A Secularist's Perspective on Spirituality

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I don't seem to believe in things that I can't see and touch. There is no God in my universe. Authors of the Torah, as well as Jesus, Buddha and Adi Shankara, are wise men to be respected for what they have much of great value to teach. However, they are not in any way of divine origins. I believe that spiritual texts and psychic readings are often interesting and filled with remarkable insights. But I don't buy into their purported source from some greater, nonhuman power.

Yet I attended Harvard Divinity School for two years and spent many an evening writing many complex theological essays. I had the pleasure and honor of witnessing Paul Tillich deliver one of his memorable Easter Sunday sermons at the Harvard Chapel (acknowledging his own impending death). I have consulted with many church-related colleges and attended many religious services—ranging from those held at a Reform Jewish Synagogue in Southern California to a Black American (Gullah) "Shout" in Red Top North Carolina.

When I have consulted in Taiwan, Europe and North America, I have asked to visit temples and cathedrals rather than corporations. One of my favorite teaching locations for students at my psychology graduate school has been a walk and reflection on the labyrinth located at the magnificent Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. This is the same cathedral where I went as an undergraduate student to see and hear the great theologian, Karl Barth offered great theological insights. I was particularly impressed that Karl Bart sprang from his seat to deliver his lecture even as a 70 something old scholar.

Yet, I remain a secularist. What is this all about?

The Nature of Spirituality

I wish to consider my secular status--yet strong interest in spirituality--from three perspectives and relate each perspective to the matter of spirituality and coaching.

Spirituality as a Once Born or Twice Born Experience

I begin by turning to the wisdom offered by William James. He was the reason I accepted a Rockefeller Fellowship to attend Harvard Divinity School. I wanted to go where William James (1982/1990) hung out and wrote *The Varieties of Religious Experience.* In this remarkable book, James differentiated between those people who are "once born" and those who are "twice born." The once born are people who seem, at least from my perspective, to be living on a single dimension. Their live tend to evolve in a straight (perhaps ascending) line. There are gradual evolutionary changes based on their personal life experiences as impacted by important external events surrounding their family, community, nation and world. I would consider myself to be one of those folks who are "once born."

By contrast, those who are twice born seem, from my perspective, to be living on two or more dimensions. James offers accounts of twice born people who are impacted by some intrusive external event that has a spiritual source. The conversion of Saul to Paul in the New Testament offers a prominent example of the twice born life course. Something happens and nothing is ever the same again. This is revolutionary change and is sparked more by something that is very personal in nature—rather than coming primarily from some external, "real" event (such as is the case with once born evolutionary change and development).

The second or third or fourth "birth" can occur early in life or much later. Young people find "God" or "Jesus" during their formative years—and are converted to a life of faithful devotion to a specific set of beliefs and values. On the other hand, one can be reborn later in life, after facing major challenges that lead to a new belief or shifting priorities. One of the students in the graduate school where I served as president, had spent time during World War II as a British bombardier. He dropped bombs on Dresden, Germany and witnessed the devastating impact of this bombing (which was even more destructive than the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki). This devastation haunted him for many years, leading this long-time member of the armed forces in both England and the United States, to shift his priorities. He decided to get a doctorate at my graduate school so that he could treat the psychological wounds of children. All of this was a "reborn" desire on his part to somehow make up for his role as someone who bombed Dresden.

I have never endured the kind of trauma that led this man (and many other victims of war-induced stress) to change their life priorities and work. I am not twice born. However, I am deeply appreciative of the life experiences of those who share narratives regarding profound transformations—and I feel honored to have presided over an educational institution that assisted those who have been traumatized. In some ways I wish I was twice born and many of my evangelical colleagues believe that I will eventually encounter a spiritual force that brings about a conversion in my own life. At another level, however, I am skeptical about conversations—or perhaps I am frightened about the prospect of some major change in my now old and comfortable lifestyle.

