

MODERN SPIRITUALISM?

what is

by Kyle Pedley.

Spiritualism.

It's a word that many people have often wildly differing ideas about.

For some, they believe it to be a fairly recent movement born out of the success of high profile mediums such as John Edward, Colin Fry and Derek Acorah in the mainstream media in the early 2000's. Others believe it is an exclusively communicatory belief - that we can commune with those who are passed, either through spirit sensitive individuals or manifested in physical paranormal activity. And there are even those who mistakenly interlink Spiritualism with the teachings of spiritual enlightenment of Buddhism and Taoism.

In truth, Spiritualism is a fully fledged religion in its own right, and one that has been active - and growing - for nearly two centuries. It has an extensive network of Churches and a core foundation around which its beliefs and values form, which some may be surprised to learn includes the belief in a deity and creator (God) and his envoys in the form of a Ministry of Angels. And, much like the Five Pillars of Islam or the Ten Commandments of Christianity, so too is Spiritualism governed by the likes of the 'Seven Principles' (though this number varies around the world), and whilst these do include the belief in life after death and the means of communicating with those who are gone, it is by no means the only thing that Spiritualism is about.

The 'Seven Principles' of the SNU...

- The Fatherhood of God
- The Brotherhood of Man
- The Communion of Spirits and the Ministry of Angels
- The Continuous Existence of the Human Soul
- Personal Responsibility
- Compensation & Retribution hereafter for all of the good and evil deeds done on Earth
- Eternal Progress open to every Human Soul

Like any religion, each Spiritualist is given the freedom to chart their own journey - for some, they simply enjoy the warm, welcoming embrace of their local Church and Spiritualist community, for others they take daily solace in the belief that this life is but one stage in a greater process, whilst others still find faith in receiving messages from those who have passed but not gone. There are no hard and fast rules, though; like any modern, progressive religion, Spiritualism has broken free of any antiquated stereotypes or interpretations of what a 'religion' exactly is. All are welcome, inclusivity is assured, and your own relationship with your faith is an intensely personal and self-governed thing.

So why 'Modern' Spiritualism?

The answer lies in a myriad of stages in both ancient and modern history, where the belief in life after death, the concept of a 'soul' or 'spirit', and the ability of some to be sensitive to and communicate with those who are passed, as well as many other facets of what Spiritualists believe, can all be traced to a number of different faith systems and historical periods. The Bible, for instance, features numerous instances of angels administering to man.

And of course, whilst it is notable that Spiritualism has survived through the rapid changes and ideological shifts of the 20th and 21st Centuries, it's still important to remember that by comparison to the likes of say, Hinduism (approx. 9,000 years old) or Judaism (approx. 4,000 years old), Spiritualism is still a very recent, and 'modern', religion indeed.

“It's important to remember that
by comparison to the likes of,
say, Hinduism or Judaism,
Spiritualism is still a very recent,
and 'modern', religion indeed”

Another fairly 'modern' element to Spiritualism as a faith system is its approach of asking questions with a scientific - and not purely faith-based - foundation. Spiritualists and Mediums look at how the laws of physics dictate that energy cannot be destroyed or eliminated, but rather moves between planes of form and existence. Modern Spiritualists also believe that, again like much we see of in Science and the natural world, the Universe and its existence are not static and defined, but rather ever moving and evolving, driven by the Spirit as the moving force of all things.

Even to this day, many active Spiritualists and Mediums engage in scientific experiments and otherwise concern themselves with the relationship between their beliefs and the ever-evolving laws and theories of Science. For a more detailed and considered exploration, we encourage you to visit our masterclass with Chris Connelly - *Science and Your Mediumship* (3:15pm, Upper Bar Masterclass) which will revolve around precisely this.

'Modern' History

It is collectively accepted by most that Modern Spiritualism traces its roots back to the activities and seances of the Fox sisters - 14 year-old Margaretta 'Maggie' Fox and her 11 year-old sister, Catherine 'Kate' Fox - in Hydesville, New York, back in the late 1840s. What began as claims of nightly communication with an intelligent spirit, manifesting in a series of raps on walls and furniture, was seized upon



The Fox Sisters (above): the 'original' mediums who helped bring about the Spiritualism Movement

by locals, and would go on to quickly - and rather unexpectedly - blossom into one of the greatest religious movements of the 19th Century.

And whilst the exact details of what transpired on that fateful night in March 1848 has been subject to the whims of hearsay, re-interpretation and creative license from reporters and historians, few can argue that it was the beginning of what would eventually come to be known as *Modern Spiritualism*.

Even 40 years later, when one of the sisters, Kate, was paid to conduct a public interview with the *New York World* where she would denounce Spiritualism and the conduct of herself and her sisters at the height of their popularity, the community reacted in abject fury and disbelief, believing her to be selling out her abilities and faith in an attempt to cash in on the negative publicity. Many assigned her own relative failure to make a living as a medium (particularly in comparison to her sisters, which now included the younger Leah Fox) as a motive for this vengeful, public act.



The Fox Family Home: *The founding site of Spiritualism, and a building that would go on to have a long and interesting history after the sisters' fateful evening. It would come to be known locally as the 'Spook House'.*

Whatever her motivations, Kate Fox would go on to very firmly and vocally recant her 'confession' one year later, insisting that the spirit guides with which she communed had beseeched her to do so.

Sixteen years later, in 1904, schoolchildren playing in the Fox's childhood home in Hydesville made the startling discovery of a skeleton between the rapidly deteriorating foundations of the house. Scientifically dating the remains revealed them to be around fifty years old, which was seen to lend further clout and credibility to the sisters' initial claims that they were receiving communication from a peddler who had been previously murdered in their home.

“Scientifically dating the remains of a skeleton discovered in the foundations of the Fox house revealed it at the time to be around fifty years old, which tallied with the sisters’ claims that they had been communicating with the spirit of a murdered peddler.”

Spiritualism Today

The history of Spiritualism is an illuminating and intriguing journey, and one that is far too extensive to cover in any adequate detail here, but we hope this overview has enlightened you - at least on a conceptual level - as to what Modern Spiritualism is, and indeed what those who follow it believe in.

A journey of faith, science and communication that began unknowingly in a child’s bedroom in the mid-19th Century has now grown into the eighth largest religion in the world, with millions coming together in Churches and congregations, events like this one, or even in their own, individual practice, to celebrate and take comfort in the belief that for all of our trials, tribulations, hardships and joys in life, the greatest experience is yet to come, and there will be ways for us to share it with those we have left behind.

To quote Minister Janet Parker:

“What is our message?
It is a message of the Spirit;
‘We cannot die’...
What a great message.”

For more information on the history of Spiritualism, please visit the Official Website for The Spiritualists’ National Union at www.snu.org.uk.

This article was originally produced for the ‘One World, One Spirit’ Souvenir Programme as part of the World Congress of Spiritualism 2018.

All original content is Copyright © Kyle Pedley 2018.

Please acquire the necessary permissions before reusing the copy and content contained herein.