Spirituality and Development

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Concepts and Categories

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Preface

An earlier version of this paper was prepared for CIDA conference on spirituality and development held in Ottawa in June, 1996. It was an attempt to define a few basic categories and concepts to fosterc clarity in the wide-ranging discourse on the issue of spirituality and developmentfor a largely secular and professional audience. This version has been adapted for readers of the Journal of Baha'i Studies, who are presumably more familiar with vocabulary related to spirituality, but might not be familiar with the application of spiritual concepts to the practical affairs of humanity[1].

My attempt to describe this emergent vocabulary has been influenced by three main sources: our Faith, our work as management consultants, and my activities with CBIDS, where I serve as a volunteer. In developing our work we read all the management and related literature we can find and run it through the grid of the spiritual principles by which we try to live. We then take whatever makes it through this sieve and prepare training sessions and other consulting services for our clients. A similar approach can be applied to international development.

Although we've lived overseas as CIDA cooperants and have spent over 20 years working in Canada's north, I'm not an expert in international development. Nor am I an accomplished scholar of the many spiritual principles that might be related to development. This paper is little more than a limited personal attempt to help the process along.

My thinking has been helped by discussions with Ed Ragan, Kendel Rust, Peter Tamas and several participants at The Canadian Public Health Association's 1996 *Lessons Learned* conference in Mukono, Uganda—Richard Carothers, Mark Henderson-Begg and Keith Lansdell were keen to share their thoughts on this topic.

Even though others offered their comments, this paper's many shortcomings are really my own responsibility. I hope it's a useful contribution to the ongoing adventure of finding more effective ways to make this world a better place.

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1 Universal House of Justice, letter 20 October 1983.

Introduction

In Bjorn Hettne's 1982 paper, *Development Theory and the Third World,* international development was described as an activity that lacked a coherent and comprehensive paradigm[1]. The intervening years don't seem to have done much to improve matters at this fundamental level. A recent Ottawa conference on UNESCO's Decade of Culture and Development[2] indicated that things are still rather confused, and that international development continues to be an effort that is searching for a better set of navigation principles.

The development field is not alone: many other areas of human endeavor are in the same position. Systems of public education, for example, seem to need re-examination every decade or so to see whether they are doing their job properly and, on occasion, to go so far as to determine what that job should actually be—to revisit the question, "Education for *what?"* The fundamentals of Environmental Studies, Adult Education, Community Development, Social Work, and most of the other applied social sciences seem to be in a constant state of redefinition. In virtually all areas old patterns are falling away as new and better frameworks emerge. Although this deep-level turbulence might cause some distress, it is also a sign of growth, an essential feature of a vibrant and rapidly-changing civilization.

Several of these re-examinations of the foundations of various fields of endeavor seem to be converging on a common deep-level theme. Neil Portman, a respected critic of American public education, recently said the problem with the system is that people no longer know what to believe in.[3] This theme is also evident in management and organizational development, where there is increasing interest in the link between belief and action, and how recognition of a spiritual dimension can contribute to greater coherence and better results. Concepts that were once discussed mainly in seminaries or temples are now being heard in boardrooms and found in professional publications. Ten years ago a title such as *The Search for Spirit in the Workplace*[4] would not have appeared on the cover of *Training* magazine, a journal dedicated to "the human side of business". Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Successful People* would not have been a best-seller[5]—his list is almost an exact replica of principles found at the core of most established Faiths.

Similarly, until recently Margaret Wheatley's *Leadership and the New Science*[6]*,* a widely-acclaimed management book in which the line between quantum physics and religion is blurry indeed, would not have attracted even passing mention. The strengthening relationship between post-Newtonian science and a redefined concept of spirituality is explored in a review of the views of David Bohm, Karl Pribram, Renée Weber, Fritjof Capra, Marilyn Ferguson and others in Wilber's *The*

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1 Hettne, Bjorn. *Development Theory and the Third World.* SAREC Report R2:1982, Stockholm: Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries, 1982.

2 Summary of the Public Forum on the Report on the World Commission on Culture and Development, Ottawa, 29 February 1996. Ottawa: Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 1996.

3 Portman, Neil. *Ideas Series on Higher Education*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, May 1999 (get full reference).

4 *Training* magazine, June 1993.

5 Covey, Stephen. *Seven Habits of Highly Successful People.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989.

6 Wheatley, Margaret. *Leadership and the New Science.* San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1994.

Holographic Paradigm[1], a wide-ranging discussion of quantum physics, neurophysiology, mysticism and other elements of an emerging holistic paradigm.

These new insights are reshaping the underpinnings of daily activity and transforming entire professions. The impact on large organizations is but one example—as Margaret Wheatley states:

> To live in a quantum world, to weave here and there with ease and grace, we will need to change what we do. We will need to stop describing tasks and instead facilitate *process.* We will need to become savvy about how to build relationships, how to nurture growing, evolving things. All of us will need better skills in listening, communicating, and facilitating groups, because these are the talents that build strong relationships. It is well known that the era of the rugged individual has been replaced by the era of the team player. But this is only the beginning. The quantum world has demolished the concept of the unconnected individual. More and more relationships are in store for us, out there in the vast web of universal connections.[2]

The recognition that "the concept of the unconnected individual" is obsolete and that we exist in a "vast web of universal connections" has massive implications for human relations at all levels. Concepts such as interdependence, positive use of conflict, and partnership are replacing older themes based on exploitation, manipulation and disunity. This calls for a change of heart, a profound system-wide transformation in identity as well as in action.

As these implications work themselves out there are changes in methods of information flow, consultation, ownership and the distribution of power and initiative—a fundamental restructuring of patterns of attitude, thought and behavior throughout the system. In debriefings after mock exercises conducted by the US Army, for example, enlisted men are being encouraged to ask field commanders to explain their reasons for making particular tactical decisions, and when shortcomings are found the commanders are encouraged to acknowledge their errors and learn from insights provided by junior personnel who are intimately familiar with conditions on the ground. Together they define better ways of achieving desired results, with a significant improvement in the organization's effectiveness. This previously forbidden authentic dialogue across hierarchy lines can be seen as one example of the application of spiritual principles—as manifested in concepts such as oneness and the inherent nobility of each person— to human relationships.

The international development field is no exception: new bridges are linking the secular and the sacred and it, too is likely to undergo a similar transformation. IDRC's recent sponsorship of an exploration of the relationship of spirituality and development[3], publication of Fr. Ryan's book on culture, spirituality and economic development[4] and the World Bank's conference with religious groups at Lambeth Palace in London in1998 are part of a constant search for better ways to define and respond to humanity's needs.

