



Equipping Social Workers to Deal with Issues of Spirituality and Religion in Times of Disaster

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What Goes Around, Comes Around?

History of Social Work

- **1900s to 1920s:**
Sectarian origins (Religion: “the mother of social work”)
- **1920s to 1970s :**
Professionalization and secularization
- **1970s to present time:**
Resurgence of interest in spirituality

Differences between religion and spirituality

Religion

Spirituality

- **Community** focused
- Observable, measurable, **objective**
- **Formal**, orthodox, organized

Individualistic

Less visible and measurable, more **subjective**

Less formal, orthodox, systematic

Differences between religion and spirituality

Religion

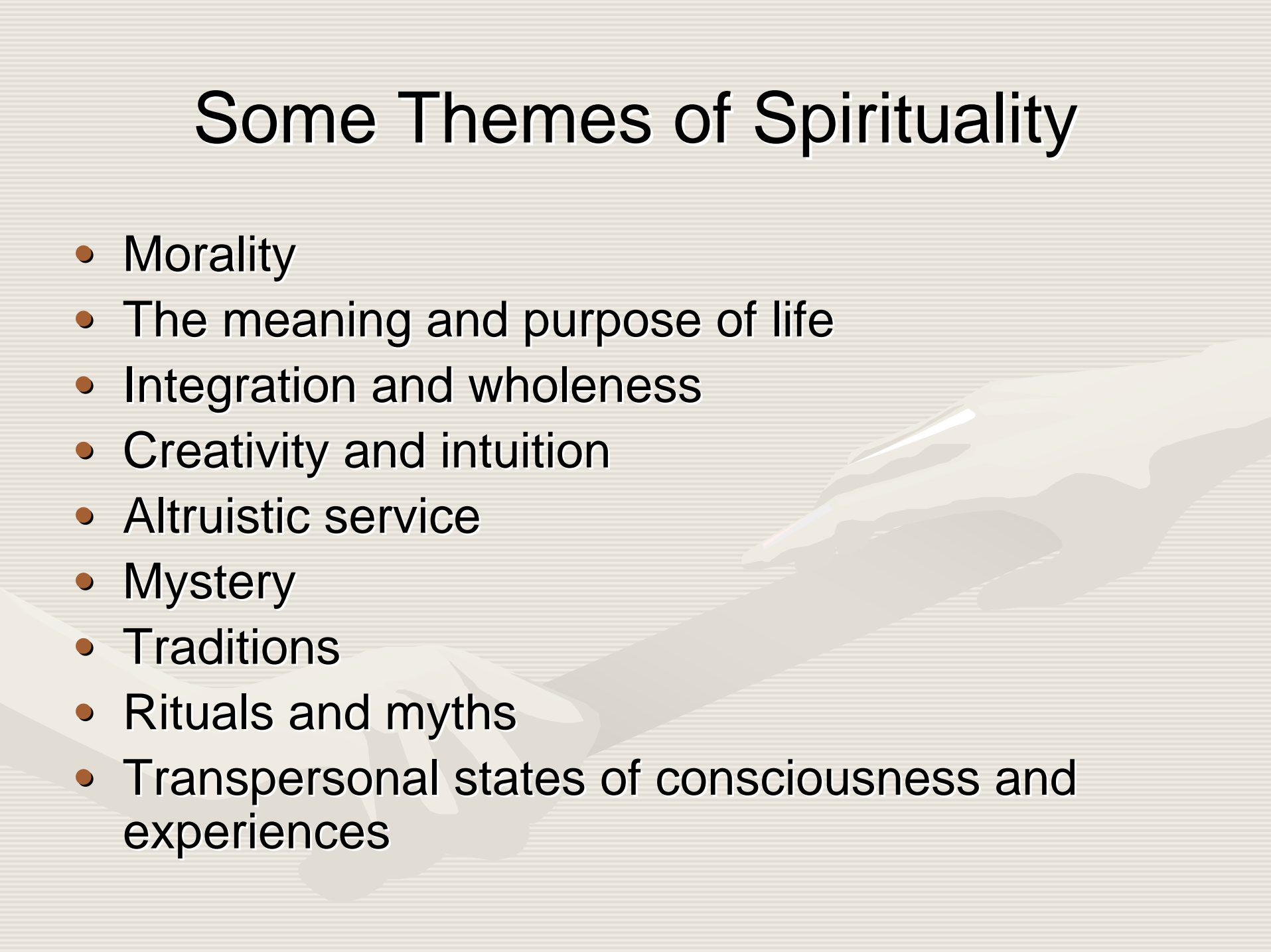
- Behavior oriented, **outward** practice
- **Authoritarian** in terms of behaviours
- **Doctrine** separating good from evil

