SPIRITUAL PATHS, SPIRITUAL FORMS, RELIGIONS
What are the characteristics of an adequate spiritual form or religion?

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INTRODUCTION

Many people today feel the need for a "spiritual container", a "community of belief", a "guiding mythologeme", a "religious home", some sort of place where one can belong and where one's longing for meaning and the possibility of answers to the ultimate questions of life and destiny may be addressed. In the last three centuries we have undergone a devastating erosion of "metaphysical infrastructure" resulting in dire threats to our planet, and only in recent decades have we begun to see serious efforts at metaphysical reconstruction. Unfortunately there are all too many individuals and groups who stand ready to provide simple, manualized answers to spiritual hunger and to ultimate questions, especially for those whose fear of chaos and the unknown or whose lack of a tolerance for ambiguity has driven them to a quest for certainty.

In today's insecure, postmodern world certainty is an artifact from an earlier time. It may refer to a Newtonian universe in which the mechanics of the physical universe is taken as an adequate metaphor for the more subtle, metaphysical realities of ultimate meaning. Or it may refer to an even earlier time of great mythological paradigms in which stories of great Gods and heroes are crystallized into concrete maps of reality, often with a personal advocate or "Savior" as in the case of Christianity, whom we can trust to take an active and personal interest in our spiritual affairs, even, perhaps, our mundane affairs.

This is not to say that either the Newtonian or the mythological versions of the universe are wrong rather that they are inadequate to our current need in the form in which they are generally presented. Our Einsteinian universe requires authenticity rather than certainty. Our spiritual forms, our religions, now need to be authentic to the evolving character of wisdom, consciousness, and aspiration, both human and Divine, as such evolution occurs on planet Earth and beyond.

CRITERIA FOR ADEQUACY IN A SPIRITUAL FORM

Let us consider the question: what are the characteristics of an adequate spiritual or religious form, one that is competent to an individual's or a community's spiritual needs? With a working answer to this question we might be able to evaluate our own experiences with religious forms with a view toward increasing our awareness and our volition regarding our own spiritual journeys. This may help us to choose or create a path which could inform and nurture a more adequate religious form in our lives. I have borrowed ideas from Joseph Campbell, Dick Anthony, and Ken Wilber to develop these criteria.[1] An adequate religious form should provide the following:

A. HUMAN COMMUNITY
1) prepares and sustains its members in a supportive way to develop a free moral conscience,
2) teaches specific moral norms and collaborative skills for living in justice and love with others,
3) offers its members an image of the universe which is in accord with the best knowledge of the time,
4) guides its members, stage by stage, in health, strength, and harmony of spirit through the whole foreseeable course of a useful life.
  (Community criteria, i.e., effective human community)

B. LEGITIMATE ASSISTANCE

      1) in translating on-going spiritual experiences as well as mundane experiences in helpful ways which give meaning in a spiritual context to issues of contemporary life,

      2) to help individuals to grow horizontally toward personal maturity and ethical responsibility in a democratic society.

            (*Legitimacy criteria*, i.e., not deceptive, ungrounded, or exploitive, but effectively legitimate within the contemporary world)

C. SPIRITUALLY AUTHENTIC METHODS

      1) provide ways ("road maps", training, mentoring, etc.) for members to undertake spiritually transforming experiences.

      2) psycho-spiritual frameworks through which members may learn to transform or transmute personality and character distortions into gifts and strengths for spiritual growth and authentic service to others

      3) spiritual journeys, pilgrimages, disciplines, etc, which help and guide members to grow vertically toward spiritual realization with a more mature relationship with the Divine (i.e., with God, Goddess, the Mystery, the Universe, the Universal Self, Ultimate Reality, etc.)

      4) opportunities for spiritually authentic service in the world.

            (*Authenticity criteria*, i.e., authentic to the higher, more advanced developmental needs of the human spirit)

SPIRITUAL FORMS, DEFINITIONS AND EXAMPLES

A spirituality which has "come into form" in the lives of a group of people, a human community, can be called a religious form. In this sense Christianity is a religious form. Methodism, Roman Catholicism, or Mormonism, for example, are somewhat more specific religious forms within Christianity. There are many other religious forms such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc., each with many sub-forms.