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1 Wilber, Ken (ed). *The Holographic Paradigm and other paradoxes.* Boston: Shambala, 1982.

2 Wheatley, Margaret. *Leadership and the New Science.* p 38.

33 Insert reference to IDRC project

4 Ryan, William F. SJ. *Culture, Spirituality and Economic Development: Opening a Dialogue.* Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1995.

Spiritual terminology is appearing at the highest level: in several UN global conferences the governments of the world have committed to "spiritual development"[1], initiatives are said to require a "spiritual vision"[2], they should address "spiritual needs"[3], recognize the "spiritual environment"[4] realize that human beings require "spiritual development"[5], and that "religion, spirituality and belief play a central role in the lives of millions of women and men."[6] Although the spiritual dimension is mentioned in these and other development fora, it remains largely undefined and is not yet an integral part of operations. As with other fields, the recognition, definition and application of this new dimension is likely to bring about a profound reorientation in all aspects of the development business.

Much work is needed to bring about this change. While there seems to be considerable interest in this emergent trend, there is no consensus on the form in which it should be expressed: there is little common language to help development professionals converse on these themes and build new ways of working together to further our common lot. This is the source of considerable confusion and frustration—we sense there is a new dimension, but have few tools to share our understanding of this fundamentally different view of our activities. Perhaps it is because we have not yet learned the words to describe and chart our transformation that this change has not yet manifested itself.

This paper is a limited attempt to describe some of the key concepts and categories in the complex area of spirituality and development. Its purpose is to support the emergence of a vocabulary that helps lend order to this as yet ill-defined sector of human experience and accelerates the shift toward a new and better way of doing this important work.

1 Agenda 21, 6.3
2 Habitat Agenda, 4
3 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, 3.
4 Programme of Action for the World Summit for Social Development, 4.
5 Agenda 21, 6.23
6 Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, 24.

Definitions

Much of the difficulty in discussing "spirituality" and "development" is linked to a tendency of practitioners to use these and other key words without clearly defining what they mean. Members of religious organizations often use "in-group" vocabulary with little regard to the likelihood that outsiders might not use the terms in the same way. Likewise, development practitioners can use their specialized vocabulary with little apparent regard to the meaning others might ascribe to their words. Members of both groups rarely take time to define the terms they use, even among themselves: they simply assume that all parties understand what they're talking about. This sometimes erroneous assumption can contribute to significant problems.

This section summarizes basic definitions of "spirituality" and "development" and comments on the relationship between these two terms in various societies and in the business of international development.

Spirituality

An adequate definition of spirituality calls for examination of three related words: spirituality, spiritual and spirit, and an associated term, "soul". Although definitions abound in the scriptures of various Faiths and among other groups, a western secular reference is used here. The following are from *Webster's New International Dictionary,* 2nd Edition (1957):

Spirituality is defined as follows:

> 1. Quality or state of being spiritual; spiritual nature or function; spiritual-mindedness.

Spiritual is defined as follows:

> 1. Of, pertaining to, or consisting of, spirit; not material; incorporeal, as, a *spiritual* substance or being.
> 2. Of or pertaining to the intellectual and higher endowments of the mind; mental; intellectual; also, highly refined in thought or feeling.
> 3. Of or pertaining to the moral feelings or states of the soul, as distinguished from the external actions; reaching and affecting the spirit.
> 4. Of or pertaining to the soul or its affections as influenced by the divine Spirit; controlled and inspired by the Spirit; proceeding from the Holy Spirit pure; holy; divine; heavenly-minded; — opposed to *carnal.*

Spirit is defined as follows:

> 1. The breath of life; life, or the life principle, conceived as a kind of breath or vapour animating the body, or, in man, mediating between body and soul…
> 2. The life principle viewed as the 'breath' or gift of deity; hence, the agent of vital and conscious functions in man; the soul.

Soul is defined as follows:

> 1. An entity conceived as the essence, substance, animating principle, or actuating cause of life, or of the individual life, esp. of life manifested in psychical activities; the vehicle of individual existence, separate in nature from the body and usually held to separable in existence. … *Soul, spirit* are often convertible terms…

Development

Current definitions of development have several dimensions: what it is, who does it, and how it is done. Volumes have been written on the topic—the following basic descriptions will suffice for the purposes of this paper:

Ideally, development is a process in which people become more active agents in improving their circumstances. It incorporates a number of subsidiary themes such as sustainability, capacity building, equity and partnership.

Sustainability usually refers to the ability of people to carry on with a development initiative after external inputs are no longer available.

Capacity-building is the increase in people's ability to improve their circumstances.

Equity refers to the distribution of an initiative's participation and benefits—usually focused on the equality of women and men, it also addresses inter-group relationships.

Partnership describes an authentic sharing and reciprocity among all participants in a development initiative—it moves the process beyond traditional donor-recipient relationships to one in which all parties have something to offer and to gain from each other.

Development initiatives have a broad scope: they can range from small-scale educational activities that foster self-esteem and problem solving in individuals all the way to strengthening an area's manufacturing or agricultural resources, establishing or strengthening a country's university system, improving a government's institutional capacity, or the construction of large works such as hydro dams or transportation systems that can transform whole regions.

