

SPIRITUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Talk for

THE CONVENTION ON SPIRIT AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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Ba Luvmour, MA and Josette Luvmour, PhD
503-493-1172 • josetteluvmour@comcast.net • baluvmour@comcast.net

Spirituality and Human Rights

It is a delicate process to try to define Spirit. However, many great people have ventured into the spiritual realms from all cultures and in all times. Some of them have been kind enough to publish reports about their experiences. Amazingly, despite the differences in time and place, there is a consensus as to the nature of spiritual experiences. In our current times, both the physical and social sciences have come to similar and in some cases identical insights as sages and saints. This consensus has come to be known as the Perennial Philosophy (Huxley, 1945). As we are attempting to speak of the relationship between spirit and human rights the Perennial Philosophy is tremendously reassuring for it accounts for the spiritual expressions of all humanity.

Perhaps the most remarkable points upon which all explorers of the Spirit agree is that the essential nature of a human is Love, Truth, and Goodness. The Hindus express this most succinctly: *Tat Tvam Asi*—Thou Art That (Prabhavananda, 1948, 1954). In the opening chapter of *The Perennial Philosophy*, Aldous Huxley (1945) quoted from over twenty different sources, East and West, to illustrate the breathtaking truth that our very nature is Love, is God.

The next consensual truth seems so simple and obvious. It is that each person must find God for themselves, through their own direct experience. Take a survey of spiritual teachers. Some speak of God, others of Mind. Some are silent while others speak and write voluminously. Krishnamurti professed disdain all spiritual teachers (Krishnamurti & Bohm, 1985), Sogyal Rinpoche claims that a spiritual teacher is indispensable (Sogyal, 1990). In our study, every mystic, saint, and spiritual explorer has expressed their awareness uniquely—even idiosyncratically.

Every spiritual tradition recognizes that we do not know the ultimate nature of a leaf or a pebble, let alone the nature of a human being or of Spirit. In science, quantum mechanics shows us that we can not define the ultimate nature of matter (Goswami, 1993). And consider the brilliant work of anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1979). In his book *Mind and Nature*, Bateson said that “the pattern which connects is a dance of interacting parts and only secondarily pegged down by various sorts of physical limits.” Thus, there are countless examples in the Perennial

Philosophy that remind us to stay open to Spirit and to avoid all definition. There is an unknowable mystery at the heart of life.

Psychologists share in the Perennial Philosophy. Ken Wilber (1977) talks of a *radical unknowing*. Roberto Assagioli (1965), one of the founding fathers of Transpersonal Psychology, tells us how it feels to actualize the Self and what various spiritual traditions have called it. He maintained that the Self can only be known through experience and then will manifest according to the unique proclivities of the experiencer. Nowhere, then, does anyone claim any final and irrevocable knowledge of matter, life, or God.

Add up the three factors—that our essence is Spirit, that no one can say what Spirit is, and that each person must find out for herself—and it becomes clear why we cannot define spirituality. First, to define spirituality would be to try to make a fact out of something that is irreducible. Second, a human has inherent knowledge of her- or himself as spiritual, so any external conceptualization will miss the mark. Third, we must experience Spirit for ourselves, as ourselves, so taught notions become impositions.

We do not, and cannot know who a human should be. And we do not, and can not know the ultimate nature of God. Nor can we define God, Truth, Love, Spirit, Tao, the Pattern-That-Connects or Holism.

We Know Spirit through the Organizing Principle toward Well-being

Since we cannot define Spirit, how can we know of it? Each and every human has innate capacities that show beyond any doubt that Spirit simply *is*, even though they cannot say exactly *what* it is. Everyone recognizes these capacities. In this essay we shall call the innate capacities the *organizing principle* toward well-being. Before we specify these organizing principles, it is helpful to frame them by describing what they hold in common.

Simply stated:

- All humans are born with the capacity for well-being.
- This natural capacity must be honored for the harmonious development of oneself and all life.

