

3 Perspectives on Spiritual Health & Thriving

The Dance of Spirit, Mind and Body

National Wellness Conference 2019

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Objectives:

- Review wellness field roots
- Discuss common obstacles
- Review ground rules
- Note myths about being spiritual
- Define spirit, spiritual and spirituality
- Review ideas, theories and research
- Participate in practical exercises

Ground Rules:

- Safety – this workshop is a safe space to explore all ideas
- Inclusiveness – all perspectives are accepted, honored and respected
- No proselytizing – this is not a space to aim to convert anyone to your specific belief system
- Take what resonates, leave what doesn't – not everything will resonate and that is okay

Notes:

Resources & Recommended Reading

Articles

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Seaward, B.L. (2001) Spiritual issues in health promotion, the Art of Health Promotion in the [American Journal of Health Promotion](#) 5 (1): 1-12.

Sharma, N. D. (2018) [On the concept of spacetime & consciousness: some western and Indic thoughts](#). Journal of Consciousness Exploration & Research, 9(4).

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Books

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Your Personal Quest for Spirituality and Health: Well-Being or Transcendence?

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Image by Bessi from Pixabay

To be a warrior of spiritual health, you must forge the swamp of silly definitions, fight the dragon of hypocrisy in health systems, scale the castle of spiritual transcendence and, once you find yourself in the tower of wholeness, wander in the shadows until you find the Holy Grail

Many people believe the ultimate goal of our life's journey lies in the meaningful fulfillment of some cherished value, accomplishment, realization, or legacy – whether in family, service, career, or one's own private aspiration. Others think that these activities and aspirations are fleeting: what matters most is access to higher states of being, insight into the flourishing and eternal cosmos, touching or merging with the divine, surrendering oneself. These two “world” views are not mutually exclusive, do not depend on religious belief, and actually nourish each other.

SELF TRANSCENDENCE

The psychologist [Abraham Maslow](#) viewed these ideas in terms of [two distinct ways of being](#): self-actualization (fulfillment of personal potential) and self-transcendence (expanding beyond the boundaries of one self). These two ways of being both influence and even define our health. Indeed, the word for health has the same origin as the words for whole and holy. Each of us is not really healthy without some integration of our whole and spiritual nature. But, even beyond that, we may learn that all of humanity – especially the complex design of our DNA, brains, and nervous systems – is a simple manifestation of cosmic consciousness residing in the universe.

The past 20 years has seen significant growth in the scientific study of self-transcendence and its relationship to health and well-being. Within the field of psychology alone, the topic is treated in one of three peer-reviewed journals: [The Journal of Humanistic Psychology](#) (founded in 1961; see [Victor Frankl's 1996 paper](#)), [The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology](#) (founded in 1969; see [Frances Vaughan Clark's 1973 article](#)), and [The Journal of Positive Psychology](#) (founded in 2006; see [Schnell, 2009](#) who distinguishes vertical and horizontal transcendence). Studies of self-transcendence are growing in the fields of holistic nursing, hospice studies, aging (gerontology) and psycho-oncology.

DEFINITIONS

The study of human growth and consciousness contains many broad, superordinate, and open-ended constructs, such as [resilience](#), [intimacy](#), and love. Most current science – stuck in a reductionist and operational paradigm – will naturally struggle to agree on a common definition of these ideas. The same goes for spiritual health. When it comes to any aspect of spirituality, it may be near-sighted and self-limiting to use only one definition. Or, even worse, to act like we know what we are talking about when it comes to transcendent matters.

YOUR PERSONAL QUEST

Instead, and for this brief orientation, do your own personal quest.

Let's look at some of the self-report questionnaires – what scientists are actually studying when they measure self-transcendence and spiritual health. Here is a random selection of items that people would endorse if they were *moving in the direction* or evolving toward and beyond spiritual health.

I encourage you to review these items with the intent of self-assessment. How much do you agree with them?

1. I am able to reach deep down into myself for comfort
2. A higher spiritual power or being is a source of help and direction in my life
3. I spend a portion of every day in prayer, meditation, and/or personal reflection
4. It seems that my life has always had purpose.
5. I have had moments of great joy in which I suddenly had a clear, deep feeling of oneness with all that exists
6. Often when I look at an ordinary thing, something wonderful happens – I get the feeling that I am seeing it fresh for the first time
7. I feel that my individual life is a part of a greater whole
8. I am able to move beyond things that once seemed important
9. I believe that death is a doorway to another plane of existence
10. I believe that no matter where I am or what I'm doing, I am never separate from others
11. At the most basic level of reality, everything is one

So... what did you notice? Do you agree with all, some, a subset? Do the items relate to each other? Are you inspired?

These items come from existing research surveys (references for each are below). Did you notice a difference between the first four (1 through 4) and the latter items (5 through 11). The first set comes from measures of spiritual health or well-being, whereas the latter come from measures that purport to measure self-transcendence or access to experiences that go beyond the self.

Both of these types of measures are used in treating patients, hospice work, and in death and dying research. However, there may be a tendency for wellness practitioners to only focus on spiritual health and not transcendence. Given that the two nourish each other – especially as we get older – I believe it is essential that health professionals always use both approaches (personally and in career).

FINAL THOUGHT

This brief article began with the distinction between self-actualization and self-transcendence. For those on a path of spiritual health, things happen that move us from a focus on health, to a focus on wholeness, and ultimately to an expanded opening to the transcendent realities that death represents. Our personal quest likely depends on knowing the possibilities on this path. Accordingly, fellow warriors, may this article further your journey.

Items and corresponding references

Item 1 - Spiritual Well-Being Scale (FACIT-Sp) – for example, see Canada, A. L., Murphy, P. E., Fitchett, G., Peterman, A. H., & Schover, L. R. (2008). A 3-factor model for the FACIT-Sp. *Psycho-Oncology: Journal of the Psychological, Social and Behavioral Dimensions of Cancer*, 17(9), 908-916.

Item 2 - Advocate HealthCare's Health Risk Assessment – Page 10 (Spiritual Health)

Item 3 - TestWell® - National Wellness Institute

Item 4 - from Adams, T., Bezner, J., & Steinhardt, M. (1997). The conceptualization and measurement of perceived wellness: Integrating balance across and within dimensions. *American Journal of health promotion*, 11(3), 208-218.

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Item 11 - Kate J. Diebels & Mark R. Leary (2018): The psychological implications of believing that everything is one, *The Journal of Positive Psychology*,
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See also

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