Commentary: Linking Spirituality and Development

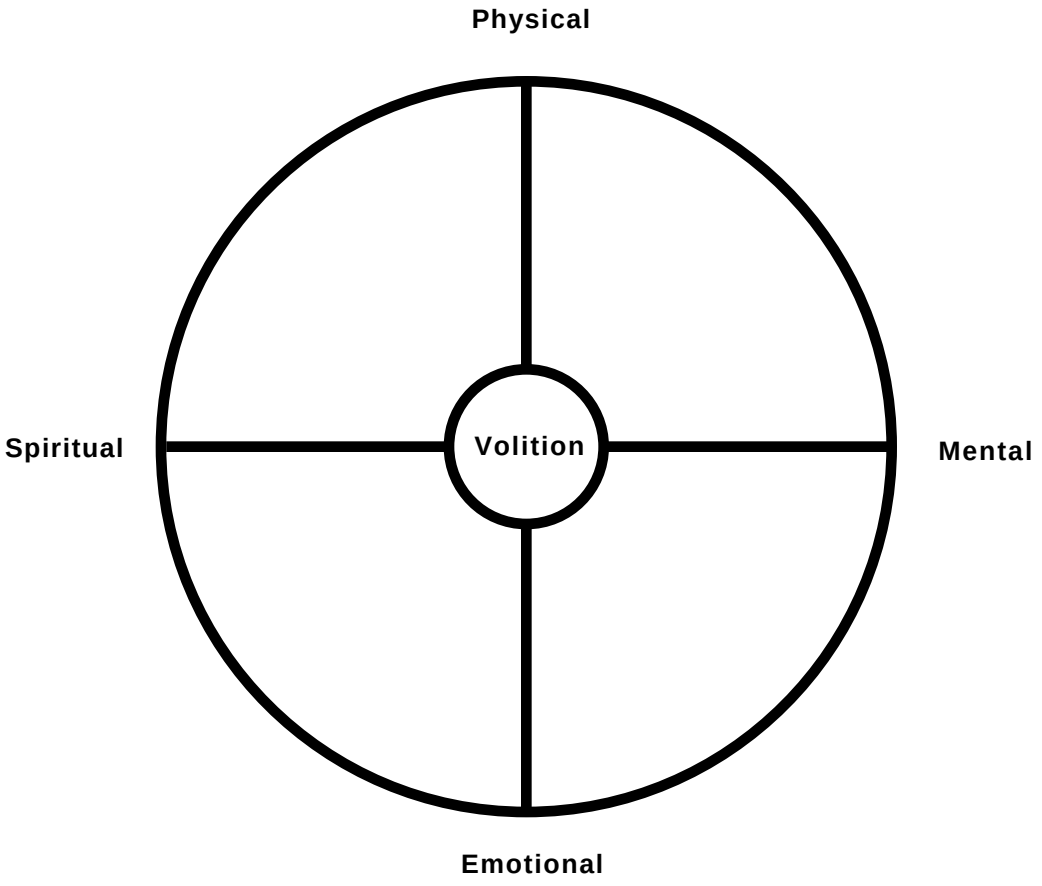
In much of contemporary western society there is a perception that spirituality and development are not related—they seem to operate in two separate sectors of life. Spirituality is largely confined to mystical or religious experience and takes place either in private or collectively, but at times and in locations separate from "work". International development is seen as "work" and usually is a material or intellectual activity that takes place without reference to the spirit. A competent development professional doesn't say prayers in management meetings or discuss project budgets, staffing issues or program evaluation during a religious service. Even if the professional has both in mind, each activity can be expressed only in its assigned location and time slot. The tendency to compartmentalize these aspects of human experience and separate these issues from each other is one of the salient characteristics of western industrialized societies.

Furthermore, development is seen as tangible and real, while spiritual matters deal with the ephemeral, the transcendent, the un-real. Because we can't see it or measure it, there seems to be no place for the spiritual in the development equation. However, it soon becomes abundantly clear when a spiritual dimension is lacking. If the spirit really is "the breath of life", to exclude it is to deprive any activity of its vitality—it becomes a hollow, mechanistic husk rather than a living, breathing growing entity. Even though this might be acknowledged in some way by development professionals, there is no room in a typical project workplan or administrative system for this source of energy: this essential feature of development seems to operate in another realm. The closest

development practitioners come to addressing this deeper dimension is to label problems using terms such as "low morale" or "motivation issues" which can be remedied by activies such as team building or management training sessions, all of which are largely secular concepts.

Other societies seem to treat these matters differently—they see spirit and work as various aspects of a whole. Among some of the Aboriginal people of North America, for example, human development is seen as a cyclical process that begins with conception and birth, passes through the stages of youth, middle age and old age, and ends with the passage of the spirit into the next world. The process is explained using a symbol, the Medicine Wheel, to show the relationship among these various stages of life. The same symbol is used to illustrate the relationships among the different facets of the self, which are described as physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. The four spokes of the medicine wheel meet at the center, which symbolizes volition.

Medicine Wheel



Other societies have similar views of the integrated nature of the human being and the proper functioning of the community. One of the stories heard in development circles is that of a people in the South Pacific who resisted offers of aid from the west. Even though they were poor and had

health problems, they would not work with the development program that was trying to become established in their area. When they were questioned about this resistance, they were reported to have said the following:

> We know that human beings have three related aspects: material, emotional and spiritual. When these three are in balance the individual and the society are well. We see your society as not having this balance—your spiritual aspect is not well-developed and everything you do reflects this imbalance. We think your society is not well. If we accept your offer of material assistance we fear it will damage our society. You should go and achieve balance with the three aspects of the self and then come back and we will talk about your kind offer of assistance.

The question often raised when these stories are discussed is the issue of which society is most in need of development assistance—the materially underdeveloped south, or the spiritually underdeveloped north? The people from the South Pacific might consider training development workers for overseas postings in Europe or North America to foster a balanced view of life in the industrialized world. (Speculation could go on.... what would they consider to be a "hardship post" and how would they compensate their development workers for serving in those areas?)

These fundamental differences of world view permeate the development business. At a 1996 gathering of experts from around the world to discuss UNESCO's Decade of Cultural Development, western-trained delegates were preoccupied with the concept of human rights. After much discussion of culture, development and human rights a participant from the Far East stood up and said, "We have some difficulty with your concept of human rights. We're not sure what it means. When we look at development activities, we use other concepts. We ask, 'Is it dharmic or is it not-dharmic?' How does your notion of human rights relate to this?"

There was an uncomfortable silence in the room, after which the delegates resumed discussion of human rights as if the question of a "dharmic" form of assessment had not been raised[1]. The gathering did not seem to know how to deal with the question of how well an activity conformed to spiritual principles such as "dharma". The category simply did not exist.

Bjorn Hettne's 1982 review of the state of development theory identified two emergent trends in the field: environmental considerations, and an approach he called "the indigenization of development theory". Both have a spiritual dimension.

Although the environment issue has a number of facets, its basic concern revolves around two themes: who are we and what is our place in the universe, and how do we reconcile the many divergent views of the way we should interact with the rest of the natural world? At the root of these questions are matters such as the purpose of existence, the nature of human beings and the rest of the physical world, the reality of the oneness of humankind, approaches to consultation and collective decision-making, and the need for justice in human affairs: these are belief-dimension concerns.

The indigenization of development theory implies an even closer relationship with affairs of the spirit. Without even sensing a distinction between economics and religion, for example, many

1 Peter Tamas: personal communication April 1996. Peter was a process recorder during this conference and observed this exchange.

Hindu or Moslem merchants will say prayers on the doorsteps of their shops before opening the shutters and getting on with their working day. Anyone wanting to strengthen the small business sector in such a society needs to understand and accept the interwoven reality of spirituality and work: in much of the world they are seamlessly intermeshed. When we lived in Ghana our African colleagues became visibly angry when they were told that we knew people who did not believe in God: the concept was unthinkable. A spiritual dimension was an integral and essential part of their frame of reference.

