

Chapter 1

Finding Authentic Spirituality

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding the importance of spirituality in today's world
 - ▶ Finding your way around this book
 - ▶ Tasting what lies ahead
-

Today's topsy-turvy world brings a unique array of spiritual challenges. Religions east and west stand accused of indiscretions and violations, while spiritual teachers who should be lifting seekers into higher wisdom are more often concerned with uplifting their own bottom line. Modern prophets cater to desire-obsessed audiences by teaching a kind of "Santa Claus" theology that is guaranteed to get you that new car you want, or if nothing else, that will get these prophets the new cars *they've* always wanted.

Newsflashes warn about small and large apocalypses that could happen at any moment in-between investigations about which star has revealed which bad quality to the paparazzi. Countrymen don't trust their leaders; family structures are crumbling; autism rates are climbing, children are being over-medicated, and people feel cut off from their divine spiritual heritage.

The key to turning things around and bringing greater light and healing into this world is through authentic spiritual knowledge, awareness, and blessings.

What the world needs now is the kind of spiritual love, wisdom, and practices that provide an anchor into the peaceful, sublime happiness of the eternal universal soul. People today need authentic, intelligent explanations of higher-consciousness spiritual principles that honor, support, and guide them right in the midst of their lives. The goal of *Spirituality For Dummies* is to be a helpful guide for your journey — a friend on your path that opens new doors of awareness, understanding, and experience.

In this chapter, I share with you some spiritual basics and tell you where to go in this book to find out more details and explore the ideas more fully.

Spirituality and Self-Knowledge

In a nutshell, spirituality relates to your own personal experience and relationship with the divine. People tend to confuse spirituality with religion, because the two often come together. Religions are sets of practices and beliefs that have been created based on the epiphanies and teachings of prophets, saints, or sages. Most religions are intended to lead you into the light of spirituality, either by focusing on an outer form of divinity, or on the spiritual presence within yourself, or both (see Chapter 2).

Self-knowledge is one of the main keys to spirituality. First you explore who you think you are, and from there, you can move into a deeper spiritual view of who you *really* are. When you have a strong foundation of spiritual self-respect, you aren't as easily brought down by the judgments and errors of yourself and others. With spiritual self-respect, you become your own best friend. You find ways to increase your spiritual understanding and uplift every aspect of your life. Through your upliftment, you also naturally help to uplift the world around you. The divine flame shines in your very own soul – shouldn't you at least know it is there? (See Chapter 3.)

Self knowledge also helps you to ask big-picture questions, such as: “Why am I here on this earth and in my body?” and “What am I supposed to do while I'm here?”

According to many spiritual sages, the most important thing to do while you're here is to expand into a spiritual awareness that guides your actions and thoughts to be powerful and positive. But how does one learn to do this? Where can you go to find out about spiritual principles and practices? Where can you meet others who will support and share your spiritual journeys together?

Since the first edition of *Spirituality For Dummies* was published, many people have asked me to recommend a spiritual path or group for them to follow. However, in spiritual journeys, there is no “one size fits all” group or path to recommend to everyone. In Chapter 5, I give you suggestions and warnings about what to look for in outer spiritual guidance such as groups, teachers, and writings. Ultimately, you have to do some research to find and recognize what works for you, because each person's spiritual path is unique and personal. You can take many roads to the divine, and you can certainly get there from wherever you are right now (although you may have to make a few u-turns!).

Spiritual Practices

Even if you're not quite ready to leap into higher visions of universal creation, you can certainly follow simple practices such as sitting for meditation or improving the spiritual atmosphere of your environment with sacred images and sounds. Chapter 6 explains the importance of bringing spirituality into form through practices for body, mind, and spirit, and guides you in choosing which practices are right for your individual nature.

- ✓ **Practices for your body:** When you approach life with a spiritual perspective, you find it easier to treat your body with love and respect — as a temple of the divine and a gift from the universe that has brought you to live in this world. Physical practices, including hatha yoga, martial arts, religious dance, and breathing exercises, can help you anchor your awareness of the divine in your body and give you the stamina to have a long and vibrant spiritual journey (see Chapter 7).
- ✓ **Practices for your mind:** It is in your mind that everything you know and experience takes place. Therefore, many spiritual sages have given supreme importance to the clarity and power of the mind. Spiritual practices for your mind include meditation, study, and contemplation. These practices help you clear up the mental and emotional clutter that keeps you from experiencing spiritual freedom and guide you to experience the universe in a personal and joyful way (see Chapter 8).
- ✓ **Practices for your spirit:** Devotional practices unlock the hardened areas of your spiritual heart so that the river of grace and love can flow more freely through your life. You can nourish your spirit through practices such as prayer, devotional singing, and worship, and by turning your everyday environment into a sacred space (see Chapter 9).

