



**CULTIVATING
SPIRITUALITY AND
COMPASSION WHEN
AND WHERE IT IS
NEEDED MOST:
CHILDREN,
PARENTS, HOMES,
AND FAMILIES**

A cura di:
**D. Paul
Schafer,**

*Founder and Director
World Culture Project.
Canada*

*We are not human beings having a spiritual
experience, we are spiritual beings having a
human experience.”*

(Teilhard de Chardin)

Abstract

There could be no better time to focus on cultivating spirituality and compassion where it counts the most, namely in the lives of children, parents, homes, and families. We can't expect to deal with the life-threatening problems in the world and create more peace, harmony, happiness, and sustainability without awarding a much higher priority to this area. Helping children to develop "strong roots" and "healthy wings" is the key to this. This should involve enhancing children's experiences in the arts, humanities, sciences, the natural environment, and heritage of history; learning systems created by Rudolph Steiner, Maria Montessori, and others; the lives of such extraordinary people as Albert Schweitzer, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Mother Teresa; and broadening and deepening children's expose to the holistic character of culture and the diverse cultures of the world through the rich array of technological, digital, visual, verbal,

and virtual devices. While spirituality requires going deep into "the self," its ideal travelling companion – compassion – requires making a strong commitment to "the other." Working in combination, these two powerful forces possess the potential to change the world and change it for the better for all people, countries, and the world as a whole.

Keywords

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Given all the life-threatening problems that exist in the world today, there couldn't be a better time to address one of the most essential requirements of humanity and the world of all. It is to cultivate spirituality and compassion in the lives of children, parents, homes, and families. How children are brought up and experience spirituality and compassion in their homes, families, and lives when they are young is bound to have a profound effect on the state of the world at present and prospects for the future.

We can't expect to have more peace, stability, sustainability, harmony, unity, and well-being in the world – and less hostility, anger, conflict, and war – without giving much more attention and awarding a far higher priority to how children are brought into the world, grow up, experience spirituality and compassion, and make their way in the world and in life.

While it is commonplace for many people to assume that children encounter spirituality long after they are born, actually most children experience it when they are still in the womb. This is when mothers provide loving experiences for their unborn babies by playing beautiful music for them, singing exquisite songs, reading fascinating stories, and whispering heartfelt messages when they are unborn.

Once they are born, babies and small children learn many things about their homes, parents, families, and family cultures during their first few years of life, due largely to their insatiable appetite for experiences, innate curiosity, ability to soak up information like sponges, and, most notably, pick things up at an astounding rate. By the time they are six or seven, most children have likely inherited, acquired, and cultivated many traits, customs, traditions, languages, values, rituals, and habits of their cultures from their parents, grandparents, other family members, relatives, friends, and others. This results from watching, listening, mimicking, and digesting everything they see, hear, and come into contact with, as well as acquiring specific ways of acting, behaving, and doing things.

This is also true for the likes, dislikes, and attitudes they have towards different people, groups, races, countries, and cultures. This should be constantly borne in mind by parents and other family members when they engage in discussions and conversations in the home because their feelings, emotions, attitudes, and comments on matters like this can be, and often are, picked up by their children at this formative stage in their lives. Like their positive experiences and likes, the negative ones are also part of children's heritages, as well as the "cultural

baggage" they carry with them for long periods of time and possibly even for the remainder of their lives, especially if this is not recognized and dealt with effectively. This makes children's upbringing and experiences in their homes and with their families and family members during the first few years of life exceedingly important in the overall scheme of things. We neglect this at our peril going forward into the future if we do not attend to matters like this at this critical period in children's lives.

As stated in UNESCO's Constitution, "since wars begin in the minds of men (people), it is in the minds of men (people) that the defenses of peace must be constructed. (Preamble, 1945).



Whenever I reflect on matters like this, which is often these days due to all the problems that exist in the world and the importance of raising children in homes, families, and family cultures, my thoughts are cast back to my own upbringing and experiences early in life. The bulk of these experiences were created by my parents and at home, as is the case for most children. As I look back on these experiences now, I realize how fortunate I was to have the parents I had and the many valuable experiences and opportunities they provided for me and my brother Murray when we were young.

