CHAPTER VIII
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We shall, in this chapter, see the religious context of spirituality and how the \textit{anthropos} evolved from a natural, fear-oriented relationship with God to another that is very salutary and uplifting of him/her, bestowing upon him/her the dignity of a child of God. The spiritual dimension consists of the ‘conscience’ and the ‘soul’, and spirituality consists in responding to God’s call and striking and maintaining the right relationship with the divine, with others, with all creation and with oneself. There are plenty of methods of spirituality and we discuss some here. At the end of our discourse, we propose one that is especially suited to learners and the non-religious, non-reclusive individuals who have a dynamic interchange with the everyday world. Spirituality for students leads to many benefits like the experience of true freedom, a healthy relationship with all and dealing effectively with the reality of suffering. We also discuss some impediments to growing spiritually as a well-formed complete person. Insights are drawn from Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Christian traditions.

8.1 FEAR AND GOD CONSCIOUSNESS

The human search for God began with the propitiation of nature’s master to see an end to the fury of the elements. Primitive humans sought
to make peace with the terrifying and mysterious powers of nature\textsuperscript{168}. Whenever our ancestors wanted rain, they would pray to the ‘rain god’; when there was a forest fire, they would offer sacrifices to the ‘fire god’; when there was rolling thunder and it drove fear into the hearts of people, they created a god for thunder and submitted to and worshipped that god. Humanity has been creating gods for itself all through history. This is evident in ancient Rome (Lipka, 2009, pp. 3, 4, 32), ancient Greece (Mikalson, 2009, pp. 31-40) ancient India (Danielou, 1991, pp. 188-189) and among the tribal societies of Africa and South America – almost all ancient civilizations display this penchant for creating gods for themselves. Primitive religions were animistic, polytheistic and many cultures such as the Koreans (Janelli & Janelli, 1992, pp. vii-ix) and the Native American Indians (Palmer, Steadman & Tilley, 1996, pp. 63-76) worship their dead ancestors. These were all gods imagined by the human mind and the aspect of fear was predominant in the relationship. Little wonder that Bertrand Russell wrote, “Religion is based primarily and mainly upon fear”\textsuperscript{169}.

It is part of being human to relate to God—the \textit{anthropos} has a deeply felt desire to transcend, to relate, to love and be loved. Historically, the quest for God emerged from human initiative. This is

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[\textsuperscript{168}]{Propitiation of nature gods was typical of primitive religions. See http://www.leaderu.com/wri-table2/primitive.html}
\footnotetext[\textsuperscript{169}]{Bertrand Russell, the famous atheist, made a case for his unbelief in God and attributed all faith to fear. See http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2013/dec/02/bertrand-russell-philosopher-religion-fear-christian}
natural religiosity. Unfortunately, that quest was grounded in fear. William James, the psychologist, who took up a scientific study of religious practices, maintains that this fear was about “what may befall” a person (James, 2013, p. 204). Certain religions, which believe in propitiating an angry god, display this kind of fear. This was also common among the Jewish people of the Old Testament. Certain religious practices still accentuate the aspect of fear and continue in the milieu to this day (Bivins, 2008, pp. 40, 50). The alternative is a divine initiative to forge a relationship between the human being and Almighty God Himself. We find that in the ‘call of Abraham’ in the book of Genesis. While Abraham, like most people around him, remained a polytheist in the land of Ur, God issued a call to leave everything and follow him on a new journey.

The attitude of ‘Fear of the Lord’ has a legitimate place in the relationship with God. It is not like the fear common among the structures of the world, like an employee fearing his/her employer, or a pupil being terrified about his/her teacher. Such fear is the stock in trade of many of the world’s political leaders, who inspire it among their followers and perpetuate it with menacing tenacity. This is the first kind of fear.

There is a further dichotomy in the aspect of fear. The entity of God is mysterium tremendum et fascinans, meaning, it is a mystery that

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170 Genesis 12:1, 9, NRSV Bible
171 Proverbs 9:10 & 2 Chronicles 26:5, NRSV Bible.
inspires both a trembling and a fascination\textsuperscript{172}, awe and shock in the \textit{anthropos}. God can be both attractive and repulsive. The ‘fear of the Lord’, in a better understanding, is holy and has a profound connection with love. It can be noticed in our attitude in the family: we sometimes go to great lengths not to hurt the one we love. We do not want to see our child or spouse or parent or sibling hurt. That is because we have a fear, the second kind of fear, fearing to hurt someone when love is the reason. The fear of the Lord as we understand it here springs from love—the disciple loves God so much that s/he fears hurting Him by sinning\textsuperscript{173}. The first kind of fear mentioned above is slavish and distorts our personality—it distances us from God. The second kind mentioned here is healthy and builds us up as sons and daughters—it endears us and brings us close to him. The following is only an example from the Judeo-Christian perspective. An important insight into fear of the Lord is found in the book of Genesis where Abraham takes his son, Isaac atop the mountain in the land of Moriah to offer sacrifice\textsuperscript{174}. When the altar was prepared and

\textsuperscript{172} The Britannica encyclopaedia defines \textit{mysterium tremendum et fascinans} in http://www.britannica.com/topic/mysterium-tremendum-et-fascinans

\textsuperscript{173} Sin is the destruction of relationships with God, self and neighbour. In the universe in which God created everything good, how can there be sin? Saint Augustine posits that sin occurs when good things are wrongly prioritized. For example, mud is good because it supports life and vegetation, but if it is put into our platter of food, there is a distortion of priorities and sin and evil are born. Also, due to disordered and inordinate appetites, which seek gratification, there are occasions for sin.

\textsuperscript{174} After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains
Abraham drew his knife to slay Isaac, the angel called out, “Abraham, Abraham, do not lay your hand on the boy… for now I know that you fear God…” It appears that fear of God is an outcome of faith. To go a little further, fear of God ‘brings us to our senses’. We will be suddenly staring at reality after a long hiatus of luke-warmness. It happens during kairos\textsuperscript{175} time in our life. It leads to great blessings, just as it had in the case of Abraham. Abraham loved his God more than his son. He, like Jesus, loved his God so much that he feared hurting him by disobedience. Indeed, ‘fear of the Lord’ is one of his gifts\textsuperscript{176} and strengthens bonds of discipleship. It has to be desired, prayed for and cultivated by the

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\textsuperscript{175} ‘Kairos time’ is from Greek, meaning an opportune time with right conditions for something decisive to happen. In the religious context, it would mean “blessed time or time of grace”.

\textsuperscript{176} ‘The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.’ Isaiah 11:2, NRSV Bible.
anthropos. The book of Psalms calls this fear the basis of all blessings. This is a reverential fear and it is holy.

8.2 THE CAPACITY FOR TRANSCENDENCE

The spiritual dimension works in the realm of relationships and the spirit is the capacity for transcendence in those relationships. Spirituality makes us open to the ‘more than’. It enables the anthropos to go beyond the commonplace, the petty and the decadent. It has the characteristic of invincible goodwill. Charity is its motive and quality. A mature spiritual individual is like a fragrant tree that bathes with its effusive fragrance the very axe that cuts it. Emmons (2000, p. 3) qualifies spiritually intelligent people as those having the following qualities: (a) the capacity for transcendence, (b) the ability to experience heightened states of consciousness, (c) the ability to sanctify everyday experience, (d) the ability to use spiritual resources to solve problems, and (e) the capacity to be virtuous.

Two aspects of the spiritual dimension, are (i) the conscience and (ii) the soul. We shall discuss them at some length.

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177 ‘Happy is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways […] You shall eat the fruit of the labour of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you […] Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.’ Psalm 128:1-4, NRSV Bible.
8.2.1 THE CONSCIENCE

The document, *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican II, defines the conscience thus:

In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart, do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths.”