Spirituality as a Numinous Experience

Many years ago, the noted religious scholar, Arthur Darby Nock (1933) observed that members of most societies over history either find spirituality all around them in nature or are born into a spiritual tradition. "There is no religious frontier to cross, no difficult decision to make . . ." (Nock, 1933, p. 5) These folks are inherently "first born" and find little reason or occasion to doubt their spiritual perspective. However, on occasion, there is the matter of confronting "the unseen and unknowable." (Nock, 1933, p. 269). This can lead to James' "twice-born" experience and to a conversion from one belief system and way of being in the world to another system and behavior pattern. I would suggest that the unseen and unknowable is often conveyed through a profound spiritual experience that Rudolph Otto and (a little later) Carl Jung, called the *Numinous*.

When he first introduced the idea of numinous, Otto was focusing on profound religious experiences. Jung, however, described the numinous in much broader terms. In what some scholars identify as the first "psychological" analysis of religious experiences, Rudolph Otto identified something that he called

the “numinous” experience. In his now-classic book, *The Idea of the Holy,* Otto (1923) creates this new word, “numinous” from the Latin word “numen” (a divine presence) and the word “omen” (paralleling the derivation of “ominous”). Otto (1923, p. 11) writes about a powerful, enthralling experience that is “felt as objective and outside the self.” Otto’s numinous experience is simultaneously awe-some and awe-full. We are enthralled and repelled. We feel powerless in the presence of the numinous—yet seem to gain power (“inspiration”) from participation in its wonderment.

Using more contemporary psychological terms, the boundaries between internal and external locus of control seem to be shattered when one is enmeshed in a numinous experience. The outside enters the inside and the inside is drawn to the outside. We are transported to another domain of experience when listening to a Bach mass or an opera by Mozart or Puccini. It all depends on our “taste,” i.e. amenability to certain numinous-inducing experiences, when identifying either the Mozart or Puccini work as numinostic.

The horrible and dreadful images and pictures of gods in primitive cultures continue to enthrall us—leading us to feelings of profound admiration or profound disgust. We view a miracle, in the form of a newborn child or the recovery of a loved one from a life-threatening disease. This leads us to a sense of the numinous. Somehow, a power from outside time or space seems to intervene and lead us to an experience that penetrates and changes (though we don’t know how) our unconscious life.

Carl Jung built on and extended Otto’s portrayal of the “numinous.” He (Jung ,1938, p. 4) describes a numinous experience as one that “seizes and controls the human subject . . . an involuntary condition . . . due to a cause external to the individual. The numinosum is either a quality of a visible object or the influence of an invisible presence causing a peculiar alteration of consciousness.” Chapman (1988, p. 89) has more recently noted that Jung’s notion of numinous is:

> . . . rooted in experience and not just in ideation. The numinous is an experience which the individual undergoes and not simply the non-rational quality of dream-thoughts and mythologems. The numen or object present in or to the numinous state of mind is experienced as a powerful and meaning-filled other. It transcends conscious intention and control.

I would suggest that Jung’s numinous involves a process that I will later in this essay describe as peremptory ideation. In our unconscious mind, cognitive content of a spiritual nature is assembled and then races along picking up the emotional content, accumulating additional thoughts and feelings. In many ways, this expanding dynamic is similar to that which occurs when an avalanche recruits nearby snow, trees, and rocks while roaring down a mountainside. Complexity and chaos theorists speak of these dynamic processes as strange attractors. The volume of a snowpack at the bottom of the mountain is much larger than the snowpack that started to fall as an avalanche at the top of the mountain. Similarly, the numinous is much larger when it comes to prominence than it was when first precipitated by some profound external or internal experience.

The numinous experience for Jung can be evoked by an exceptionally beautiful sunset or by the overwhelming prospect of a loved one’s impending death. It can be evoked by a particularly powerful interpersonal relationship—one filled with lust, love, compassion or hatred. More generally, Jung seems

to be speaking to the gradual evolution of human consciousness when writing about the numinous experience. As one of his protégés, Erich Neumann (1954), has noted, human consciousness (replicating the evolution of organic life) begins in an undifferentiated state (which Neumann calls the "uroboros"). This state is represented in many symbolic forms, ranging from the many images of chaos (floods, wind, or ocean) to the more stylized image of the snake that is circling around to begin devouring its own tail. Jungians suggest that the experience of the numinous is composed of both the primitive, undifferentiated elements (the "uroboros") and the much more complex forms of high-art. As in the avalanche, the high-art is recruited by the dynamic and compelling low-art of primitive consciousness.

