



**What is Humanistic Spirituality?
A "Q & A" by James Baquet
www.jamesbaquet.com**

What exactly is "Humanistic Spirituality"? Here are some answers.

What is "Humanistic Spirituality"?

"Humanistic Spirituality" is an inclusive philosophy that connects one with oneself, others, one's society, nature, the universe, and "everything."

What is the goal of Humanistic Spirituality?

Doesn't *everyone* want to be happy?

Some call it "enlightenment," or "salvation," or "liberation."

All of these are just fancy ways of describing what can be described as "inner peace," but which is commonly called "happiness."

By increasing your connectedness, Humanistic Spirituality is meant to teach you how to increase the sum of your happiness, on the way to peace, enlightenment, salvation, liberation...

What is meant by "Humanistic"?

Is there a god? Who knows?

But we do know that a complete, fulfilled human being is something magnificent--and rare.

"Humanistic" can simply mean

- of, or pertaining to, humans or humanity
- concerned with the interests, needs, and welfare of humans
- devoted to or study of the humanities or the liberal arts

We accept all of these meanings. There is, however, another meaning, "rejecting the importance of religious beliefs." While there is room for this so-called "atheism" within Humanistic Spirituality, we include both those who reject *and* those who embrace religious belief. Both of these can manifest deeply human worldviews.

Here's the crux: Whether God exists or not, whether one believes or not, what's important is what the individual human being *does*. Look at this twist on Pascal's Wager:

- God exists, I believe, and I take steps to build my connectedness: My happiness increases
- God exists, I believe, but I do nothing to build my connectedness: My happiness does not increase
- God exists, I don't believe, but I take steps to build my connectedness: My happiness increases
- God exists, I don't believe, and I do nothing to build my connectedness: My happiness does not increase

- God doesn't exist, I believe, and I take steps to build my connectedness: My happiness increases
- God doesn't exist, I believe, but I do nothing to build my connectedness: My happiness does not increase
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- God doesn't exist, I don't believe, and I do nothing to build my connectedness: My happiness does not increase

(Note: For the believer to "take steps to build connectedness" means reading scriptures, worshiping, going for fellowship, etc., as opposed to just mentally saying "I believe.")

Logic question: What is the determining factor: the existence of God, a person's belief, or the actions the person takes to build connectedness? (Answer: the last one.)

How can you say the atheist and the person of faith are the same?

They're not the same. But we believe all human beings have the same goal: happiness.

Some pursue it through religious practices. Others find it in climbing mountains, or going to museums, or cracking a tough math problem. Whatever brings a sense of peace, fulfillment, and connectedness is, in our sense of the word, a "spiritual" exercise.

Is there any model for this kind of fulfillment?

Humanistic Spirituality has its roots in something called "The Perennial Philosophy." This originally described a sort of mystical experience, based on four principals:

1. There is something bigger than us
2. We either are, or feel, separated from it
3. There are things we can do to come closer to it
4. The closer we get to it, the more fulfilled and happier we become

We have simply broadened this principle to include, in addition to mystical exercises, a number of endeavors that might seem "merely human" and not "spiritual" at all. However, we have come to believe that that which is human (including, but not limited to, religious exercises) is in fact spiritual. The Buddhists say "Samsara is Nirvana": This world of temporariness and change is, in fact, the world of the Absolute, if we can only learn to see it correctly. And so, a concert, or a marathon, or dinner with loved ones--all of these "mundane" ("of the world") activities are in fact paths to greater connectedness, and therefore put us one step closer to being complete.

Well then, what is "Spirituality"?

Some would contrast the "spiritual" with the "material." They are suggesting that there is something beyond what science can observe or deduce, a "ghost in the machine" or some sort of "ethereal plane."

This may be. But we believe that "spiritual" doesn't necessarily mean "pie in the sky."

"Spirituality" can mean "concern with things of the spirit," and "spirit" here might indicate:

- simply "mind" or "intellect"
- the seat of the moral or religious nature
- that which pertains to sacred, religious, or devotional things or matters

We accept with caution the idea that "spiritual" means "formally religious"; it can, but it doesn't have to. We think ecology is spiritual. So is vegetarianism, scientific inquiry, and philanthropy. As well as prayer, meditation, and worship, whether inside or outside of an organization.

So *"Humanistic Spirituality" embraces all that is gloriously human.*

What more can you say about "The Six Connectednesses"?

Ugh! Great word!

As mentioned above, Humanistic Spirituality seeks to connect one to oneself, others, one's society, nature, the universe, and "everything." Let's look at these one-by-one.

