

# Conscious spirituality in search of truth...



## ROBERT C ATCHLEY:HOW SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE AND DEVELOPMENT INTERACT WITH AGING

*While many people may not associate spirituality and human development with aging Robert [Bob] Atchley a former professor of gerontology did. Atchley is another creative pioneer in this new paradigm of aging who advocated passionately for approaching aging beyond normal chronological perspectives. He shares this new paradigm of aging with other pioneer luminaries including Ashton Applewhite, Connie Goldwater, Carol Osborn, Ron Pevny, Harry R Moody, Tom Pinkson and others.*

*Beyond academically being a professor of gerontology Atchley's wisdom legacy included author of numerous publications, a poet, singer, guest speaker, and intentional interests in Transpersonal Psychology. In 2018, Robert C Atchley passed on to a better place—we wish him well on his spirit' journey. An extract from an article Atchley wrote on spiritual practices is identified in the Transpersonal Psychology Journal, 2011. An extract follows.*

*– Philip Crouch, Tasmania,2020*

## **BOB ATCHLEY: TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICES**

TRANSPERSONAL GERONTOLOGY FOCUSES ON FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH GROWTH IN-

- (A) *ability to perceive the spiritual elements of all types of human experiences,*
- (B) *capacity to perceive from a vantage point in higher levels of consciousness, and*
- (C) *openness to experiences of connection with all of being.*

'The term spirituality refers to an inner field of human experience. It is a capacity that can grow enormously over time. **Many of the most spiritually developed human beings are older men and women.** Most adults have had experiences they would label spiritual, and most see themselves as being on a spiritual journey. Spirituality has great potential as a vital region of continued psychological growth throughout adulthood but especially in old age. Successive personal narratives of the spiritual journey are excellent sources or studying these factors.'



**BOB C ATCHLEY: HERE ARE SOME RESPONSES FROM MY INTERVIEWS**

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First and foremost, spirituality is a region of experience. Without our own inner experience of the spiritual region of life, talk about spirituality is akin to science fiction. One can imagine what spiritual experience might be like, but by no means is it the same thing as having the experience.

As I thought about [what makes an experience spiritual], I began to wonder if any experiences are not spiritual. **If being spiritual is part of our nature, maybe even the central part**, which I believe it is, then as long as we are being, there is a spiritual element. Whether we are aware of them [this] is another thing.

**Man, age 92** Life is more and more spiritual all the time. I have an ongoing experience of being part of a network. It is the backdrop to everything. Sometimes it is faint, almost not there, when I deal with the logistics of everything that I am part of and that is part of me. This tuning in' has become easier since I moved out of the city.

**Woman, age 52** As a viewpoint or vantage point, spirituality can take three basic forms: intense awareness of the present, transcendence of the personal self, or a feeling of connection with the ground of being—variously conceived as all of life, the universe, a supreme being, a great web of being, and many other conceptions. Most people grow into these perspectives in a succession or upward spiral of increasing understanding we call spiritual development or spiritual growth. Some come to recognize that these vantage points are interrelated and can reside in awareness simultaneously.

**The concept of a spiritual journey refers to an individual's personal narrative about her or his spiritual life and development, including its ups and downs.** This narrative usually includes a history of experiences, actions, and insights connected with a search for spiritual meaning and understanding.

Underlying the spiritual journey is an intentional process of seeking spiritual experiences, using values and insights informed by spiritual experience to make life choices, and learning from experience with this process. Spiritual journeys also involve learning to persist and be content on a journey into imperfectly known territory, where insights are always limited, no matter how profound they seem at the time.



**People who have been on a spiritual journey for decades usually have developed a sense of humor** about the contradictions and paradoxes they encounter, even as they use these enigmas as food for contemplation. Most spiritual journeys involve elements of commitment, self-discipline, and regular spiritual practice. Some people believe that we become what we think, but there is evidence that we are more likely to become what we do (Walsh,1999). People usually learn not to force the issue. **Waiting is an important spiritual practice** among elders—not ‘waiting for’ but just waiting. In the space created by patient waiting or contemplation, direct connection with the ground of being may be more likely.

**BOB ATCHLEY: SPIRITUAL PRACTICE IN LATER LIFE**

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Returning to spiritual practice over and over again creates habits of mind, habits of body, and habits of being that come to seem natural. If these practices are part of an open context of spiritual seeking, these habits can become enlivening. To many advanced spiritual practitioners, every day appears as a new day. Spiritual practices are things done on a regular basis to celebrate, appreciate, invite, or act on experiences of presence, transcending the personal self, and connecting directly with the ground of being.

**Many types of meditation and prayer, devotional rituals and music, inspirational reading and reflection, and movement-oriented spiritual disciplines can be mixed and matched to support a contemplative, practice-oriented spirituality.**

Considerable evidence supports the idea that spiritual concerns, experience, and development become increasingly important for many people in middle and later life. This evidence is found in the narratives of individuals as well as in social science surveys (Atchley & Barusch, 2004). Beginning around age 35 or 40, as age increases, so does the proportion of people who are consciously involved in an inner exploration of the meaning of their existence and their relation to the universe.

**Albert Winseman (2003) reported that adults age 65 or older were more than twice as likely to see themselves as spiritually committed than were adults 45 to 54. Spiritually committed people are often engaged in spiritual practices that heighten the possibility of numinous, mystical experience.**



In addition, those who experience transcendent, non-personal levels of consciousness often feel called to serve, and spiritually rooted service takes many forms. **We usually experience spirituality not in an inner vacuum of pure existence but in the context of acting in some way, even if that action is deep contemplation while sitting relatively still.** Undoubtedly, pure being is present underneath everything we do. If we were not experiencing being, at least in the background of our awareness, then how could we experience anything else?

**The spiritual journey can be seen as a quest for balance between being and doing.** In the process of learning to function in the social worlds into which we are born—family, work, community, society, and so on— many people become overly focused on acting within the context of socially defined positions and roles, their attention is absorbed by this social world, and they lose sight of the liberating qualities of being that are there also. We learn to identify with our niches, actions, and lifestyles rather than with our more fundamental being.

**The spiritual journey is often about learning to bring being back into consciousness.** People are often motivated toward this sort of journey by their feeling that something is missing from their conventional role centered lives. For many people, learning to bring being back into consciousness introduces a healthy distance from, and perspective on, social roles and also a needed element of creativity and spontaneity to one's lived experience.

The essence of fully developed spirituality is an intense aliveness and deep understanding that one intuitively comprehends as coming from a direct, internal link with that mysterious principle that connects all aspects of the universe. As fully awakened spiritual beings, people feel their interconnectedness with everything. In most spiritual traditions, mysticism lies at the heart of spirituality. Mysticism refers to transcendent, contemplative experiences that enhance spiritual understanding ...



**Suggested resources:**

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e89b/165cc2cac3d59372003a8fe64b11e8d4f3d4.pdf>

[https://legacyofwisdom.org/legacy-of-wisdom/en/library/interviewees/bob\\_atchley.html](https://legacyofwisdom.org/legacy-of-wisdom/en/library/interviewees/bob_atchley.html)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhcLQo6HZUw>