Jung suggests that the numinous experience is quite frightening and often not welcomed. He proposes that we build societal norms and institutional structures to protect us from the numinous. In a noted lecture series, Carl Jung nominates the Catholic Church as an institution that has provided protection from the numinous, though its rituals and priestly roles. Jung (1938, pp. 22-23) suggests in *Psychology and Religion* that the Protestant revolution shattered this protection and left those who adhere to a Protestant faith fully exposed to the powerful presence of the numinous.

Having pulled down many a wall which had been carefully erected by the [Catholic] church, the Protestant church began immediately to experience the disintegrating and schismatic effect of individual revelation. As soon as the dogmatic fence was broken down and as soon as the ritual had lost the authority of its efficiency, man was confronted with an inner experience, without the protection and the guidance of a dogma and a ritual which are the unparalleled quintessence of Christian as well as of pagan religious experience. Protestantism has, in the main, lost all the finer shades of the dogma: the mass, the confession, the greater part of the liturgy and the sacrificial importance of priesthood.

Without this religious institutional protection, Protestants have looked elsewhere for a barrier that can be erected between self and numinous. In *Psychology and Religion* (based on the pre-World War II 1937 Terry Lectures), Jung suggests that the Nazi regime in Germany may powerfully and horribly exemplify the substitution of a secular institution for a religious institution in blocking the emergence of numinous experiences. Whether or not Jung is correct in linking the Third Reich and ultimately the Holocaust to the threat of numinous experiences, we certainly can acknowledge and respect the power of these experiences.

To what extent is the numinous flooding our brains (and ourselves) with rich multi-sensory experiences? Are we multi-tasking in the sense of taking in and seeking to organize content from many sources? Are the trains of thought and ideations converging to create a catharsis of thoughts and feelings? Are a mixture of powerful at-the-moment sensations provoking memories of the past (both positive and negative) which interweave with hopes and fears about the future? I believe that all of this produces a tapestry of great (awe-full) affective beauty and power.

I find that cathedrals and temples are great dwellings for the numinous not just because they are sacred (though this helps), but also because they are filled with many strong sensory experiences: sound, sight, smell, touch and human interaction (often nonverbal). For me, the numinous is found in the Cathedral at Salisbury (near Stonehenge) in England, Notre Dame in Paris, a crumbling temple in Southern Taiwan—and the Jackson Square cathedral in New Orleans. It is actually not so much what happens inside the

Jackson Square Cathedral. It's what happens outside before I enter the cathedral: street musicians, painters, hucksters, tourists, smell of coffee (from Café du Monde and other nearby cafes) and Magnolia blossoms.

My wife, Kathleen, prepared several sketches of the Cathedral towers while sitting on a bench in Jackson Square on a warm day in Spring many years ago—some of the only art she has produced during the past busy decades of her life. Kathleen was multi-tasking in that she was taking in the warmth, sounds, smells and sights of the Square while sketching the Cathedral towers. These other "tasks" inspired her to sketch and influenced what she was representing on paper. As I mentioned above, the experience of the numinous is about the breaking of boundaries between the internal and external. Jackson Square and the Cathedral encourage one to "lose control." They allow internal and external experiences to intermingle, provoking new ideations that link with old memories and emotions as well as new hopes and aspirations. They encourage a spiritual "assemblage."

Spirituality as an "Assemblage" of Special Moments

I hold another perspective on spirituality that comes from my colleague, Matt Friedman, who is a reformed Jewish Rabbi. Matt and I happened to be meeting together at the time of the 9/11 collapse of buildings in New York City. I was originally scheduled to take a flight to Los Angeles (from Sacramento) but quickly left the plane when it was reported that the second airplane had crashed into one of the twin towers. I headed off to my graduate school and found Matt Friedman lingering in the school's lobby—not quite sure what to do given the events of 9/11. My other staff members at the school all went home, leaving Matt and me to watch what was unfolding on a T.V. monitor at the school.

