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WHAT IS SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE?

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Summary

This inquiry into spiritual intelligence suggests that it is one of several types of intelligence and that it can be developed relatively independently. Spiritual intelligence calls for multiple ways of knowing and for the integration of the inner life of mind and spirit with the outer life of work in the world. It can be cultivated through questing, inquiry, and practice. Spiritual experiences may also contribute to its development, depending on the context and means of integration. Spiritual maturity is expressed through wisdom and compassionate action in the world. Spiritual intelligence is necessary for discernment in making spiritual choices that contribute to psychological wellbeing and overall healthy human development.

Spirituality exists in the hearts and minds of men and women everywhere, within religious traditions and independently of tradition. If, following theologian Paul Tillich, we define spirituality as the domain of ultimate concern, then everyone is spiritual because everyone has ultimate concerns. However, the term *ultimate concern* can be interpreted in many different ways. Some people do not consider themselves or their concerns to be spiritual. Spirituality, like emotion, has varying degrees of depth and *expression*. It may be conscious or unconscious, developed or undeveloped, healthy or pathological, naive or sophisticated, beneficial or dangerously distorted.

Some current definitions of spirituality can be summarized as follows: (a) Spirituality involves the highest levels of any of the developmental lines, for example, cognitive, moral, emotional, and interpersonal; (b) spirituality is itself a separate developmental line; (c) spirituality is an attitude (such as openness to love) at any stage; and (d) spirituality involves peak experiences not stages. An integral perspective would presumably include all these different views, and others as well (Wilber, 2000).

Spirituality may also be described in terms of ultimate belonging or connection to the transcendental ground of being. Some people define spirituality in terms of relationship to God, to fellow humans, or to the earth. Others define it in terms of devotion and commitment to a particular faith or form of practice. To understand how spirituality can contribute to the good life, defined in humanistic terms as living authentically the full possibilities of being human (Anastoo, 1998), it seems necessary to differentiate healthy spirituality from beliefs and practices that may be detrimental to well-being. This leads to the challenge of defining and cultivating spiritual intelligence.

Because there is little agreement about definitions of spirituality, discussions of spiritual intelligence need to be exploratory rather than definitive. By asking what is meant by spiritual intelligence, I hope to stimulate further discussion of this topic that I think merits further investigation.

MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

Intelligence is sometimes defined as the ability to manage cognitive complexity. In current usage, the distinction between intelligence and reason has been largely lost. For example, as defined in *Webster's Dictionary* (Mish, 1993), intelligence includes the ability to understand, to apply knowledge, to use reason skillfully, and to manipulate one's environment. The view that intelligence comprises many different abilities is supported by current trends in neurology and cognitive psychology.

Among researchers who have identified various types of intelligence, Howard Gardner's (1993) pioneering work at Harvard on multiple intelligences has helped people understand that intelligence is multifaceted. His work is currently being applied in many schools across America. Gardner's research indicates that different kinds of intelligence develop relatively independently of each other, and proficiency in one area does not imply proficiency in another.

For example, linguistic skill with words can be differentiated from logical mathematical skill with numbers and from the spatial intelligence that perceives spatial relationships. Excellence in one area does not necessarily tell us anything about abilities in another. In addition, Gardner (1993) discussed kinesthetic intelligence that enables a person to use the body in highly differentiated and skilled ways, such as dance or athletics; musical intelligence necessary for all different kinds of musical aptitude; intrapersonal intelligence that implies awareness of one's own thoughts and feelings; and interpersonal intelligence that enables us to relate to others empathically. He does not discuss spiritual intelligence as a separate line of development.

Daniel Goleman's (1995) research on emotional intelligence, based primarily on intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence, indicates that success in many areas of life depends on emotional skills as much as on cognitive capacities. Emotional intelligence includes self-awareness and self-control, as well as the ability to get along well with others. Getting along with others implies an ability to listen, to communicate, to accept feedback, and to empathize with different points of view.

According to Goleman and others, different kinds of intelligence are associated with different areas of the brain. Although little research has been done to isolate areas of the brain associated with spirituality, numerous studies in meditation research indicate that significant physiological changes result from even limited practice (Murphy & Donovan, 1999; Shapiro & Walsh, 1984; Walsh & Vaughan, 1993). Studies that measure the effects of intensive, long-term practice point to significant psychological benefits in addition to deepening emotional and spiritual sensitivity.

