

*The Little Book
of Spiritual Health*



© 2021 Spiritual Health Association

ISBN: 978-0-646-84863-1

This book is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under *The Copyright Act 1968* and subsequent amendments, no part may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted by any means or process whatsoever without the prior written permission of the publishers.

First published in Australia 2021 by
Spiritual Health Association
3 Albert Coates Lane, Melbourne
office@spiritualhealth.org.au

Design, layout and typesetting by Red Chilli Design:
www.becyule.com

Printed by MMP Print:
www.mmp.com.au

Disclaimer

While the author has attempted to ensure the accuracy of information contained in this publication it is provided in good faith without any express or implied warranty. Every attempt has been made to contact copyright holders of material used in this publication. If a copyright holder believes their rights have not been recognised, this may be represented in writing to the publisher at the above address.

Dedication

Over 2020 and 2021 I had the privilege of sharing space, being with, and listening carefully to many committed healthcare worker friends and colleagues who have encountered the burden of constant change and disruption in their professional spaces. It is your voices, your experiences and practice wisdom that I have curated for this publication, *The Little Book of Spiritual Health*.

It is to all of you, with deep appreciation and with a sense of awe for the incredible work you continue to do, that this text is humbly dedicated.

Jennifer Greenham

Mental Health Leader
Spiritual Health Association

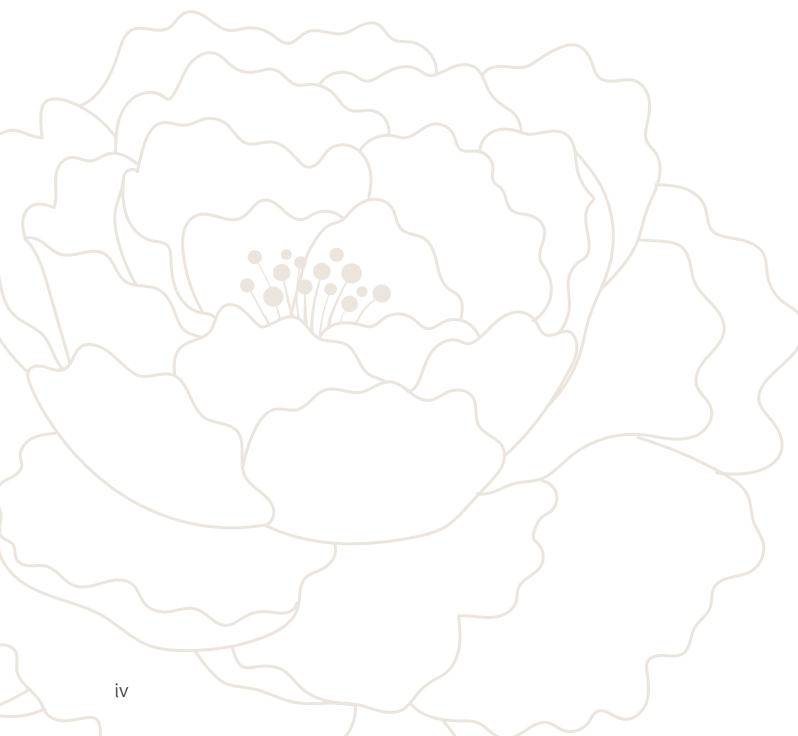
8 September 2021





Wherever you are is the entry point.

Kabir





Foreword

I welcome the opportunity to write this foreword for *The Little Book of Spiritual Health*. According to the most ancient teachings, a person is made up of body, soul and spirit. Interestingly, we can be sick in all three areas of our existence. We know well that our bodies experience illness. The soul is sick when its concerns are disregarded: things like family, home and security, nature, friendship, dining and cooking for pleasure, feeling connected with others and the world. The spirit, too, has its wounds, weaknesses and diseases. It may be neglected or pursued too enthusiastically. It can succumb to moralism, dogmatism, literalism and other isms that make it rigid and unfriendly.

Human beings need a strong awareness of the infinite world in which they live. When this awareness is constant and tended to every day, the human spirit expands and the soul has the environment it needs. Of course, this is not the infinity a scientist might talk about but that a spiritual seeker might experience now and then. Those occasional breakthroughs of a great world give the soul its spark and the encouragement to seek and experiment. Stunned by a taste of the eternal, you turn to ritual and poetry as adequate channels for the special kind of knowing proper to the spirit. It is firm and certain, and at the same time it is full of unknowing and wonder. The opening statement of the Chinese Tao Te Ching can apply to all spiritual experiments: The Tao you can give a name to is not the timeless Tao.

In these heavy days of the pandemic, *The Little Book of Spiritual Health* is a timely offering to healthcare workers and provides a foundation to begin or to continue this exploration. I suggest that you practice openness of mind and heart—radically.

Thomas Moore
13 September 2021

Thomas Moore is a psychotherapist, former monk, and writer of popular spiritual books, including the New York Times bestseller *Care of the Soul: A Guide to Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life*. He writes and lectures in the fields of archetypal psychology, mythology, and imagination.

Contents

Reflection	xi
Introduction	1
Who is this resource for and why are we talking about spiritual health?	1
What is spiritual health?	2
What does spiritual health have to do with contemporary healthcare?	3
How does spiritual health connect to spirituality?	4
How does spiritual health impact our lives?	5
Taking steps towards spiritual health	7
1. Knowing our true essence	8
2. Living our values	11
3. Being the reflection that inspires	14
4. Building a foundation to support who we are	17
5. Understanding life from a greater perspective	20
6. Appreciating love as a responsibility	23
7. Letting go of things that no longer serve	26
8. Living with greater awareness	30
9. Preparing for the new	33
Spirituality: A foundation for life	37
Glossary	40
References	46
Resources	47



Reflection

Knowing & Unknowing

We live in an age that values information, and so it is at odds with the ancient [spiritual] traditions that value the empty mind. Wisdom, these old sources say, arrives at the point where we become profoundly aware of our ignorance and when we give up the futile attempt to understand ourselves. Even the famous utterance of the Delphic Oracle, “Know thyself,” could refer to something other than a mental understanding. We come to know who we are over a lifetime, and any passing sensation that the soul has been revealed is ephemeral and provisional.

It’s important to stand deep in our ignorance, enjoying an unending exploration of the world’s secrets and the mysteries of our own hearts. Anything more than that leads to a superior place of illusion. Today we have astounding resources for knowledge, but we also desperately need the means of forgetting and letting go what we know. We are so full of humanly packaged learning that we have no room for the influx of muse and the inspirations that flow from sources beyond the human ego. As a result, our imagination and our [spiritual] sensibilities suffer. We don’t know who we are because who we are lies so deep that it requires revelation rather than explanation.

Thomas Moore



Introduction

Who is this resource for and why are we talking about spiritual health?

