

Introduction to real Spirituality

Spirituality is a complex discussion in the Western world today. This is in part because it's difficult to define and, in part because, over time, it seems to include more and more.

It's difficult to define because there's no agreed definition of the 'soul' or what is spiritual. In a post-Christian Western world there is no consensus on what the 'soul' is and even why it might be important. For some the 'soul' is about personality, about being genuine and having depth. For others it defies description and any attempt to define it is like describing the fragrance of a flower.

And now there are all sorts of spiritualities. A resurgence of ancient, mystical practices that make claims to help people know the god(s) are the root stock of New Age, feminist, environmental and occult spiritualities. This smorgasbord of spiritualities is then blended together in the movies so that, for instance, the "Matrix" trilogy merges the dualisms of ancient Gnosticism with the alleged transcendent powers of eastern martial arts.

Even historic Christianity has been plagued by repeated, well intentioned attempts to blend ancient Greek dualism, with its tension between the material and the immaterial with the even more ancient Hebrew understanding of the soul and spirit as expressed in the OT.

Given all of the above, spirituality might broadly be described as a 'relationship' with something beyond oneself. Out of this 'relationship' come security and significance and an awareness of another dimension to oneself.

Some reading to help you

Before starting these studies it would help to do some orientation reading.

First, an article from *ChristianityToday*, the justly famous American evangelical magazine (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/013/4.46.html>) which attempts to identify and survey three major spiritualities within evangelicalism

Second there's a short response from Billy Graham to a question about spirituality (<http://www.billygraham.org/qna/qna.asp?i=1791>). This response makes the simple but important point that there is more to spirituality than just love.

Lastly, in a review of a relatively new Australian book from the evangelical Anglican tradition (<http://www.anglicanmedia.com.au/index.php/article/articleview/1226/1/20/>), there's encouragement to understand and interact with other spiritualities and a call to enrich the distinctly Christian spirituality.

As you start these studies don't expect to find all the answers to your questions. They are NOT another formula for drawing nearer to God. Rather they are like a map of some of the terrain of Christian spirituality, with the hope that those who meditate on the content develop a clear idea of where they are and what are some responsible biblical directions to grow their relationship with God.