

Chapter 2

Defining Spirituality

Topics in this Chapter:

- * Exploring the meaning of spirituality
- * Understanding how spirituality relates to religion
- * Contemplating that amazing, remarkable, wondrous God
- * Preparing yourself for the great benefits of spirituality

Spirituality goes deep into the heart of every matter and extends far beyond the physical world of matter. Spirituality connects you with a profoundly powerful and divine force that's present in this universe and in yourself. Whether you're looking for happiness, inner peace, or supreme enlightenment, spiritual knowledge can propel you to achieve your personal goals and provide an effective a plan for living.

- No financial or societal stature helps you find as much fulfillment in life as spiritual wisdom.
- No amount of outer effort bears as much fruit as understanding and flowing with the spiritual laws of this universe.
- None of the powerful people you know can “connect” you like the power of knowing your own self.
- No friend can love and guide you as much as that truly best friend who exists behind all friends, behind all enemies, and in your very own soul.

In this chapter, I provide background information about spirituality and introduce spiritual ideas and theories that have the potential to immediately begin transforming your life for the better.

Spirituality: The Basic Idea

Spirituality is the one accomplishment that blesses every aspect of your life and remains with you even after your time on earth is done.

Spirituality brings you in touch with the great eternal nature of life. It invigorates and inspires your soul to reach for the highest and to do what is right instead of what may be easy or comfortable. Spirituality is like a stream of wisdom that flows through your very own being and guides you on your path.

The lion cub who thought he was a goat

While walking through the forest one day, a young lion cub became separated from his mother. Lost and hungry, the cub came upon a family of goats who took him in and brought the lion cub up as one of their own. Within a few months, the little cub even began to bleat like the other goats, though he never did get it quite right.

One day, the goats were dining in a grassy field, when a lion happened by. All the young goats went to hide behind the trees, in case the lion was looking for lunchmeat. The big lion had already eaten his meal, but was surprised to see a young lion cub running off to hide with the goats. He went over to the cub and asked, "What are you doing here with these goats?"

The cub eyed the lion nervously and replied, "These are my goat brothers and sisters, sir, and I am also a goat."

The older lion realized there was a problem here. "What on earth makes you think you're a goat?"

This question confused the cub. Couldn't this lion see he was a goat? Nobody had ever questioned his goatness before. The cub became suspicious. Maybe this lion was planning to get him involved in some dubious scheme. "Please, just let us be," implored the cub. "Everything is just fine here with us goats."

However, the elder lion couldn't bear to let this poor cub live on in such delusion. After all, this cub was king of the forest, not a lowly goat. "Come with me," the lion said, leading the cub to a nearby stream. "Look into the waters and see your true nature."

The cub walked up to the water's edge. He had drunk from these waters many times, but had never paused to look at his reflection before breaking the water's surface. As he peered into the waters, the cub saw his own majestic face and began to roar with amazement and joy.

This analogy illustrates the predicament most people are in. Not realizing their true identity, many base their self-image on the opinions of others. In Parts II and III of this book, I show you powerful spiritual practices and principles that can help you still the waters of worldly life and see your own majestic face, perhaps for the first time.

Some ways spirituality can manifest include

- Being conscious of the subtle power of grace that pulsates behind the physical appearance of your life
- Experiencing a higher universal love and respect for all, instead of only feeling connected with certain people
- Remembering that there is infinitely more to you and everything else than can be known by your mind and senses

- Surfing the waves of life with a lighthearted view that nurtures a positive sense of humor
- Not wanting to spend too much time watching and listening to manipulated and commercial media blasts that bring stress and worries about things over which you have no control.
- Staying aware of the divine nature of life as you move through events and experiences with faith, optimism, and an unfettered heart.
- Coming into your true inheritance and divine birthright as a human being
- Developing a mature approach that allows you to appreciate simplicity and peacefulness
- Achieving an ability to see the spiritual even in the ordinary
- Making your relationship with the divine more important than your relationships with this world
- Coming into your true inheritance and divine birthright as a valuable human being

Spirituality is a unique topic to explore, because it reaches beyond the boundaries of the physical world. Due to its ineffable nature, the nature of spirituality can't be perfectly captured or described in ordinary, everyday terms.

Yet, because the spiritual essence already exists inside of you, hearing the right words can trigger your own awakening into a higher perception.