The provision of healthcare from 2020 onwards suddenly became more complex as the full implications of a global pandemic began to be felt. Every aspect of our lives has been disrupted and this has stretched people both personally and professionally. This collective experience has highlighted the fragility of life and for many people it has meant going deeper with their reflections of what this time means for our shared humanity.

Research from the first year of the pandemic revealed that COVID-19 deepened the inner-life of many Australians. While Australians are not known for being excessively self-reflective, the research showed that the prevailing times are creating a more contemplative mood. Almost one in two Australians (47%) thought more about their mortality, with a similar proportion (47%) thinking more about the meaning of life; and three in ten (33%) thought more about God during the experience of COVID-19. (Data by Mainstreet Insights, published August 2020 in Health & Wellbeing, Survey of just over 1000 people)

Against this backdrop it is timely to introduce the concept of spiritual health as a deeper way to know and take care of ourselves. In understanding our own spiritual health and wellbeing needs, we become more open and responsive to the spiritual care and spiritual health needs of our patients; and members of the communities in which we work and live. Much of the conversation in current healthcare literature directs us to view the patient as the expert of their life. If we extend

this concept to ourselves, what would we say about our spiritual health status? Could we extend the expert label to ourselves?

This is a resource for all healthcare staff, those in direct and indirect care roles because delivering quality care and outcomes for our patients is a whole team effort.

What is spiritual health?

Spiritual health is a foundational part of our whole being, yet at the same time many of us overlook, or simply never consider it. When we feel off balance, or out of sorts, often it is our spiritual health that needs some noticing, nurture, and nourishment. As healthcare professionals we are all familiar with the physical, psychological, emotional, social, and mental health domains of what it is to be human. But have you ever really considered your spiritual health? Have you ever pondered or reflected upon the multidimensional aspects of life?

We all have an inner life that is a wellspring of awe, wonder, and wellbeing. Spiritual health relates to our capacity to connect within, seek counsel from our innate reserves of love, wisdom, intelligence, and other ways of knowing. It is all there should we wish to tap into it, and none of this is new! The desire to live with harmony and purpose has been studied, pondered, written about, debated, and passed down through the various spiritual and wisdom traditions of the world since the beginning of time.

What does spiritual health have to do with contemporary healthcare?

Here are some ideas from healthcare professionals ...

“Mental health, spirituality and religion are all about living in relationship. The large circle within which our relationships are defined is not only – as the WHO [World Health Organisation] seem to think – ‘the community’. There is something bigger than this – something transcendent. Within this context, spiritual and mental wellbeing are marked by our willingness or ability to be attentive to the things that matter. So, I’d like to suggest that mental health is an attentive awareness to self and others in the context of transcendence.” (Cook, 2020, p.371)

“An individual’s spiritual beliefs and practices can influence their health, the meaning they attribute to their positive or negative state of health... this is referred to as spiritual health or existential health.” (Whitehead, 2003 quoted in Ramluggan 2021, p.2)

“The meaning of spiritual health may vary from person to person. For some people, it can be associated with traditional religion, while for others it relates primarily to the quality of their personal relationships or feeling love for their surroundings... spiritual health may encompass a sense of connectedness with the self, one’s personal beliefs, interactions with others, the wider community and the ability to manage challenges in times of adversity through seeking purpose and meaning in life.” (Gaur & Sharma, 2014 quoted in Ramluggan 2021, p.2)

“A person with high levels of spiritual wellbeing – for example someone who is optimistic with clear values and a sense of worth – is likely to experience increased physical, social, and emotional health.” (Wright and Sayre-Adams 2009, Koenig et al 2012 quoted in Ramluggan 2021, p.2)

How does spiritual health connect to spirituality?

Spiritual health is supported by nurturing our connection to our spirituality which may take the form of:

- » relationship to self, family, friends, and God, the Divine, the Transcendent
- » stillness, deep listening, or as indigenous Australians identify, Dadirri
- » nature, gardens, the outdoors, the stars and beyond
- » prayer, meditation, mindfulness, yoga
- » practicing a religion
- » rituals such as fasting, reading sacred texts, chanting, pilgrimages
- » singing, dancing, walking, creative expression
- » intentional contemplative and reflective practice that allow for realisation, revelation, and clarity
- » small daily rituals that enhance self-compassion and self-love activities
- » being in and contributing to community

- » pets and other support animals who are sources of love, care, security, and intimacy
- » cultivating purpose in our life – maybe paid or volunteer work
- » knowing our values, living by them, and expressing them.

These examples illustrate some of the ways people may choose to express and attend to their spirituality. It is through the expression of our spirituality that our spiritual health needs are met.

In other words, the ways in which we find meaning, purpose, and connection in our life will reflect how we live and embody our spiritual health.

How does spiritual health impact our lives?

Essentially spiritual health is a focus on ‘being’ and experiencing joy, contentment, flourishing, playfulness, knowing the self, feeling authentic, feeling connected and confident, sustaining energy, being at ease, knowing our values and living by them, experiencing moral equilibrium, living life with meaning and purpose, fostering healthy and attentive relationships, life feeling spacious and supportive, practicing self-care, nurture, and love, feeling connected to inner wisdom and authority, our life having clarity, transparency, love abounds, we feel surrendered, empowered, and expansive. We are open, insightful and practice humility.

The opposite of spiritual health is spiritual dis-ease, dis-stress and can contribute to and manifest in physical symptoms and emotional conditions. When our spiritual health is neglected, it can contribute

to the following; feeling stressed, rushed, having no time to stop and be, sleep disturbance, self-doubting, isolation, loneliness, exhaustion, feeling disconnected, grumpy, sad, lifeless, unsure, losing confidence, despair, helplessness, experiencing grief or loss, guilt, shame, worry, anxiety, mental anguish, mental ill health, compassion fatigue, empathic distress, vicarious trauma, experiencing moral stress or injury, burnout, existential crisis, sense of hopelessness, non-engagement with life and feeling overwhelmed.

There is no doubt these things deplete us, leave us disconnected and less able to fulfil our responsibilities, let alone derive meaning from our daily lives. In the short term we may look for quick fixes to boost energy, but deep down we know we are not making much headway toward restoring a healthy balance in life. Cutting ourselves some slack to first gently acknowledge how we feel, is to acknowledge our fragility. Expressing this level of honesty to ourselves can feel like a vulnerable place to be, but it is accepting where we are at. It is neither weak nor emotional, it simply is. Being overly judgemental or critical toward ourselves is neither supportive nor helpful to our spiritual health.



Taking steps towards spiritual health

As we begin to learn about and take more responsibility for our spiritual health, things start to shift. There are things to notice and enjoy. Getting started involves the courage to take the first step, which may be setting an intention, following through, building upon any small gains or progress, while taking time to notice and celebrate these before setting another intention, and committing little by little to holistic health.

