

Spiritual Beliefs, Communal Experiences and Multicultural Diversity in Recovery

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Review Article

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Abstract

A person's ability to examine conscience, review defects, make restitution to people we hurt, resolve to help others in need, and find a spiritual space to practice newfound wisdom has always been the bedrock of the healing process of life. In the community empowerment and transformation recovery model, the counsellor must understand the relationship between the mind, body, spirit, and best practices to partner with people to achieve health and wellness. Helpers must realize the value of inclusion of faith, spirituality, and the honoring of how people, families, and communities heal. Additionally, the community model must appreciate the need to expand upon Western medicine by incorporating Eastern practices such as acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine, and other Eastern traditions. Finally, teaching people, families, and communities about holistic care enhances the chances for long-term health for the individual, the family, and the community

For thousands of years, the spiritual development of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism have overcome the spiritual evolution of the duality of Self and Object. Eastern practitioners have developed a comprehensive and holistic set of thoughts and theories [1]. Most Western spiritualists focus on personal needs and feelings. At the same time, Eastern traditions are more concerned with the communal space surrounding our world. Western thought combined with Eastern traditions is the key to what recovery individual's call "building a personal identity." As expressed in the Serenity Prayer: we must "accept the things one cannot change, change the things one can, and the wisdom to know the difference." A spiritual recovery healing process helps a person develop a better sense of his/her conscious identity and can explore the deeper meaning of one's existence. The more one feels his/her beliefs, values, and thoughts originate outside of oneself, the more one gives those directed activities the power to control his or her life. For many, the objective in life is to balance one's mythology (inner Self) and ego complexes (outer Self) so that the soul/spirit can take command of one's life rather than the heart always being a stepchild to reality. With a sense of purpose in life and a belief in hope and transcendence, this balance finds common ground in Wilber's four-quadrant theory of human experience [2]. The teleological shift from personal needs and feelings (Western thoughts) to a focus on cosmic/communal space that surrounds our private world (Eastern traditions) described by Wayne Dwyer [3] in *Everyday Wisdom*. He states, "You are not a human being having a spiritual experience; you are a spiritual being having a human experience" (p.6). This perception allows an individual to believe that he/she is much more important than the stories, good or bad, one tells about

themselves. Incorporating a spiritual life dimension creates connections that were not previously recognized by the person solely enmeshed in Western consciousness. Wilber's four-quadrant approach embodies,

1. Subjective knowledge or personal reality,
2. The body and brain,
3. Multiculturalism and collective understanding, and
4. Ecosystem sensitivities that integrate psychology, sociology, biology, religion, and philosophy.

The above four-quadrant approach is grounded in both Western thinking and Eastern traditions. It provides human beings with a paradigm that encourages people to develop a different interpretation and emotion about the meaning of life and how one interacts with the world [4]. An example of the mind/body dualism, Yoga/Meditation, is identified as using the four-quadrant approach to allow individuals to consider a model of human experiences that incorporates individual development with cultural evolution. This social transformational process attempts to:

1. Integrate Western and Eastern healing processes, and
2. Integrate education and community engagement into recovery and resilience practice.

Faith-based Communal Experiences

The great tragedy of modern life is the loss of supportive communities that facilitate spirituality and Western consciousness. Different community self-help groups exist to give encouragement, support, and understanding to individuals who face lifelong adversities from various traumas. Many support groups have borrowed heavily from the Twelve Steps

of Alcoholics Anonymous. Fellowship groups outline a way of living related to chemical use and abuse issues but provide a faith-based spiritual path to a more positive life worth living. The Steps are more than just about recovery but about a life of meaning and transcendence. As stated in the original tenants of the Oxford movement, the flow to a successful, positive experience is centered on one's ability to:

1. Examine conscience,
2. Review our defects,
3. Make restitution to people we hurt,
4. Resolve to help others in need, and
5. Find a spiritual space to practice our newfound wisdom [5].

The above five experiences were developed from a Christian perspective, but they are positive principles reflected in all faith-based organizations. Since the Steps were designed in an American Christian culture, the wording of the steps is not just Christian terms or traditions, yet the concepts find common ground in Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism.

