

# The importance of spirituality in youth development

[Life](#), [Adolescence](#)



The Importance of Spirituality in Youth Development The Oxford Dictionary defines YOUTH as “ being young, adolescence, the vigour or enthusiasm, or weakness or inexperience, or other characteristics of the period between childhood and full womanhood or manhood. ” Spirituality, often equated to religious or philosophical beliefs is not easy to define. It is not easy to distinguish spirituality from religion, but the differences are important to understanding behaviour and development. Religion’s root word is religare, meaning “ to bind”, but ironically serves to widen the divide among people. The path is wrong and we have to correct our footing to be on the right track. Religion is reduced to biographies and looking towards God through the eyes of others. Intermediaries are bound to create noise and communications distortions! Spirituality is referred to Spiritual Quality or Spiritual Reality. It aims at consolidating self confidence, repudiating misperceptions, useless images, biased impressions, wrong attitudes and predispositions. It is true knowledge that enables us to directly perceive the aesthetics (the intrinsic beauty, grace) of life and upholds civilisations, art, science and discoveries and has never satiated with the blood of any scientists. Nowadays spirituality seems to have little connection to positive youth development, it actually plays a significant role in how the child grows up. But it is an undeniable fact that spiritual development is a core developmental process for young people, in terms of positive behaviours, feelings and relationships, self-esteem and pro-social behaviour, and a buffer against negative or risky behaviour. Spirituality empowers every living being to break free from the shackles of the mind and the limitations of the small self (ego), to connect to nature or a Supreme being, to manifest our Real Nature, our True Self. In the

present world of globalization where concern is limited to markets and profitability, spirituality often triggers a paradigm shift from market value to human values: " Till there is life, there is hope..... Hope never dies out..... And it enables us to envision and attain worthier ends in life! " It gives a purpose to life, connects people, lays solid foundations for self development, general well-being, including joy and fulfilment, energy and peace and more importantly a drive to be ethical throughout, i. e. to do the right things and be truthful. Failure to attain objectives: - Youth tend to experience new ways, often different ways in an inconsistent manner, driven by the sense of own identity. - Youth want to venture, feel new experiences and enter into the conflicts of generation gap ....., misunderstood or unheard (disturbed listening process) - Intermediaries create noise in the transmission of knowledge and sharing of experiences. - Spirituality often limited to cult practices and youngsters feel alienated as they do not understand the purpose of such practices. Even scientific practices (Yoga, meditation, Yajna, healthy diet, importance of sound mind, body and spirit, need for harmonised thoughts, speech and actions, etc...) are left unexplained!!! - Youth not given sufficient space in the community (role incongruence) and left aside as inexperienced, hence the feeling that spiritual matters are only for silver grey haired-people. - Lack of role models and increased focus / media coverage: icons with risky behaviours, such as tobacco use, illicit drug use, moving under the influence of alcohol, school problems, alcohol abuse, and antisocial behaviour. - Short-term goals obliterate long term objectives. - Western culture has had the greatest impact on the world because of the power of the media to expose the world community to Western ideas. We

see this at work in China and India where the appetite for Western consumerism has taken hold in the last ten years and traditional values may be seen to be under threat. - Maslow's hierarchy of needs and self-actualisation with a " modern society" drifting more towards materialism engendering wide-scale corrupt practices. - Rat race for individual wellbeing even if detrimental to community welfare; skeletons in the cupboards. - We need to walk our talk and be role models to ourselves, our family members, the community at large. THE PRINCIPLES OF ARYA SAMAJ (NO 6, 7, 8, 9 AND 10) NEED TO BE LIVED AND NOT LEFT TO PARROT READING Socrates: " It is the destiny of mankind to seek out virtue such as courage and self-control, or propriety over the desires of ambitions or emotions that cloud the quest for truth. " Aristotle first emphasised the search for our common humanity and this gives rise to a broad understanding of moral behaviour. There are ways of behaving that diminish us as human beings and other ways of living that enhance us and help us fulfil our potential. The major world religions all focus on the idea of becoming fully human Good education is not just about producing economically effective ' units' that will be of service to their nation and economy. The broader view of what it is to be human is all too often neglected entirely. It affirms the importance of a broader approach to education that reading, writing, mathematics and science often lacks. Good education should be holistic and empower young people to (1) understand the nature of truth, justice, and goodness , as well as (2) discriminate between what is right and wrong, just and unjust, true and false, good and evil. We all want our young people to become caring, compassionate individuals who are dedicated to seeking truth, standing up for what is just

and right and who are models of integrity. How does one balance the spiritual self and the practical self? The self that has to toil to earn a living, interact on the physical plane with people and situations? Pay bills, fix the leaking windows etc? Answer: It is natural. Your spiritual self, or your soulself is inherent and natural to you. It surrounds itself with your physical body — and with this beautiful physical body come its needs. Food, sex, a home to live in, a car to ride in, bills to pay as you say — so are those not natural too? These all blend together to create what you call your ' life' — your existence, your presence on this earth planet. It is natural to be spiritual as that is food for your soul and it is just as natural for you to be practical as that is food for your physical self. When both are in harmony you are at your optimum self. You are then in harmony. You must give as much attention to your physical self as you feel comfortable doing. If you feel guilty — be aware — and examine your guilt. Why is it there? Where is it coming from? You will know all the answers and automatically find harmony again. But guilt is a feeling that must never be experienced. No, it does not ' help' but almost always ' disturbs' harmony. If you observe your reactions prior to any actions, you will know whether you should do that or not. It is when we wait to feel after the action that we sometimes encounter guilt. It would be absolutely unnecessary if we ' observed' our feelings before and not after the act. If the idea of any act is accompanied by a feeling of well being and satisfaction, you know it is the course of action that is good for you. If not, then abandon the idea. This is a sort of thumb rule. And isn't it an easy one? Q. Yes, but we don't always follow it, do we? Answer A ha! You don't. Because your mind, your conscious mind, which is often ruled by your ego is trained by it,

otherwise. The ego trains the mind not to listen to the heart, to the little voice which is the soul speaking — deeming it as ‘ foolish’, warning immediately of impending hurt and devastation. The truth is, that if you don’t heed that little voice of soul speak then there is a problem. That voice is your safest bet. Your soul is your truest companion, choosing to carry you within it, yet surrounding it; housing it yet protecting it. It is your soul that leads you towards your purpose in this lifetime. Listen to it, listen for it.