

EXPLORING SPIRITUALITY

While church attendances have been falling in recent years, there is still a hunger in the population for exploring and developing spiritual awareness. Members and friends of Central Edinburgh Quaker Meeting in Scotland have been following a programme of gentle philosophical discussion in which to ask questions and share personal experiences of spirituality (as opposed to the beliefs of religious institutions). They are not group-counselling sessions.

It has worked well for a group of 6-12 people meeting regularly (eg monthly) for sessions lasting for one-and-a-half to two hours, with a short comfort break in the middle.

We invite others to adopt this programme of spiritual exploration for their own groups, and to expand spiritual awareness in all communities.

SUGGESTED PROTOCOLS, which should be agreed by all:

The sessions will begin and end with a few minutes of silent meditation.

They are opportunities for individuals to explore or share their personal experiences and beliefs.

Confidentiality: This can lead to a very private sharing, which should not be quoted, or discussed with others, outside the group.

Respect for other members of the group is essential.

No one should try to change another individual's ideas or beliefs.

No-one should tell another that they are wrong. Everyone's personal experience is his/her truth. There are no right answers.

Usual courtesies: only one person to speak at a time.

Do not interrupt another.

Allow time after each contribution for digestion.

No-one to speak for more than five minutes until everyone has had a chance to contribute, and then for no more than another five minutes – so that no-one dominates the group.

No-one should quote long spiels from their Gurus or teachers.

As one might expect, each person's understanding is different, based on different experiences, but as long as no-one is trying to convert anyone else, this should not be a problem.

MEANINGS OF WORDS

Metaphysics: literally 'above the physical', that is. more than just the material.

Esoterica: highly specialized subjects or publications.

Psychic, paranormal: phenomena, (such as telepathy, clairvoyance), unexplainable by natural laws.

Consciousness: is the awareness or perception of a state or object, either internal to oneself, or in one's external environment.

Etheric body: an aura; subtle energy body (measurable by instruments) that retains the characteristics of the person, for a time after death.

EXPLORING SPIRITUALITY

A Programme of Topics for Gentle Discussion and Sharing of Experiences

A. THE SOURCE: WHO IS YOUR GOD? There is a range of possibilities.

An old man with a long white beard sitting on a cloud.

A remote, all-knowing, all-powerful, judgemental wrathful, male ruler.

One God, Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth.

The Old Testament – 'I AM THAT I AM' (Exodus, 3.14)

'God is a Spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.' (John 4:24, KJB)

God is Love. LOVE is GOD.

The 99 names of Allah.

The many Gods of Hinduism, each expressing one of God's many qualities.

'I would rather believe in a God that does not exist, than risk ignoring one that does.'

For agnostics/atheists/non-theists – none of the above.

Is 'Love', 'compassion', common to all the great faiths, and is it the only element common to all?

What are the differences between 'divine', 'holy', 'sacred' and 'spiritual'?

B. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY A SPIRITUAL DIMENSION TO LIFE?

Is there, and what do we mean by, a spiritual dimension of life?

Since energy and matter are interchangeable, should 'non-material' exclude energy?

Can a non-material spirituality have an effect on material beings? Yes. Love.

*What is our relationship to/within the spiritual dimension of life?

'I AM BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS'.

C. WHAT OR WHO ARE HUMANS?

BODY, MIND (CONSCIOUSNESS, PSYCHE) and SPIRIT. Id, ego, superego.

'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him...'. (Genesis 1:27, KJB)

Are we 'purely physical beings on a human journey', or

Are we 'spiritual beings on a spiritual journey'?

Do we have 'Original Sin' or Original Blessing'?

D. SURVIVAL AFTER DEATH – WHAT SURVIVES? GHOSTS? ROLE OF MEDIUMSHIP?

RESURRECTION in the SAME BODY VS RE-INCARNATION in a NEW BODY?

KARMA, VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA?

Evidence of survival after death – Graham Dunstan Martin, *Living on purpose*, Floris Books, 2008.

AD325 – at the Council of Nicaea, it was decided that humans have only this one life – easier for Constantine I to control the populations of the conquered lands of the Roman Empire.

Do our beliefs about survival after death affect our attitude to voluntary euthanasia?

