

Living and Being Alive

Part 1 – What it means to be alive

Many mistake the ability to feel, sense or react to internal or external stimuli as Living, or Being alive. This ability can, at best, be described as being **Conscious**.

Living or Being Alive is making sense of our daily experiences, in order to make Life more meaningful.

Before we continue, let us accept that a human being is made up of a body, a mind, the psyche (feelings or emotions), and the Soul/Spirit, all of which can experience and function independently, in harmony or in disharmony. Thus, it means that a human being has four levels at which he or she could be living (or be alive) – i.e. physical (body), mental (mind), emotional (psychic) or Spiritual.

Again, for the sake of developing a common understanding, let's briefly review these different levels of consciousness.

Being physically alive is the ability to see the connection between external and internal experiences and one's physical survival. Through physical experiences our body reflects back to us the choices we have made.

By extracting the lessons from these experiences, we make the connections to how we have used or abused the body. And from this we gradually become alive to the fact that when experiences come as physical illness or disease it is our body's way of getting us to stop and look at how we are living and caring for it, and to make the necessary corrections, or seek out ways to effect the change.

Such searches are what have led to developments in the field of medicine and health care, for example.

Being mentally alive is the ability to make connections between current and past experiences, in order to extrapolate lessons or conclusions from them. The extrapolation could be a projection into the future i.e. creating scenarios or pathways for the future. Or it could be making connections to guide current

events that may be directly or indirectly related. It could also be looking back into the past to extract new lessons for today, or for the future.

Such extrapolations have led to the formulation of theories that fueled research into scientific endeavors, philosophical ideologies and debates, as well as social experiments on how organize and operate societies.

The extrapolation process by which we arrive at our conclusions is what we call Thinking.

The conclusions contribute to the formation of our Thoughts.

The combined activities of thinking and thought are activities that we attribute to our Mind.

But, before human beings progressed to the point of developing their mental capability, (i.e. the use of their mind), most, if not all, humans operated at an emotional or psychic level. This is the level at which we follow, or are guided by “our feelings”, inexplicable deep inner sensing, or in some cases by direct extrasensory perceiving. But operating at this level did not necessarily convey understanding. Therefore, it was still existence at a lesser degree of total Spiritual existence or being

Over time, human beings, especially those in leadership position, soon preferred to use the Mind to guide our activities. We did so in the belief that it gave us a better understanding of our world and life, than be guided by our emotions or inner sensing or the direct communications “from above”, as was once the case.

This change is reflected in the word Intelligence which derives from the Latin word “intellectus”, i.e., understanding’.

Today, those who operate strictly by their capacity to understand are called Intellectuals. And Intellectualism has become the primary force that guides most of modern man’s activities and mind.

Today, being emotionally alive is what is popularly described as operating from one’s heart, and is viewed by many as not based on rationality.

Nonetheless, science and research show that the heart has neurons which give it its own “intelligence”.

The electromagnetic field of the heart has also been shown to radiate out of each person to impact the quality of interaction between people. And the pursuit of the feelings of the heart are behind all of the developments by true creative artist, as opposed to the artisan whose skills lie in simply copying the creation of the true artist.

Many also associate emotions like anger, disappointment, suspicion, jealousy, as feelings of the heart, unaware that even these feelings can emanate from our physical or mental activity.

It is also worth noting that our emotional life has two components, arising from the two different categories of thought activity that take place within us.

There is emotional life based on the thoughts arising from being physically alive. This can be described as our reactive emotions, such as jealousy, joy, fear.

Then there is emotional life arising from thoughts generated by mental activity, for example artistic creativity can be described as proactive emotion which can combined with any associated mental activity can fire our imagination.

This recognition is evident in the popular saying: “It (i.e., the imagination) is only in his or her head”. Also, it is noteworthy that imaginations are generally built around the material, for example dreaming about a better or different world, an enhanced or a derogatory self-image. Even, the loftiest and most inspiring of sagas, and legends that only have the earthly as their focus, or even project the earthly into the non-Earthly are works of the imagination. Therefore, having a lively imagination should not be confused with being Spiritually alive.

Being spiritually alive extends beyond improvement of our material self or environment, and is more in line with a deeper wisdom that we commonly associate with sages.

Having set the background, let us now examine what it means, and the process or state of being spiritually alive?

Hopefully, the following will help answer that question.

A young couple with a child is living a happy comfortable life. Suddenly war breaks out around them, and their very peaceful life is shattered. Their town is destroyed by enemy fire, and the child's father is killed. He and his mother are forced to flee, to live in squalor in a refugee camp. At the camp the mother is exploited and the boy soon contracts typhoid fever. He is lying on the bare floor dying, while his mother looks on helplessly.

This picture is deplorable and pitiful, but very common. Indeed, many, including believers, will question why this suffering by a poor family who had no hand in precipitating the crisis the has caused them so much suffering? They will shake their head, convinced that there is nothing like certainty in Life, neither is there justice or equity. Some observers may be inspired to become activist against the crisis. Many victims will lose their belief in GOD, if not even point a finger. Some victims may become envious of those whose lives have not been so disrupted. Others will call upon, and hope that a supernatural power will bring about an immediate end to the situation.

All of these reactions are based on a mental, and emotional analysis of the external events and the conclusions drawn. But a person who is aware of the Spiritual Law of karma will come to a very different conclusion.

Through their spiritual knowledge of the operation of this law of karma, such a person, whether a victim or an observer, will know that every human being is forced to live through all experiences that he or she has caused others, or needs for their own development. Through these experiences we are given the opportunity to learn the evil or the good of such ways, and thereby avoid, or build upon them in the future.

The decision to change, if the action brought suffering to others, will free us from the need for future atonement, and to ennoble ourselves.

With this knowledge, the victim or observer will see the love and justice lying behind this external suffering instead of focusing on the tragedy and suffering

(This is not to say that one must not help recognize, or sympathize with those who are suffering. The opportunity to help or to show empathy to those suffering also offers an opportunity for observers to redeem karma)

Thus, to be Spiritually alive is to know the Spiritual laws that operate, and to learn to recognize them in our daily experiences.

And as stated at the begin of this piece, we begin to live Spiritually, or are Being Alive only when we can make sense of our daily experiences, for it is only in this way that Life can be more meaningful.