

Student's Name

Professor's Name

Course Name/Code

Date

Spiritual Autobiography of a Young Person Exploring Their Beliefs

My name is Ava Rodriguez, and I am eighteen years old. I grew up in a household that was not religious in any formal sense. My mother was raised Catholic but had drifted away from the church by the time I was born. My father came from a secular family and treated questions about God and meaning with a kind of respectful agnosticism — he did not dismiss them, but he did not pursue them either. What this meant, practically, was that I grew up with no inherited framework for thinking about spirituality, which I experienced for most of my childhood as an absence I could not quite name.

I was aware of religion the way you are aware of a language spoken around you that you have never been taught. I went to Catholic weddings and Jewish bar mitzvahs and a Diwali celebration at a school friend's house, and at each of them I felt the same thing: that something was happening that mattered to the people around me in a way I did not fully understand, and that I wanted to understand it. I was not drawn to any one tradition in particular. I was drawn to the fact of belief itself — the idea that people organised their entire lives around things they could not prove and found in that organisation something that felt like home.

When I was sixteen, I started reading. Not devotional texts at first, but books about the history and philosophy of religion — why humans across every culture and every era have reached toward something beyond the material world, what needs that reaching serves, what it costs and what it gives. That reading led me to meditation, which led me to yoga,

which led me to journaling in a way I had never done before — not as a diary of events but as a record of questions. What do I actually believe? What do I want to believe? Where do those two things diverge, and why?

Yoga was unexpectedly important. I had thought of it as physical exercise with a spiritual aesthetic, and for the first few months it was. Then something shifted. I began to notice that the hour I spent on the mat each morning changed the quality of the rest of my day — not because I had emptied my mind of thoughts, which I never managed, but because I had practised returning my attention to the present moment so many times in that hour that the skill carried forward. I became, incrementally, a more patient person. I became more interested in other people's interior lives. I became less frightened of sitting quietly with questions that had no answers.

I do not follow a single religious tradition, and I am not sure I will. What I have arrived at, at eighteen, is something I would describe as a practice rather than a belief system: a commitment to paying attention, to treating my own inner life as worth examining, and to approaching other people's beliefs with curiosity rather than judgement. I have found that this orientation — whatever it is — gives me something I did not have before. A sense of being grounded. A capacity for what I can only call compassion, which feels less like a virtue I decided to cultivate and more like something that opened up when I stopped being so busy defending what I thought I already knew.

My spiritual journey is not finished. I suspect it never will be. But I have stopped thinking of that as a problem. The point, I have come to believe, is not to arrive somewhere. The point is to keep moving toward what is true, with as much honesty and as much openness as you can manage. I am eighteen. I have time. I intend to use it.