



## ***Spiritual Geography* Card Sort Overview**

We have big questions in life: why am I here? what happens after death? why do people suffer? Although these questions are objectively unanswerable, we try to make sense of our world. The *Spiritual Geography* exercise will help you uncover both your understanding and your experience of that which is transcendent. The values are not about doctrine of various religions or specific beliefs, but things that many religions and spiritual understandings have in common -- things like prayer, pilgrimage, purification, ritual, evangelism, compassion, peace, etc. This is a thought-provoking exercise and can be difficult. There are no "wrong" or "right" answers, although you may feel in conflict with what you believe your family, friends, or religious community value. Knowledge is power; being aware of that tension can allow you to work toward resolution and growth.

The *Spiritual Geography* card deck contains 47 cards with spiritual and/or religious values. There are 3 Heading cards, 1 instruction card, and 3 blank cards. To do the exercise, take the 3 Heading cards -- More Important, Important, and Less Important -- and lay them out on the table. Go through the 47 Value cards and put each under one of the 3 Heading cards. Each value card has a word or phrase on top and a brief description of that word or phrase underneath. Some examples:

Prayer - I engage in spiritual communion with that which is transcendent

Reason - I seek for my rational understanding to align with my spiritual beliefs

Religious Dialogue - We can learn from each other's understanding of our own religion and/or other religions

Religious Truth - My religion is the one, true religion

Ritual - Ceremonial and/or ritualistic elements are important parts of my spirituality

Some people choose to ignore the brief description and use their personal understanding of that word or phrase, which is an acceptable approach to the exercise. However, the card descriptions can prompt you to look at a word or phrase in a different way. For example, on the card "Evangelism" the description is "I believe I have the responsibility to share the Truth with all people." Many hear the word "evangelism" and think exclusively of religious believers. However, many of us evangelize in other ways. Someone who is an atheist and believes strongly in science can also "evangelize" to others. In the end you should use the definition of the word or phrase that is most meaningful to you, whether that is the description on the card or your internalized understanding of the word or phrase.

Once you have placed all 47 value cards under one of the Header cards, look at all of the values listed under More Important. Of those, choose your top 5 Most Important values. Then look at all of the values listed under Less Important. Of those, choose your bottom 5 Least Important values. If you have difficulty narrowing to 5, you can group values you feel are related (Awe and Nature, for example) so that you have no more than 5 groups. Now the fun begins.

How do these values show up in your life? Were you to have done this exercise earlier in your life would the placement of the values be different? What changed such that you



value something now more or less than you did previously? The priority of values can change over your life, so just because a value doesn't appear in your "top 5" doesn't mean it isn't important to you. This value may not have as much importance at this point in time. Are your most important values "lived" or "aspirational"? Are there values you think you "should" value more or less? If so, where did that "should" belief come from? What do you believe the values are espoused in your faith community or family? What is the role of community in your spiritual and religious values? What is the role of family in your spiritual and religious values? How do your values show up in your interactions with other people, especially your bottom 5 Least Important values? How do you relate to/interact with those who may greatly value that which you do not value? And finally: How do you feel about your values? Are there some components of your value system that you feel others should learn from your understanding?

**Background:**

This began with a simple question in 2010: Why does the values card sort used in career counseling only have one card about spirituality? If "spirituality" is one of my top values, the way "spirituality" expresses itself in my life is very different than the way someone else expresses spirituality. So I started mulling this over -- creating a card deck exclusively for spiritual and religious values. I had to come up with my understanding of spiritual and religious values first. This wasn't about beliefs, per se, but more about what aspects of our beliefs become values. How do we experience the transcendent? What aspects of religious experience are found in many different faith traditions? How does "spirituality" express itself in those who are atheist or agnostic? I read ... a lot ... and, after several iterations, came up with the *Spiritual Geography* card deck. In general, these values fall in the following four areas:

	Personal	Other People
Understanding	How do you understand that which is transcendent?	How do you relate to/understand other people's beliefs?
Experience	How do you experience that which is transcendent?	How do you interact with other people because of your spiritual framework?

Our spirituality impacts more than just our personal practices and understanding. We relate to other people differently because of our belief systems. For example, what do you say to a grieving widow at a funeral? Or a parent at the bedside of their sick child? How do you feel about a religious building (church, temple, mosque, etc.) being built in your neighborhood? How do you interact with people who believe differently than you do, especially in conversations that touch on our transcendent beliefs? And how do you process these conversations with those who believe differently than you after you have the conversation? In all of these examples what we believe influences our words, actions, and feelings.

I hope you find the *Spiritual Geography* exercise meaningful.