The pathway to spiritual health and greater wellbeing asks us to review, refine and place some foundations into our life that support us to live in our fullness, to adopt a way that acknowledges our sensitivity and connection to soul, whilst being a functioning responsible human being in the world. Spiritual health acknowledges the totality of our being and reminds us that we need to take care of all aspects of self. Our modern lives have become focused on the 'doing' at the expense of 'being'. When we neglect the inner, we end up with a neglected outer. The nine parts that follow gently unfold a way of understanding ourselves with greater clarity to bring a renewed purpose to all our life endeavours. Entering a new cycle of health starts with getting to know ourselves.



1


Knowing our true essence

*Find out where joy resides, and give it a
voice far beyond singing, for to miss
the joy is to miss all.*

Robert Louis Stevenson

When we pull back the layers that life imposes upon us, we discover that at our essence we are complete and whole. The recovery of our whole self may involve finding and re-establishing the connection to our essence, to that part of us which resides deep within us. Some people visualise this part of themselves as a spark or a flame, while others may equate it to a sense of being at one with the universe or God, or soul. Whichever way we experience this, it is the part of us that enables connection to all those around us. When we allow our essence to shine it invites connection with another that is joyful, fun, and effortless.

Getting in touch with this aspect of ourselves may not feel very familiar especially if we have been consumed by an outer focus. Walking and gentle exercise, body scanning, prayer, yoga, breathing, journal writing, and mindfulness practices are some of the ways that invite and strengthen our connection to our essence. Creating some space for inner exploration and stillness are the first steps to cultivating the practice of deep listening and connection. There are many different approaches



to explore including the ancient art of Dadirri, practised on our continent for millennia by the First Australians.

*We are like the tree standing in the middle of a
bushfire sweeping through the timber.*

*The leaves are scorched and the tough bark is
scarred and burnt,*

*but inside the tree the sap is still flowing and
under the ground the roots are still strong.*

*Like that tree we have endured the flames and we
still have the power to be re-born.*

(extract from Dadirri)

Deep listening allows the space for observation of how we are in the world, it helps us gain perspective and to notice when we may react to a situation rather than respond in a way that is more purposeful. It allows us to approach life from a quality of inner settlement that will impact how we are in relationship with family and work. The inner qualities of our essence connect us to our sensitivity and truth. From this place we sense that judgement, comparison, and other forms of criticism have no place in soulful expression. When we come back to ourselves and connect deeply within, the way we relate to ourselves and others will naturally begin to shift. Our capacity to feel, discern, and understand deepens and everything we do emanates a different quality.

For personal reflection

Can I recall a time as a child feeling free and limitless?

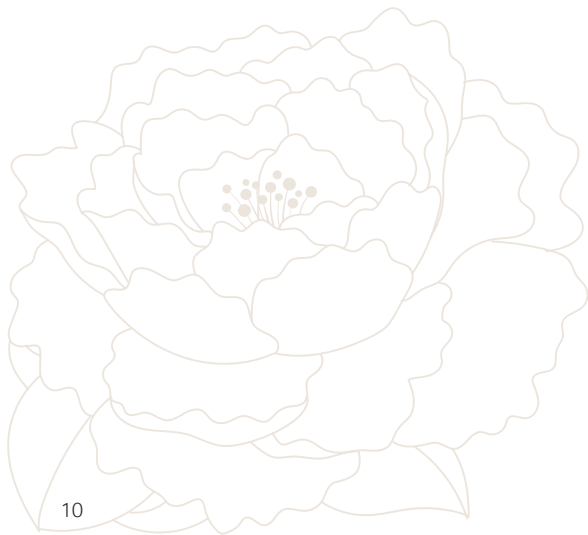
Have I ever observed a young child at play and living in the moment? What are the qualities they show me?

Have I ever enjoyed the early hours of the morning before dawn to appreciate the stillness and space on offer?

When did I last feel a lightness of being?

The secret lies in the present – if you pay attention to the present, you will be able to improve it. And if you improve the present, whatever happens afterwards will be better too. Each day brings us Eternity.

Paulo Coelho



Living our values

*Out beyond ideas of right doing and wrong doing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.*

Rumi

Connected to our essence is our value system. Knowing and expressing our values in all we do supports us to stay steady, to be in harmony with the world around us. When this occurs, there is a natural flow and ease in life, and our spiritual health and wellbeing feel in alignment. Our values are deeply personal and unique to us, they represent a standard we have chosen to live by. So, when they are disregarded or challenged, it is quite normal to feel a disconnect or experience an emotional reaction.

Our emotional response offers us valuable information about how we make decisions. Coming back to our essence will always support us to understand with greater awareness what is arising within. We are then supported to act and behave in ways that allow us to respond to whatever is being asked of us in a non-reactive way.

Misunderstandings do occur and are usually due to a clash of values with someone else. Understanding our triggers, knowing what arouses or upsets us and accepting our feelings in a situation, gives us a glimpse into our inner wellbeing. We may also experience discomfort when the

values that are stated by the organisations we work in do not match the values as they are practised. This will be a source of stress for some people and will challenge fundamental beliefs of right and wrong. There will be many occasions every day when we encounter another viewpoint, or a distraction that can take us away from our self. Clarifying and understanding our core values helps avoid discord with others and supports us to stay focussed on our spiritual health.

Some universal spiritual care values include – kindness, respect, dignity, compassion, equality, personal responsibility, love and integrity. Reflecting upon these in relation to how we are with our friends, family, patients, and colleagues, will deepen and enrich all relationships. We always have a choice about how we wish to be in the world. Taking a moment to focus, check in with yourself and ask, ‘am I being true to my values and staying connected within, or am I being influenced by outer distractions?’. Coming back to our inner connection is the key to staying steady in the face of what life throws our way.

For personal reflection

Do I know what my values are? How did I arrive at them?

Have my values changed over time?

Was there an occasion when my values were transgressed?

Which ones felt compromised and why?

*Integrity is choosing courage over comfort;
it's choosing what's right over what's fun, fast,
or easy; and it's practicing your values,
not just professing them.*

Brene Brown





3

Being the reflection that inspires


*At the end of the day people won't remember
what you did or said, they remember how
you made them feel.*

Maya Angelou

As healthcare providers we are in daily collaboration with our colleagues and those in our care. Every interaction is an opportunity to inspire and affirm one another. Every moment is a chance to share our essence with another. As we commit more deeply to our quality of being and live our values, we naturally become more spacious, present, alert, calm and ready for what the day brings.

The spiritual and wisdom traditions of the world have much to offer here. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin captured the sentiment when he suggested 'we are spiritual beings having a human experience', and therefore how we live in our physical body needs to consider how we understand our multidimensionality. This includes all the ways of knowing, sensing, perceiving, or intuiting. We are more than our physicality and paying attention to the 'being' aspect of ourselves supports us to feel greater settlement in the body. There is a long and rich history of cultivating the contemplative throughout the wisdom traditions.