Spirituality

- Emotionally oriented, **inward** directed
- **Not authoritarian**, little accountability
- Unifying, **not doctrine** oriented

Koenig, McCullough & Larson, 2001

Some Themes of Spirituality

- Morality
 - The meaning and purpose of life
 - Integration and wholeness
 - Creativity and intuition
 - Altruistic service
 - Mystery
 - Traditions
 - Rituals and myths
 - Transpersonal states of consciousness and experiences
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Some Themes of Spirituality

- Openness, willingness, surrender and receptivity
- Freedom and responsibility
- Wisdom or revealed knowledge
- Prayer, meditation and contemplation
- Understandings about suffering and death
- Relation to ultimate reality
- Relations with nonphysical reality
- The path to enlightenment or salvation
- A sensitive awareness of the earth and non human world

The nature of disasters

- **Man-made and technological**
 - conflict related, complex emergencies
 - long-term resolution with assistance from multilateral humanitarian agencies
- **Natural disasters**
 - catastrophic; early response crucial
 - responsibility of national governments
 - high visibility and response – responders descend on disaster site, often poorly organized

Phases of a Disaster

- ***Disaster pre-warning:***
Make preparations
- ***Disaster event:***
Provide resources and support
- ***Disaster recuperation:***
Community reconstruction,
healing and repair

Galambos, 2005

Nexus between Spirituality and Religion and Times of Disaster

Assume:

- An eco-systemic understanding of the person-in-environment
- A wholistic, bio-psycho-social-spiritual approach to helping
- An understanding of spirituality from two perspectives:
 - Spirituality-as-one-dimension
 - Spirituality-as-essence (Carroll, 1998)

Nexus between Spirituality and Religion and Times of Disaster



What changes when disaster strikes?

- Awareness
- Focus
- Perception
- Experience / Meaning
- Spiritual anchor based on spirituality-as-essence