Also there are many spiritual forms which are not usually referred to as religions, these may more commonly be referred to as "spiritual paths" such as: many of the yogas, prayer disciplines, divine reading, sacred writing, ceremonial activities, sacred dances, vision quests, consulting of divine oracles, sacred number systems, following a divine teacher, great humanitarian service traditions, spiritually motivated organizing for justice and service, spiritually motivated scientific inquiry, etc.

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(1) These ideas were distilled in part from the writings of Joseph Campbell, the famous mythologist, and Ken Wilber and Dick Anthony, psychology-of-religion theorists. For more information see:

    -Campbell, J. (1972). Myths to live by. New York: Bantam.

    -Anthony, D, & Ecker, B. & Wilber, K. Spiritual Choices: The Problem of recognizing Authentic Paths to Inner Transformation. New York: Paragon.
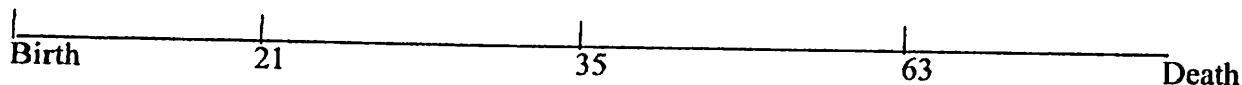
STAGES OF LIFE - TAGORE

The celebrated Indian poet of the late 19th and early 20th century, Rabindranath Tagore, wrote extensively of "the four stages of life" as they are understood in Indian society. (For more information see: The Religion of Man, ch, 14, pp. 191-203. Tagore received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913) Tagore saw these stages as the embodiment of the Soul, its training for a life, its taking up of the responsibilities of life, its elder freedom to wander and pass on accumulated wisdom, and its eventual liberation from the body and the personality in the life-cycle of the individual. This he saw as a natural progression in human life if properly guided by an adequate spiritual understanding. It should be noted that Assagioli respected Tagore highly and consulted and corresponded with him.

Following Tagore let's make a developmental time-line for life which includes spiritual development.

future generation	emerging generation	established generation	elder generation
B childhood Structuring the personality, creating an ego	21 early adulthood Integrating the personality, strengthening the ego	35 house-holders Individuating the elements of the psyche, transcending the ego	63/70 elders, wanderers D Identifying as a Transcending Self
How does the world work? Am I OK? A time of intense learning about the culture, clan, family. A time of being imposed upon by parents, teachers, peers, media. Learning to see my life through bigger and bigger windows through which to see the world: the other gender, other races, other religions, other paradigms.	Who am I? What do I? How may I find Meaning? Meaningful Work? Occupational identity? The great spiritual questions: Is there a God? What do I think about God? If I question will I go to hell? Why do bad things happen? Is this all BS? How can I find a spirituality / a community that works for me?	How can I find a spiritual education for my children? I'm busy running the world, I need a spiritual form that works like a functioning appliance. The old questions aren't as important. How can I focus on deeper purpose and meaning?	How can I find integrity and peace? How can I overcome fear? How can I express my wisdom and experience to my children and grand-children or young people I love? How can I think creatively about the "end time"?

EXERCISE -Using the blank time-line below, make some notes about your own psycho-spiritual development. How is it going so far? Reflecting on the discussion of adequate spiritual forms and the general time-line generated from Tagore's material above, what was the spiritual form, if any, guiding your childhood development? Early adulthood development? Was it an adequate spiritual form? What spiritual form, if any, is/will be guiding your establishment house-holding years? Elder wanderer years? What about the adequacy of a spiritual form for your future? Do you have one? If not, do you have any ideas about how you could find/develop one?

Take some time to write, then convene in smaller groups to discuss and share your insights. Finish by reconvening in the large group to briefly process the experience.