Judaism

In Judaism, the Talmud tells one that giving into negative, destructive impulses may be recognized to be foolish and detrimental; no one would be able to resist these urges without God's help. Thus, steps Four and Five of Alcoholics Anonymous, the "confessional Steps," reflect the need for a personal daily accounting taken as well as a more general overview of the direction, accomplishment, and shortcoming of one's life. This overview made periodically, emphasizing the period beginning with Rosh Hashanah and concluding with Yom Kippur. In addition, the Code of Jewish Law states that all the atonement possible is ineffective if an individual has harmed another unless one sought forgiveness from the victim [6]. Taking a personal inventory, promptly admitting our wrongdoings, improving our conscious contact with God through prayer and meditation, and having had a spiritual awakening because of these Steps is an integral part of all Jewish traditions [7].

The mystical aspect of Judaism, Kabala is a discipline and school of thought concerned with a group of teachings meant to explain the relationship between an eternal and mysterious Creator (God) and the mortal and finite universe (His creation). Kabala is a set of scriptures outside the traditional Jewish Scriptures. Kabala attempts to define the nature of the universe and the human being, the nature, purpose of existence, and various other questions related to life [8]. Kabbalah originally developed entirely within Jewish thought and consistently used classical Jewish sources to explain and demonstrate its teachings. Thus, these teachings define both the Hebrew Bible (Tanach) and traditional rabbinic literature [8]. In Kabbalistic thought, God, the creator, is neither matter nor spirit but is both. The question of the Divine nature envisions two aspects of God: (a) God Himself, who is ultimately unknowable, and (b) the revealed character of God that created the universe, preserves the world and interacts with humanity. Therefore, Kabbalists believe that these two aspects are not contradictory but complement one another through progressive emanation

[8]. One of the essential sources spreading Kabbalistic teachings has come from the growth and spread of Hasidic Judaism, a movement begun by Yisroel ben Eliezer (The Baal Shem Tov) in many branches and streams until today. All the components emphasize the study of mystical Hasidic texts, which now consist of a vast literature devoted to elaborating upon the long chain of Kabbalistic thought and methodology. No group emphasizes in-depth kabbalistic study, though, to the extent of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, whose students study these texts for three hours daily [9].

Islam

In Islam, all members of society are in the Flow of Oneness, as one family, one body [10]. Health and happiness are defined as increasing positive to negative emotions through the Flow of Oneness. In Islam, submission means more than a vague submission to a higher power—Islam requires submission to Allah's will (God). In the interpretation of the Islamic 12 Steps, attention is centered on Steps 11 and 12. Step Eleven—"We sought through Salaat to improve our understanding of Taqwa and Ihsano" and Step Twelve—"Having increased our level of Iman (faith/belief) and Taqwa, because applying these steps, we carried this message to humanity (dawah) and began practicing these principles in all our affairs [10].

Perhaps the vital part of Islam that encourages addicts to pull out of their addiction is Islam's insistence on abstinence from alcohol and narcotics. Not only are these statutes in Islamic law helpful to rid the addict of the abused substance, but many of the guidelines in Sharia law also offer the recovered addiction a structure to reorganize his or her life [11].

Buddhism

In the Buddhist faith, there is a collective recognition of "we." Buddhists believe that "we are many in body and one in spirit." To recover from life's traumas, one must leave their self-imposed isolation and change their life condition. Buddhists in recovery may choose to call Step Two the process that connects with their ninth level of consciousness, a higher power, god, gods, or leave the power unnamed. Yet, they came to awaken to enlightenment (the wisdom initially inherent in the lives of each Buddhist). The first three Steps rely on faith, study, and practice: Study (or gaining knowledge of the facts) is Step One. Build a foundation of honesty. Faith is Step Two with willingness and openness to hope. The practice is Step Three, as it is the willingness to trust. Taking Step Three is connecting to live with trust. The First Three Steps are internal action. Chanting, meditation, mindfulness, compassion, awareness, human revolution reflects the fourth through the eleven Steps. Step 10 is the four-cycle of honesty, lifting one positively from the challenges of behavioral health issues [12].

Zen Buddhist practitioners of the different schools apply concepts like flow to aid their mastery of life experiences. People use meditation, a conscious mental process using techniques to relax the body and mind, increase calm and relaxation, improve psychological balance, cope with illness, or enhance overall health and well-being. The various styles

of yoga used for health purposes typically combine physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation or relaxation. People use yoga as part of a general health regimen and for a variety of health conditions [12]. Both yoga and meditation involve a healing experience that moves one towards a human transformational experience that allows an individual to see the more significant collective communal connection. This collaborative experience is seen in many faith-based institutions and their relationship to the 12 Steps in recovery.

