


The Importance of
Spiritual Well-Being
in Later Life



ROBERT BEST, MAPS, CSL

1

Creating Sacred Space

Relax

Focus on Breathing

Let Go—Here Now—What's Next

2

Intention

To explore Spiritual Well-Being as a means to enhance Wholistic Health for Older Adults and those who experience Memory Loss.

3

*“Aging is a spiritual frontier because its unknowns and mysteries cannot be successfully crossed **without***

- *Humility and self-knowledge*
- *Love and compassion*
- *Acceptance of physical decline and mortality*
- *And a Sense of the Sacred”*

—Thomas R.Cole in *The Journey of Life*

4



With advancing age, we tend to seek a sense of meaning beyond our families and careers.


5

- **Spirituality**—the internal, conscious quest for a deep relationship with a higher power, community, family, creation and the universe.
- **Spiritual Well-Being**—the affirmation of life in relationship to a higher power, self, community and environment that nurtures and celebrates wholeness.

6

Spiritual Wellness encompasses~

- Appreciating beauty, nature and life
- Finding meaning and purpose
- Feeling connected to something bigger than ourselves
- Sense of Hope
- Inner Peace



7

Health Benefits of Spiritual Well-Being

- Enhanced recovery from illness
- Less reports of pain from illness/injury
- Lower rates of hypertension
- Reduced risk of stroke
- Less anxiety, depression & suicide
- Increased longevity

8


How Does Spirituality improve Health?

Stress Reduction
- Calming effects of Prayer and Meditation

Social Engagement
- Participation in Community and Fellowship



9



John Newton said that we practice spirituality because it helps us make sense of our lives in a confusing world

10

People in touch with Spirituality:

- Participate in community service
- Are more satisfied with family life
- Are more resilient
- Use better coping strategies
- Have a better quality of life



11

Other Benefits of Spiritual Well-Being

- Feel a Sense of Purpose
- Connect to the World
- Release Control
- Expand Support Network
- Lead a Healthier Life



12

Spiritual Experiences and Traditions

- Bring meaning and fulfillment to life
- Create feelings of well-being as we grow older.



13

*Spirituality helps people
find purpose and meaning*

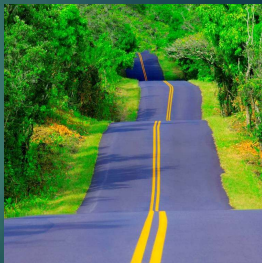


Which is essential to well-being

14

Unique Aspects of Later Life Spirituality

- Lots of Life Experience
- Time to Contemplate
- Reality of Mortality
- Paradox of Loss



15

The Shift in Focus in Later Life

- Relationships
 - From *Valuing Things to Valuing People*
- Choices
 - From *Consumption to Digestion*
- Acceptance
 - From *Proving yourself to Accepting yourself*
- Service
 - From *Self-preoccupation to Self-transcendence*
- Peace
 - From *Living on the Surface to Living Interiorly*

16

Discovering your Spirituality

- What are your important relationships?
- What do you value most in your life?
- What people give you a sense of community?
- What inspires you and gives you hope?
- What brings you joy?
- What are your proudest achievements?

17

Self-Reflection

- Prayer, Meditation & Contemplation
- Keep a journal to express your feelings
- Seek out a trusted advisor or friend
- Read inspirational stories or essays
- Talk to others whose spiritual lives you admire

18

Relationships



- Make relationships a priority
- See the good in people
- Contribute to your community

19

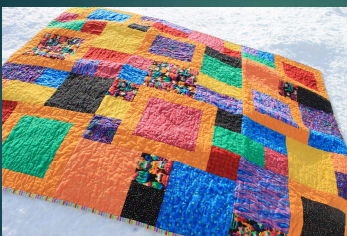
How does this apply to those with Dementia?

- Our Concepts of Spirituality assume the need for Memory and Rational Thinking
- Suggests that those with Cognitive Impairment are incapable of experiencing Spiritual Wellness



20

Life as a Patchwork Quilt



- Our lives are a patchwork of experiences
- Each patch reflects a different Experience
- Experiences may be in common, but each person assembles those experiences in their own unique way.
- With dementia, the patches may fade and even become unidentifiable

21

Backing provides the Foundation

- Backing makes up the Structural Aspects of the Quilt
- Remains in tact
- Represents our Essence, our Soul
- Spirituality offers Substance and Flows through all Aspects of our Lives



22

Rather than thinking of people with dementia as out of reach because of forgetfulness or unworthy because of cognitive disability, the moral task is to bring them into discourse in creative ways.

