

*Conceptual/Theoretical***A Spiritual Well-Being Model for the Healing Arts**

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This article presents a theoretical model based on a synthesis of psychological (the word psyche means soul) theories regarding components of the human spirit, human spirituality, and the development of spiritual well-being, with a focus on the relationship between stress and human spirituality. These components include an insightful relationship with both oneself and others, a strong personal value system, and a meaningful purpose in one's life. Additional aspects include a model for spiritual growth (seasons of the soul) and various aspects of one's life experience that hinder or promote greater spiritual growth. Based on this model, holistic nurses may integrate these concepts into their world view of holistic healing and include the health of the human spirit as a greater part of the holistic wellness paradigm.

Keywords: *human spirituality; spiritual well-being; relationships (internal and external); personal value system; a meaningful purpose in life; Jean Watson's caring model*

A Theoretical Model of Human Spirituality

Because of its ineffability and inclusive nature, human spirituality is very difficult, if not impossible, to define adequately. The words "spirit," "wind," and "breath" are often used interchangeably throughout many world traditions, including the Hebrew word "Ruah," and the Hawaiian word "ha" (as in aloha, which literally means we share the same spirit). Twentieth-century luminary Aldus Huxley (1944) called human spirituality the "perennial philosophy." The World Health Organization (as quoted in Christian News Notes, 1991) states that "Spirituality is that which is in total harmony with the perceptual and non-perceptual environment." The World Health Organization adds the following statement as well: "The existing definition of health should include the spiritual aspect and health care should be in the hands of those who are fully aware of and sympathetic to the spiritual dimension" (as quoted in Christian News Notes, 1991). If there is a language of human spirituality, perhaps it can best be described through metaphor, simile, and allegory. Several com-

mon metaphors are used, including mountains (e.g., Martin Luther King: "I have been to the mountain,") and water, (e.g., Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu: "Stand like mountain flow like water"); however, one metaphor that appears to be quite common among all cultures is the concept of a journey or path. Cultural mythologist, Joseph Campbell referred to this as "The Hero's Journey." Many luminaries, even theologians simply call it, "the spiritual path." One thing all experts and wisdom keepers agree on is that spirituality and religion are not the same thing. Spirituality is inclusive; religions are exclusive (i.e., you cannot be Jewish and Baptist at the same time). One's spirituality is based on one's personal experience. Religions are based on members having the same experience. While spirituality and religion both lead the individual toward something bigger than oneself, specifically an experience with the divine (however this may be described), they are neither the same concept nor experience. Using another

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metaphor, spiritual luminaries throughout time have described this ineffable concept of human spirituality as a structure with three pillars; aspects which are non-denominational (and reduce the potential for a nurse to knowingly, or unknowingly, offend a patient when these issues are addressed in patient care) (Seaward, 1991). In a county where a greater percentage of the population identifies as “spiritual, but not religious,” specifically called “Nones” (as in none of the above categories of denominations), it behooves health care professionals to become not only aware of the difference but how this aspect of one’s life affects one’s personal health and wellbeing (Jenkins, 2019).

Relationships, Values, and a Meaningful Purpose in One’s Life

A consensus among wisdom keepers from all the world’s traditions suggest that human spirituality is a tightly woven integration of three facets: an insightful relationship with oneself and others, a strong personal value system, and the fulfillment of a meaningful purpose to one’s life (Kubler-Ross, 1981). These facets, each lending support to the other two, provide the foundation that enhances spiritual growth by developing various personality traits associated with spiritual well-being (Seaward, 2012).

Pillar # 1: Relationships: One’s own personal diplomatic policies (a form of self-governance), consisting of a personal philosophy of thoughts and self-behavioral guidelines, in which there is both a domestic policy (an internal relationship with oneself and one’s higher self) and a foreign policy (relationships with all others).

Pillar # 2: Values: A personal set of core and supporting values based on an alchemy of attitudes and beliefs that nurture personal growth (e.g., compassion, honesty, integrity, freedom).

Pillar # 3: Meaningful purpose in one’s life: Luminaries the world over refer to a meaningful purpose in life as the cornerstone of human spirituality (“Why and I here?”). The health of the human spirit declines dramatically with the loss of meaning in one’s life (Frankl, 1984).

The fourth pillar of human spirituality? Once a mastery of the first three aspects are understood, spiritual luminaries and wisdom keepers alike will confide that there is one more aspect to human

spirituality that must be acknowledged, appreciated, and understood: The Divine Mystery. There are many things than the scientific method (“evidence-based” research) can neither explain, nor replicate (e.g., spontaneous remissions, remarkable coincidences, unexplainable healings), where the curtain of life is pulled back briefly enough to see/experience something remarkably and divinely other-worldly. Often called the “Ghost in the Machine,” by Western science, there is an element of human spirituality where a divine experience is acknowledged and greatly appreciated, yet perhaps never fully understood nor explained. Abraham Maslow called these “peak experiences.” Perhaps one of the greatest mysteries of life is how it unfolds; single unrelated events that may look like complete chaos at the time, yet in hindsight, reveal a well choreographed dance; what has also come to be known as the “*Seasons of the Soul*.”

