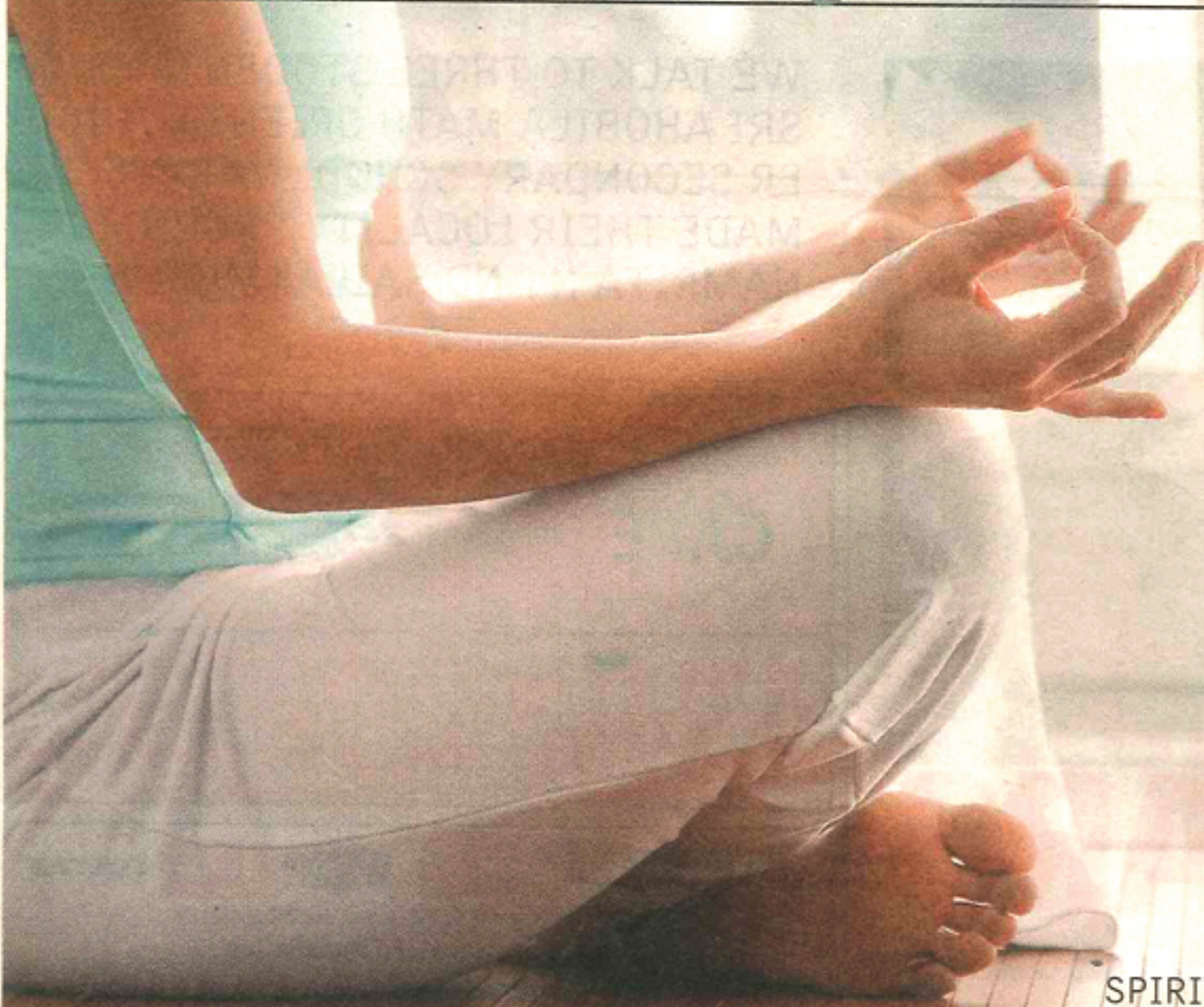


06 spirituality



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SPIRITUALITY IS A PHENOMENON THAT IS NOT EASILY UNDERSTOOD BY ALL. WE BEGIN OUR JOURNEY TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING, EXPERIENCING AND PUTTING INTO PRACTICE THE TRUE SPIRITUALITY. SHRI TATWAMASI DIXIT WRITES...