Matt and I shared our own thought about the catastrophe and evil forces manifest in New York City. It was a "blessing" for me to share my thoughts and feelings with someone who had spiritual training. One of the things Matt told me concerned his work with fellow Jews who considered themselves to be "secular" (as I did). Matt indicated that he would ask these "non-believers" to reflect on experiences in their own lives that had been particularly important, disturbing, inspiring or at least intriguing.

Matt would then begin to "assemble" these experiences into something that Matt would call a spiritual or religious foundation. He would help his non-believer identify the values, aspirations – and fears—associated with this assemblage. This was not a matter of somehow "converting" this person and making them believe Judaic dogma or observe Jewish dictates and commandments. Rather, it was a matter of assisting someone make better sense of their life and attending beliefs. I could buy into what Matt was saying and found that 9/11 was an appropriate (though awful) setting for reflecting on and assembling by own belief system.

I would also note soon after that 9/11 was an appropriate occasion for my reflection because this event was fully aligned with Otto's and Jung's numinous experience. As they suggested, all numinous experiences are compelling—whether positive or negative in nature. We are drawn to both new life and sudden death when they appear before us. Many years ago, James Redfield (1993) wrote a best-welling book called *The Celestine Prophecy* in which he describes experiences that grab our attention. They are scintillation and suggest another dimension of reality. Perhaps this is the type of experience that Matt

Friedman assembles to suggest that a spiritual life does exist in the heart and soul of even a secularist like me. For a moment I will put on my psychologist hat and offer a somewhat different explanation for what Redfield (and perhaps Rudolph Otto and Carl Jung) have described.

I turn to the description of a dynamic process—the forementioned *Peremptory Ideation.* This unconscious process was proposed by George Klein—a researcher and theorists who brought together psychoanalytic theory and cognitive psychology (producing an integrative perspective known as "ego psychology"). Many years ago, Klein (1967) proposed that in our internal world (psyche) we create a specific idea or image that begins to "travel" around our psyche (head and heart) picking up fragments of unconsciously held material (memories, feelings, thoughts). The train of ideation becomes increasingly rich and emotionally powerful. It picks up intrapsychic debris (images, thoughts, memories) as it moves through our unconscious mind.

At some point, this ideation begins to pull in material from outside the psyche. External events suddenly take on greater saliency (more emotional power and vividness)—and it is because they are now connected to the internal ideation. Klein suggested that this ideation now takes priority with regard to what is valued, attended to and remembered in the external world. It assumes a commanding ("peremptory") presence. A positive (reinforcing) loop is created, with the external material now joining the interior material—all clustered around the original (often primitive) ideation.

While Klein focused on the internal dynamics of the peremptory ideation, I propose that this internal ideation might find alignment with a similar external ideation that is coming from the witnessing of a powerful event such as 9/11 or the birth of a baby. We can envision the internal ideation "hooking on" to the ideological "train" that is passing by outside ourselves. Particularly irrational and anxiety-saturated external ideation can be particularly attractive, given that the internal ideation is likely to be quite primitive. The internal ideation is often swirling with ghosts and goblins from our own childhood and the collective (unconscious) heritage of our ancestors and culture. With this powerful alignment of internal and external, we become victims of collective peremptory ideation. Attention is demanded by this new coalition: we are obsessed, closed-minded, passionate and driven to action. This might account for at least some of Matt Friedman's assemblage.

The State of Spirituality

I have gained a third perspective on spirituality from Suzan Guest. She is a dear colleague (now deceased)--who served at one point as provost of my graduate school. Suzanne was an extraordinary psychologist who had also trained as a psychic at a training institute in her hometown of Vancouver British Columbia. An interesting requirement was embedded in the admissions policies of this ethical training institute. Graduates were not allowed to charge money for the psychic services they provide.

I asked Suzan to do a reading for me one day when I was in Vancouver. I didn't "believe" in her readings but found the insights she offered other people for whom she did readings to be remarkably insightful. If nothing else, Suzan Guest was a genius in her use of metaphor. I found many insights in the reading she did for me – more insights than I have gained over the years from psychotherapy, self-help books or my teaching of graduate-level courses in the field of psychology.