Although my parents had very little money and no formal training in some of the most essential areas connected with cultivating spirituality such as the arts, humanities, and heritage of history, my mother taught herself to play the piano and violin when she was young and ended up playing the violin in a community orchestra and the piano at home and during Sunday school classes at the church we attended on a regular basis when I was very young. My father also taught himself to play the piano, as well as to paint pictures. He had a natural gift for the visual arts, and produced many beautiful watercolor and pastel paintings that hang in our home today. He also enjoyed listening to classical music a great deal, and would often play the music of Rachmaninoff, Chopin, Beethoven, Schumann, and many other composers on the record player in our living room, as well as listen to Marion Anderson sing “He’s got the whole world in his hands,” Kathleen Ferrier sing “What is life to me without thee,” and Jussi Björling and Robert Merrill singing the duet “Au fond du temple saint from Bizet’s opera *The Pearl Fishers*. While I didn’t realize it at the time, these were some of my earliest encounters with spirituality because they were filled with profound thoughts, feelings, and emotions that were very uplifting at that time and even more so today whenever I listen to them.

My parents were anxious to see to it that Murray and I had many experiences in the arts like this when we were young. I can still recall with great fondness my parents taking us to art galleries, museums, concerts, and theatrical productions. I also remember my mother reading bedtime stories to us from *Journeys in Bookland* that were part of a universal anthology created just for children with some of the finest literary masterpieces from many different parts of the world in them. While neither of my parents had first generation relatives in Toronto where we lived because they had grown up in western Canada and only moved to Toronto later in life, my mother made sure that Murray and I had some

exposure to our more distant relatives who lived in or near Toronto in order to provide us with a good sense of our ancestral heritage on her side of the family.

When I was older, my parents provided art classes for Murray and myself at the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario), weekly piano lessons paid for in monthly installments, and enrolled us in a choir at Grace Church-on-the-Hill. This turned out to be one of the most important – if not the most important experiences – in our lives. This is confirmed by the fact that Murray became a well-known composer, music educator, and founder of the soundscape concept and the discipline of acoustic ecology later in life, and I have spent the bulk of my life working in the arts and cultural field, making the case that the arts and culture should play a central rather than marginal role in the world and people’s lives, and creating the World Culture Project in 1988 that I still direct today (Schafer, 1988).

The experiences I had in the choir exposed me to many memorable oratorios and anthems by composers such as Mozart, Haydn, Handel, and others, as well as inspirational hymns like *Abide with Me*, *He Who Would Valiant Be*, *Unto the Hills*, *Around Do I Lift Up My Longing Eyes*, *Jerusalem*, *Now Thank We All Our God* with Hearts and Hands and Voices, and countless others. I also sang in Handel’s *Messiah* at Massey Hall in downtown Toronto every Christmas when I was young. Many of these experiences filled me with a deep sense of awe, wonder, ecstasy, reverence, and humility. They lifted me to great heights and produced feelings in me that were sublime and on certain occasions divine, especially when this was enhanced by singing these pieces and many others like them in sacred surroundings with vaulted architectural features and heavenly characteristics. While most of these musical experiences were intimately connected to religion and religious beliefs and were intended to convey and confirm this, I learned very quickly that many of them also had a great deal to do with developing our personalities and characters as well as living responsibly, respectfully, and spiritually.

These experiences were amplified by many other experiences I had when I was young, such as playing in a beautiful ravine near our home that was filled with exquisite trees, flowering shrubs,

and babbling brooks. This was also true for a performance we went to one night that was performed on a lake lit with huge lights and candles and presented by an Indigenous group near Brantford, Ontario. Experiences like these had a spiritual effect on me similar to the ones I had in the choir. I will simply never forget them, and can recall them in my mind and memory today like it was yesterday.

Combined with these experiences was exposure to a number of cultures and countries that were different from ours. This was because many of the families that lived in our neighbourhood in the central part of Toronto came from countries and cultures from other parts of the world. This was especially true for European cultures and countries such as Ukraine, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Italy, and France, and occasionally from other cultures in places like Japan, China, and the Middle East. This was because families from these parts of the world came to Canada to escape the horrors of the Second World War and commence their new lives in Canada in general and Toronto in particular. This made it possible for me to play with children who had different cultural origins and backgrounds than I did, hang around with them at school, and especially spend time in their homes with their families. As a result, I learned a great deal about cultures that had different traditions, beliefs, values, customs, religions, and ways of life than mine. This proved helpful in understanding cultural differences like this at a very early age and counteracting any negative thoughts I had in my mind about matters like this or picked up from others.

