

Question: Do we have to leave the world for spiritual development?

Answer: That depends.

PEOPLE ASSOCIATE THE WORD *SPIRITUAL* WITH RELIGION.

The true meaning of the word spiritual is 'that which is connected to breath' (from the Latin *spiritos*).

Most people have priorities: health, work, family, social roles, a focus on personal creativity or philosophical questions such as "*Who am I?*"

Socrates said, "*Know thyself.*"

There is a spiritual program for all types of people. Bona fide Gurus with proper knowledge of psychology know what is best for seekers.

In present day society, with the current educational systems, the emphasis is on achievement. Through the course of a career or at retirement, many people discover they have a need to grow spiritually.

In general people need an organized religion for worship, for the rites and ceremonies that solemnize milestones such as birth, marriage and death. Many individuals are satisfied with that. Religion offers a deity, a mentor...a guide for inspiration. During adversity religion provides a great source of solace.

To understand spirituality, one must know and experience the subtle body and the causal body. Our feeling mind is connected with the subtle body and our thinking mind with the causal body. In the subtle body spinning wheels of light that, in India, are known as Chakras can be found.

You see, there are different layers of the mind that are information centers. These information centers are constantly receiving light energy from our Chakras. Our physical brain is also layered. These layers are independent as well as interconnected through neurons that are continually firing and making connections. A great scintillation is constantly occurring in the brain. It is a play of light.

The first layer, the earthly mind, says "I am this body." The second layer, the fluid mind, expresses a sense of "I am a gender," whether it be male, female...hermaphrodite. This mind is what makes us social beings. The third layer, the fiery mind, introduces us to power and entices us to pursue it. The fourth layer, the airy mind, expresses unconditional love and compassion. The fifth layer is that of spacious mind. It is the seat of the inner knowledge of the process of meditation. The sixth layer gives us control over our breath during meditation. And, finally, the seventh layer is the layer wherein all ego dissolves and an individual can experience a sense of oneness in which there is no second. This sense of oneness may be compared to deep sleep.

In India, we call this the 'transcendent state.' The great sage and poet Kabir summarizes this, "I am all alone and all is in me."

There are many different means available for spiritual growth. However, the most important question that must be asked is "What is spiritual?" If we stay true to the root of the word, it is the breath (spiritos).

Breath is the means to the realization of the self.

Religious people often lay claim to the word spiritual. But we must understand that religions are a social order, an organization to which people belong in order to maintain their faith...to live a moral and decent life. Religions function in duality in that there is a worshipper and an object of worship. There is also a great hope that one day both will become one.

Spiritual development is an individual endeavor. In India a variety of paths are recognized and individuals are free to make their own choices for such development. Most paths are Tantric, meaning that one must put forth an effort to grow spiritually. Each Tantra has a sound (Mantra) and a visual (Yantra). The Gurus of India guide individuals and families in their spiritual development. There are different paths Gurus teach dependent upon students' needs and capabilities.

Some follow Karma Yoga (seeking oneness through selfless action), the teaching of which is "Do your duty in the world, but do not think you are the doer." Training the mind to believe this is to develop spiritually. Additionally, the teachings encompass a larger context, called Dharma (larger duty). The smaller dharma is to protect children of all ages. The larger dharma is to protect our land from terrorists and invaders and to protect our adult children (who are protecting us in these instances) in the process.

Others choose Bhakti Yoga (seeking unity through devotion). These individuals gather in groups and sing to their deities. This is called Kirtan or repeating the scriptures of their faith. Bhakti Yoga serves the need of creating an identity within a group through mutual support. This is the most popular yoga in the world. People congregate, exchange ideas and maintain a balance in this social organization. The final goal for these individuals is to become one with the deity.

Lesser known is Naada Yoga. In the Chakra psychology system it is clearly known that every individual has his own fundamental tone. All of creation started with sound. Sound sensitive individuals seek out a Guru who can teach them how to listen to sounds and how to use sounds to internalize the outward flowing senses. Due to our basic, ingrained instinct for survival, we have used all five of our senses to protect ourselves from predators. Once we feel safe and secure we can then close our eyes and hear deeply. There are layers of hearing in the spacious fifth Chakra mind, and all layers of hearing are available to everyone. Some people have perfect pitch, others are tone deaf. But we can all learn to chant to ourselves...for ourselves. The gate of the inner journey becomes available and opens. It becomes so pleasurable that you grow to love solitude. This does not mean that you do not enjoy the company of others. Quite the contrary. You appreciate and enjoy the solitude even more because you are not always with others. By using sound and its mysteries - known to the Naada Yogis (the practitioners of

sound) - the inner workings of the self are explored. This path is extremely discrete and gradually leads its practitioners to dissolution of ego. In this state the earth, water, fire and air element-related Chakra minds rest in peace in the sky of Surya Aakaasha (Solar Space), the fifth chakra element which is produced through extremely subtle sound techniques.

A related branch of Naada Yoga is a Svar Yoga (often misspelt as swar yoga). Svar Yoga leads to the discrete forms of breath modalities related to the altered states of awareness. Knowledge of this yoga is imparted to initiated disciples only after severe scrutiny.

Based on the combination of these two Yoga modalities, the aspirant can experience reality through subtle sound. And, when the aspirant succeeds, he will be able to hear his own subtle, fundamental note. Everything in the universe is created through sound...sound is heard differently in different cultures.

Some hear it as AOM. Others as KUN or WORD or YA VAY...or even a multitude of small bangs or one big bang. Everything in the universe is made up of vibrating frequencies, even light.

There is Dhyan Yoga, also known as Raja Yoga (unity through meditation). Dhyan Yoga is the contemplation of the breath or a key Mantra that eventually drops off when entering the ultimate state called Samadhi (total merngence with eternal reality) or Supreme Consciousness.

There are five elements that make up the physical universe: solids, liquids, fire, air and space (Aakaasha).

Mergence may be better understood through the following: Individual awareness arises only in a waking state where any experience may take place. Ego mind experiences separateness. In deep sleep there is no ego...we are one with consciousness itself - without a second. We are in a state of eternal presence without past and future. Some can achieve this state while being in the world of duties and desires. Others require more seclusion.

Finally there are Dandi Vedantins, individuals who prefer not to live in the world at all. They live in nature, with nature. They are walking holy men with no home or relations. They live simply without complication...a totally different approach to spirituality. They are not Tantrics, following a method to achieve the end that is unity. They have renounced their bodies, egos, minds, individuality, selves and any other illusions. They live content in eternal presence called Brahman or Consciousness.