God? Is there even a God?" These are the most important questions anyone can ask in life. These are the doorway to see what is the reality of life. Why would a creator give me this inquiring mind, which makes us the roof and crown of the creation, if we are not supposed to use it? This is something to think about.

To be continued...