
Discovering a Spiritual Path to Myself

by Alexandra York, ISPE Mentor

My new secular spirituality guidebook, *Soul Celebrations and Spiritual Snacks*, is unique in that it will appeal to both religious and nonreligious individuals. Its genesis and subsequent path to completion may be of interest to others concerned with the subject.

When I was nine, my mother insisted I go to Sunday school for three years. Encountering the ideas in the Bible electrified my mind to consider matters of the spirit. Its stories and lessons inspired me to pursue a continuing and systematic spiritual quest. They led me to research, throughout high school, not only Christianity but also Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, Judaism, Animism, and other religions and mythologies, obscure and colorful, from East and West.

As a seventeen-year-old college freshman, I took a couple of terms in comparative religions to cross-check my youthful understandings, an endeavor that was edifying but not further enlightening. Then—Eureka!—in a philosophy class that same year, I found my true intellectually door-opening mentor: Aristotle. His *Ethics* affirmed the core values I had lived by my whole young life but about which I did not yet have a full intellectual understanding. Truthfulness and common sense had been my youthful guides; but Aristotle's focus on the self—the development of one's self via reason, the excellence of one's self as the highest purpose a human could strive for—rang harmonious bells in my mind. This great thinker offered objective reasons why one *should* be concerned with one's self as the primary concern of individual development, responsibility, and respect. I became utterly captivated by this monumentally superior mind, which dealt directly with reality, explicitly with reason, and illuminated a self-centered path to a life-affirming moral system I finally and fully could relate to: one that would

help me navigate my own best life here on this earth now.

The theological studies were exceedingly important, however, to my spiritual journey. Little by little during my young explorations into comparative religions, I realized that all mystical systems seek a state of spiritual grace via connection with some “other,” whether it's a supernatural “Being,” an ancestor, a saint, or a deified prophet. Identifying this seemingly universal desire for connection first led me to the more immediate idea of connecting with one's own deepest Self via “other” here-on-this-earth entities. Having had powerful childhood spiritual experiences (I only knew them then as moments of joy in being extraordinarily “alive”), via nature, music, and dance, I then, with Aristotle by my side, delved into the “whys” of those experiences. This exploration led me to confirm that the “other” was, in fact, *my own self-selected value system made physically manifest in another entity with which I could connect*.

So it was the “religious impulse” inherent in all of us humans, and satisfied for many via theology alone, that fueled my desire to discover a secular, universal path to spirituality available for everyone. Aristotle established the intellectual foundation for me because, aside from confirming my own thinking, he broadened premises and principles into a fully developed philosophy that allowed me to continue to pursue the subject seriously over ensuing years. In short: Religions in general set me to search for a secular “other,” but Aristotle's philosophy confirmed for me that the “other” could be one's own Self reflected back from select physical entities here on this earth now. This perspective also permitted me to respect religion as a personal choice, while offering additional ways to experience the joys of life and living for all people regardless of already established personal inclinations.

Countless books have been written about secular spirituality—usually tying theories to Jung, Freud, mythology, meditation, the occult, and so on, for the purpose of tapping into unconscious, subconscious, substitutive, or trance-like mental states. In contrast, my way of approaching spirituality from a secular point of view utilizes a thoroughly “awake” and active conscious methodology, universally accessible and eminently practical because it is based on values—identifiable values—and everyone has values.

Our essential self-created or accepted *value center* defines our distinctive personhood. This interior core can be activated by external stimuli into experiences of sustained secular spiritual exaltation, which become celebrations of our one-and-only unique personhood.

How can we do this? By connecting to and uniting—becoming “One”—with three “other” here-on-earth entities that can stimulate our value center psychosomatically: nature, art, and romantically beloved humans. These three, and only these three, open pathways that can provide the highest renewal to the essence—the soul—of Selfhood in a secular manner.