The conscience so understood acts as a ‘moral trigger’, alerting the person to the ills and goods of a deed, rendering judgment on the individual and acting as an internal government with objective norms for moral behavior. The conscience is ‘formed’ through a complex process (Mathulla, 2015a, pp. 31-32) that includes (a) the value system espoused in the immediate society of the individual, (b) the teaching of divine precepts, and (c) the accumulative effect of the decisions made by the person through the exercise of his or her free volition. Each moral decision taken has an inescapable consequence for the conscience. The moral correctness of that decision is left impressed on the conscience. A morally right decision has a beneficial effect on it, keeping it sharp and

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sensitive to sin. A morally corrupt decision blunts the conscience and weakens the signal to the mind about the danger of sin. Thus, the long series of decisions taken over an extended period make the conscience either a ‘live wire’ or ‘deadened,’ resulting in a ‘true’ or a ‘false’ person (Mathulla, 2015a, p. 32).

It is interesting to note that a physical wound heals rather easily, but a wound to the conscience takes a much longer time to heal (Mathulla, 2015a, pp. 32-33). Wounds to the conscience are usually the result of secret sin (Mathulla, 2015a, pp. 27-34) and distasteful experiences that have not been resolved. A large part of our spiritual development depends on whether we have used or abused our conscience.

The Gospel of Matthew likens the conscience to the eye and makes us wonder about the great penury of one who has abused his or her conscience: “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”179 The conscience plays so central a role in the spiritual health of the person that with a good conscience, the person is filled with righteous energy and a free, unencumbered spirit. The opposite is true for someone with a corrupt conscience. The Book of Isaiah warns that one who has abused his/her conscience will be in incessant torment with the undying worm gnawing away at the person: “[...] for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”180 The devastation is so great

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179 Matthew 6:22-23, NRSV Bible.
180 Isaiah 66:24, NRSV Bible.
that it is a debilitating spiritual ailment for which there is no cure in the human realm. Only divine grace can undo the stranglehold over the free action of the spirit due to sin.

It may be pertinent to mention the evil one here. The evil spiritual entity seeks the ruin of people who love God. It is the subtle but malignant foe who comes only to plunder. A particularly common way it operates is by tempting people: people may have done something wrong in the distant past through the guile of the evil one, who constantly insinuates against them, robs them of their sense of innocence, of all their hope, their joy of living and keeps them subjugated through a subaltern spirit. The person who is caught in the snare of the evil one is threatened to be exposed in the community and the wider society. The agony is greater for a person, who tries to live a good, upright life than for one who is a practicing sinner, whose conscience is defunct. On the one hand, the evil one tempts us and on the other, it constantly threatens us. Psychological havoc is wrought on the *anthropos* with myriad psychosomatic illnesses for the *anthropos*.

The Hindu belief system holds that whenever there is grave evil in the world, God incarnates in human form (Price, 2010, p. 42), some of whom have been Narasimha, Krishna and Rama. They had all vanquished evil and re-established Dharma. These multiple deities reflect an important principle of Hindu religious thought – the idea of the *ista devata* (Danielou, 1991, p. 9). The seeker chooses the *devata* (deity) of his/her *ista* (liking) and worships that God. This explains why India has been so welcoming of foreign faiths – religions like Christianity and Islam, which took birth in the Semitic regions, found safe havens and a
welcoming people in India, because the idea of *ista devata* did not deter, but encouraged another *devata* purported to be the *ista* of somebody. This makes Hinduism one of the most liberal religions, accommodating diverse thought systems within it. The Semitic religions, like Christianity, Islam and Judaism, in contrast, have strict doctrines, dogmas and laws including those for blasphemy and excommunication. The latter tend to be exclusive and keep out anyone who does not toe the line of their doctrines, dogmas and laws, whereas the former is inclusive, with a place for everyone.

In the Christian understanding, God incarnates for a different reason. To return evil for evil only begets more evil. Evil requires human instrumentality to propagate. Evil was not vanquished by violence, but was won over by the heart-stirring sacrifice of Jesus Christ – the Universal Church teaches that by taking the sin of the world upon himself as the ‘Lamb of God,’¹⁸¹ Jesus put an end to the transmission of evil¹⁸². When we suffer at the hands of an aggressor and do not retaliate, we take the sin of the other upon ourselves and stop the transmission of evil. This is the way we bear ‘our cross’; and we too play a part in stopping evil from spreading. On the other hand, refusal to bear our cross has the opposite effect, that of spreading evil around us.

From the two paragraphs above, we find that the two broad classes of Spiritualities may be existentially differentiated as follows: God in

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¹⁸¹ John 1: 29, NRSV Bible

Hinduism is a ‘God of power,’ who decimates evil, whereas God in the Christian understanding is the ‘God of love’, who saves from evil.

Taking cognizance of the powers of good and evil surrounding the *anthropos*, developing a strong voice of conscience and getting accustomed to taking noble decisions are abilities that need to be instilled in impressionable young students. Education has no substantial program for this. At best, we see such elements in informal, weekend retreats and workshops. Perhaps, this is not even in the ambit of the school—the educational canvas has to be broadened to accommodate spiritual training by other organizations.

8.2.2 THE SOUL

Let us consider the soul, the second element of the anthropological entity of the spiritual dimension. The *anthropos* has an immortal character, which is represented by his or her spiritual dimension—there is always a part of him or her that hopes for the future, leading across the mortal span—that dimension is constituted by the soul. This could also be seen in the fact that in each one of our thoughts, we transcend matter, go beyond and are uplifted. The well-being of the soul transcending the empirical life is an important pre-occupation for many people. Philosopher, Jenny Teichman says: “Those who deny the soul are very often really concerned with denying the possibility of immortality” (Teichman, 1974, p. 4). As human beings, we feel and are held accountable for our actions, and accountability carried to its trans-temporal state after death makes a case for the soul. This is reasonable because, not every offender gets punished, nor every striving individual
properly rewarded in life—although there is the long arm of the law, perfect justice is elusive in the social universe. All creation, however, is at unease and restless until perfect justice is established (Mathulla, 2012, p. 270). And for perfect justice to prevail in creation, all actions have to be recompensed (Mathulla, 2012, p. 270). This is the metaphysical reason for trans-temporal consequences for actions of the temporal life. Concern for one’s soul will lead a person to take eternity into consideration and his/her temporal life will be informed by a sound sense of moral justice that recognizes that in the final reckoning each person will be rewarded according to righteousness. In that sense, the soul is the really true self and cannot duck any issue. The old Hebrew understanding of the soul or nephesh (Squire, 1976, p. 19) referred to the whole person. Only with the soul does the anthropos become complete. Educating the soul, therefore, is an essential aspect of an anthropologically comprehensive educational program.

8.3 SPIRITUALITIES AND THEIR THEOLOGICAL CONTEXTS

Spirituality is the embodiment of a response to God’s call to the anthropos. It primarily helps in relating between persons who are endowed with a free will – free of fear and open to receiving and offering love, and combating the entropy of the universe. It requires the right disposition of the deep interior self or what we have described as the ‘heart’ in the sixth chapter. There are fundamentally four relationships (Fisher, 2010, p. 116): the relationship with the self, the relationship with others, the relationship with nature and that with Almighty God. The
ultimate end of spirituality is to be at peace across all these dimensions, and so have a peaceful, joyful soul. William James calls it the “soul of a sky-blue tint” (James, 2013, p. 80) with “a deep sense of the goodness of life” (James, 2013, p. 79). But this is easier said than done. The way to achieve that peaceful, joyful state is by doing the will of God, which itself requires spiritual training. There are two fundamental obstructions here: our own disordered appetites,\textsuperscript{183} which place our desires in opposition to the desires of God; and second, the deceptive work of the evil entity (Morose, 2011, p. 114), which does not want us to establish and grow in these relationships.