The above descriptions are but thumbnail sketches of the significant facets of spiritual beliefs. There are differences within and between each of the groups that are beyond the scope of this article. For example, counsellors working with people with behavioural health challenges will find ones who embrace a Christian tradition or denomination but whose beliefs will be scattered across the continuum from the conservative to the liberal. For example, some Roman Catholics are very liberal, oppose the unilateral authority of the Pope, reject the church's stance against abortion, and advocate for the ordination of women to the priesthood and the right to marry for their priests. Likewise, one may discover Christian mainline, typically liberal Protestant denominations who hold fundamentalist views and practices. It is essential, then, for those who seek to help know the general perspective of the various faith traditions and not assume that the people with whom they are counselling adhere to the beliefs and practices typically associated with them. Twelve Steps practice reflects the flow of the faithful and encourages the use of positive meaning beyond our daily life struggles. For most individual's life is a balance between spirit and matter [13, p.175] and the transpersonal theorists. They assert a grand design of the universe, including events beyond our bodies and immediate surroundings [13, p.7].

Contrary to some beliefs, people are very good at determining what will increase positive emotions that influence the positive flow between spirit and matter [14]. Many techniques have developed to help improve one's positive outlook on life, so if you want to practice the Flow of Oneness and the Flow of the faithful:

1. Change your activities,
2. Change your thinking,
3. Nurture relationships,
4. Value personal growth, and
5. Decrease negative emotions [15].

This integrated, holistic Flow concept of comprehensive health arises from a complex interaction of genetic, emotional, spiritual, physical, dietary, mental, and environmental life issues [16]. Long-term health in an individual involves a body, mind, and spiritual balance characterized by positive emotion, constructive thoughts, and responsible actions while supporting the whole person's physical, emotional, social, and spiritual integration [17].

Bodywork activities

The somatic approach to health assumes that the quest for recovery and resilience engages the mind and the spirit and

works directly with the physical body. Eastern practices such as massage, meditation, and the Asian methods of acupressure and acupuncture have been beneficial in reducing stress, tension, and anxiety. Bodywork activities such as Therapeutic Touch, Reiki Therapy, and Cranio-Sacral Therapy can reduce the emotional stress of daily life problems. The cornerstone to holistic health assumes whole foods, medicinal herbs, and nutrition supplements enhance diet, build physical balance, and nourish the body's tissues [18]. Taking a relationship between the soma (body) and the psyche (mind), any movement to optimal health must involve psychic approaches to recovery and resilience. These psychic approaches mandate that an individual work directly with one's thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and attitudes regarding an individual's worldview. Much of this work is encapsulated in Western psychotherapy approaches to behavioural health challenges. Yet, the body and the mind cannot ignore its spiritual presence since the intellectual strength of the ego must be transcended if one is to find peace in the collective evolution of human consciousness. Effective healing interventions that promote recovery and resilience are determined by an interaction of our biological vulnerabilities, psychological states of the mind, and our effective use of our spiritual presence in the universe. Our bodies affect our thoughts and feelings, influence our bodies and impact our mental state. Optimal health can be achieved by:

1. Helping our bodies heal through lifestyle changes,
2. Working with our negative thoughts and feelings (which destroy our bodies), and
3. Finding our spiritual path [18]

When the mind and the body seek balance, one's life force (spirituality) can create wellness as an on-going process of existence [19]. If personality is to become a path rather than harden into pathology, we need to learn to work with ourselves as we are, without aggression or blame. We must create conditions that encourage the personality structure to break open from within, revealing the essential qualities of our being hidden within it [19]. A system that promotes recovery and resilience helps a person develop a better sense of his or her conscious identity and encourages exploring the deeper meaning of one's existence. The more one feels his or her beliefs, values, and thoughts are generated outside of oneself; the more one gives those directed activities the power to control his or her life. The objective in life is to balance personal mythology (inner Self) and ego complexes (outer Self) so that the soul/spirit can command the person's life. In *Boundaries of the Soul*, June Singer (1994) stated that *the Soul makes us more than a pile of chemicals in a tangle of neurons. The Soul is the essence of consciousness that enables us to know ourselves and our world, recognize what is unique in us as individuals, and what each of us shares with the immense totality of what we are a part of* [20, p.7].