"Contemplative practices that have included meditation have endured for thousands of years in Buddhism, various



forms of yoga from Hindu traditions, contemplative prayer in Christianity such as that of St Theresa of Avila or Thomas Merton, radical questioning through dialogue such as that expressed by Plato or the self-inquiry of Ramana Maharsi, metaphysical reflection of the Sufi tradition that leads to the deeper intuitive insight of the heart (qalb), or the deep pondering suggested in the Jewish Kabbalah. Each of these practices and many, many more offer an approach to interrupt habitual thoughts, deepen awareness and provide a reference point for greater gentleness and self-love.

Inviting the contemplative simply includes the natural human capacity for knowing through silence, looking inward, pondering deeply, beholding, witnessing the contents of our consciousness, and so forth. These approaches cultivate an inner way of knowing and thereby a technology of learning and pedagogy without any imposition of religious doctrine whatsoever. This same kind of intimacy is also associated with increased empathy—that capacity to feel into another's world and to see the other through the eye of our heart, we might say." (Hart, 2004 p.29)

From our inner connection we experience expanded awareness of ourselves, our relationships, and the world around us. It is from this place that we offer inspiration to others to find their own connection, bring it out and shine.

For personal reflection

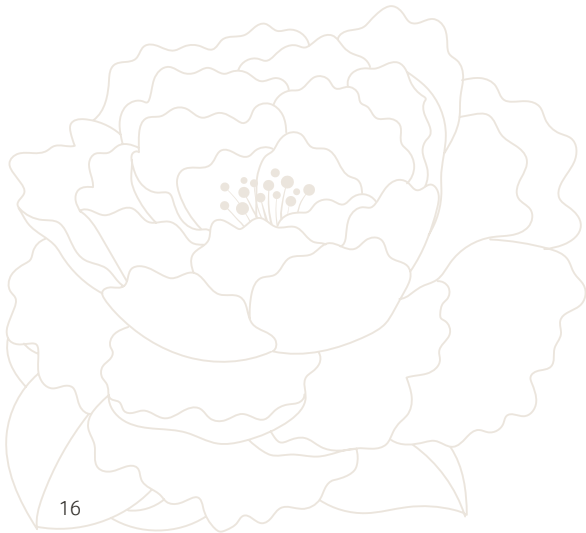
As a healthcare professional how important is it for me to model what I stand for, i.e., healing and growth?

Was there a time in my professional life where space for reflection and contemplative enquiry supported me to fulfil my responsibilities?

How do I see myself reflected in my patients and colleagues?

It is indeed a radical act of love just to sit down and be quiet for a time by yourself.

Jon Kabat-Zinn



4

Building a foundation to support who we are

Be a friend to thyself, and others will be so too.

Thomas Fuller

Our multidimensionality needs to be supported in specific ways. Establishing a solid foundation to care for our whole self enables our spiritual health to flourish. Everyday activities such as washing the dishes, showering, folding the laundry are the foundations of daily life. When we bring conscious presence to even the smallest of daily tasks it allows for that quality to flow into all our daily activities, interactions, and responsibilities.

Spiritual health is a deeply personal aspect of our holistic wellbeing. We cannot avoid the need to bring the focus back to self-care, self-nurture, and self-love, and regularly ask how am I doing in this area? 'First do no harm' is the philosophical principle that underpins our professional lives. We have most likely interpreted this in the context of our patients. But it also applies to us, and how we care for ourselves. Self-care is the loving decision we make for ourselves in the moment, and it reverberates deeply within. It is like a pebble being dropped into a pond of water; the ripples expand outwards and so too does an act of self-care. It communicates to our being that we value, honour and cherish ourselves deeply.

Self-care can include:

- » taking a break to eat and drink water
- » resting during the day
- » some gentle exercise and movement
- » reducing the consumption of stimulants such as alcohol, caffeine, or TV
- » time each day in nature to restore and replenish
- » shutting our eyes for a few minutes to connect to our essence and focus on our breath
- » prioritising sleep when we can.

Creating genuine space for ourselves possibly feels like one of the hardest things to achieve but is so integral to spiritual and mental health. Communicating with honesty and no judgement about where we are at is the first step and good medicine. It is from here a new foundation can be steadily built that will support us to live wholly. Appreciating that we have arrived at this place is an act of self-care, self-nurture, and self-love in and of itself.

For personal reflection

How am I feeling towards myself in this moment?

How do I take loving care of myself?

Are there some other daily rituals that I could develop to support my inner connection throughout the day?

How can I create more rhythm and flow in my day?

*Self-care is not selfish. You cannot serve
from an empty vessel.*

Eleanor Brownn





5


Understanding life from a greater perspective

Between stimulus and response there is space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

Victor E. Frankl

Spiritual intelligence delves deep into the existential questions of life that goes to the heart of our existence. Looking at life through this lens suggests there is a far greater purpose at work. The universe is forever expanding, and we are a part of this reality. An evening spent gazing at the stars reminds us that we inhabit a small planet that is connected to a far grander universe, something of exquisite perfection, beauty, and wonderment.

Spiritual intelligence is concerned with the inner life of mind [and soul] and its relationship to being in the world. As awareness to self and all relationships expands, it redefines our understanding, perceptions, beliefs, and behaviour (Vaughan, 2002, p30). The spiritual and wisdom traditions of the world have nurtured this capacity in different ways over time. Different societies and cultures place different value on the concepts of spirituality and spiritual knowing, but from a humanistic point of view, spiritual intelligence can be seen to exist in the hearts of people of all races, creeds and cultures, both within



and outside of religious institutions (Vaughan 1991, p.105). This suggests that most people will ask the big universal questions about life at some point in their lives.

- » Who am I?
- » What am I here for?
- » What is the purpose of my life?

These questions are an invitation to ponder life as a true philosopher might. In doing so we acknowledge there is a greater reality than what we can see and what we may have been previously aware of. Observing life and understanding the bigger picture confirms our purpose and offers our lives meaning. Working together in multidisciplinary teams to provide treatment, care, and healing for members of our communities fulfils in us a deeper sense of meaning, purpose, and connection.

It is also not uncommon for these bigger questions to arise for our patients as they confront and process uncertain health outcomes. Our willingness and capacity to gently hold space for another as these enquiries emerge is enhanced if we have previously considered them in our own lives. Knowing when it is appropriate to refer the person to an accredited spiritual care practitioner communicates to the person that you have heard and understood their spiritual care needs. In this way you are ensuring that high quality person-centred care, that is sensitive to spiritual health, is offered at what may be a critical time of illness, transition, or change.

