

consider the consequences of our actions.

- *The ability to have purpose.* We as human beings can dedicate ourselves to an ultimate goal, asking “What do I want to accomplish with my life?”

- *The ability to search for truth.* We as human beings can dedicate ourselves to dealing honestly in the world.

- *The ability to change.* “A leopard cannot change its spots,” but we human beings with strong selfish desires or a “short fuse” can make changes in our character.

I propose that the sum total of all of

these traits constitutes the human spirit.

Even if each one of us does not possess every one of these traits, all human beings have the ability to develop them, once we’ve realized their importance.



This brings us full circle back to the question of happiness. When we develop our human spirits to the fullest, when we feel we are being the best we can be, we not only avoid the chronic discontent of Spiritual Deficiency Syndrome, we can achieve true and enduring happiness.

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Often, it seems, the meanings of the terms *religion* and *spirituality* are confused as being the same. They are not. Every person can be spiritual, regardless of the degree or even presence of formal religion. And we can learn a great deal about spirituality from each other.

One morning a patient of mine, Nora\*, arrived for her psychotherapy appointment bubbling with happiness. She was eight months' sober and beginning to reap some of sobriety's rewards. Her son was attending school all day; she had found a full-time job (albeit at minimum wage) as well as a suitable, inexpensive apartment for the two of them; and she thought she might be able to save enough money to get her car fixed.

“What's wrong with your car?” I asked.

“There's no reverse,” she said. “The reverse gear is broken.”

“How can you drive without a reverse gear?” I asked.

“Oh, you have to plan things out,” she said, “like how to park so you can get out without backing up. But I must remember that some people don't even have a car.”

Unlike Nora, on that morning I was in an irritable mood. I'd had car problems, too—the cruise control on my new automobile was inaccurate, fluctuating five miles per hour. I would have to take it back to the dealer for an adjustment, which would cost half a day. Nora, in contrast, was happy with a car that didn't have a reverse gear.

Nora taught me an important spiritual lesson: Happiness is not having the most, but needing the least.

Nora also demonstrated spiritual happiness through giving back. Years earlier she had undergone chemotherapy as part of cancer treatment and lost all her hair. Now she regularly visits her oncologist's office to uplift other cancer patients. She shows them a picture of her bald head when she was on chemo and says, “Look at me now! My hair is thicker than ever! Chemotherapy was the greatest thing to happen to my hair!”

Nora is a spiritual person.



Another personal story, my own:

After serving as a rabbi for several years, I went to medical school. It was a