Seasons of the Soul

If you were to listen to the wisdom keepers of all cultures over the millennia of human existence, you would come to learn there is no one strategy/progression for spiritual growth. Nor is there a specific ritual for spiritual evolution. In fact, the paths of human spirituality are as varied as the people on them. But what you would find in searching the wisdom of the ages are four processes, like seasons of the earth, which nurture the health of the human spirit: *centering*: a time of solitude to quiet the mind, lower the ego walls, and tune into the voice of the higher Self; *emptying*: a time following the centering process to cleanse the mind and body by releasing old thoughts, perceptions, attitudes, stressful toxins, and so on that occupy or obstruct one’s attention, thus becoming a roadblock to one’s highest human potential; *grounding*: a time following the emptying process in which to access and cultivate one’s powers of intuition, imagination, and intellect; and *connecting*: the time dedicated to responsibly share the insight, creativity, and compassion to enrich the lives of all members of our collective community (see Figure 1). These four processes, like the planetary seasons they represent, centering (autumn), emptying (winter), grounding (spring), and connecting (summer), are equally subtle and dynamic, challenging and uplifting, all of which provide a sense of balance to the soul’s growth process. If you take a moment to revisit the three pillars

Autumn = Centering (soul-searching)

Winter = Emptying (cleansing)

Spring = Grounding (intuition)

Summer = Connecting (celebrating)

Figure 1. Seasons of the soul

Note. There are four seasons of the soul, which nicely correspond to the earth's seasons. The seasons of the soul also progress in a cyclical pattern, observed repeatedly throughout the life cycle.

of spiritual well-being—relationships, values, and a meaningful purpose in life—you will see that these aspects are interwoven through the passages of each season (Seaward, 2007). The following offers a closer look at each.

The Centering Process (Autumn)

The centering process is a time to sit still and quiet the mind. The word “center” means “to enter the heart.” In the centering process, one sits still and initiates what is known the world over as the soul-searching process. It begins by simply sitting calmly in quiet contemplation. Like the shorter days of autumn, which gently ushers one indoors at an earlier hour, the centering process invites one to tune into one's inner self by unplugging from the external world.

The Emptying Process (Winter)

Once the mind is quiet, it is time to start cleaning one's house of nonessentials, and that is what the emptying process is all about. This process goes by many names (e.g., cleansing, emptying, detaching, letting go, and releasing). These thoughts, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, memories, and feelings, that were once useful, no longer serve and may in fact impede the spiritual journey as well as hinder the healing process. Of these four seasons, it is the emptying process that is the most painful and stressful to go through. Many compare it to “entering a void,” and try to avoid the void, only making this process more stressful. The emptying process, which parallels the winter season, goes by several names, most notably the “dark night of the soul” or what Shakespeare called the “winter of discontent.”

Most likely, nurses will encounter their patients in this season. Remember, the “dark night” is only supposed to be a night, not an eternity.

The Grounding Process (Spring)

The grounding process is a time of insight, revelation and resolution with regard to relationships, values (and value conflicts), and perhaps, most important, it is the discovery of a meaningful purpose in one's life. If the emptying process is like plowing the field, then the grounding process is like planting, even harvesting a new crop. Like springtime that offers new growth, the grounding process is the “vision” of the vision quest: the eureka moment to gain valuable personal insights allowing one to move on with his/her life.

The Connecting Process (Summer)

The connecting process is a return home (homeostasis) and celebration. The connecting process is all about relationships: cultivating, nurturing, and sustaining relationships. The spirit of life flows freely through all things. We must do our best to continually nurture the bonds of connectivity rather than let them atrophy with fear, apathy, or indifference. Connectedness through our divinity holds the promise of our human potential. As we revolve through the seasons of the soul, the connecting process invites us to reemerge from solitude, isolation, or retreat and return to the fold of humanity.

The Connecting Process is recognized as the return home phase of Campbell's “The Hero's Journey.” In doing so, we are obligated to share what we have learned to help others on their spiritual journey because greed is not a spiritual value.

In Campbell's Hero's Journey, he described an essential aspect of each sojourn with the term, “the assistance of spiritual aids.” In fairy tales and folk tales these might be depicted as angels, elves or pure magic, something to help the hero (male or female) accomplish their initiation (e.g., the Good Witch of the West/*The Wizard of Oz*, Father Christmas/*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*). In real life, these divine gifts are referred to in psychological terms as inner coping skills. They might also be called “muscles of the soul.”