Realistically many of the systems we work in do need to change, but what we can readily control is how we approach our work. The capacity to bring conscious presence into our daily interactions means we are more likely to deliver high-quality compassionate care, despite what is going on around us.

For personal reflection

What aspects of my work give me the greatest joy?

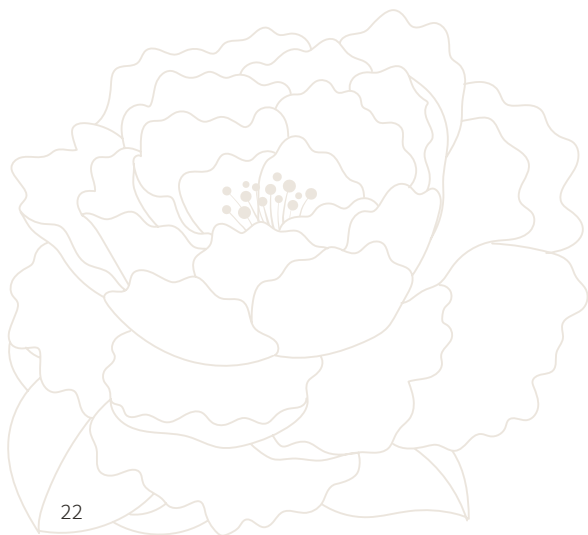
In what situations do I have clarity of purpose?

When do I experience awe and wonderment?

What is my part in the bigger scheme of things?

*Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek
and find all the barriers within yourself that you
have built against it.*

Rumi



Appreciating love as a responsibility

*Being humble means recognising that we are
not on earth to see how important we can become,
but to see how much difference
we can make in the lives of others.*

Gordon B. Hinckley

When we connect to and embrace our spirituality there is a realisation that we are never alone. His Holiness The 14th Dalai Lama refers to this phenomenon as the interconnectedness of all beings. This can also be expressed as our common humanity. If we reflect upon the reasons why we entered the helping professions, it probably had something to do with the desire to be of service to others. Perhaps there was a sense that we could make a difference to the lives of others with our skills, experience and human qualities of love, kindness, and compassion.

Over time the medicalisation of the human body has downplayed the powerful energetic role our heart organ has in our expression and connection to others. The ancients understood that living in a heart-centric or cardio-centric way was simply to focus on love, and that life was essentially about the ways we express love in all that we do. Our heart speaks to us in loud and subtle ways. We know how beautiful it feels to receive a smile, hug, or some kind words. These experiences

are felt and registered in the heart sometimes with accompanying physical sensations such as palpitations and or a feeling of lightness that spreads throughout the body. Expressing from the heart naturally feels good because it comes from our essence and ignites our desire to connect.

The care of others calls for us to practice compassion in our responses. We draw upon our inner resources that inform our outer skill sets to be with others in a way that notices, feels and responds to their needs. We are also called to bear witness to immeasurable pain, suffering and death. Our capacity to offer compassionate and caring responses may feel tested, stretched, and frayed at times. True compassion is the activation of both love and wisdom. So, whilst it is our intention to be with others in a way that extends love and care, the wisdom principle says those same qualities of care and love must be extended toward ourselves.

In this instance, self-compassion may sometimes say, 'I had the best intentions, I tried to do the right thing', whilst acknowledging that sometimes something can go wrong, we don't always have power to make it right. Acceptance, humility, and the capacity to apply wisdom to our own circumstances supports a practice of self-compassion that protects, enhances, and sustains spiritual health. In this light, self-compassion becomes an act of service, so that we can continue to turn up to work in service of others. Revisiting and revising our foundations of self-care, self-nurture and self-love will support us to deepen our compassionate responses in all areas of our lives.

For personal reflection

What can I do to enhance my capacity to bring more love to all that I do in life?

Could I bring a more compassionate approach to my professional life?

Where could I collaborate more to tap into the experience and wisdom of my colleagues?

Who are the colleagues that I admire and what can they teach me about compassion?

*The hands of compassion must be guided
by the eyes of wisdom.*

Ven. Master Hsing Yun



7


Letting go of things that no longer serve

People start to heal the moment they feel heard.

Anon.

Our physical body in-houses our soul. As we deepen into this truth, we begin to realise that whatever we ingest and take into our body either supports or inhibits our spiritual health. Food and drink account for the sustenance we need to maintain our physicality. But have you considered some of the non-tangible things that we also take into our bodies? These may include outdated beliefs, judgements, news and current affairs, opinions, social media, or negative experiences. These energies accumulate in the body, can feel heavy and leave a lasting resonance. It is always good to ask, 'what door have I left open, what am I allowing in?'. In the process of our spiritual health check-up, we may discover there are some things to let go of, things that no longer serve.

Some examples of the experiences of life that keep us from connecting with our essence include grief, loss, guilt, the inability to forgive self or others, accumulated stress, or a tendency toward being a workaholic. The pandemic has placed additional responsibilities on all healthcare workers. With each new layer of PPE there is



also another level of accountability, an extra task to think about, supervise or 'pivot' toward.

As time goes on, chances are the layers we are carrying have not diminished. It may be that the load feels even more intense. If we do not stay present to our whole person needs, each additional layer we carry makes us vulnerable to ill health - physical and mental. We can ask, 'what I am feeling? Is it fatigue, stress, anxiety, depression, fear, burn-out, or is it something harder to nominate? Maybe I feel a sense of languishing, not necessarily one thing or the other?'. This experience speaks to the emotional long haul of the pandemic.

It has indeed been a long haul in our healthcare settings. The pandemic has asked us all to go deeper with the challenges encountered in all aspects of our work. Ethical, moral, and spiritual issues arise that we may not feel entirely equipped to answer. The policies, protocols, and procedures that guide our work have all been subject to rapid change. Knowing where we stand in relation to these complex scenarios will have contributed to many sleepless nights. We may have encountered some of these questions:

- » Are all people considered equal?
- » Where do the elderly, immunocompromised and people with disabilities fit?
- » How much is a life worth?
- » How much risk am I obliged to take on behalf of my patient and then on behalf of my family?
- » Should everything be sacrificed to minimise loss of life?
- » How will I manage the difficulty of following a directive that leaves a person to die alone?

There are no straightforward or obvious answers to these questions, especially in a constantly changing landscape. These complexities have been compounded with long hours, double shifts, overtime, limited or no time off, desperately needing a break but knowing there is no back-fill, feelings of guilt about having a job when others do not. Every aspect of professional life and humanity has been stretched and scrutinized. No part of life has been untouched; most if not all have been pushed to its limits. There is a universal sense of overwhelm.