An interesting anecdote about Emmanuel Swedenborg, the 18th-century scientist who became a visionary mystic and founded the Swedenborgian church, says that when Swedenborg suffered a stroke that left him paralyzed on one side of his body, he lost his visionary capacity (Wulff, 1991). This certainly suggests that a spiritual gift may be associated with specific areas of the brain. However, the fact that spiritual experiences have physiological correlates in the brain does not necessarily mean that they are caused by the brain. Presumably neurophysiology plays a role in all experience, but referral to brain and bodily processes does not help us fully comprehend spiritual experiences or evaluate their significance.

In recent years, numerous empirical studies have supported the idea that certain spiritual beliefs and practices are positively associated with physical and mental health (Richards, 1999). In addition to exploring the relationship of spirituality to health and healing (Dossey, 1993), researchers are also investigating the impact of spiritual beliefs on the dying process (Gallup, 1997). Practical applications of spirituality are finding their way into the mainstream practice of medicine and alternative methods of healing (Boyle, 1999), and distinctions between religiousness and contemporary spirituality are being clarified (Wuthnow, 1998).

DEFINING SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE

Based on my experience of many years of working at the interface of psychology and spirituality, I would like to offer some perspectives that I think should be included in attempting to define spiritual intelligence.

Spiritual intelligence is concerned with the inner life of mind and spirit and its relationship to being in the world. Spiritual intelligence implies a capacity for a deep understanding of existential questions and insight into multiple levels of consciousness. Spiritual intelligence also implies awareness of spirit as the ground of being or as the creative life force of evolution. If the evolution of life from stardust to mineral, vegetable, animal, and human existence implies some form of intelligence rather than being a purely random process, it might be called spiritual. Spiritual intelligence emerges as consciousness evolves into an ever-deepening awareness of matter, life, body, mind, soul, and spirit.

Spiritual intelligence, then, is more than individual mental ability. It appears to connect the personal to the transpersonal and the self to spirit. Spiritual intelligence goes beyond conventional psychological development. In addition to self-awareness, it implies awareness of our relationship to the transcendent, to each other, to the earth and all beings.

Working as a psychotherapist, my impression is that spiritual intelligence opens the heart, illuminates the mind, and inspires the soul, connecting the individual human psyche to the underlying ground of being. Spiritual intelligence can be developed with practice and can help a person distinguish reality from illusion. It may be expressed in any culture as love, wisdom, and service.

Spiritual intelligence is related to emotional intelligence insofar as spiritual practice includes developing intrapersonal and interpersonal sensitivity. Paying attention to subjective thoughts and feelings and cultivating empathy is part of increasing awareness of the inner spiritual life.

Spiritual intelligence depends on the capacity to see things from more than one perspective and to recognize the relationships between perception, belief, and behavior. Most people are expected to take responsibility for behavior but not for beliefs or perceptions, although these are intimately interconnected. Refining any form of intelligence requires training and discipline, and spiritual intelligence is no exception.

We rely on spiritual intelligence when we explore the meaning of questions such as “Who am I?” “Why am I here?” and “What really matters?” Perhaps spiritual intelligence can also help a person discover hidden wellsprings of love and joy beneath the stress and turmoil of everyday life.

DIFFERENT WAYS OF KNOWING

Definitions of spiritual intelligence seem incomplete if they do not include different ways of knowing. In a recent survey of grassroots spirituality, Robert Forman (1997) reported that people from many different traditions tend to view spirituality today as being experiential rather than conceptual, and clearly transrational.

Contemplative practices, such as meditation, seem particularly relevant for refining spiritual intelligence because it depends on familiarity with at least three distinct ways of knowing: sensory, rational, and contemplative. These three ways of knowing appear to be an integral part of the spiritual intelligence that some people demonstrate.