This integration of the spirit in everyday human activity forms the foundation of consciousness of a large proportion of the peoples of the world. If their sense of the spiritual has managed to survive their secular professional training, most non-western development planners are likely to understand this linkage and work with assumptions rooted in this reality. They do so at some risk, however, because from this world view they are likely to write things into project reports and proposals that might not be understood by western secular agencies. Their competence is likely to be called into question.

If, on the other hand, they exclude these aspects from their projects they're likely to risk unbalancing the society with non-sustainable approaches to development. The core concern of sustainability is that any initiative should be consistent with the context and consciousness of the environment in which it operates. If it can't see and connect with a population's spiritual dimension the initiative will simply not take root in the hearts and minds of the people who will need to look after it once external support is no longer provided. It will be like a transplanted organ that's been rejected by the body because it was not compatible with its host. Sustainability requires indigenization, which in turn is likely to have a significant spiritual dimension.

The focus of the question is deeper than culture. Our multi-layered system of thought, emotion and behavior known as culture can be said to be shaped by influences from two main sources: through interaction with the environment, and from information embedded in religion. A culture's patterns are transmitted by osmosis through the socialization process: they are shot through with a host of largely unconscious assumptions rooted in the spiritual and material heritage of a people.

To be blind in the spiritual sector of human experience is to operate with only a part of our awareness and to act as if we can build a society without taking notice of the foundation of culture, the system of belief that we use to determine our place in the universe and how we should interact with each other as we make our journey through time. A thorough appreciation of this deeper dimension of human existence is needed for a balanced life, and an applied understanding of the affairs of the spirit is an essential element in sound and sustainable development work.

Concepts and Categories

This section defines several terms associated with spirituality.

Sources of Spiritual Knowledge and Information

Spirituality has a relationship with knowledge and information. People come to know about spiritual things, and words are used to understand this experience and share it with others. The authenticity of this knowledge can be the focus of considerable interest: how do I know whether any particular group of words (such as those in the Bible or the Koran) are true and should inform my choices of action? One of the foundation themes in theology is that of authority—the question of whether a particular body of information is valid and worthy of consideration, while another body of information merits less attention. This is not a trifling issue: differences of opinion on this matter have been associated with serious conflict throughout much of history.

A fundamental question at the outset relates to one's belief in things spiritual, such as the existence of ultimate truth, an unknowable creator or the immortality of the soul. Whether or not one believes in the existence of "Truth" or in God has a direct impact on the extent to which a person will pay attention to any knowledge attributed to this type of source or authority. Logical arguments for or against belief in the divine or transcendent seem to have equal validity. In situations where it is impossible to clearly prove matters in one way or another, the strategy recommended by some philosophers is to carefully consider the advantages of each option and then to "follow the inclination of one's heart"[1]. This inclination can be influenced by factors such as whimsy, lessons from one's experience, or by an assessment of the likely outcomes of one's decision. Whether one believes is essentially a matter of personal choice: once made, the question becomes one of identifying and accepting a valid source of information about the spiritual dimension of human existence.

Members of groups such as Christians, Moslems, Hindus and Bahá'ís, among others, attribute authority to the words of the founders of their Faiths, such as Christ, Muhammad, Krishna or Bahá'u'lláh. Their utterances are seen as the truth, and their information is said to come from a single unknowable source that some call God. The universe is seen as an open system, and these special individuals are regarded as prophets or messengers who receive knowledge from an inaccessible source that created all reality and who disseminate information about the visible and invisible aspects of life to all humanity. Although they said little about the source of their knowledge, other teachers such as Lao Tsu, Confucius and Buddha described principles of belief, thought and behavior that were seen as true foundations for right living.

The information these teachers conveyed through word and deed was used to build the foundations of the religious institutions established in their names. Most groups have specially-trained people (such as priests or mullahs) whose function is to help their members understand this knowledge. They are expected to be familiar with the various types of information in their religions and to help other members apply this knowledge in their lives.

1 Attributed to Sextus Empiricus, 3rd century AD skeptic.

In groups such as the various Aboriginal peoples of the Americas, spiritual knowledge is sometimes shared through stories or myths that are regarded as valid sources of guidance for everyday life. While some of this guidance is said to originate with prophets such as the founder of the Long House religion of the Iroquois, the origins of other teachings are not so clearly linked to a particular source. Although these groups might not store their information in books similar to the Koran or the Bible, their oral traditions have been passed from one generation to another with considerable consistency.

Some individuals state they have direct access to religious or spiritual knowledge: through arduous study, meditation, dreams, or other means they acquire information that guides their behavior. There are many forms of this direct individual-level connection with the divine, and it occurs in societies throughout the world. Some groups seem to have no linkage with a prophet or messenger. Australian aborigines, for example, report a direct personal connection with a higher power that contributes to a strong trust that they will be provided for as they set out on long treks with little other than this faith to sustain them.[1] There are increasing numbers of people in industrialized countries whose belief systems are based on similar individualistic and direct links with the divine.

Most people have had some experience of the spiritual or transcendent through reflection on the events of their lives; they can have a sentiment of being connected to something greater than one's self through witnessing the birth and development of a child, feeling the awesome power of the beauty of a sunset or the apparent order of the universe, or being profoundly moved by wanting to do something about the many difficult issues facing humanity, such as alleviating the suffering of the poor. These experiences often raise questions that prompt these individuals to look for information to explain the phenomenon or lend order and meaning to their lives. Some find the knowledge they seek in the teachings of the founders of the world's religions, and others find more personal forms of spirituality to address their needs.

Although the world's religions provide information about the spiritual aspects of life, individuals' experiences can be more or less consciously linked to the guidance provided by the messengers or prophets. People can live "good" ethical and moral lives regardless of their degree of commitment to a particular form of spirituality.

While highly individualistic forms of spirituality may provide order for the lives of a few people, when thousands share an affiliation with a common source of spiritual knowledge entire populations can operate in a coherent manner. The historian Arnold Toynbee linked the emergence of great civilizations to the infusion and application of knowledge from individuals such as the central figures of the world's major Faiths[2]. If great numbers believe a prophet is authentic and they are in agreement on the means to apply the messenger's teachings to their lives, the result is order and social progress. Unity of belief is linked to collective well-being.

One of the major sources of difficulty in the world is the lack of consciousness of our unity at the level of spirituality. While the forms of expression of the Faiths may vary, they have fundamental similarities: anyone who takes the time to study the foundations of the major systems of belief will soon find much in common at their essential core. This is not surprising—most who believe in

1 Morgan, Marlo. *Mutant Message Down Under.* New York: Harper Collins, 1994.

2 Barker, John. *The Super-Historians.* New York: Scribner. 1982. Section on Arnold Toynbee, Pp 289-292.

some form of divinity agree they all come from the same unknowable source and have the same purpose: to foster the progress of humankind. That is also the purpose of international development. More will be said about this later in this paper.

