

# Bringing Spirituality Down to Earth



By

**Michael Manning**

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## INTRODUCTION



Looking at life through spiritual eyes gives us the clearest vision.

I do not mean through religious eyes. Throughout history, wars have been fought and atrocities committed, all in the name of religious differences. Religion brings ritual and dogma that often camouflage underlying spiritual truth.

Through personal experience, I have come to know that life neither begins nor ends with our physical existence. I realize, however, that my experiences prove nothing to others. Therefore, I have written a chapter on spiritual exercises. The faithful practice of these techniques on a daily basis will bring proof of our existence as spiritual beings.

While attending university during the 1970s, I heard a man being interviewed on the radio. He was asked if he believed in God, and he replied, “No. I *know* God.”

At that moment, I realized that he was right. Belief does not matter. It is only what we *know* that counts. And the only way we can know anything is through direct, personal experience.

Hearing that radio interview was a turning point in my life. It started me on a journey of asking many questions and, little by little, finding many answers. After more than twenty years, I feel ready to share some of these answers in this book.

The next chapter deals with reincarnation and karma. I feel that it is important to present these topics immediately because they give a perspective that is vital to the understanding of subsequent chapters. If I had not personally experienced some of my past lives and observed how they are affecting me today, I would not be writing this book.

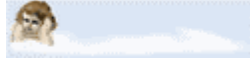
Each of us must find his own truth. Aristotle once said of his beloved teacher Plato that, “Both truth and Plato are dear to me, but I reserve the right to prefer truth!”

I have found it useful to divide life into what I know and don’t know, rather than what I believe and don’t believe. This helps me to keep an open mind and heart. To get the most out of this book, I would encourage you to adopt a similar attitude.

If you practice the techniques given in the “Spiritual Exercises” chapter, you will soon see evidence of spiritual truth in your life.

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I hope that you will benefit from what you read in these pages. Best wishes in your spiritual quest, wherever it may take you.





Why is one baby born into a life of war, poverty and disease, while another enters an environment of health, love and prosperity?

This was one of the most important questions that I encountered at the beginning of my spiritual search. If we only had one lifetime to live, then I could not find a logical answer. However, when I came across the idea of reincarnation and karma (perfect cause and effect throughout eternity), everything fell into place.

I began to understand that each of us has created who we are today through thousands of past lives--each filled with countless thoughts, words and actions. Thus, even the circumstances into which we are born are a direct result of our past. And they are always perfectly just, no matter how it may seem to human eyes.

This is not to say that we should callously accept all the suffering around us and do nothing to help. Understanding karma and reincarnation simply gives us a way of comprehending what is taking place in life. It allows us to be lovingly detached as we find ways to help others that are in need. If we understand the true pattern of cause and effect, we rise above feelings of anger, jealousy and blame. Instead, we are more likely to develop compassion, responsibility and divine love.

By practicing techniques such as those given in the “Spiritual Exercises” chapter of this book, we can receive our own proof of previous lifetimes.

To some of us in the western world, words such as “reincarnation” and “karma” may sound foreign, even today. Let me explain in down-to-earth terms what they entail:

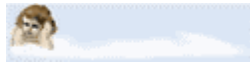
Reincarnation simply means that life does not begin nor end with our current physical bodies. We do not “have a soul” which goes to heaven or hell when we die. We *are* Soul--an atom of God’s love, an eternal being. As Soul, we live many lifetimes in many bodies so that we gain spiritual experience and begin to contribute to the divine plan of life. I will discuss this further in the next chapter, “The Purpose of Creation”.

Karma is simply the principle of cause and effect. It means that whatever we do, say or think will eventually return to us in some form. In many cases, the length of time between a cause and its effect is so long that we do not connect the two events. This is especially true when the cause took place in a previous lifetime.

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One of the benefits that I have found from practicing daily spiritual exercises is that the gap between cause and effect shortens--the connection between them becomes increasingly obvious. For example, I may get angry with a friend, and two minutes later I receive a phone call from another friend who is angry with me. This allows me to understand and accept the lesson more quickly.

One of the tremendous benefits of understanding reincarnation and karma is that we no longer believe in “victims” or “villains”. Rather, we realize that we have all done the most wonderful and the most horrific deeds throughout our many lives. We have *appeared* to be victims at times and villains at others, but these were times when we did not see the chain of cause and effect from other lifetimes. Soul is an atom of love, traveling through eternity. Along the way we play many roles. Some of these roles are labeled “victims” and others “villains”, but they are only temporary masks that we wear. Eventually we learn enough to become partners with God, giving service to all of life.





