

# **My Spiritual Journey**

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An excerpt from  
**My Testament to Humanity**  
**The Miracle, Joy and Art of Living**  
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I was born with a deep spirituality. When I was a child I looked at the stars, at the moon, at nature and at the whole Creation as miracles. I also considered human life to be a miracle. We spoke German in Alsace-Lorraine at the time and I used to say: "Das Leben ist göttlich, life is divine." I used this word because it was the biggest adjective I could find.

My father could not understand it. Here was a four years old boy who was going around saying that life was divine and who took his cap off when he met an old person. He asked me: "Why do you greet old people?" I answered: "Because they know so much about life." That was my attitude as a little boy.

I couldn't understand that just across the river there were people called Germans whom we as French people were supposed to hate. Why were these borders between humans? We looked alike and they had names like Muller and Schneider which were the names of my father and mother. Why could the sun, the clouds, the birds, the winds, the moon cross the border freely and I could not?

I would leave the house early in the morning to go to church and attend the mass at dawn, attended mostly by old people. There I was fascinated by the prayers, the playing of the organ by an old invalid and above all by the "elevation" of the host by the priest. That represented to me the consciousness and union with the heavens, the infinite, mysterious universe and God.

Then came education. French education prohibited religious education. This was due to the separation between church and state established by the Revolution against the Church leaders of France coalesced with the King and the aristocrats to exploit the people. In Alsace-Lorraine we got a separate statute allowing religious education, but it was voluntary, did not count for the grading and it was ridiculed by our professors. As a result I began to forget my spirituality, replaced by the values of French education. My deep love for nature however persisted as well as my respect for old people. I will never forget the death of my 80 years old grandfather at which I saw a Catholic Sister hold his hand and help him to die peacefully, praying with him and telling him about heaven.

Then came World War II. We were refugees twice. The Nazis occupied us. I had many adventures because I did not want to serve in the German army. I experienced German prison. I was a partisan, a member of de Gaulle's mountain fighters in France. I saw the most horrible acts between two white, highly civilized countries. There was no spirituality in all that. But there was an incident which I have never forgotten: we had captured a group of French people who had collaborated with the Germans. They were condemned to death. When they were taken to their place of execution in the woods where they had been forced to dig their graves, I saw the men protest, throwing themselves on the ground, having to be pulled by their legs. But there was one woman who walked in peace, praying. When she was shot she was reciting the Hail Mary and her last words before falling into her grave were to forgive us. I finished her prayer and never forgot her example of deep spirituality.

When the war was over and I returned home, I learned that my father had spent several months in prison because I had escaped from the Germans. He asked me what I was going to do with my life. I replied: "I will work for peace. I do not want my children and grandchildren to see the horrors I have seen in this war." He said that there were no peacemakers on this planet and that I would lose my time. But

during my doctorate of law studies at the University of Strasbourg I participated in a French essay competition on the subject "What do you think of world government?" I won the essay which led to an internship with the new United Nations in an abandoned war factory near New York City. I was hired as an official and stayed with the UN for the rest of my life.

The first surprise I had at the United Nations was that they had a meditation and prayer room and that the meetings of the General Assembly started with a minute of silence for prayer or meditation. I said to myself: "This is wonderful. That is exactly what we should do when we meet among nations and people: we should invoke spirituality to fully understand what we are doing and pray for good results."

Another surprise was our second Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjöld. He came to the United Nations as a very rational economist. But he went every Sunday to a church or meeting place of another religion. When he died we found on the night table of his bedroom in New York the book of a mystic, Thomas Kempis. When you read his *Markings, or Journal*, now published in many languages, you will see how from a pure rationalist and economist at the beginning he became himself a mystic, almost in constant communion and dialogue with God.

Another surprise to me was U Thant, the Buddhist Secretary General whose direct aide I was for two years. He was the most deeply spiritual person I have ever known. He once said to me: "Robert, I cannot understand you Catholics who limit spirituality to an hour in church on Sunday. I am a spiritual person from the moment I wake up until I go to rest." One day I said to him: "When you receive visitors, why don't you tell them to do something for peace and a better world?" He answered: "How could I do that? These people come to see me to tell me something. I must therefore open myself to them, empty myself of my self, so that I can receive them entirely as a human brother or sister."

From my experiences and lessons at the United Nations I decided to write a book on spirituality recommending that all religions should work together, with spirituality as their common values and objective. I called it *New Genesis, the Birth of a Global Spirituality*, published in several languages. Ever since that time I have been working toward the recognition of a global, all-human spirituality, out of which the various religions were born, either with one God, several gods, or nature and the Earth herself as the manifestation of the Great Spirit, or even a deeply spiritual person doing good for the Earth and humanity without belonging to any religion.

