

Preparation for the December 11, 2024 Topical Seminar on Spirituality

The next meeting of topical seminars will be on Wednesday December 11th at 3 PM in the Lewis Library. Please write a response to the topic by Monday December 9th.

As we approach the “longest night of the year” in the northern hemisphere we invite you to reflect on your own understanding of spirituality. (See below for a discussion of a faith journey) As an aid for understanding the meaning of spirituality, Aram turned to Claude AI and received the following response. “Spirituality can be understood as a person's search for and experience of meaning, purpose, and connection to something larger than themselves. This could involve:

1. A sense of transcendence or connection to something beyond the physical world
2. The pursuit of personal growth and inner wisdom
3. A feeling of interconnectedness with others, nature, or the universe
4. The exploration of life's deeper questions about existence, meaning, and purpose
5. Development of values and ethical principles that guide one's life”

Pat Newcomb, the moderator for the seminar, proposes the following **questions or prompts to assist with focus for finding a starting point.**

1. How has your understanding of spirituality evolved over time?
 - a. Write a brief, spiritual autobiography
 - b. What role has skepticism, doubt or uncertainty affected your journey?
 - c. How (if at all) have our explorations of Transhumanism and Longtermism affect your thoughts about Spirituality?
 - d. How do you see the relationship between spirituality and religion?
2. What does spirituality mean to you, TODAY?
 - a. What role does community play in your spiritual life?
 - b. What role does nature play in your spiritual experiences?
 - c. How can we nurture a spiritual experience? That is, what does one do to have a spiritual experience?

Michael Redmond adds further insightful prompt questions to aid in writing a response.

1. What about the epistemic status of spirituality?
2. How can someone know whether they have had a spiritual experience?
3. Is there such a thing as spiritual knowledge?
4. Is there a danger here, since the grounds of such claims would seem to be purely private to the individual who has the experience.
5. If there is something that is distinct about being spiritual, what is its impact? Does being spiritual make you or lead you to, well, exactly what? In other words, what difference does it make if one is spiritual? Are there social and ethical impacts?

David White offers an alternative approach, which he described as a “**faith journey**.” If this approach makes more sense to you, we would encourage you to follow this journey for writing your response.

An interest in the unseen, mysterious, and otherwise metaphysical numinous aspect of our reality is a ubiquitous aspect of the human condition. Blaise Pascal speaks to this: What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself.

The prophet Elijah, appearing in the Judeo/Christian scriptural book I Kings, experiences the “still small voice” or “whisper” of God speaking to him (I Kings 19: 12-13).

All of us have experienced a journey of faith of one type or another. Paul Tillich referred to “faith” as being “the state of being ultimately concerned.”

For our December session this year, it will make for a compelling session for us to share our individual responses and to discuss their meaning in our lives. Everyone is free to challenge their own experiences and to talk of these challenges to whatever degree the individual is comfortable in doing so.

Pat Newcomb