Spirituality as a Frozen or Active State

One segment of the reading concerned my chakras. Coming out of the Sanskrit tradition, chakras represent energy systems in my body. Each chakra is also associated with a specific color. While observing my chakras, Suzanne reported being shocked by my seventh ("Crown") chakra which was a vivid purple. Suzanne reported that this chakra (which concerns spiritual energy) was not moving. It was frozen in place—suggesting that I am deeply spiritual but am doing nothing with nor am animated by this spiritual energy. Perhaps this is why I keep being attracted to spiritual events and locations—but am not moved to acknowledge or do anything with this spirituality.

This reflection regarding my own frozen chakra has led me to wonder if there is a spiritual life that might exist in a blocked or frozen state, while there might also be a spirituality that is active and energized by our beliefs and values. Perhaps the frozen state is somehow aligned with James' "once born" status, whereas an energized and active spirituality is somehow aligned with James' "twice born" status. Xxxxx

Hard and Soft Spiritual Commitment

For many people, spirituality (or at least "being religious") means attending church service on Sundays or even attending church only on holidays. It might also mean saying prayers at the start of dinner or with children at bedtime. Perhaps an occasional reviewing of biblical passages or saying a prayer in hopes of resolving some ongoing problem. While these actions primarily describe what occurs for those holding a Christian belief, the same applies to many people aligned with other religious faiths. These "believers" are making what might be described as a *Soft Commitment* to their religion.

What about those who are making a more active commitment to their faith? Those who make sacrifices on behalf of their beliefs. Those who act on behalf of the values and purposes embedded in their religion. These are people who make a *Hard Commitment*. I am reminded of one of the students enrolled in my graduate school. She is an orthodox Jew who can't drive a car on the Sabbath (Saturdays. As leaders of a graduate school that is designed for working adults, we scheduled many classes on Saturday and Sunday. This hard commitment student would walk three miles to attend class each Saturday. This student literally exemplifies "walking the talk"—one version of Hard Commitment.

Another of our students attended and provided leadership in a church that owned a coffee shop. All members of the church volunteered to work in the coffee shop for no payment. All of the profit from this coffee shop were directed toward funding of programs to counter sex trafficking in America. These two students exemplify religion in action. I call it "rolling-up-our-sleaves" religion—a second version of Hard Commitment.

The Active Life: Unfrozen with Hard Commitment

Parker Palmer frames this matter of Hard Spiritual Commitment as a matter of engaging in an "Active Life." He contrasts this frame with that of a contemplative notion of spirituality (Palmer, 1990, p. 2):

> In the spiritual literature of our time, it is not difficult to find the world of action portrayed as an arena of ego and power, while the world of contemplation is pictured as a realm of light and grace. I have often read, for example, that the treasure of "true self" can be found as we draw

> back from active life and enter into contemplative prayer. Less often have I read that this treasure can be found in our struggles to work, create, and care in the world of action. Contemporary images of what it means to be spiritual tend to value the inward search over the outward act, silence over sound, solitude over interaction, centeredness and quietude and balance over engagement and animation and struggle. If one is called to monastic life, those images can be empowering. But if one is called to the world of action, the same images can disenfranchise the soul, for they tend to devalue the energies of active life rather than encourage us to move with those energies toward wholeness.

It is a personal matter for Palmer. He writers (Palmer, 1990, p. 4) about those moments "when I feel most alive and most able to share life with others." Palmer goes on to say:

> I thrive on the vitality and variety of the world of action. I value spontaneity more than predictability, exuberance more than order, inner freedom more than the authority of tradition, the challenge of dialogue more than the guidance of a rule, eccentricity more than staying on dead center.

