

My name is Helen Serdiville; I have been married for twenty-five years; I have a son of twenty-three, who is a trainee commercial lawyer, and a daughter of twenty-one, who is a retail manager. I have my own business in the field of accounts and business services. I do not fit into any religious category completely.

From an early age, I had strong spiritual feelings that were self-discovered, not taught by any religious denomination. Having been brought up in a divided Roman Catholic/Protestant family, I decided that, although I had been baptized a Roman Catholic, I would make my own mind up when I felt the need.

We lived out of town, in a rural area, when I was young. Always conscious of a powerful inner sense in God, I felt surrounded by him in the earth, trees, rivers, and the wind itself. As an only child, I was wrapped up in the seasons and the elements, and found inner happiness in the beautiful world that God has given us. In my dreams – or, some would say, astral adventures – I would soar above the world, and visit places and people at will. It was not until I was about eleven that I realized not everyone could do this. What I believed to be normal set me apart from my friends, and made me realize I saw the world differently from the way they did.

Now, as an adult, my spirituality has two sides to it. At least that is how it might appear to an observer. When I married my husband, I accepted his Roman Catholic faith, and over the years have found it to be a ‘comfort blanket’ in times of need or sorrow. I draw upon the community of the church, recognize the strength of the family of God, and value the communal spirit of worshipping with others. A Sunday homily provides helpful insights into the meaning of the Bible, and the ongoing love that God has for us. I also find the act of confession and contrition within Catholicism a cleansing process that provides renewal for my soul. The traditional church is, therefore, my ‘public religious face’, that I present to the world.

On the other hand, my private faith is one of spiritual searching. On the outside I say traditional prayers to God which are heartfelt and genuine. But in my inner private meditation, I delve back in time, beyond the confines of the church and the words written and formulated by men – and most were men! I look back to the creator, to the source of all life; I search for God. I long to draw upon

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the divine love to help me become what I am destined to be. I want to understand and accept the path chosen for me. I want God to make me a better person. I want to live continually in the presence of the divine. Every day I try to find some quiet time when I can meditate. This can be anywhere at any time. Sometimes, even at work, I will take a few minutes, if I am on my own. I close my eyes and go 'inwards' to my special place, and cut out the distractions of everyday life. I may need calming if the day is stressful, or just a moment to 'touch the spirit within' for a feeling of comfort in a mad world. My meditation also has another purpose – namely self-healing – which can be both spiritual and physical. I believe that the human spirit, or life force, is connected to God and, moreover, that God is able and willing to heal the soul and mend the body.

I look for guidance. Although I do not consciously have a specific 'spirit guide', I feel there is a guardian angel that watches over me. Indeed, at times of great stress or sadness, I have been fortunate to have experienced 'spiritual cleansing' and empowerment in the form of light and colour that enters my body and gives me inner calm and peace. This experience helps me to face the future with a different outlook altogether. I feel my faith transcends cultural barriers and draws elements from many religions. I have heard this described as 'spiritual shopping' and – to a large extent – that is how I see my spiritual path. The stock on the shelves of the spiritual supermarket is extensive and varied and I want to make as much use of it as I can.

As part of my spiritual beliefs, the subject of reincarnation figures strongly. As a child I always knew – before I had even heard the term for it – that I had had a previous life. I often thought to myself, 'I already knew that from before.' And it was often said to me that I was 'an old soul'. I believe that the time spent in this life paves our way for a life ultimately in the presence of God. Through many lives, we progress spiritually and draw nearer to God. Ultimately, I believe that, although many religious people may be spiritual, those who have a deep spirituality of their own do not need to embrace traditional religion at all. Seeking spiritual enlightenment allows our souls to soar, to escape the confines of our cerebral prison, and to search for our own truth in the light of God's love.

HELEN SERDIVILLE