Spirituality in Action

Opening up to a spiritual view of life

One important spiritual practice is to contemplate the nature of this world, using philosophical questions to look more deeply into the events of life. Here are a few questions you can consider right now:

- What if this world is really a school for the soul, meant for learning and growth?
- What if the experiences most people label as "bad" end up being some of the most precious transformational tools you ever encounter?
- What if true wealth is measured very differently from how the Internal Revenue Service would have you believe?
- What if the most important action you can perform in life is to expand your mind into higher realms of awareness?

These kinds of spiritual contemplations can help uplift your inner and outer responses to the blessings and challenges in your life.

I start this exploration of spirituality by contrasting it with the more common materialistic approach to life.

- **The materialistic approach:** The materialistic approach relies primarily on the five senses — what can be seen, heard, tasted, touched, or smelled. Someone following a materialistic approach depends on outer appearances of things to determine what to think and feel about them, and seeks to fix whatever is wrong or out of place solely by moving things around and making outer changes.
- **The spiritual approach:** In contrast, the spiritual way is to see beyond outer appearances and the five senses into an intuitive perception of the deeper causes behind outer conditions. Someone following a spiritual approach:
 - Seeks to change and uplift the world by first transforming and improving his own vision
 - Relies on inner guidance to show the best way to move forward with her efforts.
 - Trusts, even while striving to solve a problem, that the problem is part of a good and kind universe that may be using this situation to teach ultimately beneficial lessons to everyone involved.
 - Understands that both the worldly and spiritual levels are occurring simultaneously in his life and seeks to find a balance between his outer actions and inner vision.
 - Appreciates that even the outer events in her life have their essence and source in the spiritual plane, with the effects of those seeds becoming visible as the outer events.

Consider

Including a spiritual approach benefits all your efforts because the spiritual laws of this universe connect your personal vision with the world around you in ways you may never have even imagined. (For more on this topic, see Chapter 15.)

Are you a beginner?

When it comes to spirituality, everyone is a beginner, and nobody is a beginner.

Whether you're a "young soul" or an "old soul," religious or atheist, good or bad, you're inherently spiritual just by being alive. Even thugs can become saints once they realize and remember their spiritual soul.

As with many other fields, the awakening to spirituality can sometimes be especially accessible to those with "beginner's mind" or "beginner's luck," although continual effort and practice will help keep your experience of spirituality strong and steady.

One of the great gifts of spirituality is to realign your sense of self with something you may not have ever imagined was within you. Spirituality says that even if you think you're limited and small, it simply isn't so. You're greater and more powerful than you have ever imagined. A great and divine light exists inside of you. This same light is also in everyone you know and in everyone you will ever know in the future. You may think that you're limited to just your physical body and state of affairs — including your gender, race, family, job, and status in life — but spirituality comes in and says, “There is more to you than all these qualities and labels.”

Notice that *spirit* sounds similar to words like *inspire* and *expire*. This similarity is appropriate because when you're filled with spiritual energy, you feel great inspiration, and when the spiritual life force leaves your body, your time on this earth expires. Remembrance of your inspiration and eventual expiration are two main themes of the spiritual journey:

- **Remembering to be filled with inspiration**, which also translates into experiencing and expressing love, joy, wisdom, peacefulness, and service
- **Remembering the inevitable expiration** that waits to take you away at any moment from the physical circumstances you may think are so important right now

Making a best guess

Okay, I'll admit right off the bat that no one really knows completely and accurately why we're here on earth or what this game of life is all about. The ultimate truth simply doesn't fit into neat packages; therefore, all anybody can do is to make a best guess.

Will you choose to spend all your time and energy on acquiring more money, power, beauty, love, admiration, success, a nice house, good family, and devoted friends? These ambitions are all fine, but I propose that adding spiritual efforts and goals to the mix is also an especially good guess.

Spirituality has an importance beyond all these worldly achievements. It reaches into the depths of creation, into a part of your soul that's much greater than just your body or temporary circumstances.

Don't Forget

One of the main teachings of spirituality is to look within and find what you seek within yourself. The external world is temporary and ever changing; your body will die one day, sweeping all your worldly possessions away like a mere pile of dust. Your inner Self, on the other hand, is timeless, eternal, and deeply profound.

Spirituality: The true wealth

People say that “Health is the greatest wealth,” or “A good mind is paramount,” or “Having loving relationships is what's really important.” One prayer from India entreats *Lakshmi*, the goddess of wealth, to shower blessings in the form of intelligence, enjoyments, success, worldly positions, prosperity — and most importantly according to this prayer, the wealth of becoming

free from ego, the limited self-identification that keeps us from remembering the true greatness that exists beyond all these external accoutrements. (See Chapter 3 for more about ego.)