Spiritual Living

As you integrate spiritual principles into your life, every aspect of your experience becomes uplifted and transformed into a spiritual field of experience. Virtues such as honesty, humility, and compassion are not just a set of uncomfortable rules that you must push yourself to follow, but with spiritual awareness, these virtuous qualities become natural ways of living that improve your life in countless ways.

You can apply spiritual principles to different areas of your daily life (see Chapter 11). Your work can become grace-filled service, and your limitations can open up into spiritual freedom. Your anger can melt into forgiveness and then into the great healing gift of gratitude. Your greed for material acquisitions can mature into a state of abundance and lasting fulfillment, and your relationships can transform into blessings of good company and divine love.

Regardless of who you are and how spiritual you become, trials and tribulations are always a part of life. In fact, without any struggles and challenges, you wouldn't be able to grow as well and beautifully as you do when you strengthen your spirit by going through troubles with a commitment to turning them into triumphs. (See Chapter 12 to find out how to approach challenges with a positive mindset and strength of spirit that allows you to not only survive, but also thrive through the inevitable storms of life.)

Part of spiritual living is to make good choices in all the small and large decisions of your life. To make decisions that are focused on your highest goals, you need to discover and honor the deeper calling of your soul and tap into divine inner guidance. Honoring your individual nature and style also opens the doors to experiencing and expressing your creative spirit, so you can give something great to this world through whatever you do (see Chapter 13).

Spiritual Wisdom

The way you look at the world decides how the world manifests for you. Therefore, studying spiritual concepts and theories can vastly expand and improve your understanding and experience of life.

Certain eastern philosophies declare that this universe is divine, perfect, and one, even in the midst of its appearance of multiplicity, disarray, and imperfection. Imagine how such a viewpoint of divine universal oneness and perfection can change your approach to life! (See Chapter 14.) With a higher spiritual awareness, you can take your rightful place as a conscious co-creator of your world, and discover how to use your words and thoughts to create a happy, healthy, and spiritually enlightened life.

Some popular spiritual fads today give metaphysical principles that can help you create and manifest more of what you want in this world. These powers to create on a spiritual level tend to come naturally with spiritual maturity. However, many are using such techniques to tap into these powers of creation before they may be fully prepared to use them properly. This book is intended to give you a strong spiritual foundation that is lacking in many of these current spiritual fads.

With a strong spiritual foundation, you can use techniques such as the law of attraction (see Chapter 15) in a way that is more spiritual and beneficial in the long term. Rather than trying to push the universe into fulfilling your materialistic desires, you strive to harmonize your will with the great universal Will, which will outdo your limited wishes every time.

One ultimate goal of spirituality is to attain the state of spiritual freedom and liberation that is sometimes referred to as enlightenment, nirvana, or self-realization. Becoming aware of your true nature changes everything. With self-realization, even if you're living the exact same outer life as you always have, your inner experience expands far beyond the mundane surface living that you may have settled for in the past. (Find more about spiritual liberation in Chapter 17.)

Two important instructions that will help you find and express authentic spirituality in your life are “Trust yourself” and “Serve joyfully.” In a sense, everything in this book is intended to guide you in these two areas.

Trusting yourself

To experience a powerful and positive spiritual journey, you have to trust yourself. You are the one who decides what you believe. You are the one who chooses what to do with your time and circumstances here on earth. Will your focus be on material pursuits, spiritual aspirations, or both together? You are the King of the kingdom that is your own amazing life — it is your thoughts and actions that mold your journey. Choose your thoughts and actions wisely, and come to trust yourself so much that you are well-guided in every moment and every circumstance.

Even if you have a very good spiritual teacher who explains certain theories very nicely and whose presence brings uplifting inspiration to your spirit, still you have to trust yourself to understand the information correctly, to receive the blessings in a powerful and positive way, and to nurture and properly use what you've received. It is your calling to combine the best of what you've understood and experienced and to bring that together in your own individual view of the world. Don't just jump into someone else's belief system; rather, discover, craft, and enhance your own.