The 14th Dalai Lama, for instance, is evidently very familiar with different ways of knowing and seems to be continuously aware of multiple levels of consciousness. I have heard him give extraordinarily complex and sophisticated lectures on the nature of consciousness, and I have seen him respond to hostile questions with grace and dignity. His demeanor of friendliness and compassion never wavers. He seems to practice what he preaches when he says, “I consider

human affection, or compassion, to be the universal religion. Whether a believer or a nonbeliever, everyone needs human affection and compassion, because compassion gives us inner strength, hope and mental peace. Thus, it is indispensable for everyone” (as cited in Grey, 1998, p. 177).

Descriptions of various levels of consciousness provide useful maps for differentiating spiritual intelligence from other types of intelligence (Wilber, 1995). Wilber (1999) pointed out that although many of us have had peak experiences that access expanded states of transpersonal consciousness, we can, with practice, evolve into having constant access to the witness or pure awareness that is aware of all levels. This awareness can be maintained through waking, dreaming, and sleeping states because it is always already present in all three states. He says, “Spirit is not an altered state of consciousness or a nonordinary state. There is only Spirit. . . within which different states arise” (p. 322). From another perspective, Islamic scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr(1989) said, “Intelligence is a divine gift which pierces through the veil of maya and is able to know reality as such” (p. 146). In this context, intelligence refers to
* the capacity of distinguishing truth from illusion, which implies more than just being sensitive to subtle energies and spiritual phenomena.

Ideally, spiritual intelligence would enable us to see things as they are, free from unconscious distortions. In contrast to wishful thinking or grasping for certainty, exercising spiritual intelligence implies facing existential realities such as freedom, suffering, and death and grappling with the perennial quest for meaning.

For many people, spiritual intelligence also implies aesthetic sensitivity and appreciation of beauty. Physically, spiritual intelligence is sometimes associated with sensitivity to subtle energy currents in the body. Practices such as meditation, yoga, and martial arts that quiet the mind can expand awareness and refine perceptual sensitivity to energy, sound, light, and subtle levels of consciousness.

Since ancient times, spirituality has been an integral part of human life. I believe everyone has the potential for developing spiritual intelligence, just as everyone has a capacity for intuition, thinking, sensing, and feeling (Vaughan, 1979). However, these capacities develop and become more reliable when we pay attention to them. Whereas some people try to ignore spiritual issues, others choose to cultivate spiritual sensitivity. Because people now have access to a wide variety of spiritual teachings, intelligent discernment is needed to make wise choices and avoid some of the entrapping seductions of spiritual illusions (Anthony, Ecker, & Wilber, 1987; Deikman, 1990; Vaughan, 1995).

SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Spiritual intelligence can be developed by a variety of practices for training attention, transforming emotions, and cultivating ethical behavior. These practices are not the exclusive property of any single religious tradition or spiritual teaching. Although spiritual intelligence is related to cognitive, emotional, or moral development, it is not identical to any of them. Because different kinds of intelligence develop at different rates, a person may be highly developed in one of these areas but not in others. When left unresolved, emotional or ethical issues certainly inhibit spiritual development. Spiritual maturity, as an expression of spiritual intelligence, subsumes a degree of emotional and moral maturity as well as ethical behavior.

As I understand it, spiritual maturity implies exercising wisdom and compassion in relationship to other people, regardless of gender, creed, age, or ethnic origin, as well as reverence and respect for all forms of life. Spiritual maturity also suggests a subjective sense of insight and understanding based on the willingness to recognize illusions, to love in the face of impermanence, and to come to terms with existential freedom and mortality. It implies a depth and breadth of vision that encompasses a whole spectrum of perspectives and multiple modes of knowing. Furthermore, spiritual maturity implies connecting the inner life of mind and spirit with the outer life of action and service in the world.

Self-awareness is essential for developing spiritual maturity. When attention is directed inward, a person may begin by trying to attend to subjective sensations, feelings, and thoughts. At first, one is likely to be completely preoccupied with personal issues, unable to quiet the mind even for a minute. The mind seems to have a mind of its own and may be continuously engaged in reviewing the past or fantasizing plans for the future, despite the best intentions to stay in the moment and witness subjective processes.

Fascination with personal melodramas and stories can be a distraction if one is attempting to focus attention or cultivate choiceless awareness. Realizing that attention can be voluntarily redirected can begin the process of undoing old habits of thought and patterns of behavior. As therapists, we are trained to witness other people's stories with full, non-interfering attention. It seems evident that when we attend to one another with a quiet mind, in the light of spiritual intelligence, old wounds are healed and hearts are opened. Being with others in silent meditation can also have a healing effect.