Wealth and riches come in many forms; however, there is a prosperity that only a small percentage of people attain. This precious treasure is the experience of expanded consciousness, inner peace, and serenity that comes from the light of spiritual awareness.

Consider

Got a good family? Great. Lots of money? Fine. Exciting career? Fabulous. Spiritual awareness? Priceless!

Spiritual wisdom reveals the hand of grace that uplifts all the ever-changing circumstances of your life into the eternal light of divine spirit. With spiritual understanding, you may outwardly look nearly the same as you did before, but inside you'll have gained a great wealth of spiritual vision, peacefulness, faith, and love.

What does “spirituality” mean?

Although people sometimes confuse the word spirituality with a religious movement called *spiritualism*, the words *spirit*, *spiritual*, and *spirituality* originally referred to breath and wind and first appeared in the 13th, 14th, and 15th centuries, respectively. These terms weren't even around during the indeterminable antiquity when many world religions were formed, although other words have been available in world cultures and traditions throughout the ages to refer to aspects of what is now called spiritual energy. These words include Holy Ghost, Chi, Tao, Sefirah, Prana, Ki, Ruach, and for at least one bushman tribe in Africa, a clicking sound made with your tongue.

- Spirituality is a personal approach to connecting with the divine and experiencing the realms that exist beyond the sensory world.
- Spiritualism is a religious movement that was developed in the 18th and 19th centuries and focuses on communicating with the aspect of spirit that survives bodily death.

Spirituality is about following your heart

Spiritual Wisdom

Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart. Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens.

—Carl Jung

The spiritual journey can be summed up in two phrases:

- * Purify your heart.
- * Follow your heart.

Spiritual practices and exercises such as prayer, meditation, yoga, contemplation, scriptural study, and devotional rituals (covered in Part II of this book), as well as spiritual qualities such as compassion, honesty, steadiness, and unconditional love (covered in Part III) contribute to this process of purifying your heart and following the guidance of your pure heart.

With a purified heart, you're better able to hear, trust, and follow the still, small whisper of universal guidance that speaks softly in every moment if you have the ears to hear.

Be Careful

If you follow your heart before first purifying your heart, some of your inner promptings may in fact be regular old thoughts and desires disguised as inner inspirations and divine guidance!

Be sure your intentions are pure and not sullied by the muddy waters of greed, jealousy, anger, lust, and fear. Keeping your intentions pure will ensure that even if your inner guidance isn't always on target, you'll still be moving forward in a positive, spiritual way.

Discovering your smiling soul

When you shift into spiritual awareness, you may appear to be living the same life as before, with the same ambitions, joys, and sorrows as before. However, inside, you have a radiant smile that may or may not be visible to the world. Your spiritual soul smiles through the good times and the bad. In fact, as your smiling soul shines more and more into the world around you, the world also begins to reflect your smile back at you.

Do you ever find yourself smiling even when no one else is around? If not, try it! Smile to yourself. Smile at being alive. Smile to God, who is always present where you are — closer than your own breath.

Spirituality in Action

Experiencing self-awareness — right here and right now

One important element of spiritual growth is to become more self-aware. This is something you can practice anytime and anywhere. Try it now:

1. Observe yourself in this present moment.

How are you feeling? Are you taking nice, relaxed breaths? Is your posture gentle yet supportive of your body? Are you able to focus on the words you're reading, or is your mind flitting around to outer distractions, inner concerns, and random thoughts?

2. Look upon yourself with a kind and friendly eye.

If you aren't as peaceful or focused as you'd like to be, don't fret — because fretting definitely won't help you feel more harmonious and calm. Just be aware of your inner state without judging it as good or bad.

3. Gently align yourself, adjust your posture if necessary, and put a little more effort into focusing on the ideas you're reading.

Sometimes not-so-spiritual thoughts come up while you're contemplating spiritual teachings. If these unwelcome thoughts come up, your mind may just be doing a bit of housekeeping, such as sweeping up some old mental clutter that needs to be cleared. Be receptive to also receiving your own inner wisdom as it's churned up by all these spiritual words and contemplations.

4. Take a deep breath, allowing oxygen and energy to fill your entire body.

Breathing is how you live in continual union with the universe around you. The life force pours into your body, mind, and soul with each inhalation and then rides back out on the wave of exhalation, merging into the outer air. You may want to take a peaceful break right now by closing your eyes for a few moments and enjoying a few deep, slow breaths.

