

What is Spirituality? How Spiritual are You?

INTRODUCTION

Explain to the students that this session will look at three aspects of growth in human beings:

1. What are the different stages of **physical growth**?
... e.g., baby, child, teenager, adult, old age ...
2. What are the processes of **psychological growth**?
.. e.g., developing independence and emotional maturity ...

Explain that some thinkers such as David Hay have written about **Spirituality** in terms of 'relational consciousness'. Hay argues that spirituality involves an intuitive, experiential awareness. Spirituality is something that we *feel* more than *understand* in an intellectual sense. From interviews with children, Hay came to the conclusion that much of what has been thought of as 'spirituality' is actually an awareness of being in relationship with some larger reality.

Ask the students to respond to such questions as:

- *What do you think it means to be spiritual?*
- *Is being spiritual the same as being religious?*
- *Some people talk of atheist spirituality; what do you think this means?*

3. Explain that '**Spiritual growth**' is seen by some as a developing awareness of the self; an understanding that there is more to life than meets the eye and a sense that there are deeper truths within reality (some may call this God or The Ultimate).

In his book, *The Different Drum*, psychologist Scott Peck sets out what he calls the **Four Stages to Spiritual Growth**.

ACTIVITY

Share the following diagram with the students, and give them some time in twos or threes to read through the four stages and discuss with each other the main ideas.

Stage 4: Mystic, communal stage: to be aware of the underlying interconnectedness of the whole universe, drawn by the mystery of life. In this stage you see religion as place to explore mystery, spiritual maturity. The Bible may be one of the ways God speaks, but it is to be held lightly, and not taken word for word as a rule book. God is an inner truth of universal love and spiritual presence.

Stage 3: Sceptic, individual stage. This is a questioning, individualistic stage, but not anti-social; it maybe a non-believing phase, but it is open to TRUTH. In this stage you are seeking reality through experience and testing. You can't be certain of God's existence, but you are aware of different truth claims.

Stage 2: Formal, institutional stage. People in this stage believe in following rules, belonging to group, e.g. strong church. They believe in rules and if they are Christians they may have a literal understanding of the Bible. They want certainty and dislike mystery. If they believe in God, he is a like a giant, parental figure living in the sky; a distant, powerful being who judges our lives; he is a rule giver.

Stage 1: Chaotic, anti-social stage. People in this stage are largely unaware of the needs of others; they have little empathy. They find it hard to truly respect themselves or others and their relationships are self-serving. Life has no pattern or purpose. God seems like a stern super-being, if he exists at all.

Get some feedback from the students on their understanding of the stages and ask them to respond to such questions as:

- *Do you think these stages make sense?*
- *Do you think people can really progress from stage 1 to stage 4 in this way?*
- *Do you think any of the stages describe where you are at this moment in time?*

Explain that, when people convert to a religion, they often experience an enormous sense of elation and joy. This may be seen as the transition from stage 1 to stage 2; from chaotic to ordered. They discover a set of patterns and answers which seem to make so much sense, e.g., the Bible, Qur'an, etc may seem to give very clear guidelines for life. Evangelical Christians may see this as a liberation; the person has been saved, literally freed from their sins.

But if a believer begins to question their own beliefs, they may be made to feel that by beginning to doubt they are losing their faith (evangelicals call this becoming a 'back-slider!').

However, according to Scott Peck's theory, rather than seeing them as moving backwards, he says that they may well be moving forwards from stage 2 (formal religious) to stage 3 (open and questioning). Asking questions takes you closer to the truth.

CONCLUSION

Ask the students for their final reflections for the session: What is spirituality? And how 'spiritual' do they see themselves?