There is something else I learned that I didn’t realize at the time that has affected my entire life and is connected to spirituality in numerous ways. It is the “holistic character of culture and cultures” as complex wholes and total ways of life that Mary E. Clark wrote about in her book *Ariadne’s Thread: The Search for New Modes of Thinking*. Here is what she said about this, **“Culture is learned as a child, and as children we each learned from those around us a particular set of rules, beliefs, priorities,**

and expectations that molded our world into a meaningful whole. That is our Culture.” (Mary E. Clark, 1989)

By the time I was nine or ten, I realized it is possible to have spiritual experiences in many areas of life such as the arts, humanities, and culture and not only in religion, despite the fact that there is a strong connection between these two specific areas of life. I also learned that having spiritual experiences and cultivating spirituality is not limited to adults and people in their twilight years but can be experienced and cultivated at any age in life and often in profound, powerful, and transcendental ways. Thanks largely to my parents, the doors to spirituality were thrust open for me at a very early age and proved that they can and often do have deep effects on our lives and not just specific parts of it. As I look back on these experiences now, I can see that this made it possible for me to have deep spiritual experiences over the course of my life that have occurred in natural, conscious, and spontaneous ways and enabled me to have “peak experiences” and “spiritual highs” without having to resort to drugs or other dangerous substances.

As I reflect back on all these experiences now and give a great deal of thought to them, I realize what my friend George Simons – a well-known cultural scholar and cultural diversity expert – meant when he said to me several decades ago that, “parents, homes, and families, like cultures, should provide their children with two basic things in life: one is “strong roots,” and the other is “healthy wings.”

The strong roots are required to make it possible for children and young people to deal with all the practical necessities, basic requirements, and concrete realities they encounter in life, as well as to come to grips with the many complex problems and difficult challenges they will be confronted with over the course of their lives. The healthy wings are required to enable children to soar to great heights, help them realize their full potential, and experience a great deal of happiness, fulfillment, and contentment in

life. This resonated strongly with me at the time and even more so today because it sums up in a few simple words what my parents, home, and family did for me and my brother Murray when we were young, as well as what parents, homes, and families generally should do for their children and future generations at present and going forward into the future.

This is an ideal time for parents to ensure that their children receive a solid grounding and basic exposure to many areas and activities in life that are intimately connected to their roots and wings, such as how to come to grips with their day-to-day issues and circumstances on the one hand and the arts, humanities, ethics, religion, and the basic principles and rudiments of science on the other hand, especially scientific discoveries and achievements that have occurred in recent years involving other species, planets, galaxies, the universe, and the cosmos.

This is also an ideal time for children to get involved in a variety of athletic and recreational activities. One of the most important of these activities is playing sports, which were confined to boys and men for a very long time but now involve countless girls and women. There is a great deal that children can learn about life and living in the practical and spiritual sense by playing on teams that compete with other teams, the importance of teamwork and cooperation, achieving common goals and objectives, and especially learning how to win with grace and lose with dignity.

What is true for these activities is also true for learning about one’s own culture, heritage, customs, traditions, values, and value systems, as well as those of others. Especially important in this regard is the need to understand why all cultures in the world need to be respected, appreciated, and valued rather than condemned, downplayed, and ignored. A good start in the right direction in this regard would be visiting a variety of museums, watching films and videos about the diverse cultures of the world, going to ethnic and community cultural centers, and attending festivals, fairs, and community events organized by people who have different cultural origins, values, rituals, ancestral roots, and ways of life.

Exposure and engagement in activities like this should be augmented by exposure to the natu-

ral and cultural heritages of the diverse countries and cultures of the world, and, along with this, the tangible and intangible natural and cultural heritage of humankind and the work of organizations such as UNESCO, ICOMOS, Cultural Heritage, and others that are accessible through most media outlets and the Internet. This should be accompanied by exposure to the painful experiences incurred by Black, Indigenous, colonized, and marginalized people in the world, the Truth and Reconciliation commissions commenced initially by Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa in 1995, and how this and other commissions are now being conducted by many other peoples and countries in the world and why they are so essential.