- Natural well-being cuts across gender, race, and culture.
- The natural organizing principle toward well-being informs all the talents and intelligences of each human.
- Honoring these natural capacities in each stage of life does not in any way bias the expression of diverse cultures in diverse ways.
- There is a natural and recognizable unfolding of the organizing principle toward well-being within the human psyche.
- The organizing principle both evaluates and explicates the human's best opportunity for well-being and wholeness.
- The organizing principle toward well-being is open-ended, blending seamlessly as the human's experience.
- When any human becomes conscious of his or her organizing principle then the full potential of well-being blooms.

Now we will specify one well-conceived formulation of organizing principle toward well-being. While any such specification is subject to modification, this will serve our discussion.

- *Rightful Place*—the capacity to know that you are a part of family, community, society, and life.
- *Boundaries/Strength*—the capacity to know limits and to act capably within them.
- *Trust*—the capacity to act with integrity and dignity towards oneself and toward others.
- *Reciprocal Cooperation*—the capacity to work with others and make relational decisions with those who are trustworthy. A sense of interconnection with all life.
- *Autonomy*—healthy self-governance which involves social-ability and skill in relationships. It is not about isolated individualism.
- *Identity Construction, Personal Power, and Freedom*—these powerful tools are in the service of the development of well-being and a healthy self. A *self* aware of individual responsibility, coupled with the capacity to individuate, and form a personal identity with personal power and freedom.
- *Interconnection*—the capacity to know yourself in relation to all and everything.
- *Humor*—the capacity to see the ironies, paradoxes and contradictions in life, and especially in oneself, with perspective and enjoyment.

- *Humility*—the capacity for a courteous yielding and consideration of the needs of others.
- *Incisiveness*—the capacity for sharp, clear appreciation of a situation.
- *Commitment*—the capacity to be in relationship for extended duration through time.
- *Systems Creator*—the capacity to synthesize data-including information from the past, potential possibilities for the future, and resident knowledge into a previously non-existent system.
- *Transcendence*—the capacity to experience reality beyond thought, concepts of self, or mental constructs.
- *Clarity*—the capacity to see things “as they are” without prejudice from memory carried forward from the past.
- *Devotion*—the capacity to feel awe, reverence, and freedom in open love.
- *Compassion*—the capacity to empathically feel in human suffering as a part of oneself. To walk alongside the suffering without becoming confused.

The organizing principle toward well-being carries the full authority of allowing each person to know of Spirit as him- or herself to the fullest most comprehensive meaning of the word. The organizing principle is a way to describe our inherent, natural, capacities and so, it is reasonable to say, they constitute the law of our existence. In other words, these are the rules, the conduct, and the procedures of our natural selves.

Murder

Murder is the unlawful killing of a being. It is certainly a human right to not be murdered. The destruction of any human capacity or well-being is murder. It leads the person to believe that he or she is separate—an isolated entity cut off from self, family, community, society, nature, and Spirit. In this perceived isolation abuse, violence, and aggression is justified as an act of justice. It is the vain attempt to reconcile the loss of wholeness, a wholeness that the organizing principle toward well-being made effortlessly self-evident (Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1983). C.G. Jung (1964), Ken Wilber (1995), Ramana Maharshi (Osborne, 1970), Alice Walker (1990; , 1992) and Chief Seattle (1992), (along with a host of others). The killing of any of these capacities for well-being is murder because it violates the natural law of human access to Spirit.

It is also important to note that all special interest groups, no matter how humane, are reactions to the murders. Indeed, the need for a council on Spirit and Human Rights could only be convened in the wake of a society torn by isolation and separation. As Meister Eckhart asserted, “we only need all these churches because we have lost our relationship to God” (Eckhart & Backhouse, 1993).

Let us not equivocate on the use of the term murder. When a human capacity for well-being is destroyed it is not as if a *part* of that person is gone. Perhaps this ancient teaching story says it best. . .