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|_____|_____|_____|_____
Birth            21               35               63              Death
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(Revised, Fall 2000)

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A ROMP THROUGH THE WORLD'S GREAT RELIGIONS AND WISDOM TRADITIONS

- Taken from lectures offered during the spiritual quarter, 1st year Psychosynthesis Training

- Intention - to help us step back, step out of an "embedded consciousness," to get a more conscious look at how each of us has dealt with our own spiritual development, and to decide how we want to do it in the future

- This lecture is a big - picture look at how the world's great religions have tried to bring forth images of the Divine - ie., What is each religion's evolving image of God?

- For example, what we see in religious wars is conflict between "images of God", (these are reductionistic images since the Actual Divine is ineffable, ie., beyond knowledge, concept, or image)

- The process of crystallization and renewal - the archetype of manifestation (hand out)
    Points: - Things come into form, if they stay in form a long time they may lose
            their contact with energy and become dead forms
        - This is OK with buildings or furniture, etc.
        - It's not OK with human institutions, they can become deadly and dangerous.
            - The great sociologist, Weber, said; "Charisma becomes
                    bureaucracy" (In other words it becomes crystallized)
        - On the other hand, if things stay only as energy and don't get into form we think
            of them as ungrounded idealisms or ungrounded mysticisms.

- So humans and human institutions need both form and energy - they need to come into form and they also need to experience renewal, rebirth, and movement back to energy, otherwise forms can become quite deadly. Examples of crystallization and disconnect from the original vision abound in religious history. They also occur with frequency in the contemporary world. For example:

    -the inquisition in medieval Europe by the Christian church during which millions, mostly women, were burned at the stake, a particularly nasty form of execution. They were found to be "pagan witches" which translates literally to "country healers".

    -ethnic cleansing, a practice in which members of a particularly religion or race are targeted for death to eliminate them from the community. This often occurs where religion becomes the identifying characteristic; Jews in WW II by the Nazis, Muslims in the more recent wars in Bosnia.

    -religious wars, the 30 years war in Europe between religious factions.

    -wars of ideology, like the "cold war" which ended with the fall of the Soviet Union only a few years ago - the "religions" were Capitalism and Communism.

    -the current "war against terrorism" which involves a cynical distortion of one of the great religions, Islam, in order to mount acts of terrorism with the appearance of religious sanction with hopes of fomenting a great war between Islamic nations and the West, especially, the US. The distorted and fumbling response of the US seems to play right into the hands of the terrorists.

-The need for balance between energy and form is very important for the co-existence among religions in our contemporary world. It is also true for each of us as individuals, also for families, communities, nations, etc.

- Each great religion has an image of God which holds a central quality which gives form and definition to the religion
- I'll speak briefly about each of them - and I'll focus on the positive intention, not the distortions, that's easy and its so common, what we don't hear enough about are the great hopes and intentions of the founders of the great religions
- Also, each of them has a "school of growth", a tradition which fosters spiritual development, sometimes its underground and somewhat secret, sometimes held as a "mystery school" - but what each has is a sacred psychological system of spiritual growth. I'll mention these also as we go

NAME	FOUNDER	QUALITY	SYSTEM OR "SCHOOL" OF GROWTH
The Great Mother Religions	Pre-historic - estimate 25,000 yrs ago until about 7,000 years ago	Goddess as Sacred Source and Sacred Context (the earth)	Many rituals contexted in the cycle of the seasons - Shamanistic world view with many methods of growth and healing - Some aspects of Native American spiritual forms -Native European spiritual forms such as such as Wicca
Hinduism	Krishna and Rama estimate 4,000 yrs ago	God as Transcendence	The many Yogas - Examples: - Bachti Yoga - Path of Devotion - Jana (Nana) Yoga - Path of Knowledge - Karma Yoga - Path of Service - Hatha Yoga - Path of the Body - (Movement) Yoga - ex. Indian Prayer Dances - NADA Yoga - Path of Chanting, Mantra - Agni Yoga - Path of fire in the Heart (popularized by the Theosophical Society - Blavatsky, the Roerichs, Krishnamurti) - Raja Yoga - 8 fold path of Integration and Synthesis of all Yogas
Judiasm	Abraham approx 3,800 yrs ago and Moses 3,300 yrs ago	God as The Law of Right Human/Human and Human/Devine Relations held in the Covenant	The Kaballa - a secret system based on ancient wisdom schools of spiritual transformation and growth - contains a system of magical mathematics - known cryptically as Jacob's Ladder (the ancient Mediterranean region had many magical systems of divination such as Astrology (the Magi), Numerology, Pythagorean systems, etc)
Buddhism	Siddhartha Gautama who was called The Buddha (the Enlightened One) 2,500 yrs ago	God as Enlightenment	The Mahabhrattha, a several hundred page collection of stories and spiritual methods, the roots of the famous 8 - fold Path of the Buddha: 1. Right Understanding - to see clearly and build courage 2. Right Purpose or Aspiration -to decide to act (will) 3. Right Speech - to communicate well and with respect 4. Right Conduct - to act well and with respect 5. Right Livelihood - to have a respectful relationship with other people and with the earth and all its creatures 6. Right Effort - proper pacing and speed to