Even though the core teachings of virtually all belief systems are essentially the same, divergent religious allegiances are often associated with serious conflicts. Analysis shows that the world's major religions differ mainly in their secondary aspects such as the interpretation of their founders' teachings or their institutional arrangements. Most will agree that Moses, for example, received and disseminated information from an unknown source some call God, and this knowledge benefited the people among whom he lived. While there are many Jewish people who agree on the authority of the source of the knowledge at the centre of their faith, there is considerable disagreement on the meaning and application of this knowledge. These differences are manifested in the existence of sub-groups within Judaism. Likewise, Christians and Moslems also regard Moses as a divine messenger and hold his teachings in high esteem. Even though they believe in the same God they ascribe special status to other messengers and they, too have differences and are split into a number of smaller groups. They all agree on the core, but differ on secondary aspects—this is a common phenomenon.

While in our emerging global society there is little commonalty when it comes to the secondary aspects of the world's major religions, there is agreement on much of the essential core of their teachings. While members of particular religions might disagree with this view, this unity indicates it is possible to regard the founders of the major Faiths as being of comparable authority and their utterances as having equivalent validity.

In this vein it is also useful to consider that there have been other great teachers throughout history and that all peoples have received knowledge from the unknowable source referred to by Jesus and Muhammad and the others, even though the names of their messengers might have been lost through the passage of time. Likewise, most people who state they have a direct link with the source of spiritual knowledge recognize a fundamental commonalty in all Faiths. This unified perspective places the main sources of spiritual knowledge in all societies on essentially the same level and establishes the foundation for the principle of oneness of humankind, a central theme that will be addressed later in this paper.

Nature of Human Beings and Purpose of Existence

Two key issues in the spiritual dimension of development are the nature of human beings and the purpose of existence. Our choice of strategies will be influenced by our assumptions of what kind of entities are at the center of attention and why they exist. Materialist and spiritual frameworks have quite different views of these matters. A review of existing approaches to development illustrates some elements of the vision that is currently active in the field and highlights some of the problems in this vision.

Most development work has emphasized the material aspects of life. Economic strategies try to increase employment so there is more wealth which in turn leads to higher consumption of consumer goods which then increases employment, and so on—this cycle of accumulation seems to

be an end in itself[1]. It is becoming increasingly evident that programs based on materialistic conceptions of life are not capable of addressing humanity's needs. Predicted achievements have not been realized, and factors such as the widening gulf between rich and poor, rampant environmental degradation and the acceleration of social breakdown show that current models are fundamentally flawed. Although the matter is seldom addressed by development planners, most contemporary development initiatives seem to see the purpose of existence as little more than the accumulation of material benefits.

Another difficulty is in the distribution of initiative, participation and ownership of most development activities. A particularly troubling aspect is the assumption of a paternalistic donor/recipient relationship between those who manage a program and the intended beneficiaries of its efforts. Often one party initiates and is active, while the other is passive and is acted upon. One is seen as skilled and endowed with knowledge, while the other is thought to have limited talent and to be lacking in education. Most programs don't know how to define the knowledge people have acquired through generations of survival in often inhospitable conditions and to incorporate this information in the conceptualization and design of development initiatives. In the artificial division between "developed" and "developing" societies, recipients are rarely seen as having the innate capacity to be creative agents of their own progress.

Even more rare is a genuine reciprocity of influence, where the "donor" society is assisted in some meaningful way by the "recipients". Much of the existing framework implies a passive, limited-capacity consumer of a paternalistic one-way flow of material benefits.

A spiritual perspective views human beings and the purpose of existence quite differently. People can be seen as multi-faceted beings with material and non-material aspects—a combination of body and soul, with the spirit as the breath of life that makes it possible for the body to function. Some traditions say that our consciousness and personality are attributes of our soul or spirit moreso than our body.[2] Just as the spirit animates the body, the movements of the body indicate the condition of the soul—behavior is belief in action. Our inner and outer beings each mirror the other's attributes[3], and action in either sphere influences the other.

Another feature of a spiritual perspective is that its core is dynamic rather than static. There is a concept of progression or growth in both the material and non-material aspects of life. The soul is said to have been endowed with latent potential which can become manifested through our efforts to understand and apply the teachings of our faith.[4] In most traditions there is life after death, and movement toward progressively higher forms of being: the purpose of existence is to train souls, and to provide opportunities (which some may call "tests") that make it possible to acquire capacities that are of use in this life and in the next stages of our spiritual journey[5]. These opportunities for growth are linked to our efforts to improve the society in which we live.

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1 Baha'i International Community. *Prosperity of Humankind* (get complete reference)

2 Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings (?)* (find reference)

3 Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings (?)* (find reference)

4 Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings XXV!I, & (?).* (get complete reference).

5 See Hick, John. *An Interpretation of Religion.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989. pp. 118-124.

Existence can thus be seen as having a dual purpose: to enable a soul to progress toward its destiny (which can also be described as realizing its potential, or as "knowing God") and to foster an ever-advancing civilization[1]. These principles can be expressed in many ways, such as the following: "… Thou has created me to know Thee and to worship Thee…" and, "Work done in the spirit of service is worship.[2]" Similar principles exist in virtually all spiritual traditions. By being of service to others the soul progresses or learns what it can during this stage of its journey through the "many mansions" or worlds of God.

From a spiritual perspective, then, the essential nature of human beings is that of a combination of material and non-material elements, with the core aspect of human nature being an immortal entity that learns and is strengthened through spiritual discipline, cooperation and selfless service as it passes through this world on a journey from one reality to the next.

From this perspective the development exercise can have quite different objectives and methods than those currently in effect. Rather than a framework which assumes that an educated and politically influential minority should design and manage programs that focus on increasing the material wealth of large numbers of passive incapable people, it would find ways of working collaboratively and in a reciprocal manner with partners in other parts of the world to foster the realization of the spiritual capacities latent within all parties. It would recognize that although industralized countries have great material wealth they are impoverished in other, deeper dimensions. All societies can be seen as underdeveloped and the "south" has many lessons and resources to offer the "north".

These views imply a fundamental shift in development thinking and profound changes in program design and implementation.

1 Baha'u'llah (find reference)

2 From the Baha'i writings.

Development Principles

As noted earlier in this paper, development can be seen as a multi-faceted effort in which people are active agents in processes that improve their circumstances. Most international development agencies use themes such as sustainability, capacity building, partnership and equity to define effective development programs, and there is considerable discussion of such terms in the search for better ways to improve the human condition.