When one is drawn to deeper contemplative practices by a longing for wholeness and understanding, a spiritual path unfolds, leading gradually to spiritual maturity. Some qualities that tend to be associated with spiritual maturity include loving kindness, honesty, tolerance, open-mindedness, and inner peace or equanimity in the face of life's existential challenges.

THE SPIRITUAL PATH

The spiritual path is a metaphor for the development of spiritual qualities, including spiritual intelligence. Followed with commitment and integrity, a path can lead from the bondage of unconsciousness to spiritual freedom, from fear and defensiveness to love and compassion, and from ignorance and confusion to wisdom and understanding (Vaughan, 1995). The goal of the path may be described by terms such as *enlightenment*, *awakening*, *inner peace*, or *self-realization*. Whatever the goal, the process involves a transformation of consciousness. Most traditions say that progress on the path depends on spiritual practice. Practice can deepen the capacity for love and compassion, wisdom and transcendence, and help people cultivate other qualities to which they may aspire. Spiritual intelligence enables one to recognize the value of these qualities in others as well as within oneself.

A spiritual path may emphasize ascent to higher states of consciousness and self-transcendence or descent into communion with nature and body awareness (Wilber, 1995). The integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo (1976), the 20th-century Indian sage, regarded the attainment of transcendental freedom as a necessary but insufficient goal of practice. His philosophy holds that ascent to the divine is only the first step. A further goal is descent of the new consciousness for world transformation.

The wisdom traditions all offer stories and metaphors of transformation that depict stages on the path, such as the soul's journey in Christianity, stages of the self in Sufism, or the 10 ox-herding pictures in Zen Buddhism. The first stage of the path is usually self-centered. One may seek solace for pain and suffering or pray for help in times of terror or despair. A war veteran, for example, confessed that he was not shy about praying in the face of imminent death. Even atheists sometimes turn to God when under fire.

At conventional levels, spiritual life is usually associated with a group. Attendance at church or synagogue and observance of religious holidays and rituals such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals are a major focus of religious life. At this stage, concern is extended to the wellbeing of the group, whether it be the immediate family, the community, or an ethnic or religious identification.

At post-conventional levels of development, beyond the conventional observance of social customs, the unfolding of the spiritual path requires self-awareness and familiarity with different ways of perceiving reality. Although the basic intuition of spirit can be discerned at any stage, this awareness is more easily integrated with rationality as a person grows into spiritual maturity (Wilber, 1997).

Further stages of development depend on the capacity to coordinate different perspectives and to extend compassionate concern to all beings. As the relationship between subjective, objective, and inter-subjective modes of consciousness comes into focus, insightful interpretations of experience can contribute to deepening practice.

Although developing spiritual intelligence does not depend on a particular path or practice, it does depend on expanding consciousness to include a widening circle of empathic identification, sensitivity to subtle realities, and familiarity with various symbolic maps of consciousness. In our culture today, increasing numbers of people are embracing a spirituality based on a variety of practices drawn from more than one tradition (Wuthnow, 1998). Practice may include complex rituals or simply listening to the still, small voice that helps one align with the transcendent, whether this is conceived as the *wu wei* of Taoism, the effortless effort of Buddhism, or following the will of God. Following the will of God does not mean resignation or passively “going with the flow.” It means cultivating discernment, listening to the heart, and following inner guidance (Johnson, 1998). A spiritual path that leads to love, freedom, and wholeness is concerned with the wellbeing of the whole— the whole person, the whole human family, the whole planet, and the whole web of life.

FAITH AND SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

Symbolic images and archetypes can convey multiple levels of meaning to religious ceremonies and rituals, and myths and stories provide a context of meaning for events and transitions in life. For example, ancient stories and metaphors of transformation such as death and rebirth, awakening from the dream, or recovering buried treasure all symbolize developmental possibilities (Metzner, 1998).