Spirituality Beliefs and Multicultural Diversity

When conceptualizing multicultural diversity, we cannot just think of ethnicity, nationality, race, class, gender, and sexuality. Religion and spirituality are often essential aspects of an individual's or group's identity and multicultural diversity. This

diversity is another dimension of human existence beyond the bio-psychosocial framework that can help one understand how people express themselves, evolve, and heal. Human service educators, practitioners, and individuals receiving services need to expand their framework to include an integrated, holistic flow of comprehensive health. Long-term health and wellness management involves a body, mind, and spiritual balance characterized by positive emotion, constructive thoughts, and responsible actions. Total healing emphasizes the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual integration of the whole person. Healing the Soul *“involves the creation of contexts in which the focus is no longer primarily on problems, but instead emphasizes solutions and the facilitation of wellness in a holistic sense”* [21, p.69]. A soul-healing spiritual perspective involves five principles:

1. acknowledging connectedness,
2. suspending judgment,
3. trusting the universe,
4. creating realities, and
5. walking the path with heart. [21].

Acknowledging connectedness means underscoring the interdependence between the person and persons in the world. It goes to the heart of building warm, empathic, and genuine relationships. It acknowledges our mutual journey on the path of life and gives credibility to self-disclosure. It is mainly through the power of stories and storytelling that one can find new ways to view a situation [21, p.92].

Suspending judgment means shifting the focus away from blame toward acceptance and respect for the dignity and worth of persons. It also means moving away from diagnostic labels and acknowledging our participation in our own lives and the potential to deconstruct our lives so that we may more fully empower ourselves to challenge life more holistically. Thus, we move from linearity to circularity in suspending judgment and create a more participatory and less causal reality [21, p. 106].

Trusting the universe involves adopting a life-stance of mystery and awe with a fundamental faith in ourselves and a power beyond ourselves. Of all the soul healing principles, this the most difficult for the secular healer (professional counsellors) to appreciate and the easiest for the faith healer to acknowledge and embrace. Trusting the universe is when an individual find meaning in a coincidence (e.g., Jung’s concept of synchronicity), a dream, a clear vision, etc., for which there appears to be no scientific or rational explanation. Western psychological practices with their linear thoughts are usually at odds with the nonlinear intuitive modes of knowing, such as dream analysis, painting, dancing, music, meditation, etc. [21, p. 127].

Creating realities-suggests, we are participants in forming the realities we experience and that we have the capacity for awareness of ourselves as co-creators of our experiences. If we acknowledge that one creates their existence, it is easy to view change as transformative and responsive to new

information. An individual’s search for meaning and purpose and a connection to the sacred is a fundamental value in mental and physical well-being [21, p. 156],

Walking the path with heart means living and working so that human potential is more fully developed and that the goals of compassion and peace are integrated into our daily lives. One’s path is usually a disciplined life with self-awareness and self-control, leading to positive self-esteem. The irony of the road is that it is not looking for a destination but only going in the direction of awareness [21, p. 177].

If one embraces the above commitment to solutions, it is a smooth transition to finding a pluralist faith perspective that honors all belief systems and establishes the person’s first perspective.

The Evolution of Spiritual Traditions

Although religion and spirituality overlap, most theologians and philosophers would agree that there is a distinction between religion and spirituality. This distinction suggests that religious beliefs are characterized by an organizational structure, doctrine, ritual, authoritative leadership, and a set of clearly defined traditions. At the same time, spirituality is concerned with a person’s search for meaning, purpose, and value in life. This polarizing distinction has, at times, been interpreted as prejudice against organized faiths believing that the privatization of one’s religiosity, implied in the singular use of the word spirituality, bypasses the need to incorporate the history of religious institutions into the mainstream of our culture [22, p. 271]. With the rise of secular humanism in our present Western culture, one is faced with a myriad of different belief systems and practices that seem to defy both labelling and categorization. However, it is essential to present information that helps people living with behavioural health challenges organize their thinking about the content and experience of modern-day spirituality. For the secularist, the religions represent dogmatic, intransigence, and rejection of what is seen as the defining feature of the human mind, namely, critical reasoning. For the religious, secularism has led to excessive individualism, unbridled greed rooted in a materialistic worldview, the breakdown of family structures, and the loss of respect for anything sacred [22]. Ironically, one unifying factor associated with present-day spirituality is its diversity. One person might practice Zen Buddhism, attend workshops on astrology, and consult a channeler; another might focus on the Christian-based “Course in Miracles,” privately worship a goddess, and engage in some form of meditation. These varieties of practice differ from person to person, and it is impossible and unwise to make assumptions about someone’s spiritual practice based on limited information. However, it is possible to claim that one of the major themes in contemporary spirituality is the Self as the final authority [22]. Thus, each person must find his or her spiritual path. Persons who align themselves with the spiritual movements of the day are not prone to respond to dogmatic claims that anyone’s approach is the “best” or “only” means of obtaining spiritual growth or depth [22]. Another characteristic