- oneself: Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." For centuries preachers have suggested that failure to love oneself (in a healthy way) prevents one from loving one's neighbor or God. And modern psychology supports this insight. This is not narcissism or egotism; it is a healthy appreciation of one's place in the scheme of things. Learning to find satisfaction in even the smallest of things is essential for one's peace and happiness. Even accomplishing something as small as washing the dishes gives a sense of fulfillment that enhances personal happiness. Humanistic Spirituality emphasizes the importance of finding happiness in many ways.
- others: "Ya gotta have friends." Loneliness is a killer. True, it would be best if we could learn to be happy with and within ourselves. But we are social animals, and connectedness to others, whether an old friend, a soul mate, or a casual acquaintance, is essential for us not just to survive, but to thrive. "Love your neighbor," and your family, and the stranger you've never met.
- one's society: One step removed from the people around us is the society around us--the institutions from "family" (in the abstract) through community, government, and finally all of humanity. Being connected to one's school, place of worship, or company is a source of strength and happiness for millions, as is a wholesome concept of citizenship.
- nature: Ever have a pet? Remember the sense of unconditional love you received from it? Ever sit in a park and feed pigeons? Or take a walk in a garden? Remember the peacefulness? How about hiking in the mountains, sitting by the seaside, startling a deer in the woods? When we connect with our trans-human environment, we begin more and more to sense our place in the scheme.
- the universe: Gaze up at the stars. Read (or watch a video) about interplanetary exploration, about theories of galactic astronomy. Or go the other way, down to the level of the atom and its parts. This is not about other people, the society we live in, or even our natural environment. This is something of which we don't understand the smallest fraction, even with all the powers of discovery at our disposal. We're still framing the questions. Look at the arm of a spiral galaxy, point to a solar system on the edge, and say, "You Are Here."
- "everything": Some people--the "soft thinkers"--take one further step. Up to here, the hardest thinker--even Richard Dawkins--would probably have rolled with our ideas. But some intuit, or believe, or have "seen" in some way beyond the usual senses, that there's something beyond all of this, something "transcendent." Humanistic Spirituality honors this, too. It is not an attempt to do away with what we call "religion," but rather to broaden the definition of what can engender a "religious" experience. We insist that we can connect through a myriad of means, including the religious. We insist that all religions are true--as are all systems which bring us into connectedness with the True, the Good, and the Beautiful.

What do you mean by "the True, the Good, and the Beautiful"?

The True, the Good, and the Beautiful are a linked triad of virtues that date back to Greco-Roman philosophy. In brief:

- The True is that which is in sync with reality. This is a question not just of epistemology (how we know what we know) but of the essence of things;
- The Good is that which is morally right. True, it's a question of ethics; but like Truth, it goes beyond this to something's very nature.
- The Beautiful is more than aesthetics; this kind of beauty is far more than skin deep, but goes to the core, to the heart.

It is rightly said that these three are dependent on each other. If something is not "True," it can be neither "Good" nor "Beautiful" in the deepest sense of the words. The same goes for all other permutations of the three.

Think about a "beautiful" song that advocates something patently wrong, say, the killing of innocent children. How can anyone say it's truly "Beautiful"?

Or think of a dedicated employee but who has falsified a resume. How can he be called a "Good" man?

Or how about a solution to a problem that requires unnecessarily extreme measures. How can that solution be "True"?

Humanistic Spirituality applies these words thus: Only that which is True, Good, and Beautiful can lead to lasting connectedness. Or put it like this: A connection made through Truth, Goodness, and Beauty can never be taken away.

What are some paths toward developing one's own "Humanistic Spirituality"?

We can deepen our spirituality by:

- studying Academic Subjects like math, science, literature, and history
- appreciating the Arts, both visual and performing
- reading and discussing the Great Books and the Spiritual Classics
- enjoying the fruits of Pop Culture, including film
- studying and practicing the World's Religions, especially as they:
 - focus our awe and wonder
 - aid in our connectedness to ourselves and all things, and
 - help with our transitions through the Stages of Life
- immersing ourselves in the Natural environment
- pursuing Relationships that enhance our connectedness to others
- developing Practices (like yoga, running, meditation, prayer) that lead to greater inner peace

In fact, any endeavor that knocks down barriers and leads to greater connectedness with all that is Good, True, and Beautiful can be considered a path to deepened Humanistic Spirituality.

Summary

- "Humanistic Spirituality" is an inclusive philosophy that connects one with oneself, others, one's society, nature, the universe, and "everything." These are "The Six Connectednesses."
- The goal of Humanistic Spirituality is happiness (enlightenment, salvation, liberation).
- "Humanistic" means that whether God exists or not, whether one believes or not, what's important is what the individual human being *does*.
- "Spirituality" means concern with things of the spirit; this may be "mind"; the seat of the moral or religious nature; or something sacred, religious, or devotional.
- Both the atheist and the person of faith are seeking happiness.
- Following "The Perennial Philosophy," *all* human endeavors can be means to connection with "something bigger."
- Humanistic Spirituality embraces all that is gloriously human.
- Humanistic Spirituality can be discussed under three categories: the True (that which is in sync with reality); the Good (that which is morally right); and the Beautiful (beauty that goes to the core, to the heart).
- Humanistic Spirituality can be pursued through: academic subjects; the arts; "Great Books" and the spiritual classics; pop culture; the world's religions; the natural environment; relationships; and practices.