Recognizing stages of faith development as described by James Fowler (1995) in his classic work *Stages of Faith* seems particularly relevant to investigating spiritual intelligence. Fowler said that faith gives coherence and direction to our lives and enables us to face the inevitable difficulties of our existential condition. He pointed out that factors such as biological maturation, emotional and cognitive development, and cultural influences must be taken into account to understand faith development.

Fowler’s (1995) six stages of faith span the spectrum of development from childhood to maturity: (a) In childhood, faith is based on fantasy and imagination; (b) in the mythic literal stage, stories are interpreted literally; (c) at the conventional stage, beliefs tend to be conventional and unexamined; (d) the individuated reflective stage is characterized by demythologizing and individual responsibility for values and beliefs; (e) the conjunctive stage, which usually emerges in midlife, involves a recognition of the unconscious and a more paradoxical understanding of truth; and finally (f) universalizing faith is inclusive of all being and free from ideological shackles.

Although development does not necessarily progress in a neat, linear fashion from one stage to another, spiritual maturity implies adequately negotiating all these stages of faith. Spiritual experiences may be interpreted very differently by people at different stages of faith.

Sacred rituals, art, and music are meant to evoke consciousness of spirit, but no form of expression can do more than point the way to a direct experience of transcendence. Furthermore, although deep experiences can be subjectively significant, they do not necessarily lead to a religious or spiritual life (Smith, 1993). On the other hand, given a supportive context for integration, a transcendent experience can have a powerful transformative effect. As Scott Richards (1999) observed in his address at the American Psychological Association, transcendent spiritual experiences often positively affect people’s psychological functioning and wellbeing. By changing people “from the inside out,” such experiences can reorient their values and significantly alter their worldviews.

Deep spiritual experiences can certainly be life changing. Whether they are beneficial or not may depend, to a great extent, on the context in which they occur and how well they can be integrated with ordinary life. Discernment and insightful interpretation by a wise mentor or

counselor can help the process. In my own experience of working with people struggling to integrate spiritual experiences with ordinary life, a cognitive framework supporting the development of spiritual intelligence has been useful. In addition to an appropriate, comprehensive belief system and worldview, a supportive community and ongoing practice can also contribute to healthy integration.

INSPIRATION AND PRACTICE

Spiritual experience, like inspiration (Hart, 1998), is commonly associated with feelings of clarity, connection, opening, and energy. In art or other creative work, seeking inspiration can be a spiritual endeavor. To be inspired is to be in the spirit; to be dispirited is to feel separated and discouraged. When one is inspired by a work of art, a spiritual teacher, or a new insight, one feels refreshed, revitalized, and renewed.

Spiritual growth often begins with inspiration. In Sufi teachings, for example, it is the inspired self that first tastes the joys of spiritual experience and begins to take genuine pleasure in prayer, meditation, and other spiritual activities (Fadiman & Frager, 1997). A taste of creative inspiration can often encourage spiritual practice. Practice then becomes more attractive and compelling than worldly distractions.

Spiritual practices can be defined broadly as intentional activities concerned with relating to the sacred. They usually include activities such as prayer, meditation, contemplation, and service (Wuthnow, 1998). The objective can be described in religious terms as a process of purification or in psychological terms as movement up Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Walsh, 1999).

Cultivating spiritual intelligence seems to call for a commitment to some form of spiritual practice. Roger Walsh (1999) described seven practices common to world religions that foster opening the heart and mind and help people cultivate some of these qualities. He discussed motivation for spiritual growth and the universal desire for happiness, emotional transformation for healing old wounds and cultivating love and gratitude, ethical living for peace of mind, attentional training for concentration, the awakening of spiritual vision, and wisdom and service,

Integral practice refers to disciplines derived from many traditions that integrate body, emotions, mind, and spirit (Murphy & Leonard, 1995). These practices expand awareness of wholeness and the intimate relationship between mind and matter, body, soul, and spirit.

By enhancing awareness and cultivating sensitivity to inner realms of experience, practices such as yoga, meditation, psychotherapy, vision quests, journaling, music, and movement contribute to the development of spiritual intelligence. Some practices focus on the exploration of subtle realms of consciousness, as in the Christian "discernment of spirits." Others aim for clarity that transcends form, whereas others reach for transcendence of form and formlessness in a non-dual perception of reality as a whole.

