

# “I'm Spiritual, but I'm not Religious”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

“I'm spiritual, but I'm not religious.” How many times have we heard that phrase? Let's try to understand it.

Spiritual is what one feels. Religious is what one does. So you can announce yourself as spiritual and never join a community, never visit a home for shiva, never contribute money to a synagogue, school, Jewish center or soup kitchen. In other words, all too often 'spiritual' asks nothing of us — it is the narcissism of non-involvement.

There is a purity to non-involvement of course. Spirituality allows one to feel good about oneself. I am in touch with the great forces of the world. I am a deep soul. In contrast to the crass materialists out there, I do not allow myself to be diverted by mere physical things, because I am spiritual.

Hillel famously said, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me?” He followed that with: “If I am only for myself, what am I?” Notice that the great Rabbi could not even define an individual as one who cares only for himself. Spirituality alone is sanctimony, unworthy of God's creations. Spirituality tied to action is a truly beautiful thing. We have a word for it — religious.