



After the past two years, it's no surprise that more people are tuning in to their spiritual side. According to a recent Pew Research survey, nearly three in 10 Americans said that they have a stronger personal spiritual belief because of the pandemic and what it wrought.

Many people associate the idea of spirituality with religion, but it's much bigger than that. It's the sense of being connected to something greater in life, a larger consciousness—whatever that looks like. It may not involve religion at all, for that matter.

Exploring your spirituality is simply poking around in the

corners, looking at your beliefs and investigating the meaning and maybe even the boundaries of that connection with something bigger than yourself.

This shift toward greater spirituality—no matter what that means for you—during trying times makes sense. “The reason people originally turned to religion was because it became a place for getting answers for the bad things that were happening, like illness and death,” says Vincent Genna, MSW, a spiritual teacher (and psychic medium) based in Raleigh, North Carolina. Over time, though, when religion couldn't provide those answers anymore and the

same bad things kept happening, we turned to science and then to government, says Genna.

The problem was, it didn't work. “People have become aware that there is a disconnect somewhere,” says Genna. “We forgot who we were and it was our curiosity to find something deeper that reawakened that connection.”

One in five Americans now describes themselves as “spiritual but not religious,” according to the latest Pew Research survey (if you're using a dating app, that term is ubiquitous). “We are in the midst of a great spiritual shift, where people are opening their eyes like never before,” says Genna.

TAP INTO YOUR SPIRITU

Primed for Change

A great reawakening was destined to happen even without a global pandemic, says metaphysics teacher and motivational speaker Luke Storey, who is based in Austin, Texas. "Things were already changing before COVID," he says. "There has been a growth of young people who are incredibly tapped into not only spirituality in general but the language that's being used," he says. "It used to be that people were brought to the brink of a spiritual awakening when they were going through an existential crisis, but now I think people are generally just seeking something that gives

"HEALING YOURSELF FIRST
MAKES BEING SPIRITUAL
EASIER." —LUKE STOREY

their lives a deeper meaning and purpose." (For more on finding your purpose, turn to page 22.)

No matter what words you use, or what religious belief system you follow (*if* you follow one), one thing keeps bringing people back to exploring their spirituality: the need for more meaning in life, especially as it gets more complicated.

"People are in crisis, the status quo isn't working anymore and it's causing people to rethink how they do things and what's important to them," says Eva Selhub, MD, a Waltham, Massachusetts-based life coach, mind-body medicine expert, and author of *The Stress*

The search for meaning is the aspect of humanity that exists on a higher level—the thread that connects us all, regardless of ideology.

ALITY

CAN SEEKING MORE
PURPOSE IN LIFE BRING
YOU MORE HAPPINESS?
YOU BETCHA.

by Megan McMorris

For many people, belonging to a church helps enhance their relationship with a power greater than themselves and gives them a sense of community.

What About Atheism?

The percentage of people who identify as atheist has doubled in the past 10 years, according to a Pew Research telephone study from 2019. (The overall number, 4%, is still modest, though.)

The traditional definition of “atheist” is lacking a belief in God. Some experts claim that the concept doesn’t even exist. “There’s really no such thing as an atheist if you’re spiritual,” says Vincent Genna, MSW.

“What you can deny is all the definitions and the things you’ve heard about what God is, not about the essence of what it means.”

“I don’t truly believe there are any legitimate atheists in the world, because every single person believes in something, whether they’re religious and believe the structure that’s been taught to them, or they believe in the physical world and their own intelligence,” says teacher and speaker Luke Storey.

You don’t have to name what you’re feeling at all, he adds. “When you put an acorn in the ground and two years later there’s an oak tree, what is that?” he says. “When you go to sleep at night, what’s keeping you alive? You don’t have to call it god—or anything—it’s all probably nameless, but there is an energy field that’s present everywhere.”

Storey’s sense of spirituality helps him navigate bumps in the road more easily. “It has helped me become more malleable and responsive versus reactive,” he says. “The ways that I respond to stress now are so much different. Rather than experiencing something stressful and spinning out into anxiety or self-loathing, I find myself able to bounce back more quickly and turn [a negative experience] into a gift versus a curse. It’s an idea of being present in the moment and having an attitude of acceptance and surrender when you know that certain things are truly out of your control. When you realize that, there’s a huge alleviation of stress and letting go of the reins. You find you’re living with much more ease.”

Avoiding the tendency to define ourselves and our reality by what’s happening externally is important as well, says Selhub. “That’s the spiritual path: Learning that we are part of something much greater and that we’re not defined by what happens to us,” she says.

The pandemic showed Genna (and many of us) how his spirituality could help him navigate the unknown. “It was like I didn’t have the same fears, I was cautious but not fearful and didn’t panic,” he says. “And my life has been so wonderful as a result of that, even during this pandemic crisis.”

Tune In

Sounds great, you might say, but how do you do it? “Even if others are telling you that you are this spiritual being and you are one with God [or whatever higher power you believe in], none of that matters unless you make the choice to believe it yourself,” says Storey. “Think about it like a whiteboard. You can paste all the pretty affirmations and pretty pictures on top of the negative thoughts that you really feel about yourself, but you still have to get rid of those negative thoughts first and do the

Management Handbook: A Practical Guide to Staying Calm, Keeping Cool, and Avoiding Blow-Ups.

Finding Personal Meaning

“Being spiritual” looks different for everyone. No matter what we call it—some people aren’t comfortable with the term spiritual—we all tap into a sense of spirituality from time to time. It can be a regular morning cycling class or hot yoga session. For me, it’s an aha moment when I’m cleaning the tub. It’s “getting into the flow” when writing in my journal. It’s going for a run and temporarily feeling that my mind is on pause. It’s feeling drawn toward a particular building because I feel good when I’m inside its walls. All of those things could be considered a form of spirituality, says Selhub. They allow me to temporarily step back from my day-to-day life and see that there’s a bigger picture and maybe even an order in life. That helps me when I’m stressed about a work project or even dealing with a difficult relationship issue.

personal healing work and then retrain your subconscious mind to believe in something better.”

That might entail working with a therapist to help you uncover some deep-seated patterns that need retraining. Or it could be picking up a self-help book that speaks to you, taking a walk in nature or sitting and watching the moon. Many people tap into their spiritual side with mindfulness and meditation. I started connecting to my spiritual side by letting my dog lead the way on our walks (you never know where life will take you, after all).

“You have to find a god of your own understanding,” says Storey. “It can be nature, it can be the sky, it can be anything that’s an expression of a power greater than yourself. It’s a matter of having my own understanding of that power, knowing there’s something out there that’s more powerful than me as an individual. And that’s enough of a crack in the shell of the human ego to allow spiritual work into your life in whatever way you see fit.”

Megan McMorris is a freelance writer in Portland, Oregon.

“SPIRITUALITY HELPS US
MAKE SENSE OF THE BAD
THINGS.” —VINCENT
GENNA, MSW



**More than half of
Americans say they
pray every day.**



Taking time to be mindful, whether it's prayer or just focusing on your breath, creates a space to contemplate something higher.