

BREATHING

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BREATHE-RESPIRA

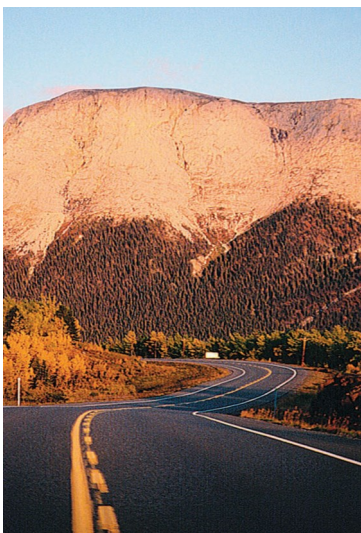
The Authentic Religious/Spiritual Experience

Antonio Ramirez de Leon, Ph.D.

We are living in an era which some have called "the second axial age". The "first" axial age happened between 700 BCE – 200 AC. During the axial age there was a transformation and an evolution in human consciousness. This is the era of the great Greek philosophers, the era of the Hebrew Prophets, of Buddha, of Taoism, and the time when Jesus of Nazareth forever changed the world. When scholars speak of the 2nd axial age, they are referring to a new transformation of consciousness. In fact, some believe that either we do finally evolve or we will destroy ourselves. Remember that there is always resistance to the good, the new, and the true. Believe it or not, there are some that even resist beauty! If we were all open to beauty, the world would change as Pope Francis says.

Today we hear and read about the concept of spirituality as perhaps never before. Some even say that all we need is spirituality and not religion at all. I must say, that those who claim that religion is no longer necessary, have a very narrow understanding of religion, for religion truly means: "that which binds together." Of course we are talking about healthy religion and not blind fanatical beliefs in non-rational realities. Reason is always an ally of truth, so in our search for truth, we need reason. But, pay attention, the true religious and/or spiritual experience is by nature "trans-rational", meaning that these experiences go beyond our rational mind.

It was in the early 1900's that a psychologist by the name of William James lead a "scientific" study of religion. The recording of his findings are to be found in his classic book "*The Varieties of Religious Experience*" (highly recommended). James states that there are four characteristics of the authentic religious experience. First, the experience is *noetic*. By noetic he means that what is experienced gives the person a new and transcendent insight that he or she did not previously have. Second, the experience is *transitory*; it cannot be retained for long periods of time. Third, the religious experience is also *passive*. It is an experience that cannot be produced or be self-made; the experience is "given" and only can be received (truly as a gift). Finally, James as well as all true mystics says, the authentic religious experience is *ineffable*. It cannot be describe by words alone. In fact, any attempt to explain the nature of the experience and any effort to verbalize what happened is impossible.



There is one more characteristics that I believe we need to add to Jame's list. Jesus said: "by their fruits you will know." What occurs to the person after the experience can give us a real hint of the authenticity of the experience. If the experience produces good, unity, love, peace, goodness, new awareness, or any form of virtue, we could almost assert that the experience is not only real, but "authentic". By authentic we mean that there is a real transformation in the person's mind, perception, attitude, and "heart." A false religious experience is by nature deceptive and often leads to delusions and some sort of rigid fanatical view of life and God.

The good news is that God wants to give all of us, including you, a true experience of his love, beauty, and goodness. God can only and truly be known by "participation" in his being. It is a new kind of knowing, which we Christians call contemplation. Contemplation is true enlightenment and always leads to deeper union, compassionate wisdoms, and transformation. We cannot make it happen, but we can be open to receive it. **"If you search for me with all of your heart, you will find Me".**

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MINDFUL MOTHERHOOD

Amira Valle



May is the month when we celebrate all of our mothers, but, what is the role of a mother nowadays?

Women are required to fill many roles that were not expected from us in the past.

Today we are expected to be good mothers and housewives; to be successful in our professions and to contribute to the household income. Additionally, we are supposed to maintain ourselves beautiful and in shape.

After a day in which we've had to fill all these roles, we obviously get home exhausted, with very little energy and patience left to deal with our children. We have no time to develop attitudes and qualities that were naturally cultivated in the past, an main role of women was raising our children.

This month I 'd like to share ten Mindfulness exercises that I find useful to develop some of these qualities:

- 1) Imagine that you are a sculptor and your child is your master piece. Every moment you spend with your child you are chiseling his personality and self-esteem. Remember: you are creating your masterpiece!. Do it mindfully and with love.
- 2) Take three deep breaths at the beginning of the day and when you get home after work, and establish in your mind the intention to be present and mindful in your interactions with your children that day.
- 3) Wear something different in your dominant hand, like a special ring or nail polish, or wrap a thread around your wrist; anything that reminds you, when you look at it, to be aware of whatever you are doing with your hands at that moment (washing the dishes, preparing the meals, ironing the clothes...), and do it with love.
- 4) Practice looking at the world from your child's point of view. Reflect on how you appear before his or her eyes and what does he or she need from you in that moment.
- 5) When you talk with your children, listen to them mindfully. Watch your posture and your body language. Smile and look at their eyes.
- 6) When you fear you are about to lose control; remember to stop before you act; bring awareness to your breath and to your body sensations. Don't act until you are calmed, present and angerless.
- 7) Apologize to your child if you've betrayed his or her trust or if you've used him or her as the target of your own frustration. This will help him or her to heal any inflicted wound and will teach him or her to apologize when he makes a mistake.
- 8) When you have to discipline your children, say what you need to say when you are not angry. Analyze if what you are about to say is the result of your concern for his or her wellbeing and education or if it is because of your self-righteousness and need to be in control.
- 9) Share with your children activities that involve being in the present moment: hiking, bird watching, story telling...
- 10) Practice gratitude rituals, like giving thanks before the meals, writing thank you notes or keeping a gratitude journal... Anything that helps them to be aware of their blessings.

If we live mindfully every moment we spend with our children, we'll be full of beautiful memories the day they leave our nest and we'll be proud of having raised good people who will contribute to the welfare of society.

Amira's page in Facebook: [Elephant-Wise-LLC-A-Journey-to-a-Mindful Life](#)