When you read books, it is you who must discern what you do or don't believe, or what you want to focus on now versus later. For example, as you read this book, please drink in whatever speaks to you, shelve what doesn't for possible revisiting in the future, come up with converse examples to my assertions, and expand what I share through your own experiences, opinions, and wisdom. I'm just giving you some good materials — you have to use them to build your own spiritual house.



Trusting yourself is a big responsibility, but a necessary one. You are the conductor of the orchestra of your thoughts. Bring in whatever melodies resonate with you and combine them with your own inner music to create a beautiful symphony that is your journey of life.

Being trustworthy

Trusting yourself doesn't mean to trust your ignorance, but to strive, heart and soul, to be trustworthy. All the spiritual practices and virtues come together to make you trustworthy to yourself, to others, to God, and to this world. (Find more on spiritual practices in Part II and more on spiritual virtues in Chapter 10.)

Being trustworthy means being honest and keeping your word to yourself and others. Being trustworthy means that you've pushed aside lower emotions, such as greed, hatred, and jealousy, so that your thoughts and actions are coming from higher emotions, such as love, generosity, and joy.

It is not enough to lazily say that you trust yourself when you're really only trusting your most surface opinions, many of which have been planted in you by the very commercialized society we are living in today. You have to go deeper, through meditation, prayer, contemplation, and spiritual study, to find and express the part of yourself that is wise, divine, and trustworthy.

That trustworthy part of yourself will lead you through the jungles and mazes of life. It will guide you on what to do, who to spend time with, what to read, what goals to pursue, and where to go when. This trustworthy part of yourself is also your intuition, which knows a lot more about the world manifesting around you than you consciously do.

For example, your intuition knows if you're dealing with someone who is being dishonest with you. If you're in tune with your intuition, then you may be gently guided around the situation without even having to go through a messy confrontation with the person who is being dishonest (unless a messy confrontation is something both of your souls need to experience). Your trustworthy guidance takes you through the most beneficial roads of life and protects you from pitfalls along the way.

Trusting God

Here, I use the word God to represent whatever you conceive the universal conscious presence to be. (Chapter 2 discusses the word "God" and various representations of divinity.) By trusting God, you are trusting the beneficence of the universe; you are trusting the divine presence that presides over everything.

When you trust God, you stop worrying so much about the twists and turns of life. Even if you do feel upset or concerned about some turns of events, you still can access a place inside yourself that trusts that whatever is happening has a higher purpose. Even awful experiences can have a higher purpose if they guide you to expand your awareness into greater realms of spiritual freedom.

Trusting God is an essential part of trusting yourself. Ultimately, the most trustworthy part of yourself is also a seed of God that came with your birth into this world. Trusting yourself and trusting God are ultimately two faces of the same coin.

In each moment, trusting God allows you to move happily and spontaneously through life. You courageously try things that you don't necessarily know how to do. You sign up for that class, write that book, offer to help, give that speech, or make that commitment. I can guarantee you that it is my trust in God, along with my love of sharing and serving, that has allowed me to write this book and to sing some of the songs on the accompanying CD.

Serve joyfully

Part of trusting yourself is to have clear intentions and motivations in everything you think, say, and do. Greedy desires and ulterior motives cover the light of spiritual intuition that is necessary for receiving inner guidance.

To have a vibrant journey, you have to shift from the usual perspective most people have of looking at each situation in terms of what they can get from it. Instead, you walk into each moment of your life with an openness and readiness to serve, connect, help, and bless.

Instead of grabbing at life, you walk with your hands open and ready to give and receive. When you cease grabbing for lesser things, the universe has the opportunity to give greater things that you may not have even thought to want.

Eventually, "How can I be of service?" becomes etched in your psyche so that it becomes a natural presence in your being. Then, you don't have to actively seek out ways to help — you are in harmony with this loving universe, and that harmony brings you exactly where you should be to naturally offer what is helpful, just by being who you are.

Being of service to the universe is a great and personal way to relate to life. Serving is a sign of friendship and love, and having friendship and love in your heart for God and the entire universe is definitely going to have a positive and powerful impact on your spiritual journey.