What is this concept of spirituality? In my view it is very simple. It is what I felt as a little boy. It is to receive from the religions help to understand the mystery of the universe and time. This is what all religions have in common. They help us, they elevate us, while the mysteries of the universe and time have never been resolved by the scientists, not even by Einstein. They will always remain mysteries. Religions give us hope that there is a soul in us which binds us as sentient beings with the entire universe and time, that we are children of God, active, living cosmic beings, each one the true miracle I felt already to be as a child.

As a consequence I created several spiritual associations in the UN and brought many outside spiritual organizations in contact and relation with the UN. I had contact with the Mayor of Assisi who at my suggestion arranged for the Pope to have yearly meetings in Assisi with the heads of other religions. I convinced U Thant to invite the Pope to the UN and was put in charge of that visit. I could write a whole book *What the UN Taught Me About Spirituality* as I wrote *What War Taught Me About Peace*.

The greatest chance given to me was the invitation to be the opening speaker of the second World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1993. I made a passionate appeal to the religions to create a

world organization similar to the United Nations. Why? Because it was not sufficient for the religious leaders to meet, there was need also for a permanent organization with an inter-religious Secretariat to study in common all religions of the world and their contributions to a global spirituality as we have done at the UN for peace and other common ideals and needs of humanity. In my view there was an absolute need for a spiritual Renaissance on planet Earth. I also made an appeal that the Parliament of Religions should not wait another hundred years to meet again but should meet before the year 2000. Bishop Edmund Tutu heard me and invited the Parliament to meet in South Africa in December 1999. Six thousand people from around the world attended it.

My proposal to create a world organization of religions is being implemented. The Charter of a United Religions Organization, still called Initiative was created on 26 June 2000, the anniversary date of the signing of the Charter of the United Nations. That organization will help the peaceful resolution of the several religious conflicts we still have on this planet, develop a common modern global science of spirituality, a strategy and a methodology of spirituality (e.g. prayer, forgiveness, sanctity, thanksgiving, confession and so many other helpful practices). It will create a different, better, spiritual world, with religions united in a wonderful, non-fundamentalist diversity.

There are now many good signs of a spiritual Renaissance in the world: the World Bank has meetings with spiritual leaders to see how poverty in the poor countries can be healed. Harvard University has conducted a vast survey of the contributions of the religions to the environment and safeguard of the Earth. Secretary General Kofi Annan has meetings with the leaders of the main religions of the world. A World Commission on Global Consciousness and Spirituality has been created. Dr. Karan Singh of India and I are its Co-chairmen.

This is where we stand. I have offered my views, hopes and proposals in many writings. One of them describes my vision of a spiritual world in the year 2013, twenty years after the Chicago session. Another is a chapter on the UN and Spirituality in my *Testament to the UN*. The excerpts on the subject of religion and spirituality from my *5000 Ideas and Dreams for a Better World* count almost 100 pages. They could be published as a book of its own.

But there is still so much to do. It is not even governments who are responsible for the current disorders in the world. It is the lack of spirituality, the lack of respect for God, for His miraculous creation which I loved so much already as a child. Please, dear readers, be the active defenders of these miracles so that we can at long last become the paradise of peace, beauty and happiness God and all religious leaders want us to become, a true jewel in the universe. And the progress I have seen achieved since the horrible World War II gives me good hope, even the conviction that we will succeed.



## **Decide to be a Spiritual Person**

Render others spiritual  
Irradiate your spirituality  
Treat every moment of your life  
    with divine respect  
Love passionately your God given,  
    miraculous life  
Be endlessly astonished at your brief,  
    breathtaking consciousness of the universe  
Thank God every moment  
    for the tremendous gift of life  
Lift your heart to the heavens always  
Be a cosmic, divine being,  
    an integral, conscious  
    part of the universe  
Contemplate with wonder  
    the miraculous Creation all around you  
Fill your body, mind, heart and soul  
    with divine trepidation  
Know that you are coming from somewhere  
    and that you are going somewhere  
    in the universal stream of time  
Be always open to the entire universe  
Know yourself and the heavens and the Earth

Act spiritually  
Think spiritually  
Love spiritually

Treat every person and living being with  
    humaneness and divine respect  
Pray, meditate, practice the art  
    of spiritual being  
And be convinced of eternal life  
    and resurrection.