While Palmer would certainly recognize that a monastic life is clearly evidence of Hard Commitment, he suggests that an active life oriented toward the promotion of specific values is just as "spiritual" as a life of contemplation. Furthermore, it is in the act of seeking to change something that we find significant illumination (perhaps as much as that found in several hours of mindfulness):

> There is an intimate link between risk=taking and our commitment to learning and growing. A risk is an effort that may not succeed, and the bigger the risk, the less the chance of success. So why would anyone take such risks? There are many reasons, but one of the most creative is that by risking we may learn more about ourselves and our world, and the bigger the risk, the greater the learning. If we do not value learning, we will not risk, and our actions will be limited to small and predictable arenas in which we know we can succeed. (Palmer, 1990, p. 23)

Palmer (1990, p. 23) extends this analysis by offering an important distinction:

> Our capacity to take risks and learn from them depends heavily on whether we understand action as *instrumental* or *expressive*. The instrumental image, which dominates Western culture, portrays action as a means to predetermined ends, as an instrument or tool of our intentions. The only possible measure of such action is whether it achieves the ends at which it is aimed. Instrumental action is governed by the logic of success and failure; it discourages us from risk-taking because it values success over learning, and it abhors failure whether we learn from it or not.
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> Instrumental action always wants to win, but win or lose, it inhibits our learning. If we win we think we know it all and have nothing more to learn. If we lose we feel so defeated that learning is a hollow consolation. Instrumental action trans us in a system of raise or blame, credit or shame a system that gives primacy to goals and external evaluation, devalues the gift of self-knowledge, and diminishes our capacity to take the risk that may yield growth.

Should Palmer's distinction lead us to dismiss the action of my graduate student who worked "instrumentally" in his coffee shop? I would suggest that it doesn't, for my student and others in his church learned not only about service-to-others (via their work in the coffee shop and on behalf of the welfare of those enslaved) but also specifically about sex trafficking and the best leverage points for confronting this practice. In fact, my student devoted his dissertation to these practices and ways in which to not only block these illegal acts but also understand and treat the victims.

As John Dewey (1997/1938) noted many years ago, we learn by doing. Furthermore, as Palmer (1990, p. 119) noted, an active life produces growth in our "knowledge" of not only the external world, but also our internal, spiritual world: "right action demands that we find a deeper and truer source of energy and guidance than relevance, power and spectacle can provide." Perhaps, this source of energy and guidance helped my other student find her way to school every Saturday. She might have learned more during her 3 mile walk than in our classroom—at least with regard to her own deep spiritual commitment.

The Ultimate Concern

Does all of this somehow come together for me as I seek out my own spiritual foundation? Can I somehow "unfreeze" my vivid purple chakra and find some spiritual guidance and direction in my life? Perhaps my own "active" life as an educator, author, consultant and coach constitutes something of what Parker Palmer is referencing. My active life has certainly provided me with many rich opportunities for new learning—but has this learning translated into greater understanding of my own internal spiritual world? As someone who is "once born," will I ever have a belief and behavior changing encounter with a numinous experience (other than the collective numinous associated with 9/ll)?

The Courage to Be

I find at least a partial answer to these questions in the words offered by Paul Tillich (1952) in *The Courage to Be*. Tillich writes about *Ultimate Concern* and relates this orienting concern to the fundamental vitality to be found in one's life (Tillich, 1952, p. 81):

> Vitality, power of life, is correlated to the kind of life to which it gives power. The power of man's life cannot, be seen separately from what the medieval philosophers called "intentionality," the relation to meanings. Man's vitality is as great as his intentionality; they are interdependent. This makes man the most vital of all beings. He can transcend any given situation in any direction and this possibility drives him to create beyond himself. Vitality is the power of creating beyond oneself without losing oneself. The more power of creating beyond itself a being has the more vitality it has. The world of technical creations is the most conspicuous expression of man's vitality and its infinite superiority over animal vitality. Only man has complete vitality because he alone has complete intentionality.-

While I had some trouble understanding what Tillich meant regarding vitality and intentionality when I first read this book many years ago, my appreciation for and at least partial understanding of this remarkable passage has increased over time. I find that I am energized and excited about working with colleagues on a new project or book; my time tending to my mother during the final years of her life

brought me great joy and contentment; time now being spent with my wife, children and grandchildren here in Maine (where we all live) is truly a “blessing” for me. I am finding my priorities (intentionality) during these last decades of my life and am living an active life (vitality) that is directed toward these priorities. My ultimate concerns are manifest in what I do and not just in what I think. Perhaps, this is the kind of spirituality that has been promoted by Parker Palmer when reflecting on his own life.