E. WHY DO WE BECOME INCARNATE? PURPOSE? MEANING OF LIFE? ENJOYMENT?

WHO DECIDES? FREE-WILL? PRE-DETERMINATION?

Why do spirits become incarnate, (only once, or again and again)?

Ref. Helen Wambach, *Life Before Life*. Bantam Books, 1979.

To learn to love and to accept love, to be, to be fully human, to enjoy and be joyful, to be creative, to experience and experiment, to learn, to serve, to be in relationship, to achieve an objective, to build heaven on earth, to be fully divine – like the spokes of a wheel, one life at a time. Enjoyment of having agency with a physical body – denied to us in our purely spiritual form? Opportunity to be creative in the material world. Sort out relationships from previous lives.

F. PERSONAL CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE – WHAT DO WE DO AND WHERE?

What do we do? How often? Effects? Variations?

Listening, discernment, via meditation, mindfulness, worship, prayer, spiritual healing.

Palpable alpha waves. Walking, nature, music.

G. DOES KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SPIRITUALITY AUTOMATICALLY LEAD TO EXPERIENCE OF IT?

HOW DO OUR SPIRITS AFFECT OUR LIVES IN PRACTICE?

AND DO OUR SPIRITS CHANGE DURING OUR LIFE-TIMES? WHY AND HOW?

Does merely thinking about, and awareness of, our spiritual nature, affect the way we live our lives?

H. MYSTICISM – WHAT EXACTLY IS IT? A STUDY THEREOF (ESOTERICA), OR AN EXPERIENCE?

What do we mean by 'personal spiritual experience'?

What have the great mystics of the past told/shown us?

All the great faiths have a mystical 'wing'. Could this be the basis for peace?

I. WHO IS JESUS?

An evolved spiritual being with an important message for all human beings – The Love Commandment – who took on the mantle of the myth at the eastern Mediterranean at that time, of a betrayed redeemer who would be crucified, as a method of ensuring that his message would be taken up and spread?

Is Jesus the same advanced spiritual being who became incarnate as Buddha, Abraham, Jesus and Mohammed?

J. HOW TO FULFILL JESUS' LOVE COMMANDMENT?

'Love thy neighbour (not just family and friends), but also the stranger and thine enemy ... as thyself.'

But what does 'love thyself' mean? What do strangers require of us? How to love the unlovable?

And what does 'loving God' mean?

K. JOY – EMOTION AND/OR VIBRATION (MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE)?

Which of the following is our own experience:

Joy is love, expressed freely. One cannot feel joy until one lets it out.

Joy must be shared. Joy is life expressed at the highest vibration.

What is our experience of joy? Do we sense joy as a vibration?

Young children express joy fully/openly – a natural state.

‘The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.’

Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*. Is this true?

L. OUR HUMAN INADEQUACIES: MISTAKES, REGRETS, GUILT AND REPARATION.

We all are human and make mistakes – try not repeat them – come to terms with them – not be consumed by guilt. Live in, (not for), the moment. Make amends. Opportunities for growth?

M. FORGIVENESS

What is forgiveness? Why forgive?

Is it easier to forgive someone if one understands why they have hurt us?

Whom does forgiveness help more – the forgiven or the forgiver?

The Love Commandments. Jesus advised ‘forgive seventy times seven’.

Why is forgiving oneself often so hard?

N. FEAR, ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, DESPAIR

What techniques do we have for dealing with general or specific anxiety?

Personal devotion buffers one against depression by up to 80%.

Ref: Lisa Miller, *The Awakened Brain*, Penguin, 2021.

O. ATTACHMENT, LOSS, PAIN, GRIEF

Any loss can lead to grief (and/or relief).

How do we cope with the many losses and grief that we experience during our lives?

When someone close dies, does it help to remember that the person is OK, so that one needs only to mourn for oneself?

P. LOOKING AT DEATH, AND LAUGHTER

Preparations: administrative, mental, emotional and spiritual.

How do we want to be remembered – tombstones, epigraphs and obituaries? Famous last words?

Q. CAN SCIENTIFIC METHOD PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF LIFE?

What assumptions? Theory? Hypotheses? Evidence?

R. ESOTERICA – applied to the study of religion and spirituality.

What have we read/heard/watched or observed that has helped us on our way?

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