

Spirituality Defined

Spirituality has been an area of increasing interest in the past two decades. This field that was once dismissed as one for the odd, the off-centered, the eccentric is now on the cover of *Time*, one of the most mainstream American news magazines. Harvard-trained medical doctors are now talking about how body and soul are one and that one can heal through the spirit. Asked why this is so, a woman spirituality teacher said that this heightened awareness of spirituality is our reaction to a world that is rapidly being mechanized. People have started feeling the need for finding and reconnecting with their being.

Yet, for us who are not from the West, there is something that does not sound right in all these talk. They seem to focus only on rites and rituals or about resurrecting or inventing new goddesses. If this is what spirituality is all about, then indeed it is esoteric, secret. But this is not the way spirituality is practiced in the East and among indigenous cultures. Among these peoples, spirituality is practiced by everybody almost everyday. But in contrast to religion that imposes an outside power upon the individual, spirituality is the integration of our being. Spirituality allows people, especially women who are, more than men, subjugated by religions, to realize her inner powers. Which is why spirituality has been attracting women a lot more than men. And this is why there is no stopping the emerging women's spirituality.

Women's spirituality is self-affirming. It makes you realize that you are important in your self.

Women's spirituality is mutually empowering. It reaches out to other people, especially to other women. It builds communities.

Women's spirituality is integral. There is no dichotomy between prayer and work, body and soul, heaven and earth. It reinforces one's relationship with other people, with God/Goddess, with the planet, with the self.

This spirituality does not shut out the injustices going on in the world because these are negative energies. It actually opens your eyes more to it, makes you feel it perhaps even more intensely because now you know how you are connected with what is going on. Therefore, it gives you the strength and creativity with which to fight your causes but,

at the same time, protects you from being burned out by the anger and the rage.

Women's spirituality is liberating. It frees us from our inner slaveries, namely, our fears, our idols, our bitterness and resentments. It helps us analyze our fears, helps us act upon the real ones and forget those that have no basis in fact. It helps us put each of our idols down gently onto the ground where they can no longer oppress us. It helps us gain self-knowledge and self-acceptance in order for us to be free. We gain self-knowledge through our own failures, when we contemplate and reflect, and when people tell us things about ourselves that we are not yet aware of. Of course, many of these things will hurt and we must find the grace and courage to accept these ugly things as parts of us. For this, we need friends. Good ones.

Women's spirituality is contemplative. It is imperative that we *make time* for reflection, to meditate: to sit still and be calm movement and thought. It is the way to stay in touch with the source of life.

Women's spirituality is healing. It soothes our inner wounds and aches. It helps us to gain the ability to forgive and to move forward.

Women's spirituality is celebratory. In contrast to Catholicism that is sharply focused on suffering, women's spirituality emphasizes our ability to triumph.

Women's spirituality is an unfinished process. It is possible for us not only to make progress but even to make quantum leaps. But then again, it is also quite possible to retrogress.

There is another definition we found, one that many people who do not consider themselves enlightened might probably find easy to understand. Spirituality is that force that keeps you going in times of crisis, when you are sapped of your energies and are terribly confused, when you are deathly afraid of the uncertainties before you. It is that which clears your mind of the bog and gives you the conviction—the faith—that this one particular course of action is the right one. It pulls you through, but when you look back, you don't know how you managed to do what you just did. Quite a simple definition. But, definitely, a most assuring one.