

## Spirituality And Wellness – Personal Reflections<sup>©</sup>

**The following is the first of, hopefully, many conversations with an individual who is describing his reflections on the positive connection between his spirituality and his health. My questions are in italics.**

*What does spirituality mean to you?*

It means a connection or at least an awareness of a divine force (presence or being) which exists outside of ordinary time and space. Insofar as a connection **can** be made, it touches both our existence and whatever might be beyond.

*What does wellness mean to you?*

Physical, but more importantly, emotional health. I further define the latter as not happiness, but peace and a sense of well-being. I believe it is possible to feel well despite physical conditions if one is healthy within oneself, and feels spiritually accepted and engaged. It is equally possible to feel physically out of sorts when one is emotionally and spiritually troubled; often this leads to physical as well as emotional disease.

*Do you experience your spirituality within the context of a specific religion? If so, what religion?*

Judaism

*Describe your relationship with this religion and why you consider it to be a positive influence in your life.*

Judaism and its law (halacha) engage one in activities and rules by which one can forge and maintain a spiritual connection. The emphasis is on ethical behaviour and the pursuit of commandments (mitzvot) through which one can bring the sacred into daily life. In Judaism this does not depend on the administering of sacramental duties by a priest (though a rabbi is the authority on the law within a congregation). The individual is instructed to do so; the individual carries great responsibility as a partner in creation. One's commitment is to pursue the mitzvot. I also continue with my Judaic and Hebrew studies, and indeed continued learning is expected as part of being a Jew.

It is the individual who lights the candles which begin Shabbat, and any other Yom Tov. Through such observances as keeping kosher, one is reminded of the divine and the sacred through out the day; it is not enough to "eat"; one is instructed to eat mindfully. I believe this is the real purpose and intent behind such practices.

The ethics of one's activities and the intellectual/emotional seeking of the divine are considered the paths to spiritual authenticity and ultimately a better world. Even when faced with adverse situations, the advice often given

is "If you need comfort, do". Our positive activities in the world, including mitzvot, are a spiritual connection with G-d and a way in which we can all participate in creation.

*How has your spiritual life positively affected your relationship with yourself, others, and the world?*

Judaism recognizes that we live in communities and one must take responsibility for one's actions. For example, at the New Year, a Jew is to ask for forgiveness from those individuals he/she might have wronged, and then one asks for forgiveness from G-d. One cannot forgive on behalf of someone else, nor can one dispense with reconciliation with others. This is not an onerous expectation. On the contrary, it makes one more constantly aware that there are consequences to one's actions and breathes a great deal of life into the wise and ethical treatment of others. "Don't do onto others what you would not have them do to you".

The structure, ritual, and sense of "peoplehood" have, in fact, given me a great sense of peace that has been noticed by my friends and family. In turn, I believe I treat others with greater tolerance and compassion.

*What other reflections about your spiritual life describe the positive relationship between spirituality and wellness?*

I am a calmer, more centered person. I do a better job of standing up for myself and expressing myself. I am a happier person and am developing a sense of belonging, spiritually and communality, which is very reassuring. I think I am better equipped and supported to handle challenges in my life. I hope I have generally been an ethical person, but now I am more keenly aware of the consequences of one's actions and more aware, mindful.

I have known for a number of years that the relationship which exists between physical, emotional, and spiritual health. My relationship with my faith, therefore, gives me a healthier outlook and over time will manifest in improved physical and emotional health. A spiritual base will help and strengthen my abilities to deal positively with what lies ahead.

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***Gloria McArter***