

What Is Spirit?
Appeared in the "Faith Section" on Aug. 2, 2014
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Question: "How would you describe the place "spirit" has in your faith?"

Answer: The English word spirit comes from the Latin word *spiritus* meaning "breath." In Buddhism the main spiritual practice is meditation and in meditation we focus our attention upon our breath (spirit).

Other words derived from the root "spirit" have different connotations; yet retain their original meaning. For example the word "inspire" means both to breath in but also means to become encouraged or motivated. Likewise the word "expire" while having to do with exhaling also refers to death.

From the Buddhist perspective it is believed that all living beings with awareness are called "sentient" beings and are subject to karma and rebirth. At death, when the body dies and begins decomposing, it is this subtle essence/spirit that continues on. This disembodied essence experiences something called the "bardo" that translated means "in-between state." This in-between state is similar to a dream in that what is experienced is nothing more than a manifestation of one's own mind. This in-between state may last up to, but no longer, than 49 days. At that time one's essence/spirit either attains enlightenment, but more likely it continues on to the cycle of re-birth once again.

It is through the practice of meditation that we learn to cut the clinging and grasping of our mind. As we quiet our minds and cut through the discursive thoughts raging there, our mind and body become one, allowing us to connect with our true essence/spirit. The result is the pure awareness (Buddha-nature) with which we were born.