A sage came to a new land but noticed something was missing. After a while he realized there were no birds. When he asked why, he was told that they all had left. Everyone said this was sad, but no one knew why it had happened. Then the sage went to the edge of the town and saw the forest decimated through clear cutting.

“This is why the birds have left,” he announced to the villagers. “No way,” they cried. We had a special edict passed that no one could harm the birds. And not one person had to go to jail for harming a single bird.

Murder, Spirit and Human Rights

All that a declaration on Spirit and Human Rights needs to say is captured in the oldest human insight into the sacredness of Life, *Thou shall not murder*. All that really needs to be added is the Perennial Philosophy understanding that a human is a complex synergy of interweaving natural capacities for well-being, each of which is essential for knowledge of Spirit.

Therefore, those who commit to such a declaration would seriously undertake an understanding of each organizing principle toward well-being. That person would realize that every individual deserves to be understood for her expression of these capacities; and would never violate any of these capacities. For they see that to do so would mean that all the natural talents and intelligences of the individual would be lost. There would be no more birds. *Spirit*

and Human Rights are the natural human experience that is self-arising as long as there is not murder. This is human birthright of natural well-being.

Society

There is an obvious and instantaneous feedback loop between social/cultural expressions, right human relationships, and access to Spirit. Clearly, the end of murder would quickly yield healthy societal institutions. More to the immediate point, is it possible for any of our current cultural/social manifestations to begin the process of ending the murder?

Yes, emphatically yes. To do so, however, requires lucid analyses of the social expression and a profound understanding of the nature of the organizing principles toward well-being. The authors of this essay have begun such work on the institution of education. Though preliminary and overly simplified, the following table suggests an approach that would genuinely honor Spirit and Human Rights, as defined in this essay. The table contains but a few of the many examples that must be recognized to begin transformation. The intention is to offer a small taste of the direction that the transformation needs to go. You will notice that the process of bringing these transformations into the educational world is addressed in text after the table.

Some traditional educational approaches have a pervasive tenor of murder concerning the innate capacities of the child by failing to account for the whole child. In this sense, it is a microcosm of the world that fails to see the fundamental connection between Spirit and Human Rights. *Children have a right to guidance and support in all their developmental stages.*

School Action	Murdered Innate Wisdom	Transformation
Rewards and punishments	Rightful Place, Trust, Clarity, Autonomy, Cooperation, Incisiveness	Learning is to be seen for its intrinsic value.
Absence of interpersonal curriculum	Trust, Reciprocal Cooperation, Interconnection, Commitment	Human relations be given the central place it deserves
Teacher as authority	Humility, Interconnection, Boundaries, Commitment, Autonomy, Freedom	Cooperative learning with shared governance
Performance curriculum	Incisiveness, Clarity, Rightful Place, Freedom	Individualized curriculum, Individualized assessments
Absence of intrapersonal curriculum	Devotion, Transcendence, Clarity, Interconnectedness	<i>Know Thyself</i> must be taken seriously

We can bring these transformations about through diligent work on every front conceivable. As with any adaptation, it is through millions of trials throughout many members of a population that a transformation takes hold.

We can:

1. Take responsibility for the education of our children.
2. Create ongoing learning centers that honor Spirit and Human Rights.
3. Use the various media to publicize the information.
4. Take appropriate political action, especially in the neighborhood and community.
5. Constantly refine our understanding.
6. Bring our understanding to every child that we encounter.
7. Model our understanding.
8. Bring wholehearted commitment to the transformation.

Written by Ba Luvmour, MA and Josette Luvmour, PhD for the convention on Spirit and Human Rights by the Fetzer Foundation designed to incorporate a statement on spirituality in the United Nations Document on Human Rights.

The Luvmour's are co-founders of EnCompass Institute. EnCompass Institute provides students and their families with the resources, education, and community to achieve optimal well-being in self, family, and society. The vision is a community of families and professionals strengthened through sustainable family relationships and the experience of education providing the highest potential for self-actualization in all children.

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