Breaking the Barrier

At another point in *The Courage to Be,* Tillich (1952, p. 82) proposes that: “in every encounter with reality the structures of self and world are interdependently present.” He seems to be aligning with the notion of spirituality as requiring a breaking of the barrier between our internal and external life. For Tillich, this capacity to break the barrier is central to the human capacity for transcendence—and it is in this transcendence that we find our freedom and our vitality. For me, this means that I have been free to make choices regarding priorities in my life. I have been free to teach, write, tend to those about whom I care, and spend quality time with members of my family. Most people in the world are not privileged with this opportunity to make choices. Perhaps my vivid purple chakra portrays something about my being “blessed” with choice and freedom. This might be an element of my actual spiritual life.

Tillich (1952, p. 82) goes on to relate vitality and freedom to courage (the primary focus of this book):

> Certainly courage is a function of vitality, but vitality is not something which can be separated from the totality of man's being, his language, his creativity, his spiritual life, his ultimate concern. One of the unfortunate consequences of the intellectualization of man's spiritual life was that the word "spirit'' was lost and replaced by mind or intellect, and that the element of vitality which is present in "spirit" was separated and interpreted as an independent biological force. Man was divided into a bloodless intellect and a meaningless vitality. The middle ground between them, the spiritual soul in which vitality and intentionality are united, was dropped.

I wonder if I (like many “secularists”) have been a casualty of this loss of spirit. Even during my years attending Divinity School, I was writing about religion rather than engaging it in any meaningful manner. It is in the active life I have led since leaving Harvard that the “spirit” might have become manifest. Tillich (1952, p.46) might have been telling me something about the vital life I have been blessed to lead since Harvard:

> Everyone who lives creatively in meanings affirms himself as a participant in these meanings. He affirms himself as receiving and transforming reality creatively. He loves himself as participating in the spiritual life and as loving its contents. He loves them because they are his own fulfillment and because they are actualized through him. The scientist loves both the truth he discovers and himself insofar as he discovers it. He is held by the content of his discovery. This is what one can call "spiritual self-affirmation." And if he has not discovered but only participates in the discovery, it is equally spiritual self-affirmation.

Like the scientist, I might have been finding a spiritual self-affirmation in my own writing and the “truth” I have “discovered” (at last for myself) in collaboration with other people. I might have been creative in my caring for my mother, colleagues and family members – without being aware of this “creativity.”

It might be in the "spirited" way I have come to act on my ultimate concerns that my secular life has yielded meaning and purpose for me. Yet, I have not recognized this spirit—even as it displayed itself in my purple chakra! I wrote "HOW" when first reading this book, for I didn't know how to do much with the ethereal words that Paul Tillich wrote. I "liked" what he had to say and was moved by the speech he gave on Easter Sunday morning at the Harvard Chapel. Yet, I asked "HOW." I suspect that the answer to "HOW" came in the priorities I have established and actions I have taken since leaving Harvard.

Paul Tillich might also be supportive of my efforts to come to terms with my spirituality in this essay and during moments I have reflecting on and surfaced emotions related to the content of this essay. For Tillich (1952, p.47), concerns about spirituality are of greatest, ultimate importance—the failure to address these concerns leaves us in a very dark psychic space:

> The spiritual life [should be] taken seriously . . .it is a matter of ultimate concern. And this again presupposes that in it and through it ultimate reality becomes manifest. A spiritual life in which this is not experienced is threatened by nonbeing in the two forms in which it attacks spiritual self-affirmation: emptiness and meaninglessness.

Paul Tillich, William James, Carl Jung, George Klein, Parker Palmer and the other theological psychologists and philosophers I have cited are to be appreciated and thanked for their spiritual guidance. I am coming to a new appreciation of the gifts I have received and the opportunity I still have to lead an active "spirited" life that is filled with purpose and enacted in a world that is rich with meaning.