A spiritual perspective provides a context for terms such as sustainability and capacity building: while these say something about how development programs should operate and what they should do, spiritual concepts go much deeper. They describe objectives that are more meaningful than factors such as "meeting basic human needs" — usually seen in terms of resources such as shelter, food and basic health care. While it is essential to meet these basic needs, when planners can incorporate information on belief-dimension issues such as the nature of human beings and the purpose of existence they are in a better position to design programs that enhance this deeper nature and foster attainment of this higher purpose.

One of the difficulties in defining development principles that reflect a spiritual perspective is that while most faith groups will agree on general notions such as the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, there is little consensus on other more applied concepts. Planners need practical guidance on elements that reflect spirituality in development initiatives.

There are a number of inter-related principles that support a spiritual approach to development. Policies and programs that reflect these principles are likely to foster the spiritual and material progress of the populations they serve. These principles include:

- Spiritual nature of human beings
- Progress of humankind
- Unity and oneness of humanity
- Justice and the reduction of extremes of wealth and poverty
- Equality of the sexes
- Harmony of science and religion
- Institutional and administrative development
- Consultation

Although these points appear in a list, they are not discrete categories and do not operate independently of each other. While there is an overall coherence and complementarity among these principles, there is some overlap and imprecision as to the limits of each.

Spiritual Nature of Human Beings

Previous sections of this paper described a central feature of most Faiths as a belief that human beings are immortal entities on one stage of a journey of the soul. One of the purposes of existence is to foster the fulfilment of the potential latent in the human spirit, and everyday life is the school (or crucible) in which the soul manifests and enhances its capacities for use during this life and in the next stages of the journey. Strengthening or purification of the inner being is accomplished through spiritual disciplines such as fasting, prayer, study of religious or spiritual teachings, and through selfless service to others as one contributes to the progress of society.

Development projects that address the full spectrum of human experience must take note of these essential features of the individuals they serve, and incorporate an awareness of the spiritual nature of human beings in all aspects of their design. If the purpose of a person's life is to fulfil one's destiny or draw closer to the creator while furthering an ever-advancing civilization, then programs should contribute to the attainment of these objectives. In this respect there is little difference, for example, between a villager digging a pit latrine or planting a kitchen garden and a doctor or politician responsible for the design and implementation of health or education programs serving a region. All roles in the enterprise serve to help participants fulfil their fundamental objectives, the progress of the soul and of society. What is important is the extent to which the activity fosters the emergence of qualities latent within individuals and helps them realize their potential as they move toward fulfilling their destiny.

Progress of Humankind

When viewed through the lens of the history of humanity, we can see that we have progressed through several stages of social organization. In our earliest days we formed families, then tribes, city-states and more recently, nations. We are now in the transition from the nation-state to an international federation of states. Although it is not a smooth journey and there are numerous hurdles along the path, progress is being made toward the unification of the diverse elements of humanity. Obsolete strategies such as the adolescent approach of using force to resolve disputes are falling away as new more mature and collaborative forms of interaction are emerging. There is much yet to do. Part of the work is material while other parts are more ephemeral: changes are required both in actions and in attitudes.

As the globalization process unfolds and mass communication, new technologies and the world of business bring us together, there is a parallel shift in consciousness at all levels of society. For example, gatherings of world leaders to sign international conventions on matters affecting children, women or the environment signal an emerging awareness of humanity as being one family and the need for us all to work together to address concerns of each member of this collectivity. Previously uninformed and uninvolved masses are becoming progressively more engaged in finding ways to improve their circumstances, and they are using various means to resolve their difficulties and become active agents in the grand enterprise of helping our global society move forward. This participation is bringing about fundamental changes in attitudes at individual, family and community levels throughout the world. Individuals are realizing their ability and responsibility to contribute to humanity's advance. International development is but one element in society's multi-dimensional awareness of this growing commitment to collaboration on a world-embracing scale.

This is part of the maturation of humankind as we move toward a new form of consciousness of ourselves as citizens of a diverse and united world. Improvements in areas such as education systems, family dynamics, health programs and all the other structural aspects of society must encourage the emergence of more advanced systems of social and material organization as well as foster our spiritual development as we each proceed on our unique journeys of the soul. Development initiatives need to address the dual focus of the progress of humankind: to support institutional measures that foster the transition to a global society, and to recognize and reinforce the profound transformation of human consciousness that comes about as people at all levels of society contribute to this process.

Unity and Oneness of Humanity

One of the most important spiritual principles, along with the notion of seeing human beings as spiritual entities and the purpose of life as a progression of the soul toward one's destiny while furthering an ever-advancing civilization, is the concept of unity and the oneness of humanity. Other concepts described in this paper such as justice, gender equity and consultation rest on this principle.

A deep-seated conviction that we are all members of one human family is an essential element in a spiritual approach to development. With oneness at the foundations of virtually all systems of belief comes a need for unity in our collective behavior.

The implications of this concept are immense: the foundations of most of our institutions, such as the adversarial structure of civil government, many systems of law and the ideology of the inevitability of class struggle reflect outdated notions based on disunity. Change is required at both the institutional level and deep within each individual.

This awareness of unity can be fostered through structural arrangements in each development initiative. Inter-group prejudice, for example, is diminished by creating opportunities for diverse groups to value their differences and realize their unity and interdependence by working together to achieve common objectives[1]. Mechanisms are needed to engage members of all sub-groups and people with disparate points of view in common efforts to improve society. Well-designed development initiatives can accelerate the emergence of this awareness and can reinforce behaviors that reflect the reality of the oneness of humanity.

Justice and the Reduction of Extremes of Wealth and Poverty

As one of the twin purposes of existence is the realization of human potential, the context in which people live must support this purpose. Therefore, a spiritual principle that should be at the foundation of development is the need to reduce the extremes of wealth and poverty, and to operate programs in a manner that equitably distributes the demands and the benefits of any activity. This makes sustainable development possible. Only those programs that are perceived as meeting the needs of the generality of the population and are seen as being just and equitable will be able to engage the commitment of the masses of humanity upon whom implementation depends.

Identification of the components of justice (determining what is "just") calls for an examination of the fundamental principles in relevant spiritual traditions and their application in an appropriate manner to the work at hand. Common themes appear throughout this body of knowledge in most societies: the "Golden Rule" is but one of many. The practice of justice is a primary criteria in conceptualizing, designing and implementing successful development programs. Populations are likely to support development initiatives that they perceive as fostering justice in their communities.