This should also be accompanied by exposing children to the cultures of other species, taking full responsibility for looking after their animals and pets, and visiting zoos and animal shelters. This should also include engaging children in measures to protect and preserve the natural environment by planting trees, visiting public gardens and arboretums, creating a garden of their own and accepting full responsibility for it, and taking long walks in parks, conservation areas, forests, and wilderness areas as often as possible. Of utmost importance in this regard is demonstrating to children why it is so imperative to achieve sustainable development in their neighbourhoods, communities, countries, and throughout the world, as well as how this can be achieved most effectively in reality and concrete terms.

Involvement in activities like this and many others will help prepare children for living their lives in both realistic and idealistic terms, making strong commitments to life-long learning and education for life, and becoming responsible citizens. It will also help to make them feel good about themselves, more confident in their actions and decision-making processes, interacting and dealing with others, and ultimately enabling them to live happier, healthier, well-rounded, and spiritual lives. This is also an excellent time to help them create worldviews, values, lifestyles, and ways of life that enable them to be kinder, more considerate, thoughtful, and tolerant, conscious of their own culture, other cultures, and other species, as well as committed to preserving and protecting the world’s scarce resources and sacred sites.

A specific aspect of this should be ensuring that children are taught to manifest good manners and have discriminating taste—something that is missing in the world these days – dealing with

people who are abrasive, aggressive, domineering, and have radical forms of behaviour, or are confrontational in their actions. This is intimately connected to what has become known throughout the world as character education, or education that deals with the cultivation of children's sensitivities, sensibilities, altruistic development, and aesthetic judgements. Included in this should be cultivating civility, especially when it comes to dealing with other people as well as in a variety of community, collective, and causal settings. Also important in this regard is developing moral values and ethical standards, respecting the needs, rights, and beliefs of others, learning to compromise and make concessions, acting in a trustworthy and responsible manner, and being resilient and optimistic.

All of this has a great deal to do with helping children to achieve the goals, objectives, and ideals they set for themselves, as well as to recognize that they have responsibilities to assume and not just rights to enjoy. This will make it possible for them to achieve much more in life, experience fulfillment, contentment, and purpose in the adult and final stages of their lives, find their calling, develop their creativity, and realize their full potential.

Fortunately, many educators and scholars have spent their careers and lives developing learning systems, methods, and techniques that can be easily accessed by parents online and used to help their children develop strong roots that enable them to deal with the everyday realities in life, as well as healthy wings that make it possible for them to spread their wings and fly high and far.

This is especially true for the learning systems, methods and techniques developed by Shinichi Suzuki, Rudolph Steiner, and Maria Montessori, who had children, parents, homes, and families uppermost in mind when they created them. It is not surprising in this regard that millions of children and young people all over the world have benefited immensely from the capabilities and opportunities these and other educational authorities have provided for them.

Shinichi Suzuki devised a system to help children learn to play musical instruments such as the piano and violin by encouraging them to listen to the pieces first, then imitate them, and finally practice and practice them until they get them right and master them. Rudolph Steiner devised a method for teaching and learning that engaged the mind, body, and spirit – and more specifically the heart, head, and hands – and was a strong advocate that there is a spiritual dimension to every person's life. This method became well known throughout the world as the “Waldorf method” with more than 2,000 early childhood programs using this method in more than 60 countries. Most of all, there is Maria Montessori, the best known of these three pioneers as confirmed by the countless Montessori schools that now exist throughout the world. Her approach to learning is based on developing the natural interests and inclinations as well as “hands-on” and “real-world” experiences of children and downplaying the more traditional practices such as tests, rote-learning, and others.

Added to this list should be John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Paulo Freire. John Dewey developed a learning system based largely on concrete and pragmatic experiences and involve creating opportunities in children's lives and schooling that are thoughtful, reflective, experiential, interactive, interdisciplinary, and socially engaging. Jean Piaget focused on cognitive developments and learning experiences that are concerned with how all the different species in the world in general – and the human species in particular – adapt to their environments and consequently emphasized the planting of trees, the creation of gardens, taking long walks in the countryside, numerous outdoor activities, and concern for conservation, preservation, and ecological sustainability. And Paulo Freire, advocated teaching and learning techniques based on children and young people interacting freely, openly, and equally with each other and their parents, teachers, classmates, and friends, as well as being “active agents” in creating their own learning experiences as well as standing up to oppressive regimes and systems that are intended to impose their wills, beliefs, and practices on other people, children, and students, as spelled out in detail in his popular book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Going back much earlier in time, there are many Chinese philosophers, educators, and scholars

such as Confucius, Mencius, Lao Tzu, and numerous others who also contributed an enormous amount to teaching and learning requirements for children, parents, families, and future generations, as well as developing their homes, families, and family cultures, and particularly their character and overall ways of life. This is especially true for Confucius, who emphasized personal and professional integrity and morality, correctness in all social situations and public engagements, kindness, benevolence, family loyalty, and the importance of the mind and mindfulness in all teaching and learning activities.