A few decades ago, conventional (allopathic) medicine ruled the western world with little competition. Most of us were only vaguely aware that people in the other cultures used herbs, acupuncture and other “questionable” healing techniques. However, in recent years this has began to change.

Today in North America, Europe and other parts of the world, there is a growing awareness of alternative methods of healing. This has created an ongoing storm of controversy in many circles.

Traditional allopathic doctors point to the statistically significant research that has been done by drug companies, hospitals and universities. Millions of dollars are spent to develop, test and market an increasing number of new medications. This testing can be helpful in that it screens not only the effectiveness of a drug, but also its possible side effects.

Alternative practitioners such as naturopaths, herbalists, homeopaths, and chiropractors, seldom have the research funds that it takes to get hard scientific proof about the effectiveness of a treatment. Therefore, many of these healers must rely on anecdotal evidence and personal experience.

In an ideal world, ample funding would be available for research in every healing field. However, this is not an ideal world. As spiritual beings, we must learn to rely on a balance of common sense and intuition. If we are able to do this, we will be led to the methods of healing that are best for us at present.

An important part of our spiritual growth is realizing that *what works for one person may not work for another*. It is vital that we learn to live and let live. Also, we must realize that *what works for us today, may not work tomorrow*.

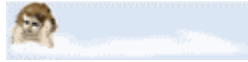
The drugs and surgery of traditional western medicine usually attack the symptoms of illness in a highly aggressive manner. Eastern and alternative therapies are typically more subtle and often focus on the cause of the disease rather than on the symptoms. Some people feel that allopathic medicine is best when we are seriously ill and that other forms of treatment may be more useful in maintaining good health.

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It makes no sense to say that one approach is better than another. Once again, we need to use both common sense and intuition when making a choice of treatment. We must also learn to accept the methods of healing that others choose. Unless we do this, we run the risk of taking on their karma.

True healing takes place from the inside out. Healing must include our thoughts and emotions as well as our physical bodies. Truly loving ourselves is one of the most powerful healing techniques in existence.

If we ask for spiritual guidance, we will be led to the methods of healing that are best for us in each moment.





## **SEX AND SEXUALITY**



Sex and sexuality are perhaps the most talked about topics of our time. Yet they are almost never viewed from a spiritual point of view.

Many people feel that spirituality and sex are completely unrelated topics. This is largely due to the fact that we often associate spirituality with orthodox religion. Many religions have dogma that denies or restricts human sexuality, but from a spiritual point of view, sex is simply a part of life.

Let's begin with one simple fact: Human beings have sex for more reasons than simple procreation. If this were not so, we would only have an urge to mate once a year like some species of animals. The sex urge in humans is complex and multifaceted. In its highest form, we use sex to share love, warmth, tenderness, passion, playfulness, trust and commitment.

Of course some people use sex for more selfish purposes: ignoring a partner's needs, using sex as a weapon of power and control, or even acts of violence such as child abuse or rape. As with most things in life there is always the possibility of abuse.

Interestingly, one cause of sexual abuse is a denial of normal, healthy sexual activity. If we can accept ourselves for who we are, we will have little need to indulge in the darker aspects of sexuality. When we suppress our normal sexuality with feelings of guilt or shame, our natural sexual tendencies may transform into socially unacceptable behavior.

Here is the paradox: If we were not being constantly told that sex is dirty by those on the extreme right, the extreme left would all but cease to exist. Hard core pornography and violent sex crimes would virtually disappear if people accepted their normal, healthy sexuality.

Sex is the most physically intimate bond that we have with one another. It affects us emotionally as well as physically. During the sex act, a certain amount of emotional as well as physical karma is exchanged between partners. The amount of karma exchanged depends on the people involved and the agreement that they have made, but the notion of casual sex with no karma is a myth.

When a relationship ends, the karma between the two people is not complete until only good will remains between them. This could take months, years or even

lifetimes. However, much of the karma can be worked out through dreams for those who are sincere about their spiritual growth.

Many difficulties can be avoided when we first enter a sexual relationship by clearly communicating our desires and expectations to our partner. Many sexual relationships involve a lot of game playing. It is the game playing rather than the sex that often leads to spiritual problems. Honesty and integrity are key elements in good sexual relationships as well as other areas of life.

Sex itself is neither good nor bad. It is simply a part of life in this world. It is how we *use it* that makes it uplifting or destructive. If consenting adults enter into an open and honest sexual relationship in which no one is hurt, then no spiritual law is broken.

The topic of masturbation is worth mentioning here. Although masturbation is seldom discussed in “polite” society, it remains the most accessible sexual outlet for people who do not have a regular partner. Woody Allen has a terrific attitude when he writes, “Don’t knock masturbation. It’s sex with someone I love!”

