

The Stages of Consciousness and the Experience of Spirit

**Some clarifying discourses for the
Spirit explorer in century twenty-one**

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Introduction: The Solitude of the Spirit Explorer

Becoming a Spirit explorer is a solitary business. Another explorer may encourage you to explore Spirit and/or enable you to realize how little Spirit you have explored. Such service is valuable, for it pinpoints where you must do your own solitary work. Another Spirit explorer can model for you what Spirit exploration looks like, but the model does not quite make sense until you have, in your own inward aloneness, become what the model expresses. When you or I are attracted to a Spirit explorer, it is because we have sufficient inward Spirit to realize that this particular Spirit explorer is a more adequate expression of that same Spirit potential that you or I have also tasted.

Furthermore, the Spirit explorers we choose to guide our lives keep changing as we mature in Spirit ourselves. We wear out our teachers, so to speak, and move beyond them. We move on to other explorers. Sometimes we flee our teachers before we have finished learning from them what they have to teach us. How can we know when we are fleeing from a teacher and when we are moving beyond a teacher? The teacher might know. At least we should listen to our teachers on this subject. But after we have listened, each of us all alone has to decide whether we have worn out this teacher or whether we are only being tempted to flee this Spirit teacher because he or she has begun to teach us things we do not want to learn.

Having Spirit teachers and becoming a Spirit explorer are two aspects of the same journey. I am writing this collection of discourses to assist you in becoming a Spirit explorer and perhaps a Spirit teacher as well. This means taking your own Spirit journey and doing so with the aid of whatever Spirit teachers you need. You may delight in Spirit exploration and you may also hate it. Many points along this path are painfully humiliating. Many points along this path are upsetting in the extreme--entering into dark nights of the inner being, dark nights in which some old sentimentality, some old moralism, some old intellectualism is dying its grueling death. On these dark nights, it is not always clearly visible that some new Spirit aliveness is being born. And even when Spirit aliveness has been born, the task of expressing and living that aliveness may seem overwhelming. It is because of such trials that we need the encouragement of Spirit teachers.

Yet, in spite of the need for Spirit teachers, becoming a Spirit explorer is a solitary business. Even if you are at a convention of a thousand other Spirit explorers, you are no less alone. Aloneness is a primary quality of being a Spirit explorer. Aloneness understood positively might be called "solitude." The capacity for solitude and the capacity for Spirit are one and the same capacity. "Loneliness" is a word that usually has negative meanings about being without friends or without some beloved person. The pains of loneliness can only be fully handled by seeing how glorious it is to be alone.

A convention of Spirit explorers might assist you in affirming your aloneness and thus expanding your solitude. This is the strange truth about all good religious community: it nurtures solitude. Good religious community is a community of those who are entering the full and final solitude. So we do not join good religious community simply in order to find a sense of belonging, in order to be with people who think like we do, act like we do, or feel like we do. We join a good religious community in order to more fully become our own boundless solitude.

Paradoxically, we also find, that it is glorious to be in a community of genuine solitaires--meeting Spirit to Spirit with other Spirit beings. But these encounters do not lessen our solitude. They serve to increase it. The journey of Spirit is a solitary business.

In the poetry of the writer of the fourth Gospel of the New Testament, the Spirit teacher Jesus is saying these words (my paraphrase) to his novice followers:

In the house of our Infinite Parentage there are many solitary rooms --- I am going to prepare a place for you --- that where I am, you may also be.¹

Such promises are far down the road of the Spirit journey. We must begin with far more elemental matters. What do we mean by “Spirit” anyhow? What might we mean by an Infinite Parentage? How is each of us a Spirit being as well as everything else we are? What does it mean to mature in our Spirit aliveness? Are there stages of Spirit? How is religious practice related to the journey of Spirit? How is religious thought related to scientific thought, psychological thought, and sociological thought? What is thought anyhow? These and other questions have provoked me to write the following discourses.

¹ John 14:2