If parents can help their children's learning processes by exposing them to the basic rudiments of systems, methods, and techniques such as these and others, they can also help their children's learning processes by exposing them to the lives and deeds of such reverential and humanistic individuals as Albert Schweitzer, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, and many others who lived very spiritual lives. This is revealed in all the numerous books, films, and videos that have been produced about them and their lives, as well as their spirituality and remarkable accomplishments in life. It is difficult to see how the world will become a better, safer, and more secure, harmonious, and peaceful place – and people will be able to overcome the colossal problems they are confronted with at present and going forward into the future – without making a strong commitment to cultivating spirituality, devoting themselves to causes that are greater than themselves, and manifesting a great deal of caring, sharing, and kindness in their lives and work. This is why the aforementioned people provide excellent role models for children and indeed people of all ages, especially in terms of directing their lives, energies, and efforts to areas where they are needed the most.

There are millions of people all over the world who are also doing this as well and doing it on a daily basis by devoting themselves to a single cause or many diverse causes. This is true regardless of whether they are concerned with helping other people to improve their health, welfare, and well-being, dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and its many viruses, variants, and long-term effects, assisting communities, towns, cities, and countries with necessities like this and many others, helping Ukraine and Ukrainians in their deplorable war with Russia, joining protest groups to bring an end to systemic racism and racial violence and abuse, participating in marches to curb climate change and global warming, fighting gender in-

equalities and injustices, or striving to achieve more equality, sustainability, and stability for all people and countries as well as the world as a whole.

While involvement in causes like this and many others can help a great deal in cultivating spirituality and living a spiritual life, this is not the only way this can be achieved. There are many other ways as well.

One of the best ways to do this is to expose children to the diverse cultures of the world in the all-inclusive, holistic sense. While it is not possible for the vast majority of children, parents, and families to travel to other parts of the world to experience these cultures on the ground or in fact, it is possible to do this through all the technological, digital, visual, and virtual devices that now exist in the world and can be accessed by parents, children, and families on their computers and the Internet, as well as in many other ways. For example, it is now possible through technological means to fly high and low over most countries and cultures in the world, view their most impressive cultural achievements, monuments, and sites, stroll through their towns, cities, and streets, visit their arts galleries, museums, and libraries, enjoy their concerts, theatrical productions, celebrations, parades, and festivals, explore their wineries, be exposed to their cuisines, and a great deal else.

It is possibilities and capabilities like these that make learning a great deal about the diverse cultures of the world so exciting, rewarding, and compelling. This is because many of the signs, symbols, and materials that are required for this already exist and are accessible through the arts, humanities, heritage of history, cultural industries, and other means. This includes beautiful music, exquisite paintings, superb plays, enticing architectural creations, fascinating stories, enduring myths, tasty foods, inspiring ideas, worthwhile ideals, and many others. These are the “gateways” that children, parents, homes, and families need to open the doors to the world’s diverse cultures, civilizations, and cultural treasures if they take the time and expend the effort that are required to have in-depth encounters with them.

Learning about culture and cultures in this broader and deeper all-encompassing sense and expanding knowledge, understanding, awareness, and appreciation of them is what makes it possible to experience a real “paradise on earth” according to Brian Holihan, an American cultural scholar who explains how this can be achieved in his timely and valuable

book *Thinking in a New Light: How to Boost Your Creativity and Live More Fully by Exploring World Cultures*. In this book, Brian sets out a very effective way to broaden, deepen, connect, and experience this paradise on earth by “looking at, with, and beyond cultures,” or what he calls “the AWB circle.” (Brian Holihan, 2019) An additional advantage of this book is that he illustrates how this method can be utilized and applied by examining the historical and contemporary achievements of several South Asian cultures that are rapidly gaining prominence throughout the world and generating a great deal of interest, attention, and enthusiasm.