Equality of the Sexes

Two of the issues addressed earlier, the principle of oneness and the need for justice, come into focus when considering the relationship between women and men in virtually all societies. Men and women can be seen as the two wings of the bird of humanity, and progress requires they be equally developed and capable of contributing to the well-being of society. Established patterns of

1 Hofstede, Geert. *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind.* London: McGraw-Hill, 1991.

inequality between men and women foster conditions in which the latent capacities of the soul cannot flourish, and the growth of both women and men is hampered by this injustice.

Equality does not necessarily mean sameness, but rather implies a just and diverse complementarity of roles. It means both sexes should have equity of access to opportunity, and the voices of both can be fully heard in the unfoldment of civilization. Successful development programs foster gender equity and help women and men work together to achieve this balance.

We should not, however, underestimate the difficulties in this challenge[1] or the scale of the transforming potential of movement in this direction. It calls for changes in deep-rooted patterns of identity and human relations which can be resisted by both genders.

Spiritually-based development programs should raise the issue of gender equity to the level of a core principle of belief. They should apply it to bring about changes in attitudes and behaviors that foster the full flowering of the capacities latent in both women and men and enables both genders to contribute to the advancement of their societies.

Harmony of Science and Religion

A spiritual approach to development must reflect the complementarity of science and religion. A balance is required for effective development: science without religion becomes materialism, while religion without the benefit of science can be little more than superstition[2].

To avoid the constraints imposed by a stifling orthodoxy science has tended to operate separate from religion and society has paid dearly for this gap. One result has been a new orthodoxy that argues that truth is amoral and facts are independent of values. This "non-religious" and "objective" system of belief is the subject of considerable debate on several grounds[3], not the least of which are the impossibility of a value-free stance in any initiative. The questions one chooses to ask are a product of one's system of belief, and regardless of protestations to the contrary, culture and belief exert their influences on science.

A closer and more open relationship between science and religion, particularly in light of the growing appreciation of the need for morality in human affairs, would provide more complete insights into the nature of these influences.

On the other side, programs based on the realization that people need to learn to separate fact from conjecture and that society would benefit from more people who could think systematically and in terms of historical processes would bring the benefits of science into development activities.

A current difficulty is the concentration of scientific knowledge in relatively few affluent countries, and the use of science in a way that perpetuates an inequitable exploitation of the majority of humankind by this elite. In a vein consistent with Hettne's concept of the indigenization of

1 Tannen, Deborah. *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation.* New York: Ballantine, 1991.

2 Find reference

3 Riley, Gresham (ed). *Values, Objectivity and the Social Sciences.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1974.

development theory (described early in this paper) there is a need for a concerted effort to make scientific knowledge available to societies around the world.

Communication networks are accelerating this distribution of information, but all societies need to participate in generating new knowledge. Development initiatives should support a massive increase in educational resources to address these needs. The varied peoples of the world will then develop their own forms of science suited to their contexts and systems of belief and share this with colleagues around the globe. The result will be an enrichment of the lives of all humanity.

Institutional and Administrative Development

A spiritual approach to development requires an appropriate vehicle, a suitable administrative system to coordinate human activity and carry forward the entire enterprise. Belief without an implementing mechanism can result in withdrawal and can fuel a sense of futility and cynicism. There is a need for a structure to guide the collective activity in communities and organizations, and spiritual principles can be applied to foster development in both.

One of the problems identified in Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* is the relative scarcity of administratively capable individuals in so-called "developing" societies[1]. The ability of industrialized countries such as Germany and Japan to recover from the damages of the second world war was directly related to the high level of skills and distribution of administrative capacity in their populations. One of the difficulties he identified in countries such as Nigeria was the lack of people with technical competencies and middle-level management ability who could coordinate the efforts of large numbers of workers to achieve collective benefits.

Communities (and indeed countries) need systems of administration that enable people to select their leaders on the basis of the high quality of their character and their capacity to serve rather than on charisma and the strength of their desire for power and influence. These leaders should work as a collective rather than as individuals, with consultative bodies established to administer the affairs of the community.

Likewise, organizations need leaders with high sense of morals, technical skills and a desire to support their fellow workers. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, emergent trends in management are focusing on values as well as skills: a leader's success is often a product of some technical expertise supported by a noble character and good communication skills. Education processes and workplace dynamics that bring forth the attributes of the divine which are latent within the soul and teach people how to relate to each other can foster the development of managers who can provide guidance conducive to effective collaboration and productivity.

In selecting leaders for community affairs, electoral process can be established that encourage voters to choose those from amongst themselves who have high moral character and well-trained minds, irrespective of their standing in the society. A system can be established that uses secret ballots to record the vote in an electoral process that has no nominations or campaigning, and where all are eligible for office. Once selected by the community, leaders offer their time and efforts as a form of

1 Schumacher, E.F. *Small in Beautiful: Economic Development as if People Matter.* (get comple reference & page number)

service, as work that is equivalent to worship. In such a context leadership is a sacred trust, a way of witnessing one's faith.

In a spiritual approach to managing in organizations leaders are selected on the basis of their character, competency and the ability to help others shine, and relationships are based on principles of oneness and justice. Expectations are clear, communication is effective, and performance is assessed on the basis of collaboratively developed workplans. Work can be carried out either in teams or by individuals in contexts where openness, trust, safety and honesty prevail. Where appropriate, profit sharing schemes equitably distribute the results of workers' efforts.

Development intiatives should foster communities and organizations that are administered in this manner. They will provide contexts in which the capacities latent in the souls of their participants will be able to flourish: they will come pregressively more productive workplaces and vibrant communities, increasingly good places to live and work.

Consultation

A core element of a spiritual approach to development is consultation, an effective method of collective decision-making. It recognizes that each participant has unique capacaties and potentialities and creates a respectful and orderly space for the full expression of these gifts in a group's deliberations as they strive to foster progress of the community or organization that is the focus of their discussion.

In true consultation individuals strive to transcend their particular points of view in order to function as members of a body with its own interests and goals: they subordinate their personal agendas and identities to the needs and purposes of their group. In such an atmosphere, characterized by both candor and courtesy, opinions expressed belong not to the individuals to whom they occur during the discussion but to the group as a whole, to take up, to discard or revise as seems to best serve the goal pursued. Consultation succeeds to the extent that all participants support the decision arrived at, regardless of individual opinions with which they entered the discussion. Under such circumstances an earlier decision can be readily reconsidered if experience exposes any shortcomings.

Viewed in this light, consultation is the operating expression of justice in human affairs and a vital element in any successful development strategy. Indeed, the participation of the people on whose commitment and efforts the success of such a strategy depends becomes effective only when consultation is made a central feature of every project.