Giving recognition to our physical body and its needs is the only place to start, it is where we live after all. Attention to what we are ingesting and how we move supports spiritual health. Our posture reflects how we are feeling. Getting up and changing positions allows our body to realign and can be supported by regular walking, workouts, massage, swimming, or gardening. A sedentary lifestyle compounds our physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual expressions. Being sensitive and attentive to the body's need for rest cannot be overlooked.

Beyond our immediate physical needs, we are relational beings at our core. People need people. Good foundations in life also include being able to reach out to trusted people, and being available to support others too. The difficulties we encounter at work and in life need to be noticed, nominated, and appropriately supported. When we open ourselves up to others we let love in and we ensure our heart stays open, healthy, vital, and able to extend love to another.

For personal reflection

How have I been holding it all together so I can keep going?

Who can I readily call upon to support me with the extra emotional load I may be carrying?

Have I thought about moving my body to shift my emotions? e.g. walking, jogging or dancing instead of fighting, resisting or stressing?

What other activities can I pursue to bring equilibrium back into my life to support my physical body and spiritual health?

As much as I hear and validate others' feelings of loss and helplessness, how important is it for my feelings of loss and helplessness to be heard and validated too?

We need people in our lives with whom we can be as open as possible. To have real conversations with people may seem like such a simple, yet obvious suggestion, but it involves courage and risk.

Thomas Moore



8

Living with greater awareness


When we feed and support our own happiness, we are nourishing our ability to love. That's why to love means to learn the art of nourishing our happiness.

Thich Nhat Hanh

Understanding the truth of our whole body, mind and soul connection enables us to claim ourselves more fully and live consistently from our inner most being. Living and expressing from this connection becomes reason to celebrate as we notice all the ways our life is informed and enriched. We may notice that life flows and feels spacious, there is less tension felt despite what may be occurring around us. To build upon this momentum it is useful to revisit all the ways in which our spirituality informs our expression.

In other words, what are the ways we find meaning, purpose, and connection in our lives? The answers to this question will reflect how we live and embody our spiritual health.

How we choose to express our spirituality will differ from one another, it is unique to each of us. Spirituality can be informed by a religious or cultural tradition that brings connection with others who share similar beliefs and values. For another a relationship with nature or



with a pet may provide the connection that sustains and nourishes deeply. Spiritual expression may tend towards a community of like-hearted folk, or it could be a very personal pursuit. What is of fundamental importance is that the beauty felt within is brought out, reflected, and shared with all those around us. Emanating our whole selves may look like:

- » deepening into self-love, appreciation, and celebration of all that we are, and all that we uniquely offer others
- » accessing the inner spaciousness that doesn't run on linear time, knowing that the wisdom of our heart unfolds in non-linear ways as we surrender and align to its riches
- » noticing how others approach life; the reflection of a small child who lives for the moment in pure playfulness and joy; an elder who embodies a lived way that inspires us to stay the distance
- » honouring our connections, choosing and being with a community of people
- » practicing gratitude and grace – the old-fashioned activity of counting your blessings
- » forming conscious relationships that nurture and inspire
- » making time for self-reflection, meaning-making and true care of self
- » invoking imagination with prayer, meditation, music, dancing, writing
- » practising unconditional love or positive regard toward another – our pets have much to teach us about the art of 'agape'.

Coming back to the simplicity and joy of a connection to our essence is all we have control over in life. As we begin to live from this place more consistently all our interactions benefit and flourish. Now more than ever, our workplaces, families and extended communities need our steady and true reflection of spiritual health and wellbeing.

For personal reflection

When do I feel most content and at ease in life?

Where in life do I call upon my wisdom to approach a situation?

Who are the people in my life who inspire me to shine brightly?

How can I create more opportunities to connect with the people and things that inspire me?

If you must look back, do so forgivingly.

If you must look forward, do so prayerfully.

However, the wisest thing you can do is be present with the present... gratefully.

Maya Angelou

9

Preparing for the new

It is always important to know when something has reached its end. Closing circles, shutting doors, finishing chapters, it doesn't matter what we call it; what matters is to leave behind us in the past those moments in life that are over.

Paulo Coelho

The birth, death and rebirth cycles reflect the spherical reality of life, and nature is a rich and wise teacher. Observing the seasons offers understanding into how cycles move in unison with the rhythm of the universe. When we adjust our lives according to the cycle we are in, we naturally honour our spiritual health.

Ritual embraces all those bigger life events that celebrate and acknowledge events such as birth, death, marriage, starting a new career or retirement. Of equal significance are many everyday rituals that support us to develop and sustain structure, rhythm, and flow in our lives. From walking the dog, making the bed, to attending and participating in team meetings or celebrating a colleague's birthday; these are all the small rituals that exist within the bigger cycles of our lives.

The pandemic has offered us a deeper understanding and appreciation of the importance and relevance of ritual and ceremony in our lives. The ways we have

traditionally come together in our communities during this period have been compromised and fractured. Many of our significant rituals have been cancelled, postponed, or gone ahead in different and modified ways. Whilst postponing a wedding or birthday celebration has been possible, or moving family dinners to an online event, the funeral of a loved one may have been hard to arrange and impossible to reconcile in heartbreaking circumstances.

Managing change is never easy, no matter how prepared we may feel. It can feel uncomfortable and unfamiliar when standing in a transitional or liminal space. Across all cultures and societies, ritual and ceremony have been used for eternity to give meaning, honour, and celebration to the significant transitions and universal experiences of life. They support us to process change by naming what is occurring and relocating us in the new. Ritual has the capacity to speak to the part of us that connects with something greater than ourselves and offers the opportunity to have our stories witnessed and validated as meaningful and important.

Ways to consider cycles, ritual and completion in your life is to ponder upon:

- » **beginnings** – birth of a child, starting a new job, new home, puberty, first grey hair
- » **merging** – marriage, new roommate, business mergers
- » **cycles** – birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, seasons
- » **endings** – death, divorce, retirement, completing a project

- » **healings** – for any kind of imbalance (illness, emotional upheaval, mental disquiet, spiritual crisis, relationship disturbance, recognition of patterns of thought or actions that interfere with well-being) for self, another person, group, or the planet to inspire harmony and oneness.

The cycles of life offer a natural completion, a surrender and letting go. As we work our way through this process, space is then created for the birth of something new to emerge, an opportunity to welcome the expansion a new cycle offers. Our inner resources support us with even deeper levels of love, wisdom, and intelligence. From this place of settlement, the future events of life are less likely to throw us off course as we step forward with greater clarity, connection, and conscious presence.

Spiritual health and wellbeing is the ongoing, evolving practice of nurturing, exploring, learning, committing to, and cultivating a rich spiritual life. Each new cycle is an opportunity to embrace and expand upon the last with renewed energy and zest for life.