Spirituality - What does it really mean?

Am I spiritual? Ask yourself this question and you will come some clichéd responses - of course I'm spiritual, I pray everyday; or I'm spiritual because I visit a place of worship regularly; I'm spiritually inclined as I am into Yoga... and so on. But have we really understood what spirituality is? Let us try and look at the fundamental difference between being religious, ritualistic and spiritual. A person can be called religious when he abides by the rules and duties laid down by a particular religion. His respect and conviction in the principles of the religion he follows would determine the way he would lead his life. A ritualistic person follows certain rituals laid down by the religion, caste or family tradition, sometimes, without really delving into the basis behind why the particular ritual is performed. Very often the traits of religiousness and ritualism go hand-in-hand with either one being predominant.

However, spirituality stands alone, being dependent on neither of the former two. Looking at the etymology of the word, Spirituality stems from the old French word 'Spirituel', which means of or concerning the spirit. It has another source from Latin 'spiritualis' or 'spiritus', which means 'of breathing' or 'of spirit'.

These are, however, as recent as 13th century interpretations, but spirituality has been part of our lives from time immemorial. By delving deep into the ancient texts like the Vedas, one can understand and learn the true deep meaning of spirituality. The Vedas, which are considered apauruseya i.e. not of human agency, were directly revealed by the Supreme Being to humankind. It is often considered that

the Vedas are scriptures of the Hindus, but the Vedas transcend religion, caste, and even time. The Vedas have been described as *Pratyakshena anumityava yastupayo na vidyate Tam vidanti vedena tasmad vedasya vedata*

This states that what cannot be learnt by direct perception or inference, that which is incomprehensible for the senses and mind, is stated in the Vedas. Spirituality is one such phenomenon that is not easily understood by all, which has been explained in great detail in the Vedas. The 4 vedas - Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva are each made of 4 parts or divisions viz. Samhitas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads. In order to get a gist of what has been explained in the Vedas, let us look at a few relevant verses from Upanishads, which are the culmination of the Vedas and are also called Vedanta.

The Vedas propound one fundamental truth that Spirituality is knowledge of the Supreme Being (Brahman/ Isvara). To understand this one must be able to accept that the Supreme Being is the self within each one of us and that there is oneness amongst all animate and inanimate objects in the universe.

In the Isavasya Upanishad of Yajur Veda, the verse:

Yastu sarvani bhootani atmanyevanupasyati Sarvabhootesu chatmanam tato na vijugupasate.

This states that a person who sees every being in himself and himself in every being is truly spiritual. Another verse from the Isavasya Upanishad states that *yasmin sarvani bhootani atmaivabhoodvijanatah tatra ko mohah kah shoka ekatvamanupasyatah* When all beings are seen as one, there is

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neither attachment nor sadness. Connectedness in thoughts, feelings and existence result in relinquishing emotional aberrations.

In principle, this phenomenon may be understood, but how does one really put it in practice in today's world. Does it mean that in order to be spiritual, one needs to renounce everything and live a life of an ascetic? Does it mean that all human feelings, relationships and desires are futile and condemnable? Such thoughts add to a person's confusion and put deterrents in his path towards spiritual growth. Spirituality, by no means, demands any of the above. It can be perceived in everything that one does - good, bad, small or big. It is basically looking at your true self, not that which is governed by your conditioned mind. Your true self is immortal; it is that Supreme Being - Brahman! It exists beyond this particular lifetime. Each lifetime is considered an experience, which can be used to move higher or lower in the ladder of spirituality.

In our journey towards understanding, experiencing and putting into practice true spirituality, let us start with the following. As a first step, sit silently and observe your breathing and witness your thoughts for ten minutes daily. Practice this sincerely and diligently and note any difference that you experience. We shall explore more practical steps to spirituality in the subsequent issues of this supplement.

The writer is the founder of Ojas Foundation, which is a Global Vedic Health Movement with the goal of promoting the Vedic Path to a Healthy Living. The foundation believes in applying the solutions extracted from the Vedas and other ancient scriptures for day-to-day life to enhance physical, mental and spiritual well-being.