

Rethinking energy from a spiritual perspective

Paul Newman / Vancouver Courier

AUGUST 19, 2017 08:07 AM

[The Spiritual View](#)

Spirit is a word that people of many religions or people with no religious affiliation frequently use. What does it mean? This is the first in a series of seven articles exploring the meaning of the term spirit.

Spirit can refer, first, to an unseen but real energy active in a wide variety of situations. In Hebrew Scriptures the word for spirit was *Ruach*, a word that also meant “wind” and “breath.” These words are really good metaphors for spirit. Like the wind and like breath, spirit cannot be seen but is definitely real and it can exist everywhere in all kinds of situations. Also, like wind and breath the energy of spirit is vitally important in those many situations where it is active. Think of the spirit of friendship or the spirit of love. In these cases spirit comes like a miracle, not of our own making but causing a tremendous difference in our lives. It is like the wind; it blows all over the world and, like breath, it occurs in every living person regardless of their religion or their having no religion. The energy of spirit links all people of the world in the common humanity that we desperately need to honour and remember.

The Hebrew Scriptures also spoke of spirit being like fire that warms our bodies and souls with physical and emotional energy in many different situations. Think of sexual attraction or sporting activities or strenuous working situations. Again, the Bible speaks of spirit being like water that comes to our dry and needy souls to freshen and renew life. What a blessing it can be! Into our depression or despair or self-doubt or discouragement can come the spirit of hope or confidence or delight or understanding that changes our perspectives or raises our horizons enabling us to continue in healthy living.

The Bible also speaks of spirit being like a mighty rock. It can give what the theologian Paul Tillich called “the courage to be,” an anonymous energy that the Creator gives to all creatures. Spirit, like a rock, provides the power of endurance, courtesy, honesty, commitment, trust and other personal strengths needed in human relationships and healthy living.

In this marvellous universe that we are a part of, there is a real power of energy that works in a wide variety of ways to make life better. Some of us call it God or the Creator but whatever we call it we might largely agree about how it works.

How extensive is the spirit? In the Bible, Job is quoted saying “the *ruach* of the Almighty gives me life.”(33:4) The Psalmist expands the activity of the spirit to all creatures. “When You send forth Your Spirit they are created and You renew the face of the ground.” (104:30).

In our modern scientific understanding of the universe there is agreement that energy is the most basic and pervasive reality that there is. Northrup Frye writes: “Einstein is the great symbol for a new realization that matter, which up to the twentieth century had been the great bastion of the objectivity of the world, was an illusion of energy.” Energy is the farthest horizon we can see when we look microscopically or telescopically at the universe or ourselves. In God the Spirit we truly do “live and move and have our being” (Acts17:28) as Paul said in Athens.

It requires some adjustment of thinking to feel and act as if we are so closely involved with the universal Spirit of the Creator. There is comfort in this and there is challenge. It is comforting to realize that “We are not alone, we live in God’s world,” as The New Creed of the United Church says. And it is a challenge to realize that as covenant partners with the Creator we share responsibility for the way things go in our part of the creation.

The comfort and delight of sharing the energy of the Spirit are themselves part of the energy we need to be covenant partners with the Creator.



Paul Newman is a retired United Church minister, and retired Professor Emeritus of Theology at St. Andrew’s College, Saskatoon. He lives in Sooke, Vancouver Island. He is author of two books: *Humanity and Spirit: Reasons For Hope*; and *A Spirit Christology, Recovering the Biblical Paradigm of Christian Faith*

You can read more articles from our interfaith blog, The Spiritual View [HERE](#)