Examples:

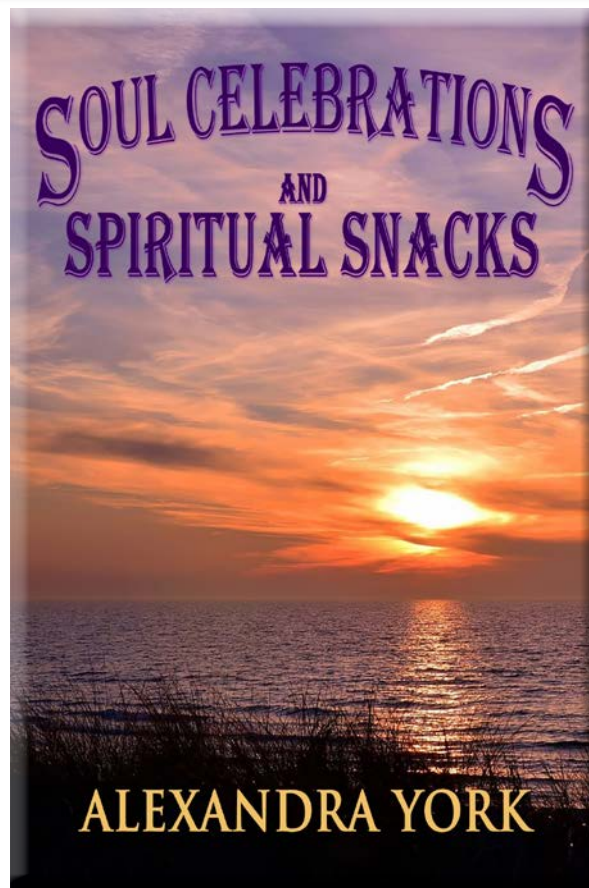
- Rain can become a spiritual experience rather than cause for an umbrella. By learning how to approach the wonders of the physical universe selectively and in a focused manner, we can experience a “merging” with chosen aspects of nature and come away with a wondrously fulfilled sense of having participated in eternity.
- A museum stroll, a novel, and music may turn into empowering experiences that feed the soul because art at its best expresses ideas that make manifest—in an external, material form—the artists’ internal values. If those values match our own, we may feel elevated to the

point of exaltation and experience the art spiritually as well as aesthetically.

- Romantic love with its sexual component can become the supreme secular spiritual experience because the most desirable and most cherished human being is a *living* embodiment of our highest values—and that makes this mind-body union the most sacred of all.
- Aside from these three primaries, families and friends are two secondary subcategories of values where rewarding semi-spiritual experiences can be shared.

These are examples of spiritual experiences to be gained from a secular approach. But however we approach spirituality—religiously or secularly—at root the subject concerns the fundamentals that constitute a good and right life to pursue for the greatest satisfaction and happiness. My thesis offers broad avenues and private pathways to achieve a variety of sustained, empowering, exalted, and expanding “Soul Celebration” experiences that are unique to every individual because each person’s value system is exclusively theirs alone. In addition, it offers smaller, shorter “Spiritual Snacks” (idea compliments of 16th-century Italian Cardinal Giles of Viterbo) to provide instantly available, delectable bits of spiritual nourishment for those wishing to experience the wondrous joys of being alive in today’s whirlwind world on a spur-of-the-moment daily basis.

Especially in the context of current cultural and global strife, it is more important than ever for all individuals to create for themselves a loving, soul-satisfying private life untouchable by external events. Fortunately, an exquisite state of stability within the present turmoil—an intimate “Still Point” in the global storm—can be achieved by everyone regardless of situational circumstance, allowing every individual to seek and select their own personal paths to inalienable, self-created happiness.



Religious individuals of all creeds can add these enthralling pleasures to their already existing faith-based experiences. Nonreligious individuals can experience the heights of emotional-physiological-spiritual (mind, body, and soul) exaltation usually unimagined in a secular environment, thus elevating their normal levels of pleasure to the summit of passionate earthly joy. All can discover new, enlivening, and soul-stirring experiences for personal happiness and spiritual fulfillment.

Following is the dedication in this book which says it all:

**This book is dedicated to
men and women committed to reason
but who sense there may be something missing**

and

**to men and women of faith
who sense there may be something more.**

Editor's note:

Mentor Alexandra York received ISPE's Whiting Memorial Award in 1997. She is an internationally published author of fiction and nonfiction books and the founding president of the NYC-based educational arts foundation American Renaissance for the Twenty-first Century (ART), www.ART-21.org. She also serves on the Policy Advisory Board for Heartland Institute, a Chicago think-tank, and the Advisory Council for the Florence Academy of Art in Italy. Alexandra's current book, *Soul Celebrations and Spiritual Snacks*, will be available in November 2019 and can be purchased through Amazon, B&N, and several other online venues and bookstores across America. As readers of Alexandra's work know, if you purchase her book and email Alexandra@ART-21.org with your name and address (or that of your gift recipients), she will send you a dedicated, author-signed bookplate to paste in the front of your book or of those you are giving to others. [Ω](#)