Spirituality and Coaching

I can address the matter of spirituality and coaching not only from my own experiences and the analyses I have just offered, but also from the perspective offered by my senior coaching colleagues who attended the New Executive Coaching Summit that our Library (LPC) sponsored in April of 2022. Held at a Bed and Breakfast Inn located on the edge of the sea in Harpswell Maine, this free-wheeling conference involved a set of conversations held over three days among 24 men and women who came with extensive and highly diverse experiences in the field of professional coaching.

Though spirituality was not originally on the conference agenda, the Open Space technology that we employed as facilitators of the conference enabled this theme to rapidly emerge as one of the key focal points. Two major issues were being addressed. First, is it appropriate to bring spirituality into a coaching session? If so, how is it best addressed? Second, what are the primary concerns embedded in any spiritual journey?

Appropriate?

The first question offers a major challenge for many professional coaches—for many people who have been involved in the provision of coaching for many years come out of a strong personal religious commitment. In many cases, they chose to become a professional coach precisely because they believe that certain fundamental values and deeply-felt concerns for the human condition are not being properly addressed in many of the human services that were prominent at the time (usually 1990s or

early 2000s) This did not mean, however, they wished to use coaching as a way to "proselytize" their own specific religious faith. They could do this overt "recruiting" through their church or some other explicitly religious forum. The challenge, therefore, was for these "early" coaches to be values-oriented and promoting of human welfare without "preaching."

The summit conversation often evolved around the way challenging questions regarding personal values and commitments can be framed. A commitment to helping their client find their own personal "quest" often was emphasized, as was the identification of moments in their client's life and work that conveyed some fundamental life purpose. In many ways, the suggestions being made were aligned with the "spiritual assemblage" process described by Matt Friedman, my rabbinical colleague.

In the workplace?

The second question was often addressed as the "soulful" engagement of leadership in the workplace. For a leader to be soulful, they must be deeply caring of not only the welfare of their organization but also the welfare of those employees with whom they work. "Soulfulness" was often aligned with an emphasis on coach-based leadership, as well as leadership being "appreciative" in nature. One of the summit participants stated that they look forward to working with and receiving support and feedback from a leader who is "helpful": "I prefer to hear it from someone who is here to H.E.L.P. They make an **H**onest **E**ffort as **L**oving **P**eople."

Other conversations regarding the nature of spiritual leadership focused on legacy—making a difference and leaving something behind. Should "legacy" be considered a spiritual term? The topic of late life leadership came up in conjunction with the matter of legacy. Is it particularly appropriate to bring up spiritual (or at least values-based) matters when we are coaching someone near the end of their career. When is it appropriate to ask: how would you like to be remembered? Should we invite our leader to reflect back on their early aspirations as a leader? What kind of a leader did you want to be? Were these aspirations fulfilled? Did they change over time?

Attention also turned to the matter of spirituality when working with newly minted leaders. When is it appropriate to ask: What kind of leader do you wish to be? How does the answer to this question get linked to the "actual" behavior engaged by this leader as they take on this role. Is exploration of the gap between aspiration and reality related to the fundamental journey toward some spiritual truth and integrity—and perhaps some "forgiveness" of oneself for not always being what we would aspire to be as a leader.

Conclusions

The fundamental conclusion to be reached at the summit regarding spirituality and coaching seems to relate to the matter of context. It is not so much a matter of bringing a "spiritual perspective" to one's coaching. It is more a matter of choosing specific topics and framing specific questions that invite exploration of issues related to "spirituality" – issues such as personal integrity, interpersonal caring, focusing on personal and organizational purpose. The coaching dialogue should lean into the future and promote "learning into the future".

I suspect that my own secular perspective on spirituality is similarly topic specific. As Matt Friedman would suggest, I am "spiritual" in my caring concern about the welfare of family members and friends. I assume a spiritual frame of reference when I think about my own legacy (as a 82 year old man) and as I consider the important ("bucket-list") things I have yet to accomplish in my life. I must sort out priorities and fully nurture the relationships that are truly important to me. As Erik Erikson would remind me, this is the time in my life to bring together all the disparate elements that are important (Friedman's spiritual assemblage) –and to care deeply about and take deep care of these elements.

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