For personal reflection

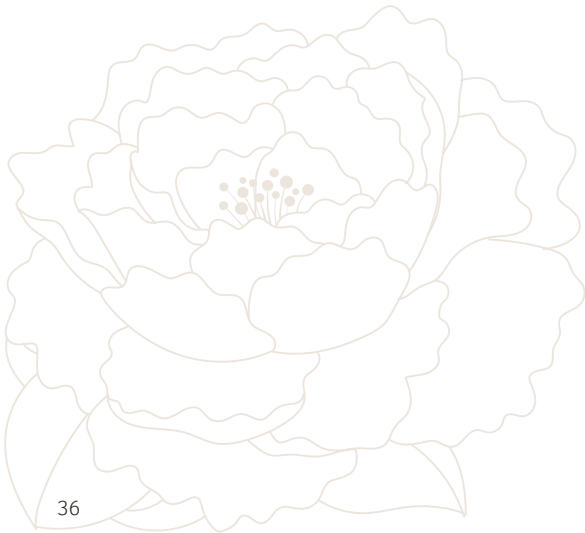
Where have I been reluctant to move on from something that I have outgrown? What has stopped me from completing and moving on?

Is there an event in my life that may need further honouring, recognition, or completion?

Can I nominate 3 positive things at the end of each day that support me to feel settled, to rest and let go of the day?

The use of ritual in our lives provides us with the opportunity to build a bridge between that which is ordinary and that which is extraordinary. It provides a segue between our everyday existence and the reality of the sacred. The use of ritual in our lives brings meaning and focus to our sense of who we are and why we are here on earth.

Hal & Sidra Stone



Spirituality: A foundation for life

*The heart has reasons that reason
knows nothing about.*

Pascal

Human resources in the healthcare industry are the cornerstone of healthcare provision. Recognising our role and the contribution we make to the health and wellbeing of the greater community is something to deeply appreciate.

Regarding ourselves as one of those precious resources is to understand fully that what we bring to the team effort is unique to each of us. No-one else can play the part each one of us plays. In this sense everyone counts and needs to be accounted for. A part of the accountability is showing up to the best of your ability feeling able to meet what the day presents.

Our mental health and spiritual health are intrinsically interwoven, they contribute to our felt sense of wellbeing. Commentators from all walks of life have suggested the long tail of the pandemic will be experienced in the accumulative toll on our mental health. Paying attention to our spiritual health needs, therefore becomes a protective factor to mental, emotional, psychological, and physical health. It is a foundational piece of the wellbeing puzzle.

Seeking to understand ourselves in a holistic way, or as spiritual beings, opens us to another perspective. It

offers another lens from which to explore our expression and connection to the world around us. It allows us to tap into our sensitivities and bring greater understanding and awareness to our lives and the people in our lives. It gives us permission to go beyond the mundane and embrace something far grander.

Many healthcare workers acknowledge that their spirituality actively informs their work, suggesting it fosters engagement, growth, and fulfillment in both the professional and personal realm.

Spiritual expression in the workplace may look like:

- » a twinkle in the eye that meets all others with openness, curiosity, and joy
- » living and expressing our values in all that we do
- » how we hold ourselves when communicating with colleagues, patients, friends, and family
- » the grace, poise, and conscious presence we bring to the most difficult of situations
- » taking time to stop and care for ourselves in different moments throughout the day
- » processing feelings as they arise
- » how we discern our understanding of what is 'true'
- » noticing opportunities for authentic connection in every interaction with another
- » noticing what informs us at a most profound and innate level
- » the deep knowledge that we are not alone; we are inter-connected.

Remaining cognisant to the ways in which *meaning*, *purpose*, and *connection* weave in and through our lives are constant themes to revisit, review, and renew, and in doing so our spiritual health and wellbeing is enhanced. Life is and will continue to be challenging. Our healthcare workplace settings will continue to be busy, overcrowded and ever changing. There will be times when a little more attention to our personal spiritual care is needed to support us to move through difficulties with greater ease.

Spiritual health is an ever-evolving exploration of who we are in relationship to the world around us. It is a dynamic process that calls us back to our authentic self. To the best of our ability, returning to our essence and fostering inner connection are the first genuine steps on the path toward holistic health. From here a new horizon is visible, it is a vista sprinkled with many new discoveries that enrich us to live and work from a place of greater love, wisdom, and intelligence.

*Explore yourself in silent contemplation.
You will find a breathtaking person you were
completely unaware about.*

Hiral Nagda

Glossary

Compassion/self-compassion – are the same sides of the coin. The word comes from the Latin, ‘to suffer with’ and is the noticing of another’s pain and being motivated to want to help. It is moving toward the distress, not turning away. This is an emerging field which suggests true compassion is energizing rather than depleting when the principles are applied to ourselves, i.e. the same kindness, love and care is directed towards ourselves in response to our own experience of suffering.

Discernment – the moment-by-moment choices we make in search of clarity. Clear seeing and clear choices.

Existential crisis – a broad term to describe the experience of deeply questioning all aspects of life and existence. It can result in intense feelings of despair as we attempt to understand our life and its purpose. Questions such as ‘what is the point?’ or ‘why does it matter?’ may emerge. It can coincide with a natural turning point in life, e.g., a significant birthday, death or divorce, or a sudden external event like a pandemic or natural calamity that challenge our view on the normal. Symptoms can be like those of a mental health crisis and include loss of interest in daily life, unexplained fear, lack of energy or motivation, questioning every choice, anxiousness, loneliness, negative self-worth.

Mental wellbeing – a dynamic state of complete physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing in which a person can develop potential, cope

with normal stresses of life, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others and contribute to community. Mental wellbeing contributes to healthier lifestyles, better physical health, improved quality of life, greater social connection and productivity. (VicHealth, 2015)

Moral injury – we have individual and collective values and beliefs informed by our interactions and shared decision making in health service spaces. When different values and beliefs come into conflict, between us and others or us and our organisation, or we experience a conflict within ourselves while isolated from a healthy decision-making process, we begin to experience what is called moral stress. The care of others involves daily spiritual intersections like this with patients, families, colleagues, and the organisation in decision making. When these decisions contradict or challenge our beliefs and values, we experience moral stress. Like all stress when it is managed well, it can be part of a healthy process. Decisions involving values and beliefs can, when enforced or made in isolation, cause a form of trauma – they can generate moral injury. Guilt and shame form part of the spiritual crisis that we may experience as moral injury. (Turner, 2020)

Multidimensionality – our sensory capacity for awareness beyond our ordinary day to day senses. This includes sensing, perceiving and intuiting, or other non-tangible ways of knowing.

Post-traumatic growth, existential growth & change – the Chinese use two brush strokes

to communicate the word ‘crisis.’ One brush stroke denotes danger, the other opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger, but recognize the opportunity. Following an intense period of stress or hardship we may experience a period of personal growth and development that re-frames and gives new meaning to the circumstances that were challenging with us.