Getting to know your spiritual heart

Spirituality is a shift into the knowing of your heart — not your physical heart, but the inner, spiritual heart that represents all the ways of knowing that take place beyond the rational mind. The spiritual heart can transform this ordinary world into a heavenly realm.

Your spiritual heart is a nonphysical space of communion with spirit that is also your:

- **Seat of intuition:** This intuition comes from a deeper way of knowing than has been captured by scientists and psychologists. Through intuition, your spiritual heart guides you to move in harmony with the universe.

- **Realm of unconditional love:** To the spiritual heart, every person is a brother, sister, mother, and father. But unlike many worldly relationships, this flow of love can't be squashed even if someone acts against you. When you have true unconditional love, your vibration of love and the universal vibration of love become one — because universal love is inherently unconditional.
- **Abode of inner peace:** When peace begins to make its home in you, it is like a still lake after a thunderstorm — the air is gentle, yet vibrant and fresh. When you're in touch with your spiritual heart, even when you become frazzled from the storms and challenges of life, you can find your way back to the lake of your own inner peace. You can take a dip in the refreshing waters that flow within your spiritual heart.
- **Ocean of contentment:** The spiritual heart knows that true happiness doesn't come from outer objects, people, or events. Things and people can bring little blips of happy feelings, but the contentment of your spiritual heart is much better. Inner contentment may not always be as exciting or dramatic as having outer desires and passions fulfilled, but spiritual contentment becomes your soothing companion during easy times and hard times, and on both stormy and sunny days.

Oh, the contradictions!

There are two kinds of truth, small truth and great truth. You can recognize a small truth because its opposite is falsehood. The opposite of a great truth is another great truth.

—Niels Bohr

Spirituality encourages you to approach life with more responsibly and respect for the deeper meanings behind even the smallest details of life. At the same time, spirituality also gives you an awareness that everything is running quite well without your having to feel anxious or responsible for it all.

The spiritual journey is filled with these sorts of seemingly opposite viewpoints. Here are a few more:

- **Effort is of utmost importance, but you have to stop trying.** If you don't put effort into attaining the great benefits of spiritual life, these attainments will probably not fall right into your lap. However, there comes a time when your trying must lose its sense of effort, wanting, and striving for something that you don't have. You make the efforts, yet the attainments come as a gift, like when someone who has worked hard to become famous for years or decades is called an "overnight success."
- **You're a work in progress that's already done.** You may have a whole list of improvements you'd like to make in your self. Maybe you're unhappy with how you act at times, or with certain self-defeating habits or thought patterns you may have gathered along the way. In this way, you're still a work in progress, with great room

and potential for change, growth, and improvement. On the other hand — and this is a big spiritual hand I'm talking about — after you glimpse the amazing beauty and perfection of this eternal universe, you also recognize that your deepest spiritual essence is ultimately eternal and perfectly complete.

- **Love thy neighbor, but not too much!** A love for humanity is paramount for spiritual growth, but this love doesn't mean you have to spend a lot of time with all kinds of people all the time. The company you keep affects your thoughts and life in ways you may not even imagine (see Chapter 11). Some spiritual seekers find that a certain amount of solitude allows them to explore the inner realms and become clearer about what they really feel and believe. Even while opening your heart to fellow human beings, tap into the invaluable spiritual freedom and growth that comes when you don't feel obliged to fit your expanding beliefs into the concepts of too many other people's belief systems.
- **You have to take care of your body, even though you're not really the body.** You know how all these spiritual teachers say that you aren't really the body, you are pure spirit and all that? Still, you can bet that most of them eat when they're hungry and sleep when they're tired and probably moan and groan like everyone else when their own bodies go through a painful experience. This discrepancy doesn't mean they were lying about this "not the body, but pure spirit" thing. Rather, it's one more dichotomy on the spiritual path: You are in the body, but not of it.
- **You are supreme consciousness, but you still have to wash the dishes.** In the depths of spiritual practices such as meditation, you begin to experience greater realms of thought. You may feel completely free, expansive, and powerful — even one with the whole universe. Then, you come out of meditation, and that pile of bills is still sitting there waiting to be paid, the house needs cleaning, or the phone is ringing and your boss, a creditor, or a relative wants to have an aggressive chat with you. Where did all that freedom and expansion go?

The Difference between Spirituality and Religion

Although the words *religion* and *spirituality* are sometimes used interchangeably, they really indicate two different aspects of the human experience.