The most interesting thing of all about this is that the more children, parents, and families become immersed in activities like this, the more their lives become spiritual in nature and enable them to soar to greater heights, realize their innate potential as individuals, members of families, and citizens of countries, make valuable contributions to the world, and live their lives on a much higher plane of existence and level of consciousness.

Like the phenomenal breakthroughs that are occurring in the sciences these days – which also constitute a fundamental dimension of getting deeply immersed in culture and cultures of all types by broadening individual and collective knowledge of the smallest particles and molecules in the world to the largest human, physical, mystical, and mysterious dimensions of life, the planet, the universe, and the cosmos – these developments possess the potential to produce higher and higher levels and states of spirituality in one form or another.

From the most exquisite works of art, actions of humanists, and the artistic and humanistic perceptions of culture to the broadest and deepest biological, ecological, and cosmological perceptions of culture, there is no doubt that culture and cultures possess the ability to act as the keys to spirituality in a multitude of ways because everything is there in one form or another when things are added up and examined in totality. This is because culture and cultures make it possible to move horizontally and vertically – as well as in breadth and depth – across and around the vast domain of different activities and disciplines, from the human to the non-human, the simple to the profound, the individual to the collective, the local to the global, and the

mundane to the magnificent.

This is especially important in today’s world with its extremely high levels and rates of human, social, and cultural mobility as well as much more migration, immigration and emigration, numerous transportation and communications developments, and a great deal of technological change. As matters stand now, severe tensions and open conflicts can and often do erupt when parents and grandparents come from different cultures and countries than their children and expect their children or grandchildren to learn about their original cultures, maintain their traditional languages, and follow in their footsteps, whereas their children and grandchildren are born in other countries or come to them early in life and are struggling to find themselves, develop friendships, and “fit in” where they are living and going to school at present. Dealing with significant cultural differences like this can be extremely difficult, and undoubtedly one of the most stressful and painful problems of all for many children, parents, homes, and families.

This is the principal theme of a Pixar movie made in Canada in 2022 called *Turning Red* which struck a responsive chord with countless children, young people, teachers, and parents throughout the world due to its remarkable relevance to the situation they are facing in their lives and families today. This movie is about a thirteen-year-old Chinese Canadian girl Mei (Meilin) Lee who is concerned with all the unexpected problems she experiences navigating her home and family life on the one hand and her school and community life on the other hand. In an article written by Evelyn Kwong for the *Toronto Star*, Kwong explains in some detail how this movie fit perfectly with her own situation when she was growing up, as well as many Chinese and other children, parents, and adults who are confronted with the very same problems and must deal with them earlier and later in life. This is because Kwong’s home life took place in a world that “consisted of upholding the values that would make my family and ancestors proud, achieving academic excellence, respecting elders, and being a “good

kid,” – which meant being obedient and less of a burden.” However, she learned very quickly that her “home life” would make fitting in at school – “her outside life” – exceedingly difficult. She went on to say, **“Entering kindergarten was a cultural shock from the weird looks I’d get to the questions and comments from others about my appearance, the food I ate, and the language I spoke. ...I began to rid myself of all things “Chinese” when I went into the classroom.”** (Evelyn Kwong, 2022)

What has become steadily more apparent throughout the world in recent years is that we can’t go on dealing with cultural problems like this in the same way we dealt with them in the past or are dealing with them at present. Fundamental changes are needed in the lives of children, parents, homes, families, and family cultures, as well as their worldviews, lifestyles, values, ideals, and ways of life if these problems and others like them are to be addressed successfully and overcome in the future. Many of these changes require cultivating spirituality “as a condition for saving humanity and the world.” This will not be possible, however, without delving more deeply into how spirituality is cultivated and achieved.

Regardless of whether we are talking about cultivating spirituality in general terms or realizing periodic moments or permanent states of spirituality and living a spiritual life, it is usually necessary to go deep into “the self” at some point in life in order to achieve it. This is because spirituality is essentially an internal rather than external affair, despite the fact that many moments, states, and experiences with respect to spirituality result from involvement in activities that take place outside rather than inside the self.

The problem here is that there are risks as well as rewards to be experienced by getting deeply immersed in the self. As a quest that is basically “within rather than without,” there is the constant risk that people will get so caught up with “the self” when they go deep inside themselves that they become self-centred and egocentric rather than other-centred and altruistic.