sustain one's effort
7. Right Awareness or Mindfulness - to keep your path within your awareness at all times
8. Right Concentration and Meditation - to contemplate with Deep Mind

Christianity

Jesus of Nazareth who was called The Christ (Greek for the Messiah) 2,000 yrs ago

God as Love and Forgiveness (the canceling of Karma - we get to start over again, not forgetting but learning)

The so - called Christian Gnostic Traditions

- Doctrines of Grace and Spiritual Rebirth (Paul the Apostle)
    - The Christian orders (order in the chaos of the disintegration of the Roman Empire)
        - The Canonical Hours (every 3 ½ hrs - Matins, Prine, Tierce, Sect, Nones, Vespers, Compline - to be in the chapel available for God's gift of Grace 7 times a day)
    - The Vows:
        - Poverty (detachment)
        - Chastity (the will to one thing)
        - Obedience (to the Inner Voice of God)
- The phenomenon of Repentance ("re-framing" the meaning of one's personal history, transforming one's Karma; catharsis, metanoia)
- Elements of the Hermetic Corpus, the ancient mystery school of spiritual transformation outside the Church (the Rosicrucians, Knights Templars, Freemasons, etc.
- Elements of Spiritual Alchemy adopted by underground Medieval Christian groups (popularized by Carl Jung who is considered a modern Gnostic)

Islam

Mohammed, who was called the Prophet of God (Allah) 1,300 yrs ago

God as Sacred Community

Spiritual disciplines and methods
The Sufi Schools and Traditions
    - Stories of wisdom, healing, and spiritual awakening and growth
    - Group and individual dances and other physical movement methods
    - Daily Prayers toward Mecca, the Holy City
    - Pilgrimages to Mecca

Scientific Triumphalism
(Name given by Huston smith)

The Human Mind as Sacred

God as a superstitious, anthropo-morphic projection

The Scientific Method
    - Education at a respected University
    - Training in the Scientific Method
    - Original research to add a new piece of truth to what is known by the human mind, preferably in the quest of a PhD (Doctor of Philosophy Degree)
    -Note: Science does not have a liturgy, it has no yoga, it does have a disciplined protocol. But its discipline is mental, not spiritual. It has no moral instructions for living an ethical life .

in community. It is not a spiritual form in the sense that the others mentioned are. And it has never purported to be such.

There is much confusion about this since many young people often leave their religious or spiritual form, finding it pre-modern or otherwise irrelevant, in favor of science. Expecting a guiding ethic they find none or very little. They may assume a moral infrastructure in the culture but that has traditionally been provided by some form of religion which traditionally generated the symbols which held meaning and purpose. But symbol creation is now the business of "Madison Avenue" and the media, where ethical infrastructure is not a priority.

THE PROCESSES OF CRYSTALLIZATION AND RENEWAL

The basic archetype of manifestation by which all things in our world
are created, destroyed, and evolved

ENERGY

TRANSFORMATION

TRANSMUTATION

The "I"

Location of the Conscious Observer
(Who has Potential for Self-Awareness and Will)

An example of energy
might be spirituality
while an example of
form might be religion

FORM