



# Introduction

## Where Is This Book Coming From?

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The journey to spirituality is one that can take many turns. It could be a simple and easy process or a long and tedious one. What if you could find a way to accelerate the process, to make this journey much shorter?

A shortcut to spirituality does exist, and I intend to show you, in these pages, how to find it. Let me start your expedition to understanding how to speed up your journey by telling you how this book came about.

I've had the privilege of working with thousands of people who experienced a variety of conditions such as stress, depression, anxiety, chronic pain, burnout, aggressiveness, shyness, workaholism, perfectionism, cognitive impairment, and trauma. In the beginning of my counseling career, I realized that many of my patients' emotional and behavioral challenges connected to one core issue: low self-esteem. Whenever possible, instead of working directly on the problem at hand, I focused first on the person's self-esteem. Once the person developed better self-regard and confidence, resolving the stated problem became easier.

I have always looked for similar shortcuts to personal growth for my patients. We have a phenomenal mind-body system and our ability to positively affect this system is vastly underutilized. Finding

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.

*Marcel Proust*

shortcuts to better our health and well-being is always possible.

Prior to writing this book, I worked on a manuscript that dealt with stress titled *The Unstress Process*. It demonstrated how to make the necessary inner changes not only to reduce stress, but also to prevent most of it from happening in the first place. I don't refer to external stressors, which most times we have very little control over, but to how we respond to such stressors and how they make us feel. The Unstress process came about through accomplishing mastery over oneself and consequently one's life.

As my writing progressed, I realized that a spiritual perspective was missing. It occurred to me that a book focusing on spirituality could prove far more effective than one just about stress. Spirituality provided a shortcut to self-mastery. I decided not to combine the two topics because in achieving self-mastery, you also remove most stress from your system.

I set aside the Unstress idea, with its predominantly "psychological" theme and chose to write this one, which is predominantly "spiritual." This shift in focus also reflected the changes I had experienced both personally and professionally.

"Spirituality" is such an overused term that its meaning has become blurred for many people. As you read, you'll find three different definitions of spirituality, each one shorter than the previous one.

Right now I want to tell you how my interest in spirituality started. My path was not the traditional route many take as they search for answers to deep questions, although my search came later. I was perfectly comfortable working in the psycho-emotional domain. I felt satisfied and grateful for the opportunity to help people. Spirituality at the time was too "New Age" for me, too far out to fit my more conventional nature.

A few years ago, while attending a professional conference, I talked with a colleague about different therapeutic approaches I used in my practice. At the time, I worked with individuals

suffering from chronic pain, sleep disorders, and cognitive difficulties resulting from trauma or ongoing stress. During our conversation, I realized that I had become tired and somewhat bored with my work. But as we continued talking, an interesting question popped into my mind: *What if I could find deeper solutions to the challenges my patients faced?*

Motivated by that idea, I started to change selected elements of my therapy approach, encouraging deeper awareness within the person. As I did, a notable phenomenon occurred. Many patients began reporting what they called “deep experiences,” which in retrospect I realized were spiritual in nature.

I decided to look more carefully into these patterns and work with those patients who were interested in traveling this spirituality path with me. The results were amazing, and I really thought that I had discovered a totally new treatment approach. Later, a few patients commented that my ideas were somewhat similar to those found in Eastern philosophies, which I found worthy of note. As I understood how important and powerful my findings were, I did what I usually do in such cases: sought ways to teach the principles of spirituality and make them as practical as possible.

I have noticed that most books on spirituality have been written by theology scholars, rabbis, ministers, students of Eastern philosophies and practices, or people who have had a profound spiritual experience. I want to clarify that I am not a devoted student of any Eastern discipline, nor am I involved in any religious organization. However, since I began exploring spirituality, I have become more interested in world religions, trying to extract the essence of many of them. It was not too surprising to find that most religions, at their core, aim for the same purpose; they just differ in their approach and technique.

This book is my attempt to teach the spiritual principles that I have discovered, learned, and taught, in a way that you can apply in your everyday life.