We could say that a subordinate aim of spirituality is to develop into a person who serves God. For this, s/he has first got to be free—free from ignorance, prejudice, guilt and self-centeredness. The Gospel of John speaks eloquently about spiritual freedom: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”\textsuperscript{184} The first step here is to live the Gospel life in small and large ways. The precepts of the Gospels need to be interiorized through personal application. Some precepts are easy to follow, whereas others are challenging and can be achieved only at an advanced stage of maturity. The more a disciple appropriates the truths of the Gospel, the more endowed s/he becomes in freedom. Such a person will have no axe to grind, but like a dutiful and well-endowed executive is ideally poised and ready to carry out the wishes of the master. Only a radically free person can reach that stage. Needless to say, such spiritual


\textsuperscript{184} John 8:31-32, NRSV Bible.
autonomy is attained by different people at different ages depending on their ‘walk with God’.

The author, E. H. Carr (1961, pp. 3-35) in his book, What is History? informs that people should read the historian before reading his or her version of history to understand what that historian’s presuppositions are. An analog may be applied to religious interpretation of sacred texts to clear the confusion and help assimilate the beauty of the truth in them. There are innumerable sects among Christian corporality across the world, each one with its particular interpretation of the Bible. The same can be claimed about Muslim Corporality. For example, the ISIS’185 extreme interpretation of Islam is quite different from that of the moderate Muslim. Ironically, they both quote the same Quran and Hadith186. As regards Jihad or Holy War against unbelievers, there is the interpretation of the greater Jihad, a ‘peaceful inner spiritual struggle for self-purification,’ (Suroor, 2014, p. 8) and lesser Jihad, permitted only in specific circumstances like the use of force in self-defense. It’s all a matter of interpretation.

The Second Vatican Council document, Nostra Aetate proclaims that the ‘ray187 of truth’ is present in all great religions of the world and so

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185 ISIS is the ‘Islamic State of Iraq and Syria,’ a radical Sunni Muslim group that has a particularly brutal record of violence against those who don’t share their ideas and interpretation of the Quran.

186 Hadith is a compilation of Prophet Mohammad’s sayings and teachings.

187 Pope Paul VI, “The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all
there are important lessons to be learnt from each of them. Let us understand the presence of the ‘ray of truth’ mentioned above through an analogy from the world of architecture. It is a startling fact that the material world of architecture has flourished under the spiritual influence of the world’s great religions. Thus, Hindu architecture can boast of the Sun Temple at Konark in Orissa and Belur Hale Bidu Temples in Karnataka, which have an arresting beauty of sculpture and carvings, all their own. Islamic architecture has accomplished the marvelous Taj Mahal at Agra, with its beautiful proportions and three distinct colors at different times of the day, viz., soft milky at dawn, pale and rosy at sunset and brilliant white at mid-day. It is one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Buddhist architecture prides itself in the Stupa at Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh and the Ajantha, Ellora Cave Temples in Maharashtra showing rock-cut architecture. And Christian Architecture has given us magnificent Cathedrals and Basilicas all over the world. These expressions in stone, brick and mortar embody the human spirit unique to a particular age and place – they stand testimony to the inspired human spirit in the attempt to build a house of God under different religious influences. We find that all religious dispensations have produced edifices that are rich in their distinctive style and are absolutely stunning. We posit here that just as architecture has flourished brilliantly under each religious dispensation in different ways, valid ideas about God also are to men.” Declaration of the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions. See http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html 1965, Article 2.
be found in the teachings of different religions, each with their distinctive flavor and appeal. Students must be open to learning from their rich stock of knowledge and deep spiritual lessons, which constitute the ‘ray of truth’ in each religion, and must be introduced to this without indoctrination. That way, they will be given seeds that will one day help them mature into people with a universal spirit that is truly open to God and all humanity. They will be able to see and appreciate the good in people who do not share their faith but most definitely share their humanness.

Thus, in Hinduism, the divine mystery is contemplated and expressed through an abundance of myths and deep philosophical thought. The munis and rishis of ancient India contemplated the essence of life, and the Vedas and Upanishads are a great source of practical wisdom, pithy aphorisms and lessons relevant to education. Hinduism addresses the need for freedom from the anguished human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with deep devotion in love and trust.

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188 “The theory of permutations and combinations is built into the Vedic metre as explained in various texts from Pingala’s Chandahsutra to Bhaskar’s Lilavati. The aksa sukta of the Rgveda gives a beautiful account of the game of dice, which is the foundation of the theory of probability. The romantic story of Nala and Damayanti in the Mahabharatha further relates the dice to sampling theory (to count the number of fruits in a tree.)” C. K. Raju, ‘Nothing Vedic in Vedic maths,’ The Hindu, p. 11, 3 Sep 2014.

189 Pope Paul VI, “Thus in Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek freedom from the anguish of the human condition either through
Some Hindu tenets were intimately woven into the life of the people. Let us consider the example of *ayudha puja*, a popular festival in southern India. The festival has to do with the life of the laboring people. The hardworking laborers took a holiday from their relentless routine as *kaarigars* and masons and rested their tools and implements. They found time to clean and maintain their equipment. It was a practical requirement to ‘oil and grease’ their tools so that they continue to come good for the next year. They however gave it a religious connotation to inculcate discipline and an obligation. There we have religion being an intimate part of the professional life of the people.

The *Bhagavadgita* teaches about the three margas (Krishan, 1997, p. 112), viz., *karma marga* (the path of labor), *jnana marga* (the path of knowledge) and *bhakti marga* (the path of devotion). The three margas correspond to the three faculties of the *anthropos*, viz., the embodied, the cognitive and the affective dimensions respectively in our conceptualization. Although these three margas may appear to be distinct, with nothing shared amongst them, in practice, none can pursue only knowledge or only labor or only devotion to God. There are overlaps between each of these margas in a seeker’s life. Right spiritual ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust,”

*Declaration of the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions.*

190 *Ayudha Puja* is a popular southern Indian festival, in which devotees worship weapons or *ayudha*. Its cultural history and significance and interpretative meaning is presented above. See http://www.drikpanchang.com/navratri/durga-puja/ayudha-puja-date-time.html
development calls for integration of the three margas or the three anthropological faculties. So, there is some knowledge, some devotion and some labor in one’s spiritual quest. And a healthy balance of all three makes for a mature and well-developed spirituality.

An example of this well-developed spirituality is perhaps, sahana yoga or ‘yoga of suffering’. Someone who practiced sahana yoga is Cardinal Edward Manning, whose story is well documented (Armitage, 2014, pp. 7-8). The role he played in the Great London Dock strike of 1889 still holds lessons for us. The Cardinal agreed to mediate between the striking dock workers and the belligerent dock owners of London. Both sides trusted him because of his impeccable integrity. During the negotiations, many participants walked out but Manning stayed till the very end although he was 81 years old and very frail. The ‘Cardinal’s Peace’ as it came to be called, brought to end a socio-economic calamity of epic proportions and a great period of unrest, which had paralyzed the whole London economy. A person of God with his/her openness to both sides became a bipartisan peace-maker.

Cardinal Manning’s role may be termed a deep engagement with reality through the spirituality of suffering – sahana yoga, the patrimony of Jesus Christ and his message of the cross. Manning’s great gift to us was to show us how to nurture the values of dignity of every human person, the preferential option for the poor, the values of solidarity and participation, and striving for the common good. Through the spirituality of sahana yoga, he lived these values engaging in action that is patient with people and faithful to God. Looking deep into the elements of sahana Yoga from the three margas, we find that Manning practiced
*gnana yoga* because he brought many years of experience in ecclesiastical leadership to the negotiating table as an arbitrator and mediator—he understood the nuances of a mass human problem and found solutions for it. Second, he displayed *karma yoga* by unyieldingly expending of his bodily strength through many days and long nights of concentrated effort. And finally, he practiced *bhakti yoga* as he prayerfully approached the problem and brought his intercession before God to solve the stubborn and vexing problem. This example is a depiction of *sahana yoga* involving the integration of the three anthropological faculties.

8.3.1 ORIENTAL (HINDU AND BUDDHIST) SPIRITUALITY: MEDITATIVE CONTEMPLATION

Buddhism, in its various forms, realizes the insufficiency of this passing world (Powers, 2007, p. 38) to satisfy the human soul; it preaches a devout and confident spirit through which we may be able either to acquire the state of total liberation, or attain, supreme illumination by self-effort or higher help.191 Similarly, various other religions try to offer repose to the restless human heart, by proposing ‘ways’, comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites.

Buddhism gives the eight-fold path (Laumakis, 2008, p. 45) that leads to peace, which consists of right understanding, right thought, right

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speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. In the four noble truths, it preaches the reality of suffering, *dukhā*; the cause of suffering, *dukhā*; the cessation of suffering, *dukhā*; and the path leading to the cessation of suffering, *dukhā* (Laumakis, 2008, p. 45). The *ashtanga marga* or eightfold path is the Buddhist way of overcoming suffering. Buddhism offers a great insight into the human condition and advocates the cessation of craving in all its forms to achieve peace.

Oriental Spirituality, which has elements of Buddhist and Hindu traditions interwoven together, has a strong component of exercising and dexterously controlling the respiratory system. The ancient Hebrews used to believe that breath is life (De Mello, 2014, p. 33). When a person dies, God takes away our breath; that is the end of life. If we lived, it was because God had put His breath into us (De Mello, 2014, p. 33). That is why the respiratory apparatus of the body assumes cardinal importance in seeking God through meditative contemplation in the oriental tradition. The reasoning is that one reaches the spirit through the vehicle of the body. There are at least eight methods to breathe according to the yogic techniques of *pranayama.*

Also, in the oriental tradition, there seems to be great emphasis on the aspect of silence. All attachments in life were renounced by the ancient *Munis* when they proceeded into the forest and meditated in the midst of nature. There is disturbed cognition and upheaval of emotions

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192 Some of these *pranayama* breathing techniques are *bhastrika, bhramari, kapalabhatti, bahya, anulom vilom, udeeth, pranav, nadhi shodhana* etc. See http://eyogaguru.com/seven-pranayama-breathing-exercises-and-benefits/
during silent contemplation. The quality of the silence (how deep the silence is) rather than the content (what thoughts pass by) of the awareness is of importance (De Mello, 1987, pp. 5-6). With mastery to attain silence, one can tap the mysterious that produces transformation – it challenges us to surrender, to let our guard down to the great unknown. De Mello reveals that some seekers who practice silence panic and withdraw on reaching its frontiers. Silence can be frightening! Letting down one’s guard in this manner is not always easy (De Mello, 1987, p. 4).

If not anything, meditative or contemplative silence helps collect oneself to mentally relax and regain strength that has been sapped by the demands of life; it helps start reinvigorated again for each day. What is this silence? First, in contemplative silence, our spirit is engaged deeply, with much happening, and time, as it were, flies. It is a wordless, imageless, concept-less silence (De Mello, 1987, p. 24). The powers of concentration and awareness, perception and attention are developed through meditation (De Mello, 1987, p. 10). For the orient, both procedurally and substantively, spirituality is synonymous with meditation. How is meditation different from prayer? De Mello claims that both meditation and prayer are communication with God. Whereas prayer uses thoughts and images to achieve the communication, contemplation uses very little of it or dispenses with it altogether (De Mello, 1987, p. 24).

With this emphasis on awareness of the self, of one’s body, of one’s breath, the aim is to proceed from a coarseness or grossness of awareness (De Mello, 1987, pp. 39-40) of oneself to a fine and highly sensitive and
wonderful stillness and awareness before God. One has to endure all
disturbances without reacting and reach a stillness and awareness and
become one with the environment. There are also distractive thoughts.
De Mello quotes Hindu masters of meditation and articulates that thoughts
are like thorns—one thorn is removed by another (De Mello, 1987, p.
28)—which is to say that one thought can rid us of all other thoughts that
crowd the mind. The constant refrain of the masters is to get out of the
head (De Mello, 1987, pp. 8-9) and get into the senses, collecting oneself
completely and making a loving offering of oneself to God. It amounts to
praying with our body (De Mello, 1987, p. 41). It is in this mysterious
silence of a total offering of oneself, body and soul, that one is revealed
the truth about oneself, one’s destiny and one’s mission in the world.
When a person realizes his/her ultimate and fundamental reality before
God, which is nothingness before grandeur, one will be less boastful, less
self-exalting and more understanding and accommodating of others.
Going back again and again to this deep silence prepares the human soul
to discern God’s will.

To the author of the spiritual classic, ‘Cloud of Unknowing,’ there
is one’s heart; it is not the biological organ\textsuperscript{193} that pumps blood through
the circulatory system, neither is it the site of affectivity. It may be called
the mystical heart (De Mello, 1987, p. 25). In most people, this heart is

\textsuperscript{193} The author of the spiritual classic, ‘The Cloud of Unknowing’ is obscure. The
work is published with a contemporary translation as \textit{The cloud of unknowing: A new
translation}, and refers to the ‘spiritual heart’, not the ‘physical heart’ which helps to
respond to the stirrings of the spirit. Published by Shambhala Publications, Boulder,
dormant and lies undeveloped. And to develop it, one needs to remove the dross surrounding it (De Mello, 1987, p. 25). The dross that may be likened to the thick layer of thoughts, words, images which are always occupying the space between the seeker and God, and impedes the communion and intimacy therein. This cultivated silence paves the way for good communion when the heart is full of love (De Mello, 1987, p. 26). However, there are different response patterns in different individuals: some are naturally predisposed to heart-communion with God (De Mello, 1987, p. 31) when communicating with Him through words and images, whereas for others, it is an arduous task to attain stillness, and then reach communion. The more the seeker listens in silence and humility, the stronger his or her bond with God grows (Walters, 2014, p. 78).

Only if one can accept oneself, can one really offer oneself to others and to God (De Mello, 1987, 56). An important spiritual principle is that there is no greater reality of God for a person than one’s own self—God is the ground of the self, of one’s being. It is only when I am aware and tuned in to myself that I can be open to my neighbor. Some mystics say that when they reach the stage of illumination, they become mysteriously filled with deep reverence for life in all its forms (De Mello, 1987, pp. 56-57).

One prays using this oriental method not just with the intellect but with the whole being including the body. When we pray, if we are carelessly slouched on a chair or standing in a slovenly fashion, we are not gripped by the majestic presence of God. If we were, it would show on our body (De Mello, 1987, p. 44). The familiar refrain is that the
whole *anthropos* is involved in communicating with God, moving away from grossness of awareness into deep communion.

Besides this deep contemplative silence mentioned above, there is a more ordinary silence that we can relate to – the absence of din and disturbing sound, in a quiet room, perhaps. We need this kind of silence for prayer. According to Basil Hume, prayer may be understood as follows:

Prayer is the song of one who strives to see the majesty and beauty of God; who can admire the wonders of the created universe in order to wonder at the Creator whose majesty and beauty those created things mirror. It is a song of response from one who has reflected on the greatness of God’s love for us and who strives to return love for love. But in our day-to-day life it may often not be easy to react along these lines. That is why we have to treasure moments of solitude and silence, why we must strive to dwell on the things of God in our reading of the Scriptures, in our pondering on the happenings of the day, in our thinking. That is the part we have to play […] (Hume, 2002, p. 156)

Similarly, Saint Teresa of Avila, the Carmelite nun, advocates mystical prayer. Her method leads to mystical union with God when the seeker passes through the ‘seven mansions’ (or stages) of contemplative prayer (Saint Teresa of Avila, 2007, pp. 4-6). Briefly, they are—the first stage, where the soul is in a state of grace but is still smitten by desires of the world; second, the stage where there is a desire to put virtue into practice; third, the soul is disposed to acts of charity but is held back by the penchant for reason; fourth, the soul gives of itself more and shrinks from no trials (God’s part is greater, but the soul is still vulnerable to
relapsing); fifth, the soul is completely possessed by God for short periods of time; sixth, the lover (God) and the beloved (soul) see each other for long periods of time (they grow in intimacy but the soul has to endure afflictions), and finally the seventh stage of spiritual marriage or perfect peace, which is the best state possible in this life. This transformative journey begins with human effort and active intellection in prayer, ends in union with God in the seventh mansion, where God intensifies His activity. The soul of the seeker is only a host, who offers loving attentiveness to the divine guest, who is ardently waited for and imminently expected. The seeker’s role is only to wait on the Lord in a prayerful disposition. Teresa’s method emphasizes waiting for the lover to arrive.\textsuperscript{194} Whereas the initiative in the oriental method is taken by the seeker, the initiative in Christian mysticism is taken by God Himself (Egan, 1991, p. xvi). It is not the seeker praying but the divine guest, God Himself praying in the seeker’s spirit with groans too deep for words.\textsuperscript{195}

Most spiritualities mentioned above can be practiced only in silence and meditation, in a sort of retreat from the world. It is ideally suited to sages and monks who live a reclusive life. What about the ordinary person who has to live in the world? S/he needs a spirituality of dynamic balance that lets him/her engage in the struggles of living in the world while simultaneously being in communion with God and promoting the

\textsuperscript{194} A simile is seen in Hinduism in Mirabai, Chaitanya and Ramakrishna.

\textsuperscript{195} “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.” Romans 8:26, NRSV Bible.
good of neighbor. What kind of spirituality would that be? We shall offer a suggestion in the concluding pages of this chapter.

8.3.2 ISLAMIC SPIRITUALITY

Islam is a major religion adhered to by about 1.6 billion people in the world, who constitute 23% of the earth’s population; it is arguably the fastest growing religion of the world. Etymologically, ‘Islam’ means, ‘voluntary submission to the will of God’. The word, ‘Muslim’ is the active participle of the same verb of which Islam is the infinitive. Muslims adore the one God, living and subsisting in himself; Allah is merciful and all-powerful, the creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to humanity. Through a strong filial faith, they submit wholeheartedly to even his inscrutable decrees. In addition, they await the Day-of-Judgment when God will render just desserts to all who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, Muslims value the moral life and have a strong tradition of prayer, almsgiving and fasting. The Holy Quran, the scripture of the Muslim, is considered a verbatim record of God’s word to Prophet Mohammad given through Angel Gabriel.

Islam suggests an internal conviction in the adherent: “Whomsoever God decides to guide, He opens his heart to Islam.”196 The spirituality of Islam is that of ‘right conduct’ (Corbin, 2014, p. 194) that permeates all areas of life197 from eating and bathing to praying and

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197 An example of diverse areas of life being touched in the Islamic world is seen in the word “algorithm” in mathematics, which comes from “algorithmus,” the Latinized name of al Khwarizmi of the 9th century House of Wisdom in Baghdad. He wrote an
penance, and economics and government. The *Hadith* prescribes rules and methods for various aspects of life (Banohar, 2014, p. 57). Let us consider two aspects, the personal and the professional. First, the family is the basic unit of Islamic society and it defines the obligations and rights of family members. Marriage is a civil contract in which the groom seeks the bride’s hand through a request made to her father. He is required to furnish the *Mahr* or bridal gift to her as stipulated in the contract. Second, an interesting aspect of an Islamic economy is that Muslims are not allowed to engage in usury by giving out loans and charging interest without taking business risk. However, trade is permissible and for those who take business risk, a profit is allowed. Further, wealth is taxed through *Zakat* but trade is not taxed. However, most countries in the world today do not conform to Islamic economic jurisprudence; they all do issue government bonds for which interest is charged by their respective central banks.

The five pillars\(^{198}\) (or sacraments) of Islam are: (a) *Shahadah*, the belief in one God, Allah; (b) *Salat*, prayer five times a day; (c) *Zakat*, giving 2.5% of one’s wealth every year to the poor and needy; (d) *Roza*, fasting and penance during the Holy month of Ramadan; and (e) *Hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime. From the cradle to the grave, the Muslim lives the sacramental life by practicing the five

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\(^{198}\)The five pillars of Islam are discussed in

https://www.saudiembassy.net/about/country-information/Islam/five_pillars_of_Islam.aspx
elements mentioned above – faithfulness to these may be termed Muslim spirituality. Some of the salient aspects of Islamic spirituality are a strong emphasis on community and oneness; the rejection of caste and class; the spirit of inquiry it fosters; its command not to bow to any authoritarian or dictatorial temporal authority; its stress on simple and Spartan living, a complete rejection of social and economic exploitation and its egalitarianism (Suroor, 2014, p. 8).

8.3.3 SOME CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITIES

Christianity preaches salvation through the person of Jesus Christ, the son of God, who squarely meets the question of suffering. Christians believe that through his redemptive sacrifice upon the cross, Jesus reconciled an estranged humanity with God. Whereas in Buddhism, the emphasis is on avoiding suffering by training oneself to be stolid, Jesus’ message is the opposite: He invites the disciple to embrace all reality of life, which includes the openness to suffering, to endure it in prayerful union with him and transcend it. The disciple often has to struggle in prayer as a prelude to accepting his/her cross with dignity. This is poignantly pictured in the garden of Gethsemane.  

We could say that there are three stages (Mathulla, 2015a, pp. 51-55) in encountering the cross: before, during and after the cross is borne. In the first stage, if we simply take a situation of suffering as fait accompli (Mathulla, 2015a, p. 51), we would be cursing and screaming, biting and

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199 The garden of Gethsemane is portrayed in the Gospels as the place of Jesus’ agony and prayer just before his arrest by the Roman soldiers and Jewish temple guards.
kicking all the way. It can be excruciating. Jesus leads by example in the garden of Gethsemane. While his mortal flesh came apart in the struggle to accept his cross, he attained a heightened sense of sacredness through deep and violent communion in the garden. It was mortal struggle in prayer. Being open to God and humanity in so radical a manner occasions unspeakable agony! But it also increases the capacity of the spirit to accept the negative situation gracefully. Jesus appears shaken\(^{200}\) before his acceptance, but with the angel coming to restore him to strength\(^{201}\) and his transformative prayer\(^{202}\) in the garden, he faced his captors just after, with characteristic radiance, fully in command of himself. It takes much prayer and spiritual preparation to accept our misery with dignity. It was after such a violent struggle in prayer that Jesus was armed in his will and fully ready to take up his cross.

The second stage (Mathulla, 2015a, p. 53) in encountering the cross is the actual, real-time contact with suffering—that’s the period demanding the greatest endurance. There is no easy way out here – one can only look up to God in prayer. There is suffering caused due to sin and suffering on the way to redemption. The two kinds are very different. In the suffering caused due to sin, one has done the immoral, but it fails to give sustained satisfaction—there is an emptiness within, besides, guilt for

\(^{200}\)Sweating great drops of blood and pleading with the father to let his cup pass, Luke 22:44 and 41, NRSV Bible.

\(^{201}\)‘Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength.’ Luke 22:43, NRSV Bible.

\(^{202}\)“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.” Luke 22:42, NRSV Bible.
a person with a good conscience. On the other hand, in the suffering on the way to redemption, God takes away something or someone precious from our life—there is sorrow and mourning over the loss. Norman Vincent Peale says: “Sorrow is a wound. It cuts deeply, but sorrow is a clean wound, and will heal”. Sorrow is effective in maturing and sanctifying us. This kind of suffering is actually salutary for us because such a loss orients us correctly in our relationship with God, ridding us of any impediment in relating to Him. The cost\textsuperscript{203} of discipleship is clearly laid out in the Gospels.

The third stage comes after we have endured the cross – there is great peace and joy (Mathulla, 2015a, p. 54). We are given the fruits of the Holy Spirit – the \textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church} calls these the ‘first fruits of eternal glory.’\textsuperscript{204} Our nature changes for the better when we are vested with these. We could relate these fruits of the Spirit as leading from one to another (Francis, 2001, p. 57) as follows: ‘Charity’ on our part leads to ‘Joy’ and then ‘Peace;’ ‘Patience’ to ‘Kindness’ and thereafter ‘Goodness;’ ‘Generosity’ to ‘Gentleness’ and finally ‘Faithfulness;’ and ‘Modesty’ to ‘Self-control’ and then to ‘Chastity.’ There are four sets of triplets here making twelve in all. They begin with human effort and end with divine munificence.

Divine grace is given to one who takes up his or her cross (or accepts suffering). The Gospel of Matthew claims that the disciple’s

\textsuperscript{203} “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?” Luke 14:28, NRSV Bible; “If you wish to serve the Lord, be prepared for an ordeal” Sirach2:1, NRSV Bible.

\textsuperscript{204} Pope John Paul II, \textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church}, 1994, Article 1832.
“yoke is easy and his burden is light”\textsuperscript{205} because the Lord is with him/her in suffering: “The lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”\textsuperscript{206} In addition, the disciple also finds meaning in suffering. Unlike other religions, Christianity, modeling on Jesus’ passion, does not avoid suffering but endures it and transcends it through faith to end in joy.

There are several spiritualities in the Church. Some prominent ones are mentioned here: the one developed by Saint Ignatius of Loyola emphasizes ‘Magis’ – which is to do excellently better for the greater glory of God. Magis, which in Latin means “more;” it typically asks, “what [more] ought I to do for Christ?” (Modras, 2004, p. 28). Ignatian spirituality\textsuperscript{207} is for daily life. All anthropological faculties and resources at the command of the disciple are to be employed to bring about the best possible offering for the sake of God’s greater glory. This greater glory is brought about by sacred labor of the \textit{anthropos} (the internal glory of God is already at work; we humans cannot add to it). It recognizes that God is present in the world and is active in our lives. It emphasizes deep prayer, well-considered decisions guided by discernment, and a life of service.

The Benedictine monks practice the spirituality of “pray and work”, or “ora et labora” (de Vogue, 1983, p. 242) in Latin, whereby they labor

\textsuperscript{205} Matthew 11:30, NRSV Bible.
\textsuperscript{206} Psalm 34:18, NRSV Bible.
passionately in a community to bring about the kingdom of God in a material and spiritual way, and find a balance by practicing deep prayer and letting it inform their work in community (Saint Benedict, 1998, pp. 3, xxxiii).

The Franciscans of the patrimony of Saint Francis of Assisi embrace poverty as a way of life (Short, 1999, pp. 58-71) and believe in radically abandoning their lives to the mercy of God, who provides for them. They recognize the sacredness of all creation and try to foster an interdependent relationship leading to an inter-formed harmony with nature. They are known for their thankful attitude and joyful nature, devoting themselves to promoting peace, dialog and reconciliation wherever possible.

8.4 IMPEDIMENTS TO SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality is a living principle of the transcendent person. Nettleship describes the Platonic soul as an entity which we can neither create nor destroy but we can feed or starve, nourish or poison (Nettleship, 1935, p. 5). It has assimilative power and can take in both good and evil. It also has the dismal quality of growing evil and becoming its own worst enemy. Nettleship continues, “[A] gifted soul in a corrupt society is like a good seed sown in strange soil; it grows crooked and unlike itself, loses its proper virtue, and sinks at last to the level of its surroundings” (Nettleship, 1935, p. 6). Two norms of society are particularly harmful to spiritual advancement, i.e., ‘exaltation of the self’ and ‘worship of hidden treasures.’ We shall consider them in turn.
8.4.1 EXALTATION OF THE SELF

The ranking system in school education has been the norm for scholastic assessment for well over a century. Recently in India, the Central Board of Secondary Education, CBSE, the Indian Council of Secondary Education, ICSE and most State Boards of Secondary Education have moved to the system of grades, which is a more benign system that is not so obvious in rank ordering students on performance. Surely, there is an argument for rank ordering students; for one thing, it is the easiest way to decide the ‘winner;’ it may also be argued to be objective, besides, it is easy to compute. But human beings are not so easily measured as physical quantities, like a liter of milk or a pound of bread. Each human person has an unassailable dignity\textsuperscript{208} and infinite worth, and we cannot consider anyone a lesser mortal based on scholastic ranks. Not all abilities of students are accounted for and not all attributes are considered in the rank order scheme of assessment: it is a simplistic, one-dimensional system of measurement. The psychologist-philosopher, Howard Gardner argues against the practice of using the same measure for students who may be differently endowed. In Gardner’s words, “it should be possible to identify an individual’s intellectual profile (or proclivities) at an early age and then draw upon this knowledge to enhance that

\textsuperscript{208} According infinite worth to a person, Immanuel Kant said: “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.” See Kant’s \textit{Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals}, 2013, p. 38. Also, Robin S. Dillon remarks that dignity sets us apart from everything else and gives us a special status, which is marked by calling us ‘persons’. See R. S. Dillon, \textit{Dignity, character and self-respect}, 1994, p. 14.
person’s educational opportunities and options” (Gardner, 1983, p. 10). He theorizes about different profiles of intellectual abilities for different individuals. Gardner delineated it in his ‘Theory of Multiple Intelligences’. There are seven in all: linguistic intelligence, musical intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily kinesthetic intelligence, personal intelligences. Rather than quantifying a student in terms of IQ (Gardner, 1983, p. xxv) Gardner’s approach is for a more holistic and broad-based system of assessment.

The system of rank ordering leads to fierce competition and unnecessary rivalry among students. Ordinary students who are not used to such competitive rivalry will feel distinctively uncomfortable and stressful. It is an unnecessary construct that increases the burden in school. It is a valid argument that scholastic achievement as measured by grades is good because there is a very self-motivating trophy that the student can cherish. It opens many opportunities for advancement and helps them stand apart from the herd with a positive, uplifting self-concept. But that is not everything. Poor scholastic achievement is not the end of the world. For much lesser, vulnerable students commit suicide because they see their worth solely through the grade they obtain. If there should be an occasion for a strong scholastic achiever to taste defeat, it will be interesting to see how that is handled – it is quite likely that s/he would be psychologically devastated. Along with the quest to be numero uno, even a student who thrives on competition will display character traits like intolerance and impatience.209 It has the unwelcome fallout of

an attitude of superiority and promotes vanity. It is a source of great misery for the tender minds of other students, who may not have attained scholastic excellence, but are also living, breathing human beings with eternal worth. Thinking on the lines of Gardner’s MI theory, such students are likely to have competence in some other area, not measured or formally recognized in schools.

Consider the ability to smile and make others feel happy by one’s demeanor and speech. Smiling is not just a physical activity but a deeply spiritual one—it comes when all relationships involving the individual are right—the relationship with others, with oneself, with the living environment and with God. A true smile is a spontaneous emotion that overflows from the deep interior of the anthropos. It cannot be controlled as Sartre would say—true emotion just has to be undergone (Sartre, 1993, p. 70). A person who has an upset equation in any one of the relationship dimensions can never really and truly smile. Colin Jones maintains that the ‘smile of the soul’ is always superior to the ‘laugh of the mouth’ (Jones, 2014, p. 62). Spiritual maturity enables one to ‘take everything with a smile’. It is a manifestation of transcendent energy that is the hallmark of invincible goodwill. The ability to smile when faced with adversity is an important attribute that will surely not find any mention in scholastic assessment reports, but is a genuine ability in every sense that can make all the difference to a relationship, personal and professional. The ability to smile translates into a very important social skill because it puts people at ease. Jones says: “Smiles promote socialization, lubricate social interaction, curtail negative emotions and stress, ease tension, and coordinate group fellow-feeling” (Jones, 2014, p. 7). Unfortunately, in
the scholastic determinant, such abilities do not find a place. Let us consider two professions – that of the teacher and the doctor. The lessons taught by the teacher who smiles, all other factors being equal, has the ability to sink deeper into the minds of the student because s/he feels un-intimidated. Similarly, the therapeutic regime ordered by a doctor who smilingly deals with his or her patient and empathizes with them, all other factors being equal, is more likely to have the patient’s cooperation.

The attitude of self-promotion is just a full-fledged development of our innate proclivities. Beginning from the tender ages, we are selfish and self-centered—the educational philosopher, Rousseau says that this instinct is put into us and aids self-preservation: “Man is credited with a strong desire for self-preservation, and this desire exists [...].” An extreme obsession with self-promotion can do us more harm than good. Some parents have an obsessive compulsion to aggressively push their children to achieve more and to do better than others. Nothing in school is more important than success as measured through scholastic grades. Most are teetering on the verge of becoming success-lunatics. They think that by scholastic super-achievement they are building up their child’s self-esteem, securing a future and giving them valuable life-lessons. However, behind the push for scholastic success can sometimes be the hidden agenda of parents who do not want to go the long haul of sustained support to their children; instead, they want to wash their hands off as early as possible from that responsibility. It is also a case of instant gratification.

How does that help a late bloomer or a dyslexic? Some children are slow learners and take more time to attain intellectual maturity, while others may have peaked early and be experiencing burnout. In such cases, there needs to be support of the family or parents well past the normative age of 18. In the calculus of scholastic achievement, there is no provision for late-bloomers or early burnout. We sentence such children to lowly places instead of bearing with them, patiently supporting them and suffering with them. If a parent truly loves their child, they will accept them as they are and stand in solidarity with them despite their poor grades; love for their children will not be contingent upon scholastic achievement. Many children, especially from affluent backgrounds, are often sent to college as a matter of family pride rather than to pursue an interest. Parents want to save face and claim that their child is a graduate student and put them through a forced program of study. They simply do it for the sake of glamour. This can also be seen in the values espoused by parents who pride themselves in sending their children to schools with air-conditioned classrooms and in providing their little ones with ‘tablets’ and ‘laptops’. Digital speed cannot substitute for skills like critical thinking.211 There are issues far more serious in anthropological development. It is a sad truth that some parents deal with the issue of education very superficially – directed more at making claims of status rather than in helping children make deep and serious learning.

There is a common malaise affecting the human race: everyone everywhere wants to exalt his and her self-will. We all have the propensity to let the other person be damned! In fact, Jean Paul Sartre has articulated it: “Hell is other people” (Sartre, 1989, p. 45). This is the universal affliction of all humanity. With each one seeking only his or her own will, a clash of wills is inevitable, leading to violent conflict, hatred and deep-seated animosity amongst colleagues, friends, family, children and even nations! The human being everywhere, every time is exalting the self, wanting to be the first and pre-eminent one! It is designed to be particularly so in education. Instead, the educational aim should rather be to make overall accomplishment, which cannot be measured simplistically by grades. Instead of callously and blindly exalting the self-will, students must be trained to accommodate the will of others. Only that will enable relating well. We can go a step further by surrendering our wills to God.

Pedagogic measures based on accomplishment rather than unidimensional grading will lead to a better social environment of work and play where students cooperate with each other and make great learning. To achieve this goal, the spiritual self that encourages and fosters other-orientedness can be of much help.

8.4.2 OUR HIDDEN TREASURES AND A JEALOUS GOD

God’s love for humanity is so strong that it can scarcely be comprehended. God is an extreme lover – He loves with a jealous\textsuperscript{212} love – He wants ‘all’ of us, not ‘part’ of us. A very moving depiction of God’s overwhelming love is found in the book of Isaiah: “Because you are

\begin{footnote} {Exodus 20.5, 34:14, Deuteronomy 5:9, 4:24, NRSV Bible.} \end{footnote}
precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life.” The Bible is replete with references to God’s love. The first commandment in the Decalogue strongly emphasizes this. God will not settle for less than our total and complete avowal of Him. But He does not force our acceptance; with the freedom he grants, there is danger of grave transgression on our part—that is the price of true love and the opportunity for responding in freedom.

However, a person who imagines that s/he loves God but has actually placed his or her loyalties elsewhere is one who is in delusion and guilty of idolatry. Theologically, idolatry is the worship of and the tendency to derive life from anything other than the living God. The author Kerry Walters has formalized ten popular idolatries. The first in the list is ‘Genie god’ (Walters, 2014, pp. 27-33) – with this god, we are prone to making desperate incantations to grant us what we want as though it were an entitlement owed to us – there is petulance and stubborn irreverence at the slightest hint of delay in answering or thwarting of one’s petition. The other side of the coin however is that by making the charge above, we risk destruction of the simple faith of neophytes. The second kind of idolatry is making God the ‘Big Brother god,’ (Walters, 2014, pp. 35-48) someone whom we depend on in order to absolve ourselves of the burden of making decisions – it makes us retreat from reality and pass the buck when things get a little too hot to handle. Walters charges that such people do not engage their own rationality enough but simply pass on the responsibility to God. However, that takes away a lot of merit away from those who “surrender” to God. There is

213 Isaiah 43:4, NRSV Bible.
nothing wrong with someone depending on God in so radical a manner. In fact, it is greatly recommended in scripture: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.”

Third in the list is ‘Patriot god’ (Walters, 2014, pp. 48-63) – one’s nation or caste becomes the ultimate concern, the foundational principle and primary value from which all other values are derived – devotees of Patriot God have the potential to whip up a frenzy and indulge in pseudo-prophetic invective married to partisan political agendas. The fourth is the ‘We Can Do It god’ (Walters, 2014, pp. 65-78) who is the God of people who get busy with social causes, getting things done as spiritual busy-bodies, who just can’t seem to be still and know God because they want forever to be in control of things. Can Doers are always bustling to save the world and don’t have time to cultivate much of an interior life – the result is that depression, despair and burnout is common among them. The fifth is the “By the Book god,” (Walters, 2014, pp. 79-92) whose devotees take every verse from the Bible literally and absolutely; they embrace as their ultimate concern a book rather than a God. When God is imprisoned inside a book, a stale, motionless aridity replaces the invigorating wind of the Holy Spirit, claims Walters. Sixth, the ‘My god’ (Walters, 2014, pp. 93-106) deity belongs to those who claim an exclusive relationship with their god, his affections and favors. It results in a private god, who is a pal, to the exclusion of everyone else. Walters gives a powerful example to drive the point home: “My thirst shouldn’t lead me to demand all the potable water the world has to offer. This is not only foolish, since I can never drink it all myself, but it’s also improper, because I have no

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214 Proverbs 3:5, NRSV Bible.
exclusive right to the world’s water. Everyone gets thirsty. It’s not my water, any more than it’s my Jesus. It’s our water, and our Jesus.” It is instructive to heed Thomas Merton, the Trappist Monk and Spiritual Master of the 20th century, who himself struggled with this form of idolatry. He states that even though he was a monk, he does not have a relationship with God to the exclusion of others – monks may be more conscious of their relationship with God, “but does that entitle us to consider ourselves different, or even better than others? The whole idea is preposterous” (Merton, 1968, p. 154)!

Seventh, there is “Church god,” (Walters, 2014, pp. 107-120) and he is worshipped by the spiritual agoraphobic, claims Walters. The agoraphobic is a person who lives a routinized life highly conformed to religious sameness and s/he has an exaggerated reverence for the worldly institution called Church. Ecclesial ethos conflate church and God; and such conflation morphs the living God into the Church god. To be sure, there are many who frequent church regularly, but their personal lives are anything but Godly. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and the litmus test can be applied through the verse: “you will know them by their fruits.”

Eighth, we have what Walters calls the “Designer god,” (Walters, 2014, pp. 121-133) who may be understood as the God of our fancy, our whim. It typically appeals to those who are temperamentally very independent and find it hard to accept any authority but their own. So, they fashion a God for themselves by being “creative” and eclectic about it. Ninth, we have ‘Sunday School god’ (Walters, 2014, pp. 135-148) – the worshippers of this god never grow beyond what they have learnt in Sunday school and the very

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215 Matthew 7:20, NRSV Bible.
rudimentaries of their faith. They have an arrested development. Walters very tellingly points out: “children never get tired of hearing the same bedtime stories over and over again. But there comes a point in their development when they need to move on to other kinds of literature that stretch their imaginations and their reason.” Worshippers of Sunday school god remain infantile and dread their uncomplicated faith being challenged in the slightest way. Finally, there is Walters’ ‘Eghead god,’ (Walters, 2014, pp. 149-162) who is the God of the philosophers. They play with arguments, concepts, ideas and language in a rarefied space of abstraction; and like the mythical Pygmalion, they fall in love with their own creation and mistake it for reality.

Idolatry may be summarized as follows: if one loves anyone or anything more than God, that person is being idolatrous. As we go about the business of living, anybody can slip into it if not cautious. These are all great impediments to growing spiritually.

8.5 CLOSING REMARKS

Early in this chapter, we understood spirituality as the practice of cultivating three basic relationships and being at peace across those dimensions—the relationship with the self, that with the neighbor and that with God. We close with the following paragraphs focusing on the spirituality of being open to God and the neighbor. An important sign of being open to God and neighbor is the willingness to change – to reconsider one’s time-honored methods in the light of new realities and accept the unfamiliar. However, we have difficulty with identifying with a new image, of someone who has been humbled and taught a lesson. The
role-change is difficult to undergo because we constantly hark back to our previous guise, which had hidden treasures and secret investments which God wanted us to give up. Some of these could be our property, our reputation, our family pride, etc. and we accord unwarranted importance to these to the point of relegating the divine. Human tendency is to clutch onto these for life and substitute them and others like them for God. Indeed, the spiritually uninitiated depend on anything but God.

Admittedly, a reordering of priorities and according the first place to God is easier said than done. Idolatry creeps in very surreptitiously through some vulnerable area of personality in a most innocuous manner. Left unnoticed, it grows into a stubborn character-trait that goes on to corrode the spiritual life. Advancing spiritually calls into play an important spiritual capacity: the undergoing of spiritual death. This is deep and painful transformation, involving a violation of our social esteem from which only a supernatural agency can restore us (Mathulla, 2015a, p. 44). The ‘redemptive couple’ (Mathulla, 2016a, p. 17) of suffering and rejoicing is called into play.

Spiritual death is the destruction of our being, the essence of who we are, of all of our cherished dreams and desires, of what we are known for and as. Nobody will appreciate the death of their public image. However, genuine spirituality entails nothing short of responding to a call to martyrdom, social and mortal. Such occasions come to us in the course of daily life. Let us consider the mad scramble for credit in organizations. Whereas there is a jockeying for credit in the wake of success of an event with the deserving one being underplayed, it is the rare person who passes up due credit. Instead of credit, the spiritually mature person is satisfied
with the opportunity to participate in the act of God, who “parts with what is precious because he loves us” (Mathulla, 2015a, p. 44). This way, spiritually, the person ‘gives life’ and ‘takes death,’ and this death has no ‘sting.’

One is an efficacious instrument in God’s hands as one dies spiritually. It is simply not a human ability but a transcendent one. We must be open to dying and rising spiritually as we partake of the mystery of life. Shakespeare, in Julius Caesar, had said: "Cowards die many times before their deaths, the valiant never taste of death but once" (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 78). This articulation of a brave death by Shakespeare has merely a horizontal element. It is a statement of human valor. On the other hand, dying spiritually and rising again has both a vertical and horizontal dimension. It is a sacrifice of love loaded with salvific import. When we die spiritually, our cherished investments are lost, our dearest dreams are shattered and our enthusiasm and energy decline. But spiritual death is not the end – there is something beautiful laying ahead, a serene peace that passes all understanding that none can touch or ruffle. When we dare to undergo suffering for the sake of love, we are invested with meaning, and suffering ironically becomes a joy-filled experience.

Radical openness to God and neighbor will drive the anthropos into the mill of suffering. The three relationships mentioned in the definition

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216 “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” 1Corinthians 15:55, NRSV Bible.

217 The vertical dimension can be thought of as the relationship with God, whereas the horizontal dimension may be understood as relationship with people.
of spirituality, namely the one with the self, with others and with God, are constantly prone to spiritual entropy,\textsuperscript{218} and need to be reclaimed and reaffirmed all through life. Obedience to God’s precepts and observance of the just laws of the land are the lot of the \textit{anthropos}. As a willing and capable executive who is ever ready to carry out the boss’ orders, the \textit{anthropos} sees God’s hand through simple faith in all areas of life. With this openness, the \textit{anthropos} should deeply engage with the concrete here and now and face life as it comes, one day at a time. Jean-Pierre de Caussade qualifies this attitude as “sacrament of the present moment requires us to carry out our duty, whatever it may be, a carrying out of God’s purpose” (de Caussade, 2009, p. viii). The \textit{anthropos} can practice the spirituality of making every moment count and make a daily offering of his or her whole self, comprised of the embodied, the cognitive, the affective, the spiritual and the conative dimensions for the glory of God and good of neighbor. A person who lives this spirituality to a high degree of perfection is radically open to God and people around—always saying yes to him and doing good.

This spirituality is ideally suited to learners, who typically need the attitudes of humility and openness in their epistemic quest. They need humility because the spiritual quest needs the seeker to know his/her own

\textsuperscript{218}Spiritual Entropy is analogous to entropy of the universe, according to which, the universe is constantly moving from a state of order to disorder. It is a part of the second law of thermodynamics. The universe is prone to decay and deterioration, and it takes ‘work’ to combat and reverse it. In the spiritual life too, there is a constant attack on the person’s spiritual ardour. One has to be alert and resolute to negate spiritual entropy. That is what the Gospel of Matthew teaches, “The kingdom of God suffers violence and the violent take it by force” Matthew 11:12, NRSV Bible.
poverty and need for God; and openness, because they are consciously partaking of the mystery of life unfolding within and around them. With all that they have and all that they are, they make a daily offering to the Almighty. They maintain a delicate conscience that is sensitive to sin and are readily alerted to the possibility of moral decay. Living each moment with passion, they remain in touch with reality and always ready for the next adventure.