- Stephen Post
in *Ethical Issues*



23

We express our Spirituality intellectually, emotionally and behaviorally

In other words, what we:

- **Know** about Spirituality
- **Feel** about Spirituality
- **Do** about Spirituality

For People with Dementia, knowledge is locked up in some irretrievable place.
But, they are still able to express feelings and act on those feelings.

24

Spirituality engages the person, at all levels of human experience, in the lifelong pursuit of meaning, connection and self-transcendence.



25

Perhaps the journey that takes me away from reality into the blackness of that place of the emotionless, unmoving Alzheimer's stare is, in reality, a journey into the richest depths of God's love that few have experienced on earth.

-Reverend Robert Davis

26

After listening to him preaching, one of his disciples approaches Jesus. "Master, if I continue to listen to you, I will begin to forget who I am." To which Jesus replies: "and wouldn't that be a freeing experience."

*-Diarmuid O'Murchu
In Catching Up With Jesus*



"Aging is a stage in life that is especially ripe for us to get free."
—Ram Dass in One Liners

27

Spiritual Dimensions of Leisure

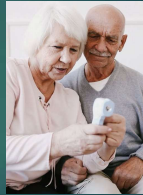
- **Being Me**—personally meaningful experiences
- **Being With**—connecting with self, others, animals and nature
- **Having Fun**—experiencing feelings of pleasure, playfulness, and mischievousness
- **Making a Difference**—contributing to others
- **Seeking Freedom**—taking a break from everyday stress and restrictive environments
- **Finding Balance**—relaxation and keeping busy
- **Growing and Developing**—Challenging the mind and body

28

Connecting with the Spirit of People with Dementia

Principles for Working with People with Dementia

- Gain Attention
- Speak *with* the person not *at* the person
- Simple Directions
- Maintain Self-Esteem
- Identify Strengths, not just weaknesses
- Significant Others



Adapted from: Brown, M.J., Ellor, J.W., "An Approach to Treatment of the Symptoms Caused by Cognitive Disorders in the Aged," Salud Publica De Mexico, May-June 1981, Vol. 23, No.3, PP. 259 – 268

29

Connecting with the Spirit of People with Dementia

Useful Approaches

- Benevolent Touch
- Music
- Quotes and Spiritual Texts
- Symbols and Ritual
- Silence



Adapted from: Spiritual care and dementia by Christopher Durfene Last updated: Mar 9, 2023


30

When dementia-specific communication skills, person-centered approaches to challenging behaviors, and innovative activities are undergirded by compassion, empathy, humility and recognition of the person's ultimate value, the best of dementia care is achieved.

31

Such dementia care fosters the spiritual pursuit, facilitating meaning, connection and self-transcendence.

—Cordula Dick-Muchlke, PhD, *Fostering Spirituality in Dementia: Looking Beyond Cognition in The Essential Spirit: Providing Wholistic Services to and with Older Adults* (2016)



32

Spend enough time in the old folks' home and you'll discover that the residents keep asking two questions: **"Where am I?"** and **"What am I supposed to do now?"**

The correct answers, which can make our last years a time of serenity rather than confusion, are: **"Right here"** and **"Just be."**

—Dean Sluyter in *The Zen Commandments*

33

Contact Information

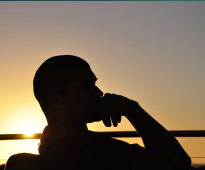
Robert J. Best MAPS CSL
 Program Manager

Serving Older Adults
 of Southeastern Wisconsin, Inc.
 Kelly Senior Center
 6100 South Lake Drive
 Cudahy, WI 53110
 414-481-9611 X3
 rbest@servinolderadults.org



34

Religion and Spirituality



At it's best, religion provides:

- A **Vehicle** for exploring spirituality
- A **Language** for expressing spirituality
- A **Framework** for understanding spirituality

35