You won't find recommendations here for traditional meditation or practicing mantras. Not that anything is wrong with meditation and mantras; these are indeed powerful tools. Meditation, however,

is just part of a process. A common mistake is trying to turn the process into the goal, instead of using it as a vehicle on the road to deeper awareness.

This journey is often filled with mental obstructions that can slow you down, at times even stop you from establishing a stronger spiritual connection. Working through these obstructions can build a solid bridge from our more psychological world to our more hidden spiritual territory.

I like this Japanese saying: “If you give a person a fish, you will satisfy his hunger for the day, but if you teach him how to fish, it will satisfy his hunger for life.” In a similar way, I hope to equip you with many tools to help you overcome mental roadblocks.

At first I wanted to call this book *Practical Spirituality*. This title came to me after listening to people’s complaints about how frustrating the effort was “to become more spiritual.” The objections were often identical: Exposure to high quality material and eloquent ideas inspired them to contemplate change; but that initial excitement wore off once they asked the inevitable question, “So how exactly do I do this?” The problem with the title *Practical Spirituality* is that it implies the occurrence of impractical spirituality, which obviously does not exist.

The point of practicality is still an important one. I am not interested in teaching philosophical concepts that look beautiful on paper but are hard to practice and integrate. The purpose of this book is to show spirituality the way we can live it day by day—not in a monastery, or on top of a mountain, but right here amidst the chaos of our everyday lives.

I have never had a sole, earth-shattering spiritual experience that totally changed my life in an instant. My personal process was comprised of many deep, smaller scale realizations and spiritual experiences, which served to light many dark areas of my awareness. For me this has been a more gradual process of deeper learning, with transforming realizations that led to an improved feeling of balance, freedom, and inner peace. Throughout these pages, I will share some of my experiences with you.

You may encounter extraordinary spiritual experiences while exploring this territory. If you do, I want to hear about them. Please feel free to write to me.

Even if a miraculous event does not happen to you, once you “figure it out” on a deep level, you’ll enjoy the same state of bliss usually felt after such remarkable experiences.

I often come across the term “seekers.” Although I understand why this term is widely used, it still puzzles me. I used to ask myself, “How come so many people are constantly seeking? What exactly are they seeking and when will they finally find it?”

Those questions led me to the goal of this book: to help you identify what you ultimately seek, and then to help you transform from seeker to finder.

So why did I choose the title *Shortcut to Spirituality*? I began to look for more ways to connect deeply with the magical world of spirituality, and I believe I found a few shortcuts. A shortcut is a practical route to a destination, and I’ve already expressed my desire to teach spirituality in a practical way. Along with the principles and realizations that I will share with you, I will also guide you through different awareness exercises that will help you implement these ideas in your individual life right away.

Together we will consider the following fundamental questions:

- What exactly is spirituality?
- How does spirituality differ from religion?
- How can it be practiced daily?
- How can you overcome mental blocks that may interfere with increasing spiritual awareness?
- Who are you?
- What do you really want?
- What is your purpose in life?
- What is the meaning of life?

You will notice that this book has no chapters. Instead, it is divided into three parts. I wrote the book as a continuous flow of ideas from one part to another. Removing the need to follow certain

structures can free your mind to find its unique pathway to an uncharted destination. Transforming our cubical, analytical, rational thinking into the unbounded, unrestricted area of spirituality requires a shift in how we view life. The lack of a traditional structure in the book is important as a way to begin to establish this fundamental shift.

I have included thoughts and ideas taken from the fields of cosmology, quantum physics, holography, biology, philosophy, and different religions. You will also find quotes from philosophers, poets, Holy Scriptures, and even movies, all to expand your mind and enable you to understand what lies beyond your present thoughts and perceptions.

You will not find a set program as part of the book because becoming more deeply spiritual does not happen in rigid steps. Transformation happens through each individual's realizations; and the deeper the realization, the deeper the change. Instead, you will find recommendations for different practices throughout the book, which can be useful to accelerate the process.