The word “masturbation” might be translated from other languages as “self pleasuring”. This is a wonderfully accurate way of describing it. Although it is not a complete substitute for sex with a partner, it is nonetheless a great way of releasing and balancing sexual energy and giving love to ourselves.

The subject of homosexuality is also an important one to discuss from a spiritual perspective. We are all Soul, an atom of God’s love that is neither male nor female. As we reincarnate through thousands of lifetimes, we take on both male and female bodies. Sometimes we have more male energy; sometimes the female energy is dominant. In our current incarnation, there are men and women with a lot of female energy, men and women with a lot of male energy, and men and women who are somewhere in the middle. Most women have more female energy and most men have more male energy, but this is not always true.

The amount of male or female energy we have brought with us from previous lives often influences our sexual orientation in this life. For example, a woman with a recent, significant past life as a man, may well end up becoming sexually attracted to women in this life.

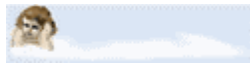
It is important to note that no one is 100% heterosexual or 100% homosexual. People may label themselves “straight”, “gay”, or “bisexual”, but in truth we are all somewhere in between. Most of us are closer to being heterosexual, probably to ensure procreation of the species. But the majority of people have had

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at least some same-sex fantasies. From a spiritual perspective this makes perfect sense. We all have memories and feelings from thousands of lifetimes as both men and women.

We are all sexual as well as sensual beings. It feels good to touch and be touched, whether it is making love, hugging, or even shaking hands. If we can acknowledge the full range of sexual and sensual pleasure that life has to offer, we will stop being afraid of our own sexuality. In doing so, we will stop judging others who have a sexual orientation different from our own. One of the signs of spiritual growth is that we can live our lives fully and allow others to do the same. Divine love, not judgment and fear, is the measure of spiritual growth.

It is always important to find a balance in our lives. Overindulgence in sex or total avoidance of sex (including masturbation) are indications of a spiritual imbalance. That said, we are all different and we each need to find a healthy balance in our lives. To be complete spiritual beings in this world, we must accept everything we are--spiritually, mentally, emotionally, physically and sexually.





There has been a lot of discussion lately about guardian angels. They are real beings and they are one type of spiritual guide who can help us if we ask.

What images appear to us when we think of spiritual guides? A man with long flowing robes and a halo of light around his face? A guru teaching a circle of followers in an ashram?

It may be surprising to discover that men and women of every age and race have served as spiritual guides. We may recall a vivid dream where one of these wonderful beings gave us spiritual insight or helped to solve a puzzle in our lives.

Yet we must be careful not to place our trust too quickly in someone claiming to be a spiritual guide. There are power seekers and charlatans on the other planes of existence similar to those here on earth. Ultimately, each of us must decide whether or not to follow the advice of another.

Here are a few qualities of a true spiritual master:

- A master will never suggest a course of action that would bring harm to someone.
- A master will never give advice unless it is asked for.
- A master operates from a position of love, not power.
- A master does not care if he has a large following; his only concern is to help us on our journey home to God.

There are teachers in the other worlds who are ethical, yet have not attained the status of a true master. These teachers will turn us over to another guide when they have taken us as far as they can in the spiritual worlds.

When doing our spiritual exercises, we can ask for help from a particular spiritual guide. If we know what he or she looks like, we can place the image of his or her face in our spiritual eye. If not, we can simply make a request for whichever guide is best for our spiritual unfoldment at that point in time.

One of the functions of spiritual guides is to steer us around the pitfalls of life, both on earth and in the other worlds. Some of these pitfalls may seem obvious, but others are extremely subtle and easily missed. For example, each time

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we reach a higher level of heaven, it can be so breathtakingly beautiful that it is very easy to think we have reached the ultimate plane of existence. A knowledgeable guide will point out to us that there are many levels beyond and encourage us to continue on our spiritual journey.

If you have someone that you already look to for spiritual guidance and insight, it is useful to ask from time to time:

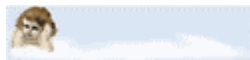
Is this individual still looking out for my best interests?

Is he or she completely ethical?

Is he or she capable of taking me as far as I want to go in my spiritual journey at this time?"

If the answers are "yes", then there is no problem. If, however, we find that we need additional help, it is always there for the asking.

A final word on spiritual guides: It is a common trap to worship the personality of teachers. This is a dangerous practice in any situation, but especially when it comes to the spiritual arena. True teachers seek only to teach. They do not wish praise and they certainly don't want to be put on pedestals. Naturally, they need to have respect, but never worship. Someday, we will all become spiritual masters. In the meantime, we are all teachers at times, students at others. Let us always remember that it is the lessons that count, not the personality of the teachers.



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