

# Spiritual Beliefs – Living, Dying, and the Afterlife

Anupam Goyal, Ph.D.

[www.anupamgoyal.com](http://www.anupamgoyal.com)

anupam17@gmail.com

June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024

“Successful Aging” Special Interest Group

The Harvard Club of San Francisco

# Spiritual Beliefs – Living, Dying, and the Afterlife

- What values to live by?
- Commonalities in spirituality
- Why spirituality interests me
- Spirituality as inspiration to a worthwhile life
- Implementing spiritual beliefs in living
- The ending as a continuum and the afterlife as joyful
- Conclusions

# What values to live by?

Dr. Rudenstine asks “What values should we live by, and what constitutes a good life?”

- Live Sensitive and Creatively
- Do What Makes One Feel Creative

I see several reasons to live by one's values:

- improve life satisfaction;
- leave a positive legacy for others;
- gain a good afterlife.

**Dr. Neil Leon Rudenstine,** 26<sup>th</sup> President of Harvard University

Harvard Magazine article titled “The Impression that you Exist.”

<https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2016/11/neil-rudenstine-on-the-humanities-at-dumbarton-oaks>

# Commonalities in **spirituality**

- Spiritual aspirations are common to many religions.

“The fruit of the **Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

## **The New Jerusalem Bible**

The Book of Galatians

Chapter 5, Verses 22-23

- As I work on living spiritually, these qualities—especially peace—tend to emerge.

# Commonalities in spirituality

God also is characterized similarly across religions, e.g.:

“The sage, the ancient, the ruler, subtler than the subtlest, the supporter of all, the inconceivable, glorious as the sun, beyond darkness.”

## **The Gita according to Gandhi**

Chapter 8 Verse 9

Pages 176-177

<https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/gita-according-to-gandhi.pdf>

# Why spirituality interests me?

- Personal efforts in spirituality and ensuing results

I aspire to fulfill the potential of God's many gifts, spiritual clarity being perhaps the greatest.

-In the dedication of my PhD dissertation, in 1999, I quoted:

“May God grant me to speak as he would wish and conceive thoughts worthy of the gifts I have received, since he is both guide to Wisdom and director of sages; for we are in his hand, yes, ourselves and our sayings, and all intellectual and all practical knowledge.”

**The New Jerusalem Bible** The Book of Wisdom, Chapter 7, verses 15 and 16

- Observing the long-term impact of religions and spiritual leaders.

# Spirituality as inspiration to a worthwhile life

- Historical example 1: President Lincoln built on his spirituality and faith to guide his actions.

“Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it.”

**Abraham Lincoln**

Cooper Union Speech

# Spirituality as inspiration to a worthwhile life

- Historical Example 2: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. demonstrates that spirituality can inspire us to care for the human community even at significant personal cost.

**“I have enjoyed being on this mountaintop and I am tempted to want to stay here ... I must return to the valley. ... —a valley filled with the misguided bloodthirsty mobs, but a valley filled at the same time with the little Negro boys and girls who grow up with the ominous clouds of inferiority forming in their little mental skies; ...”**

**Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

27th January 1965



# Spirituality as inspiration to a worthwhile life

- Historical Example 3: President Kennedy elevated working for God as a motivator because he saw a good conscience as his **only** sure reward.

“With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that **here on earth God's work must truly be our own.**”

**John Fitzgerald Kennedy**

Presidential Inaugural Address, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/inaugural-address>

# Implementing spiritual beliefs in living

Gandhi valued truth and nonviolence.

- His autobiography, “The story of my experiments with Truth”, relates **his** experiments; he encourages us all to carry out **our own** experiments. (His are not the only path to truth.)
- Gandhi even considers trying to force someone to act, e.g. asking for something repeatedly, to be violence. (I would like the world to be free of coercion.)

“I am but a poor struggling soul yearning to be wholly good—**wholly truthful and wholly non-violent** in thought, word and deed, but ever failing to reach the ideal which I know to be true. It is a painful climb, but the pain of it is a positive pleasure to me. Each step upward makes me feel stronger and fit for the next.”

## **Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi**

Young India, April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1925

Truth is God

Navajivan Publishing House

Ahmedabad, India

<https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/gandhiebooks.php>

# Implementing spiritual beliefs in living

- President Clinton asks us to align our will with God.
- He cites Christ willingly praying for those who crucified him, to help bring peace in the face of injustice.

“I ask you to pray for all of us, including yourself, to pray that **our purpose truly will reflect God’s will**, to pray that we can all be purged of the temptation to pretend that our willfulness is somehow equal to God's will, to remember that all the great peacemakers in the world, in the end, have to let go and walk away, like Christ, not from apparent but from genuine grievances.”

**William Jefferson Clinton**

National Prayer Breakfast, Washington Hilton Hotel, February 4, 1999

(This echoes my hope that God grant that I speak and think as He would wish.)

# Implementing spiritual beliefs in living

“I am only God’s pencil, one that he uses to sketch whatever he wants.”

**Saint Teresa of Calcutta / Mother Teresa**

*Like a drop in the ocean*

99 Sayings by Mother Teresa, Saying number 3

# The ending as a continuum

Nearing death, Gautama, the Buddha, gathered his disciples together. *Accepting* death as the natural fulfillment of life's impermanence, seems to elicit a feeling of peace and perhaps even joy about the transition.

“It is not appropriate to grieve in an hour of joy. ... recognize that all that lives is subject to the laws of impermanence. ... the end of life is seen as peace and as a cure to a disease. Everything that lives is bound to perish.”

## **Gautama, the Buddha**

Hinduism Today magazine  
July/August/September 2018, Page 41

# The afterlife as joyful

Jane Stanford's inscription implores us to emulate God's joy.

- I understand Christ undertook his life knowing great joy awaited him in the afterlife. He exemplified peace in living and dying because of this joy.

“No man can work well unless he can speak as the Great Master did of the joy set before Him.”

## **Stanford Memorial Church**

Inscriptions assembled by

Jane Stanford, co-founder of the Leland Stanford Junior University

<https://orsl.stanford.edu/memorial-church/memorial-church-inscriptions>

# Conclusions

- I'm interested in spiritual commonalities.
- Spirituality interests me both in personal experience and observing the world.
- Spiritual success can be defined as freely aligning one's will with God's.
- Implementing spirituality demands continual striving.
- The ending of life can be seen as joyful or freeing.
- The afterlife can be understood as joyful.

**Presenter:**

**Anupam Goyal, Ph.D.**  
[www.anupamgoyal.com](http://www.anupamgoyal.com)  
[anupam17@gmail.com](mailto:anupam17@gmail.com)

**Acknowledgements:**

Lee Robbins, Ph.D.  
Mark Eugene Fanucchi  
Jon Frankle, Ph.D.  
Paul Karofsky

**Thank you!**