of modern spiritualists is their solidarity and community amid striking individuality. Even though there is a broad continuum of belief and practice, there is also a kinship among persons who have chosen countercultural or non-institutional means of pursuing spiritual direction. Another aspect of modern spiritualists is related to the paradigm shift that has occurred in contemporary philosophy. To rationalize institutional structures of religion, some people have taken on what Bloch (1998) calls “a consumerist and personal approach to the acquisition of religious or spiritualized information” (p. 9). Bloch maintained that such persons seek various spiritual experiences based on “a desire to reduce social uncertainty by seeking compatibility across different knowledge claims, rather than having to select one at the absolute social cost of another” [23, p. 9]. Thus, it is not uncommon for contemporary spiritualists to embrace multiple belief systems that may include different material. Dunlap (2008) believes that a person’s difficulty embracing traditional faith-based institutions and spirituality has to do with five prejudices:

1. The discrimination against organized religion and the rise of secular humanism,
2. The bias against hierarchy and the fear of institutional control of moral beliefs,
3. The prejudice against the process of consensus-building and the fear of submitting to external authority,
4. The discrimination against science and the doubt that the conservative worldview has some coherence, and
5. The prejudice against psychology or the fear that emotion and science could coexist [22, pp.269-274].

What is known about the fundamental components of recovery are those:

1. Faith-based Communal Experiences,
2. Spirituality Beliefs and Multicultural Diversity, and
3. the Evolution of Spiritual

Traditions has led to a recovery paradigm that should be:

1. **Self-Directed** : Consumers lead, control, exercise choice over, and determine their path of recovery by optimizing autonomy, independence, and management of resources to achieve a self-determined life. The recovery process must be self-directed; they must define their life goals and design a unique path.
2. **Person-Centered** : There are multiple pathways to recovery based on an individual’s unique strengths and resiliencies as well as his or her needs, preferences, experiences (including past trauma), and cultural background in all its diverse representations. Individuals also must identify recovery as being an on-going journey and a result as well as an overall paradigm for achieving wellness and optimal mental health.
3. **Empowered** : Consumers have the authority to choose from a range of options and participate in all decisions, including allocating resources that affect their lives, and are educated and supported in so doing. They can join with other consumers to collectively and effectively themselves about their needs, wants, desires, and aspirations. Through empowerment, individuals gain control of their destiny

and influence their lives’ organizational and societal structures.

4. **Holistic** : Recovery encompasses an individual’s whole life, including mind, body, spirit, and community. Recovery embraces all aspects of life, including housing, employment, education, mental health and healthcare treatment and services, complementary and naturalistic services, addictions treatment, spirituality, creativity, social networks, community participation, and family supports as determined by the person. Families, providers, organizations, systems, communities, and society play crucial roles in creating and maintaining meaningful opportunities for consumer access to these supports.
5. **Nonlinear** : Recovery is not a linear process but based on continual circular growth, occasional setbacks, and learning from experience. Recovery begins with awareness in which a person recognizes that positive change is possible. This recognition enables the person to move on to engage in the work of recovery fully.
6. **Strengths-Based** : Recovery focuses on valuing and building on the multiple capacities, resiliencies, talents, coping abilities, and inherent worth of individuals. By building on these strengths, consumers leave stymied life roles behind, and recovery moves forward through interaction with others in supportive, trust-based relationships.
7. **Peer Supported** : Mutual support—including the sharing of experiential knowledge and skills and social learning—plays an invaluable role in recovery. Consumers encourage and engage other consumers in recovery and provide each other with a sense of belonging, supportive relationships, valued roles, and community.
8. **Respected** : Community, systems, and societal acceptance and appreciation of consumers—including protecting their rights and eliminating discrimination and stigma—are crucial in achieving recovery. Self-acceptance and regaining belief in oneself is particularly vital. Respect ensures the inclusion and full participation of consumers in all aspects of their lives.
9. **Responsible** : Consumers have a personal responsibility for their self and journeys of recovery. Taking steps towards their goals may require great courage. Consumers must strive to understand and give meaning to their experiences and identify coping strategies and healing processes to promote wellness.
10. **Hopeful** : Recovery provides the essential and motivating message of a better future—that people can and do overcome the barriers and obstacles that confront them. Hope is internalized and fostered by peers, families, friends, providers, and others. Hope is the catalyst of the recovery process. Mental health recovery not only benefits individuals with mental health disabilities by focusing on their abilities to live, work, learn, and fully participate in our society but also enriches the texture of American community life. America reaps the benefits individuals with mental disabilities can make, ultimately becoming a more robust and healthier Nation. [24].

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