- *Spirituality* is the wellspring of divinity that pulsates, dances, and flows as the source and essence of every soul. Spirituality relates mainly to your personal search and connection with the divine, as you look beyond outer appearances to find deeper significance and meaning.
- *Religion* is most often used to describe an organized group or culture that has been sparked by the fire of a spiritual or divine soul. Religions often act with a mission and intention of presenting specific teachings and doctrines while nurturing and propagating a particular way of life.

There is only one religion, though there are a hundred versions of it.

—George Bernard Shaw

Different religions can look quite unlike one another. Some participants bow to colorful statues of deities, some listen to inspired sermons while dressed in their Sunday finery, and others set out their prayer rugs five times a day to bow their heads to the ground. Regardless of these different outer forms of worship, the kernel of religion is spirituality – the relationship between the individual soul and divine universal spirit.

Here are some more ways to distinguish spirituality from religion:

- Spirituality is the mystical face of religion.
- Spirituality is being guided from within, while religion is being guided outwardly.
- Spirituality is the pearl within the shell of religion.
- Spirituality is the banana, while religion is the banana skin. Respect the banana skin, but eat the banana!.

Don't Forget

Religion and spirituality can blend together beautifully.

Thou shalt nots

One way to describe the difference between religion and spirituality is to say that religion is about being outwardly guided, while spirituality is being inwardly guided. Here's a small sampling of the many prohibitions dictated by various religious traditions as part of their outer guidance:

- Thou shalt not kill any living thing (Buddhism)
- Thou shalt not eat pork (Judaism, Islam)
- Thou shalt not cut your hair (Sikhism)
- Thou shalt not disturb birds and other animals (Taoism)
- Thou shalt not commit adultery (Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and pretty much every religion)
- Thou shalt not wear head coverings in a house of worship if you are a male (Christianity)
- Thou shalt not go bareheaded into a house of worship if you are a male (Judaism, Sikhism)
- Thou shalt not point the bottoms of your feet toward an altar (Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, Sikhism)

Spirituality is:

- Beyond religion, yet contains all religions
- Beyond science, yet contains all science
- Beyond philosophy, yet contains all philosophy

GOD: Generous Omniscient Divinity

When you talk about spirituality, you have to also talk about God. Who is God? What is God? Is God?

These questions have been asked and answered in countless ways throughout human history. Some ancient ancestors sacrificed animals at the altars of stone representations of God, while others worshipped a multitude of colorful gods with strikingly human traits and desires. Some believe God is a conceptual repository for all the questions that have not yet received acceptable answers, while others speak to God as a child might address his or her mother or father.

What is God to you? Were you made in His image? Is God alive in your life? Did He die for your sins? Is She showering you with blessings or sending arrows into your heart? Is He keeping track of whether you've been bad or good (so, be good, for goodness sake!)?

In the beginning, there was nothing. God said, "Let there be light!" And there was light. There was still nothing, but you could see it a whole lot better.

—Ellen DeGeneres

Many people are fair weather friends with God. They ignore God when things are going well, and as soon as disaster hits, they'll be saying, "Um, God, remember me?"

Be Careful

Don't wait for a disaster to think of God or talk to God, or God may find that disaster is the best way to ring your phone!

In fact, you can make God an integral part of your daily life in a real way, where an open line of communication is gently present in even your smallest actions and thoughts.

Playing "My God is better than your God"

Spiritual Wisdom

It is more important to create a safer, kinder world than to recruit more people to the religion that happens to satisfy us.

—Dalai Lama

What wise ones say about God

"Looking for God is like seeking a path in a field of snow, if there is no path and you are looking for one, walk across it and there is your path."

—Thomas Merton

"Once you have seen the face of God, you see the same face on everyone you meet."

—Deng Ming-Da

"The eye with which I see God is the same eye by which God sees me."

—Meister Eckhart

"God is simple, everything else is complex."

—Paramahansa Yogananda

"God to me, it seems, is a verb and not a noun, proper or improper."

—Buckminster Fuller

"The simplest person who in his integrity worships God, becomes God."

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

"The mind that wishes to behold God must itself become God."

—Plotinus

"If God made us in His image, we have certainly returned the compliment."

—Voltaire

Many wars have been fought based on what amounts to fairly slight variations in religious theory and language. However, in the light of spirituality, no one needs to fight with anyone else over whose religion is better. No one needs to quarrel over every rule and detail of all the different doctrines. Rather, a spiritually aware person is open to learning and growing from everything in life. An ancient Indian scripture explains, "Truth is one, although sages call it differently." The Sufi poet Jelalud'Din Rumi expressed, "There are a hundred thousand ways to kneel and kiss the ground."

