

#2 Spiritual Family

For most of human history, people have lived in tribes, clans or extended families. These were close-knit groups that gave members a sense of belonging and secured their physical survival. People worked together for the common good and taught each other the basic principles of life according to their culture. Generally, they shared similar spiritual beliefs and trusted their elders for the wisdom born of experience.

In our culture, the small nuclear family is the norm. This is a relatively modern social invention with its own strengths and weakness. As recent as it is, even this social institution is evolving with time. Over the past few decades, more and more people live outside of this nuclear family norm: many live alone and there are an increasing number of single-parent households.

In an ideal world, we are all born into a loving extended family and are surrounded by good role models in healthy relationships. Our spiritual growth is given the highest priority, and cultural institutions foster development of its citizens' virtues.

Unfortunately, we do not live in such an ideal world. Families are often broken and scattered, good role models can be as much the exception as the rule, spiritual growth is frequently given a lower priority than the ethics of profit and our institutions aggrandize distorted relations based on power and politics. Given this bittersweet reality, the question must be asked: "What is best for the growth of the spirit?"

In this new social context, there is an emerging trend in which people are taking the best attributes of the ancestral tribal environment and blending these with the best of our modern culture. One indication of this emerging trend is people creating an extended family for themselves, regardless of their marital status. People, with kids or without, need a sense of belonging to a larger social group, and children flourish when they are loved and supported by such a group. As adults, whether alone or in nuclear families, we yearn to belong to groups that assist not only with physical survival, but emotional and spiritual survival as well.

One of the purposes of a spiritual family is to raise healthy, happy kids. Likewise, adults have their varied needs met even as they are able to better meet the needs of the children. Each person in a new family has connections with others who participate in their own unique clusters. We are creating a loving web that is strong, light and open. Our connections spread, uniting us all into one community. We nurture and help each other to reach emotional and spiritual maturity. It is through connections like these that our consciousness matures, thus leading to a fuller and more interesting life.

Spiritual Kinship

Our kindred spirits are sacred. Beyond our skin, past our bloodline, we are united in spirit. Our quest is to seek the deepest relationship with self, then to make our love available to others. The essential part of this endeavor is to form several friendships

and, where possible, link our friendships together. This is how we will create a critical mass of consciousness. Spiritual kinship is where all the virtues come into play.

Our kinship is with the light. The bonding begins as a brief flash, a mere glimpse, felt by our spirit. The sensation in our spirit is a kind of harmony, resonance, a brightness that guides us. We recognize the other as kin in spirit.

“Sangha” is an ancient Sanskrit term for fellowship, meaning a relationship between many individuals used to advance the human spirit of all. The spiritual family of kindred spirits is a new sangha. We are an unusual collection of people with differing beliefs yet we share a common spiritual path of friendship. Our devotion to our friendship transcends the variety of spiritual practices we follow. We share a reverence for each other’s enlightenment, celebrating each new revelation. The memories we create uplift the spirit. The quest for kindred spirits is a search for spirit.

Each of our lights is brighter for having known each other. Our consciousness expands and grows from the center in all directions. We are transformed by our love, full of tenderness and strength. We cherish and honor each other. We feel supported and embraced in warm, peaceful, uplifting love. Kindred spirits are necessary for our spiritual well-being. They are deep friendships that reach our spiritual core: spirit-centered relationships.