It is this process of looking inward into the self rather than outward onto the world that helps to explain the development of the “me generation” over the last few decades that is so conspicuous throughout the world today. In the process of going within, it is easy to get so pre-occupied or obsessed with one’s own interests, challenges, problems, needs, or beliefs that this becomes the answer to all questions and solution to all problems. This often ends up turning people off rather than on to things that prevail outside the self, as well as feeling that one’s own situation and circumstances are sacrosanct and take precedence over everything else. Hence the imbalance and disharmony that exists in many parts of the world today between “the self” and “the other,” which seems to be accompanied by a great deal of stress, anger, anxiety, and aggressive behaviour in the world we are living in today.

Fortunately, this is not the case with compassion – spirituality’s ideal travelling companion, alter ego, and steadfast friend – especially when it is addressed effectively and dealt with fully. Compassion possesses the potential to counteract and reverse the trend towards egoism, egocentrism, and the me generation in many ways, as well as to create much more balance and harmony between the self and the other, and with this, a great deal more kindness, generosity, goodness, and thoughtfulness in the world and in life. This is achieved by extending spirituality well beyond the self and taking it to its logical conclusion. This was certainly the case for Albert Schweitzer, Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Mother Teresa, since they were all remarkably spiritual in character, but also manifested an incredible amount of compassion for other people as well as commitment to causes over the course of their lives that extended far beyond themselves.

Just as cultivating spirituality requires going deeper and deeper into “the self,” so cultivating compassion requires going deeper and deeper into “the other” and the world at large. While this differs significantly from spirituality and living a spiritual life in the internal sense, a great

deal of fulfillment, happiness, contentment, and spirituality can also be achieved by cultivating compassion and living a compassionate life. While spirituality is often deemed to be a private and personal affair that is confined to individuals, compassion is usually deemed to be a public and collective affair that encompasses hundreds, thousands, and millions of people.

While involvement in a single cause or many diverse causes helps immensely in cultivating compassion and living a compassionate life, this is not the only way to realize this. There are many other ways as well. A very essential part of compassion involves having empathy for other people whose situation and circumstances are much worse than one’s own and are usually very bleak. This necessitates “getting out of one’s own skin” and feeling empathy and remorse for other people who are in far more dangerous straights or dire situations than we are and assisting them with their problems and helping them to overcome them. In fact, having or feeling empathy for other people is often the most important step we can take in cultivating spirituality and compassion because it means recognizing and identifying with other people who are dealing with problems that are far more severe than our own and desperately need our help in getting their lives sorted out and back on track.

By expanding and enriching life in virtually all directions and every possible way, Schweitzer provided an excellent illustration of how our personalities and lives can be enhanced, enriched, and transformed by cultivating and manifesting spirituality, compassion, and concern for “the other and others” and not just “the self and ourselves” as the principal foundation and focal point for our lives. Schweitzer described what life and living could and should be like as one of the greatest proponents of reverential thinking, action, and compassion for others that are less fortunate than ourselves:



The ripeness that our development must aim at is one which makes us simpler, more truthful, purer, more peace loving, meeker, kinder, more sympathetic.. that is the process in which the soft iron of youthful idealism hardens into the steel of a full-grown idealism which can never be lost. (Charles R. Joy, 1947)

When spirituality and compassion are combined and cultivated together, they create an awesome couple and unbeatable combination. As Robert Atkinson pointed out in his book, *A New Story of Wholeness: An Experiential Guide for Connecting the Human Family*:

We transcend our own seeming limits by seeing beyond the seen and understanding beyond the understood. We expand and evolve our consciousness as greater and greater levels of awareness and comprehension of self, society, the mysteries of life, and the wonders of the universe are explored to their fullest.

The independent investigation of reality unleashes our fullest potential and leads to the spiritualization of our consciousness. This awakening of inner capacities brings with it the recognition of new responsibilities for contributing to the collective wellbeing of all, which will reshape and restructure society. (Atkinson, 2022)

And this is not all. This also leads us to Bahá'u'lláh's sage advice and basic belief to "Let your vision be world embracing. Dedicate the precious days of your lives to the betterment of the world." (Atkinson, 2022) Surely it is time to set this process in motion in order to improve the well-being for all people and all countries as well as the human family and the world as a whole.

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