Contemplative practices range from simple reflection to deep meditative awareness that transcends thought altogether. Today, many people are making an effort to weave the deep experiences of silence and harmony attained in contemplation into the fabric of daily life. Spiritual intelligence facilitates the integration of subjective insights and illuminations with ways of being and acting in the world.

SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

Spiritual intelligence can generally be associated with psychological health, although some forms of spirituality may be dysfunctional or pathogenic (Deikman, 1990). When spiritual beliefs foster denial and projection and contribute to fear and conflict, they can be destructive and seriously problematic. For example, when a cult leader exerts control over people through manipulation of fear and guilt, the community may exhibit the characteristics of a dysfunctional

family. It can sometimes take a person years to recover from having made a spiritual commitment without discernment.

Conventional religion often provides a person with a sense of security and belonging, serving as a social support to its members. Among those who have been disillusioned by conventional religion, spirituality is more likely to be inner directed. A person may still belong to a group, but with the development of spiritual intelligence the circle of empathic identification expands to all people and takes the well-being of the whole into account. When we recognize our interconnectedness and interdependence, it becomes possible to view the world from multiple perspectives.

Developing spiritual intelligence includes and transcends personal growth, extending to the farther reaches of healthy psychological development. It begins with cultivating authenticity and self-awareness and develops with practice to a concern for all beings. Some personal characteristics that could be associated with spiritual intelligence are the traditional virtues of veracity, humility, and charity, which could also be described as authenticity, respect for differences, and the willingness to engage in service to others. Well-developed spiritual intelligence could also be associated with the absence of defensiveness and hostility as well as an inclination to kindness and generosity. Of course, these traits can also be found in psychologically healthy people who do not consider themselves particularly spiritual. In other words, they can be considered necessary but insufficient conditions for spiritual intelligence.

SPIRITUAL INQUIRY

Following are some examples of how spiritual intelligence can be discerned in connection with different areas of inquiry.

Scientific inquiry. Research into spirituality is now under way in a variety of fields, including medicine, psychology and thanatology. Applying spiritual intelligence to all areas of inquiry means reexamining beliefs and assumptions about reality and deepening our inquiry to include subjective as well as objective perspectives. Just as information is necessary but not sufficient for scientific knowledge, knowledge is necessary but not sufficient for wisdom.

Spiritual choices. The wide assortment of spiritual teachings that is now available at any bookstore confronts anyone seeking spiritual guidance with many choices. When the marketplace is flooded with information of variable quality, each person must sort out what is relevant and valuable from that which is seductively entrapping (Anthony et al., 1987). Spiritual intelligence could enable a person to recognize what really matters (Schwartz, 1995).

Relationships. In addition to deepening primary love relationships, spiritual intelligence contributes to healing relationships in families and among friends and colleagues and helps people appreciate teachers and mentors. By integrating heart and mind, spiritual intelligence could help people recognize the power of forgiveness and enhance their capacity to give and receive love. In intimate relationships, spiritual intelligence helps us learn from our mistakes and make wise choices.

Parenting. Early childhood experiences of spirituality can have a long-lasting effect (Hoffman, 1992). A child learns the basic elements of spiritual intelligence while exploring the inner world of imagination. For example, understanding the meaning of symbols can help both adults and children appreciate metaphors and stories.

Solitude. Discovering the value of periods of silence and solitude seems essential to the work of spiritual inquiry. Periods of solitude, whether in nature or in retreat, can often help a person come to terms with the existential realities of aloneness, freedom, and death.

Varieties of spiritual experience. Any discussion of spiritual intelligence would be incomplete without acknowledging the wide range of spiritual experiences. Such experiences can offer significant insights, yet interpretations are inevitably shaped by beliefs and successful integration depends on both cognitive and emotional factors.

Self-concept. Investigation of personal beliefs about who and what we think we are is an important part of spiritual inquiry. The teachings of the Indian sage Ramana Maharshi (2000) focus on a single question, “Who am I?” Sustained meditation on this question is meant to bring youth a state of self-realization and abiding peace and happiness. Many spiritual teachings encourage a person to disidentify from the ego, recognizing that the self-centered demands of the ego never satisfy the soul. The self can also disidentify from thoughts, feelings, and sensations and simply witness whatever arises in awareness. Buddhist teachings point out that any self-concept can be deconstructed.