Your experience of God doesn't have to be the same as the experience of everybody or anybody else. One sign of spiritual awakening is an increased respect for all people, all religions, and all forms of God. This kinder, gentler approach replaces outdated tendencies toward intolerance and prejudice. As one becomes more spiritual, the animalistic aggressions of fighting and trying to control the beliefs of other people can be cast off like an old set of clothes that no longer fits.

In fact, many spiritual seekers begin to feel that every image of divinity, regardless of its religious context, is just one more face of the same, eternally present God.

Loving and respecting all religions and images of God doesn't mean that you have to agree with all their doctrines. In fact, you don't even have to believe and agree with every element and doctrine of your own religion! This suggestion goes for any teachings you may encounter along your path. For example, as you read this book, enjoy whatever words work for you and just skim over what doesn't. My goal is to share spiritual ideas that have been helpful on my journey, not to make you agree with them.

What Spirituality Can Do for You

Knowledge of your true spiritual nature can transform your entire world because the world you know is inherently limited by your ability to know it. The journey of spirituality gives you new eyes through which to see. My spiritual teacher used to call it "changing the prescription of your glasses." You still see the same world as before, but it is nothing like before:

- Within every joy and behind every sorrow, you begin to perceive the same underlying exhilaration of being alive.
- Your uncomfortable feeling of being separate from the world begins to dissolve into a subtle sense of oneness with all things.
- You take greater responsibility for the circumstances of your life as you realize that everything around you is a reflection of your inner being.
- Even when you're totally alone, you know that you're never really alone.
- When you're aggravated by an outer circumstance, you can sense that it is only a reflection of some deep lesson your soul is struggling to learn.
- As the ups and downs of life come like waves to your shore, you ride them with acceptance and detachment, knowing that your true home is in the ocean's great depths — in the peaceful calm beneath the ever-changing waves of worldly life.

You won't find this many benefits being promised on even the most enthusiastic infomercial for any product! With spiritual awareness, you'll have:

- A greater sense of power in co-creating your life with the universal Spirit
- An enhanced appreciation for every moment of life, whether pleasurable or challenging
- A steadiness that carries you into the precious confidence that everything is all right, all the time
- Faith in a living God or Divine Nature that is present in even the smallest detail of your life
- Days filled with joyful service and inspirational inner growth

- A natural state of peacefulness and contentment
- Honesty and self-acceptance, without needing to hide who you really are
- The transformation of your limited self-identification into a greatness and magnificence you may never have imagined exists in you, *as* you

Great things about being spiritual today

The quest for spiritual realization is as valid and important now as ever, and today's technologies and advances offer an abundance of benefits to bless your vibrant spiritual journey. Here are some of the great advantages for spiritual seekers today:

- Recent advances in science and technology mean that more information about this world and your mind and body is available to contemplate and consider.
- Relatively widespread freedoms of religion around the world allow you to craft your spiritual beliefs in a personal way.
- Today's longer life spans give you more time to learn and grow.
- Running hot water — because hot showers must automatically be included on all lists about what is good about today!
- Magnificent telescopic photos of the universe are available to remind you of how big it all is.
- Wisdom from cultures past and present is readily accessible in libraries, bookstores, and at the click of a mouse.
- More time is potentially available than when people had to carry water from a well, cook meals over open fires, and milk the cows before dawn.
- Convenient opportunities for transportation give seekers the ability to go on spiritual pilgrimages and experience other cultures.
- More movies, television programming, news stories, and documentaries can give opportunities to contemplate and grow from a massive array of life lessons without having to travel to each place or go through each experience and event yourself.

Not so great things about being spiritual today

Obviously, I want to convince you that today is a great time to be spiritual, and indeed, it is. However, it wouldn't be fair if I didn't also point out some of the unique challenges facing a spiritual seeker today:

- Ever-present media machines blasting negative, violent, and manipulative energies into today's society, exposing even young children to a lot of unspiritual images.
- A pervasion of toxins, pesticides, junk foods, pollutants, and invisible radio, television, and telephone signals that can compromise your physical health and clarity of thought.
- A more scattered society, with less sense of family, community, and commitment to one another. (On the other hand, this trend toward social separation can also give more opportunity to spend time with yourself, which can be *helpful* to spiritual growth.)
- Cement cities that take people away from the colors, shapes, textures, and smells of nature that are so essential for nurturing the soul.
- The infiltration of commercialism and corporate greed into every aspect of worldly life, with companies spending millions of dollars to convince you that you won't be happy unless you acquire their product.