At this point, I'll summarize important messages that you will find in greater detail throughout this book.

1. *We cope excessively as individuals.* Unnecessary coping uses up too much energy, a commodity that is becoming rare for many people. This "energy crisis" may be the primary cause of many of the maladies people presently experience.

For instance, in North America, visits to the doctor for depression are at their highest rate ever, second only to appointments related to high blood pressure. One reason for the increased rate of doctor visits may be the fact that more than ever before, people are willing to admit that they are depressed.

But I also believe that the rise in depression is a direct result of the increased accumulation of stress. We have to move from just coping with stress to resolving the of fundamental issues that cause it in the first place. This will enable us to better handle the challenges we face, and will continue to face, in this new millennium.

2. *We overuse the analytical capacities of our mind.* Too much analysis compromises our innate creativity and intuition as well as the ability to connect on a deeper level. We don't want to let go of this ability completely, but we would like to learn to use this faculty in a more balanced way.
3. *We need to connect from within.* Galileo said, "You cannot teach a man anything, you can only help him to find it within himself." People need to make the time and effort to look below the surface and establish a deeper connection with themselves, even if it feels uncomfortable at first. It is only through this connection that we can fully manifest our spirituality. The answers to all our personal questions cannot be found outside of us, but rather lie within. Our true goal is to connect with this inner wisdom and manifest it in our lives.
4. *We need to significantly increase our conscious awareness and begin to see the complete world picture,* not just individual bits and pieces of it. We must learn to set aside personal agendas and begin to look at our planet as one territory and at its habitants as one big family. Then we can overcome the challenges of wars, terrorism, famine, racism, animosity, cruelty, prejudice, gender bias, and territorial conflicts. Peace on earth begins inside each person. We cannot accomplish it unless each of us achieves inner peace.
5. *Spirituality does not require coping mechanisms.* In fact, it offers solutions to the issues that call for coping in the first place. Spirituality carries the wisdom necessary to resolve the challenges we currently face, whether personal, social, or global. Given the time and focus, spirituality is the only way to deal with challenges effectively and, ultimately, to restore balance.
6. *Spirituality is attainable right now.* Nothing has to happen outside of you for a complete spiritual transformation to occur. Such metamorphosis can be quickly achieved through practical shortcuts.

You will find that a large part of this book deals with the contrast between the spiritual essence and the *ego*—the part in us that needs, wants, desires, and craves. This part is more concerned with the self

and less with others. Being able to recognize and reduce our ego-based behavior is an absolute must for spiritual awakening.

By the end of this book, you will have a clear idea of how your ego works. You will also possess effective tools to significantly reduce its influence on your life. Some of the principles outlined in the book will be repeated over and over. It is not that they are difficult to understand; the goal is to integrate them deeper and enable them to be a natural part of your thought patterns and actions.

You can read this book in two ways. The first is what I call “reading for information,” the less constructive option. Information alone is what keeps people in the seekers category. The second and more beneficial way is to absorb the information, and then take the time to practice the awareness exercises outlined in this book, noting how they affect your experience.

You’ll recognize awareness exercises because they look like this:

**Stop to reflect on the principles as you read, wrestle with them if you feel the need, and if you like them, ask yourself, “How can I apply them in my life?” Take your time. Treat this book as a spiritual fitness program rather than just external reading material, and you may soon join the “finders” club.**

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “We are always getting ready to live, but never living.” I hope that you will use this book as a guide to living life more fully.

As you read and work through the exercises, you may experience personal realizations. You can record them in the “Realizations” section at the end of the book and refer to them from time to time. You can also note concepts that you want to understand better or that you need to explore. This will deepen the effectiveness of your study and help you to progress in quantum leaps.

Finally, if you are interested in practicing and promoting the principles taught in this book with like-minded individuals, please refer to the note at its end. You’ll learn how to become part of a discussion group that I call “PeaceTogether.”

Shall we begin?