THE SPIRITUAL QUEST

A person on a spiritual path may identify with being a soul on a quest for meaning rather than an ego in pursuit of personal power. The soul is usually identified as the innermost, essential part of oneself (Vaughan, 1995). The quest may focus on a search for truth or enlightenment or on the realization of one’s true nature. Some people choose to make a commitment of devotion to a teacher or a particular path that promises to fulfill the quest, whereas others prefer to follow a more solitary path of individuation.

At one time, the spiritual quest presumably required renunciation of secular concerns. Today, it is more likely to be undertaken as an effort to balance and integrate the psychic forces that exist inside us (Moody, 1997). Although questing is an integral part of deepening awareness and cultivating spiritual intelligence, one can easily get lost in the quest, always searching for the next teacher or method that promises liberation. There is a time to seek, a time to practice, and a time to let go and let be, simply deepening silence. Sometimes one form of practice may be more compelling than another. Spiritual intelligence can help a person discern what is most appropriate at a given time.

When the quest is fulfilled in a sense of illumination that brings insight into the meaning of life and a state of contentment ensues, the change may be temporary or it may have a lasting, transformative effect (Moody, 1997). Contentment is not to be confused with complacency or withdrawal. A soul that rests in contentment may regard everything in life as an opportunity for learning.

In Sufism, the contented self accepts both joy and suffering without complaint (Fadiman & Frager, 1997). The contented self is drawn to the practice of contemplation. In the words of the Christian mystic St. Teresa of Avila,

You may think. . . that the soul (in the state of Union) should be so absorbed that she can occupy herself with nothing. You deceive yourselves. She turns with greater ease and ardor than before to all that which belongs to the service of God, and when these occupations leave her free again, she remains in the enjoyment of that companionship. (as cited in Fontana, 1999, p. 5)

When the soul is at rest in the peace that passes understanding, everything is perceived as grace and the heart overflows with gratitude and reverence for life. The mind that is intentionally trained in spiritual practice is closely connected to the heart and open to the world.

According to Tibetan Buddhism, when the mind is calm, the sense of freedom and well-being that arises is not dependent on external circumstances. When the wisdom of the mind has been unveiled in the spiritually awakened person, boundless compassion for all sentient beings arises spontaneously (Wallace, 1999).

Practice that nurtures spiritual intelligence can be found in all the wisdom traditions and in all walks of life. Some individuals whose lives have inspired others to undertake the quest are famous, such as the Dalai Lama, Mother Teresa, or Thomas Merton. Many others are inconspicuous and prefer to remain anonymous. Three of my teachers, a Christian, a Buddhist, and a shaman, all shunned publicity and public recognition. They have touched many lives, simply demonstrating spiritual intelligence by being who they are. Spiritual intelligence helps us appreciate the value of different teachers at various stages on the path.

INTEGRATING SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE

A variety of integral visions seem to be emerging from the chaotic disintegration of postmodernism. These integral visions— such as Ken Wilber’s (1998) work on the integration of science and religion; humanistic and transpersonal theories integrating physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of wellbeing; cross-cultural integral practices; and the common work of integrating the inner life of mind and spirit with action in the world—all point to a new appreciation of integration as a key to healing and wholeness.

An integral view of spiritual intelligence subsumes multiple intelligences and looks at spiritual intelligence in the context of a person’s whole life. It is not enough for a person to claim spiritual knowledge if it is not expressed in the world through wisdom, compassion, and action. Integrating spiritual intelligence means living in accordance with one’s core beliefs. This integration reinforces a sense of purpose, whereas fragmentation leads to alienation and despair. I have seen many people awoken to a sense of gratitude and meaningful purpose when they do the inner work required for developing spiritual intelligence.

Many questions remain to be explored. What can we expect from developing spiritual intelligence? What are the costs and benefits associated with spiritual freedom? What indicators of spiritual maturity can serve as guideposts on the path? In the unfolding story of human evolution, spiritual inquiry reflects the perennial quest for wisdom that gives life meaning. Integrating spiritual intelligence helps us deepen the quest and expand our vision of possibilities.

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