Muscles of the Soul

Renowned psychologist Carl Jung once said, “Every crisis is a spiritual crisis. Spiritual crises require spiritual cures” (Jung, 1964). The spiritual cures he spoke of are often called inner resources: coping skills to deal with life’s most difficult moments. Using the language of metaphor, we describe these spiritual cures as “muscles of the soul.” These include but are not limited to forgiveness, compassion, creativity, optimism, courage, curiosity, faith, humor, intuition, humbleness, integrity, patience, persistence, and resiliency. Used alone or together, these provide the means to dismantle, circumnavigate, or transcend roadblocks (stressors) encountered on the spiritual path. And while these muscles will never disappear, like physical muscles, they will atrophy with disuse.

Spiritual Potential and Spiritual Health

In a theoretical model to conceptualize spiritual well-being, two terms are coined: *spiritual potential* and *spiritual health*. These muscles of the soul are not gifts for a chosen few. They are inherent birthrights that everyone possess. Yet like our physical muscles, these muscles will atrophy with little or no use. Sadly, there are many people who chose not to exercise these muscles and claim victim to their problems. “Spiritual potential” speaks to the nature of these inner resources, a potential (a birthright) that resides in each and every one of us. “Spiritual health” is the cultivation and utilization of these muscles of the soul in times of stress. It is the use of these spiritual muscles of the soul that helps us dismantle, circumnavigate, or transcend the roadblocks before us and allows us to move on with our lives from victim to victor on the hero’s journey.

Roadblocks on the Spiritual Path

Roadblocks are best described as life’s major obstacles that, on first encounter, we would rather run in the opposite direction than face head-on and resolve. While some obstructions can merely be sidestepped, the majority demands our immediate attention and resolution, not avoidance. Anyone with enough experience knows that if you turn your

back on an issue and go the other direction, the same problem awaits you miles down the road, until it gets resolved. At the worksite, roadblocks take the form of anything from corporate mergers, restructuring, inappropriate reassignments, difficult co-workers, incompetent managers, excessive hours, or lack of adequate staffing. Compounding these problems are potential personal issues (e.g., unruly teenagers, an ex-spouse, financial concerns, etc.) that bleed into our working hours. The result can and does make one feel helpless at times.

Distractions on the Spiritual Path

Distraction on the spiritual path often begin as attractions; temptations of interest and curiosity that pull one off the path, sometimes indefinitely. These potential hazards are often referred to as “falling asleep on the spiritual path.” Our most common distractions are substance and process addictions: alcoholism, narcotics, sex, gambling, and most recently screen addictions, to name a few. By no coincidence, these are also our biggest health concerns today. Most addiction support groups, based on the 12-step principles, acknowledge spiritual well-being as a significant construct of healing. Recovery programs based on the biomedical model are said to have a much smaller success rate than programs that incorporate the spiritual dimension in the healing process (Seaward, 2018, 2020).

Applications for the Nursing Profession

All disease and illness has a significant stress component and human spirituality is often considered the neglected component in holistic wellness. Even a tacit acknowledgement denies the proper care for each individual in all health care settings, from hospitals to high schools to drug and alcohol recovery centers. This model of human spirituality acknowledges the connection between stress and human spirituality. Human spirituality is not only essential for quality patient care, but essential self-care of nurses as well. In a profession where more time and attention is placed on digital information, less time and attention is given to hands on-bedside manner, where important questions like “How can I support you in your spiritual wellbeing at this time?” are asked.

With an increasing level of stress on the world stage, spiritual wellbeing can no longer be ignored as a critical component in the health care setting. Moreover, many millennials today describe themselves as “spiritual, but not religious”, and as such prefer not to see staff clergy. For this reason alone, it is important that nurses understand the difference between these two aspects and use appropriate wording such as ‘How can I best support your spiritual needs today?’ In Jean Watson’s Caring Model, it is imperative for nurses to understand their patient’s world view, and this includes their spiritual perspective for the best care possible (Watson, 2010). Many nurses today are aware that this aspect needs to be integrated into their nursing practice, from midwifery to end of life care (Elk, 2017; Zehtab, 2014).

Conclusion

Human spirituality is not only an essential component to health, many consider it to be the cornerstone of holistic wellness—that on which mental, emotional, and physical health are based. Nurses, particularly those offering a holistic perspective, must understand not only the nuances of human spirituality, but its implications and associations with health and well-being as well. A shift in paradigms can prove to be a very exciting time as people in all walks of life begin to see the bigger picture of the alchemy between humanity and divinity, specifically the recognition and inherent power of the human spirit. The implications of this recognition as depicted through ageless wisdom suggest a new consciousness of health and healing re-emerging in our culture.

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