Spiritually-based development initiatives that foster effective consultation require high levels of self-discipline and self-awareness, and a genuine appreciation for the opinions of others. It calls for a deep-seated belief that the best solution can be found only through an open sharing of views, even if some differ from one's own. This collective decision-making process is an essential feature of sustainable development.

Application of Concepts

A spiritual dimension is more than a section in a workplan or a line item in a budget. It occupies a much larger space than is currently allocated to issues such as environmental impact assessment or gender equity, which seem to be included almost as an afterthought. This is not the appropriate position for spirituality in development.

The spiritual dimension is the context within which the entire development activity takes place. The program's conceptualization, objectives, methodology, evaluation system, budget allocations, reporting processes and anything else associated with the activity must all be consistent with the spiritual principles at its root.

In this integrated perspective there would be nothing unusual about the project planning team saying a round of prayers or having a brief meditation period before beginning a strategy meeting, and it would be perfectly acceptable for the manager to discuss concerns about the budget during a religious service. In a spiritually-based development project there is no line between the sacred and the secular: all activity is permeated by both aspects of its operations. The distinction is irrelevant.

The preliminary list of spiritual principles described in this paper can act as a set of categories for project design and operations and the initiative's plan can be based on these concepts. For example, the introduction could have a statement to the effect that the project recognizes the spiritual nature of human beings, and intends to foster the progress of humanity by providing a number of opportunities for people to further their own progress by working together to achieve a common objective. The process of their interaction would be seen as providing opportunities for spiritual growth as well as carrying out the project's physical activities. Unity in diversity would be developed by creating interdependencies among different project teams and structuring activity in a way that obliges all parties to learn to work together. A simple example of this approach on a water project would be to set it up so the villagers, local politicians and public servants, engineers and anthropologists all had to contribute to and approve a workplan before any group could proceed with their part of the project.

In like manner the other components of a spiritual approach to development could form the framework for project activity. The categories noted in this paper (or some similar framework) could be criteria for project design, operations and evaluation. In the end it might be that a spiritually-based project would deal with issues that seem similar to other types of development, but the range of objectives and the methods used would be quite different. So would the results: rather than touching only the material dimension of the people involved, the activity would reach deep into the moral and ethical core of participants, and would tap the energies and commitments at the center of their beliefs. This would call forth a powerful and sustainable participation in the activity at hand and ensure on-going engagement of the population in the project's success.

Conclusions and Future Directions

This paper is an attempt to define a vocabulary and some basic concepts of what is meant by "spirituality in development." Although the language used might not reflect all the spiritual traditions of the many groups with an interest in the field, a number of categories have been described. There may be no consensus on these terms and undoubtedly there are more to add to the

list. It is encouraging that the various schools of thought are beginning to discuss this dimension of human experience and its relation to development, and in so doing they are breaking the monopoly that materialistic assumptions have, until recently, held in the field. That's progress.

As we begin to eliminate the artificial dichotomy between our material and spiritual nature we are likely to find a merging of terminology from the two fields. This won't always be easy: this area of human experience is probably the most heavily emotionally laden of all, and there are a multiplicity of strongly-held views on the issue. For some the dichotomy may never be overcome, and for others there might be no dichotomy at all: they recognize no spiritual dimension in their own lives and can't see it in others. Some are comfortable with a diversity of forms of spirituality, and work easily with people whose systems differ from their own. Others are less pluralistic in outlook. Regardless of their personal positions on the issue, even development workers whose belief systems exclude a spiritual element will find a vocabulary defining these concepts helpful, and secular agencies that have been struggling to find an adequate framework to describe and guide their activities will find some use in this preliminary description. If nothing else, these concepts can contribute to improved wholistic and people-centered development strategies.

One of the established principles of sustainable human development is the concept of dealing with the whole person, and beginning where people are as we foster progress. In education and social work it is accepted that learner-centered education and client-centered therapy are requirements of effective service provision. The interaction takes into account the full range of clients' beliefs and experiences and works with them to find solutions to their challenges. Whether the service provider shares these beliefs or not, they are taken into consideration. The worker learns from the client in a collaborative effort to foster growth.

In international development these people-centered approaches seem to be emerging somewhat more slowly than in other fields. With some exceptions there is still much talk of "delivery" of material goods and services and the framework shows few signs of a genuine depth of sharing or partnership. Power and movement is largely one-way and as such the whole field has some fundamental changing to do before all parties can occupy their rightful places in the matrix of relationships.

A systematic approach to development requires an evaluative component: we need to determine whether we're making progress or not, and learn what we can from our failures and our successes. These lessons serve ultimately to strengthen the whole process. The evaluation system should be set up with care: its structure in large measure delimits the scope and depth of program operations and sets the frame within which legitimate activity unfolds. Things that are not assessed are generally seen as having little value. In management this concept is well known: you get the behaviors you reward, and you can reward only what you choose to measure. Business managers are advised to take care, because they might be measuring and rewarding behaviors and attitudes that are not central to their organizations' effectiveness, and overlooking others that may be keys to their survival. Similar concepts apply to development initiatives.

If development is to deal with the whole person, including the spiritual dimension, appropriate indicators and methods need to be incorporated in the design from the outset. One of the most powerful development tools is participatory evaluation, where the people effected by the activity gather to consult and define the categories and processes to be used to assess all aspects of their activities. This participatory process can determine evaluation indicators for the full range of

spiritual factors defined in this paper. Unfortunately, this challenging issue can not be explored further here: it is a project for another more ambitious effort.

A core element of a spiritual approach to development is the depth of commitment and devotion to service that can be brought to bear in a program. Calling on spiritual principle evokes a will and dynamic that empowers people to find, implement and persevere in achieving successful solutions to material problems. When planned and carried out in an appropriate manner, such programs can achieve great results with relatively few resources.

Spirituality is something that affects us all, whether we believe in a creator or not. Somewhere in our inner being, whatever it is called, is the spark of life that manifests itself with every action we take. Our bodies are propelled by this spark and carry it about as we go through the rituals of our everyday lives. A spiritual dimension assumes this activity has a purpose, and that this purpose is to strengthen this inner light within each of us as we foster an ever-advancing civilization. As noted earlier in this paper, in this respect there is little difference between a villager digging a pit latrine, a doctor planning an immunization campaign, or a politician considering new legislation. All are engaged in the same exercise: helping humanity move forward, and hopefully wiping some bits of dross off the mirror of their souls so they can share a few more glimmers of light with their surroundings. This has been the purpose of this paper. Hopefully it has been achieved.