Reflection – understanding ourselves more deeply by the mirror offered to us by another, the message may be a learning or an affirmation. Reflection supports us to overcome judgement as we come to understand that the things we see in others are the things we see in ourselves.

Religion – is derived from the Latin word ‘religio’ and means to re-connect, re-establish, or re-bind our links to the divine in a quest for wholeness. Over many centuries the word religion has come to be associated with organised faith-based expressions and the meaning of the word has taken on a narrower interpretation.

Resilience – coming through a personal challenge with some form of growth. The adversity may have been overwhelming had additional support not been available to help us cope with the additional load.

Revelation – non-linear knowing, a moment of clarity that allows true wisdom to emerge. To connect to the universe within and without, to find the missing piece of the puzzle, an ‘aha’ moment that occurs outside the normal boundaries of time and space.

Revelation supports a new level of awareness and understanding.

Rites of Passage – birthdays, leaving school, first job, weddings, funerals are examples of some of the universal human experiences that speak to big and small transitions we each encounter on our journey through life. Ritual and ceremony provide a holding space to ‘name’ what is occurring and help us to process the change by locating us in the new. The in-between space of transitional change is known as the ‘liminal’ and this can sometimes feel unfamiliar or uncomfortable. Rites of passage ritual and ceremony support us to transform our experience of life into a new sphere, to remember our spiritual essence and bring the often-conflicting opposing forces of our dual nature into some semblance of harmony.

Service (to be of) – the highest impulse of the human heart, to return the gift to another. One of the characteristics of service is the beauty of being invited into a relationship of helping and remembering we are all equal in essence, hence the ground is fertile to work from a place of appreciation, truth, and honesty.

Spirituality – (long definition) is a dynamic and intrinsic aspect of humanity through which persons seek ultimate meaning, purpose, and transcendence, and experience relationship to self, family, others, community, society, nature, and the significant or sacred. (Puchalski et al, 2014)

Spirituality is individual, subjective and can be expressed in different ways. Some people choose to express their spirituality through religion or

religious practice, while others may not. Spirituality can also be described as the search for answers to life's big questions, such as: 'why is this happening to me?', 'what does it all mean?', 'what gives me comfort and hope?', 'does my life have meaning?' and 'what happens after we die?'.

(short definition) – meaning, purpose and connection; 'where do I find meaning, purpose and connection in my life?'. The answers to these questions will reveal how you express your spirituality.

Spiritual care – (clinical definition) is the provision of assessment, counselling, support, and ritual in matters of a person's beliefs, traditions, values, and practices enabling the person to access their own spiritual resources.

(non-clinical definition) – spiritual care can help you feel more connected with yourself, other people or to something beyond. It is about the beliefs, traditions, values, and practices that are important to you. Spiritual care supports what gives meaning and purpose to your life.

Spiritual care practitioner – (also sometimes referred to as pastoral care worker or chaplain) are appointed and credentialled by the health service, and can be from a diverse range of beliefs, traditions, values, and practices.

Spiritual struggle – is a natural part of life and occurs across the lifespan. It is not a symptom of pathology or spiritual immaturity, rather can be interpreted as a fork in the road that either leads to positive or negative outcomes. It is worth

noting that all revered sages throughout history experienced spiritual struggle. Spiritual care practitioners have a role to play in supporting this exploration and unfolding.

Wellbeing – is a state of balance or alignment in body, mind, and spirit. In this state, we feel content. We are connected to purpose, people, nature, and community. We feel peaceful and energized; resilient and safe. (Centre for Spirituality and Healing, 2021)



References

- Centre for Spirituality and Healing, University of Minnesota, Wellbeing for Organisations. <https://www.csh.umn.edu/>
- Cook, C., 2020. Spirituality, religion & mental health: exploring the boundaries. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 23:5, 363-374.
- Hart, T., Opening the contemplative mind in the classroom. *Journal of Transformative Education*. 2004; 2:1:2004 28-46 DOI: 10.1177/1541344603259311
- McCrinkle, M Fell, A., 2020. *Work Wellbeing, leading thriving teams in rapidly changing times*, Rockpool Publishing.
- Moore, T. (Ed), 1996. *The Education of the Heart*. HarperCollins Publishers, New York.
- Puchalski C, Vitillo R, Hull, S Reller, N., 2014. Improving the spiritual dimension of whole person care: Reaching national and international consensus. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*. 17:642-56
- Ramluggun P, Idowu C, Sandy P., 2021. Supporting mental health nurses to meet patients' spiritual needs. *Mental Health Practice*. doi: 10.7748/mhp.2021.e1549
- Reventure & McCrinkle, Mainstreet Insights. *The Australian Spirit during COVID-19, Exploring the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on Australians*. <https://mainstreetinsights.com.au/>
- Spiritual Health Association, 2020. *Guidelines for Quality Spiritual Care in Health*. Melbourne, Australia.
- Turner, C., 2020. Moral stress and moral injury in clinical spiritual care context, paper presented at Professional development program for spiritual care practitioners, 11 November.
- Ungemerr, MR., Dadirri – Inner deep listening and quiet still awareness. Miriam Rose Foundation. <https://www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au/dadirri/>
- Vaughan, F., 1991. Spiritual issues in psychotherapy. *The Journal of Transcultural Psychology*. 23:2:105-119
- Vaughan, F., 2002. What is spiritual intelligence? *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*. 42:2: 16-33
- VicHealth. 2015. *Promoting equity in child and adolescent wellbeing*. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, Australia.

Resources

- On Being Podcasts, writing, reflections. <https://onbeing.org/>
- Professional Quality of Life (ProQoL) - Compassion satisfaction and fatigue test. <https://proqol.org/>
- Safer Care Victoria – Healthcare Worker Wellbeing Centre. <https://www.bettersafecare.vic.gov.au/support-and-training/hcw-wellbeing>

Spiritual Health Association – Heart and Soul Matters:
A guide to providing spiritual care in mental health settings.

<https://www.spiritualhealth.org.au/download/Heart-And-Soul-Matters.pdf>

Spirituality and Practice, resources for spiritual journeys – The Alphabet of Spiritual Literacy.
<https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/features/view/28921/a-pandemic-alphabet>

St Luke's Innovative Resources, Signposts: exploring everyday spirituality.
<https://innovativeresources.org/>

The Black Dog Institute – resources for health professionals.
<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/resources-support/coronavirus-resources-for-anxiety-stress/coronavirus-resources-for-health-professionals/>

The Janki Foundation for Spirituality in Healthcare – Values in healthcare: a spiritual approach.
<https://www.jankifoundation.org/values-in-healthcare/>

To Medicine with Love – reflections on the practice of medicine.
<https://tomedicinewithlove.com/>

Values in Action Institute – Character Strengths.
<https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths>