

## **The Importance of Understanding Spirituality**

**Robert van Mourik**

"We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience." - Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Spirituality is an awareness that there is no difference between matter and spirit. Some define spirituality as man's search for meaning and others as recognising this awareness. Mystics have long recognised spiritual growth (e.g. The Interior Castle, St Teresa of Avila) while modern authors have written about stages of faith (Stages of Faith, Fowler) and stages of spiritual growth (Integral Spirituality, Wilber).

Wilber proposes various levels of understanding the world. They range between Egocentric (it's all about me), Ethnocentric (it's all about my family, tribe, country), Worldcentric (I appreciate my commonality with all in a world beyond my tribe) and Cosmocentric (I appreciate my place within the universe, that I am related to everything, everywhere). Spiritual growth through these levels also requires growth through other levels of development such as physical, emotional and intellectual maturity. We can progress through these various levels at different rates. About two thirds of the world has been identified as living in the first two levels.

Nevertheless, Richard Rohr understands the importance of well-grounded formation in early stages of growth. They have a relative importance as scaffolding, but they are not the building itself. Yet, we don't need to continue protecting the scaffolding once it's served its purpose. In the first half of life, our task is to build a container. Eventually we realise that life isn't primarily about the container but the contents. In the second half of our lives, we might appreciate the ladder we have been climbing all our lives is leaning against the wrong wall. We search for new meaning and understanding in our lives.

Anthony de Mello acknowledged barriers to our recognising reality. Beliefs and attachments blind and restrict us. Carl Jung identified the shadow in our subconscious as restricting our personal growth. However, a clear vision reveals a wondrous world and an inner spirit that seeks to be recognised. Howard Thurman, spiritual adviser to Dr Martin Luther King, wrote about the importance of discerning what makes you come alive because the world needs people who have come alive. This emerging consciousness leads to a new freedom.

Albert Einstein remarked that higher levels of consciousness are required to solve the problems of the world for they cannot be solved at the level of those who created them. We need only listen to the language of our political leaders to recognise that conflicts within our societies are grounded in tribal outlooks. Immigration and care for our planet are other examples requiring higher consciousness to identify solutions. New ways of looking at each other and our world.

The development of the science of quantum theory over the last hundred years is establishing a new understanding of a more coherent worldview. Past worldviews founded in patriarchal and monarchical attitudes, medieval theology and classical physics are inadequate to understand the world now being recognised in a new way. That we are all related to each other, to everything, everywhere and even throughout time.

Hence the importance to spirituality of recognising that these various levels of understanding the world exist. We need to grow spiritually and attain a higher consciousness so that we can address

ourselves to resolving the world's problems. As we grow, our institutions, religions and our understanding of God will inevitably change.

Robert van Mourik is a co-convenor of St Lucia Spirituality, a community that supports seekers in their spiritual growth. To learn more, see [stluciaspirituality.com](http://stluciaspirituality.com)