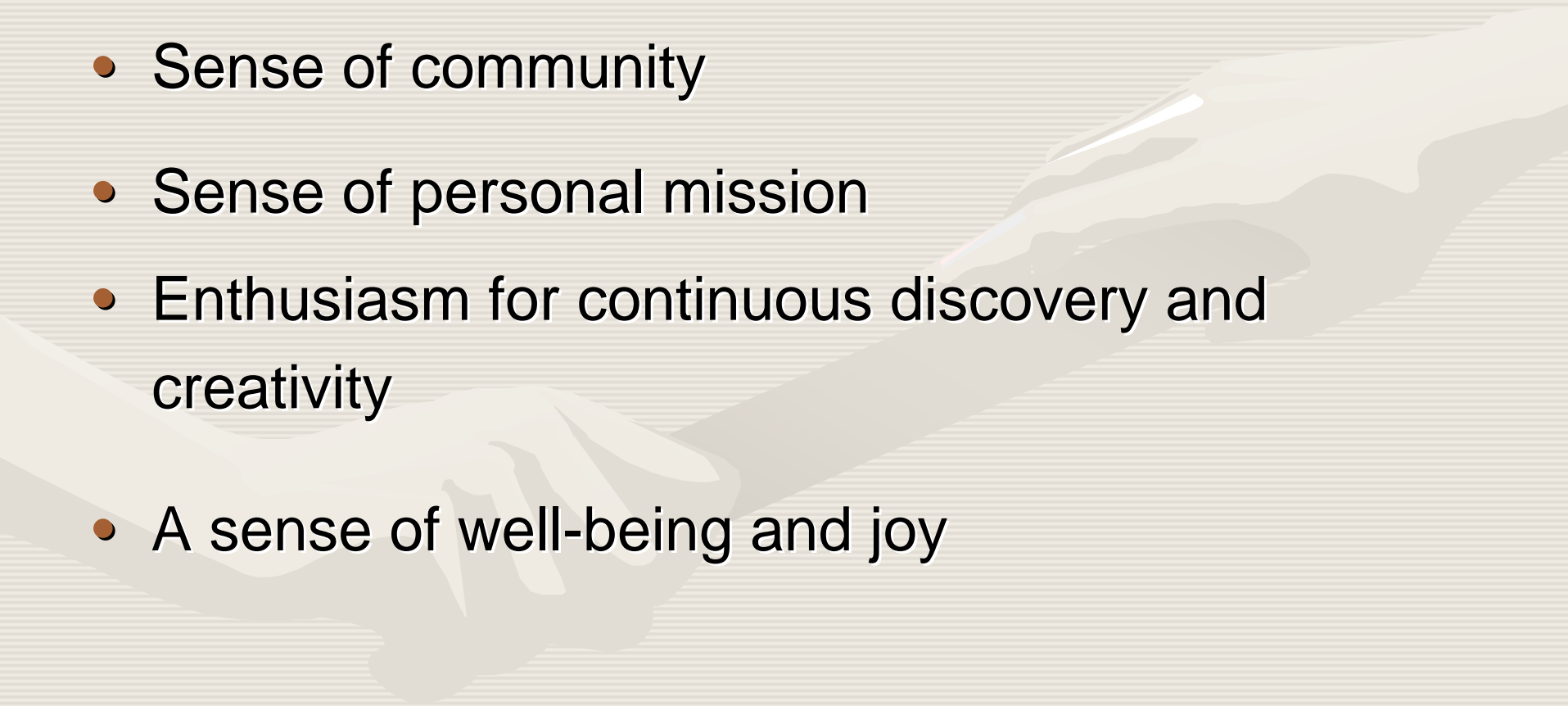
Recognizing spiritual crisis

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and
everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned.

(Y. B. Yeats, January 1919)

Characteristics of Spiritual Health

- Sense of awe and wonder
 - Sense of community
 - Sense of personal mission
 - Enthusiasm for continuous discovery and creativity
 - A sense of well-being and joy
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Similarities between Psychological and Spiritual Care

- Embrace a holistic view of persons
- Concern for emotional well-being
- Build a trusting, therapeutic relationship with persons
- Practice of attentive, active listening as part of the healing process

Adapted: NVOAD, 2006

How to Recognize Psychological Needs

- Flat, expressionless affect or face or voice
- Thinking or talking about hurting oneself or others
- Uncontrollable outbursts of emotion long after trauma
- Persistent nightmares long after trauma
- Problems with relationships
- Articulating violent or self-destructive imagery

NVOAD, 2006.

How to Recognize Spiritual Needs

- Desiring to experience rituals and receive resources from a faith tradition
- Feeling far from previously held beliefs
- Reconsidering core tenets of one's faith
- Questioning justice and meaning
- Asking questions about hope and transcendent power while experiencing despair and hopelessness
- Feeling guilt or shame

Issues of Spirituality and Religion in Times of Disasters

- Existential questions or statements
- Spirituality as a primary coping strategy for many
- There is an increasing need for trained workers attuned to spiritual needs
- Such workers must themselves be spiritually and psychologically grounded.

How Should Social Workers Equip Themselves to Deal with Spiritual and Religious Issues?

Familiar Paradigms

- NASW Code of Ethics
- NASW Standards for Cultural Competence
- Social Work knowledge, attitudes and skills applied to working with individuals, families, groups, and organizations
- Crisis intervention
- Stress and trauma management
- Clinical skills in applied counselling and therapy

How Should Social Workers Equip Themselves?

Do Some Paradigm Shifting

Pre-disaster

- Become grounded in your own spirituality
- Examine your beliefs/cognitions about spirituality, religion and the nexus with disasters
- Engage in interdisciplinary, interfaith conversations
- Seeking training in how to deal with spiritual and religious issues – perspective of “wounded healer”
- Establish your resource network for referrals

How Should Social Workers Equip Themselves?

Disaster Event

- Offer presence and hospitality
- Meet, accept and respect persons exactly as they are
- Do no harm – never evangelize, proselytize or exploit persons in vulnerable need

(NVOAD, 2006)

ABOVE ALL, BUILD HOPE AND SUPPORT

How Should Social Workers Equip Themselves?

Listen to the voices of the suffering:

- Treat us as subjects (not as “objects of charity”) who want to be involved. Do things with us, not for us.
- Do not deny and repress our complaint, our cry. Comfort and help in critical clarification. Encourage liberating confrontation in a critical dialogue.
- Let us see you as fellow-sufferers and partners who are personally involved – not just in your officially assigned roles.

Schuchardt (2005).

How Should Social Workers Equip Themselves?

Consider also:

- A **TRANSPERSONAL** perspective on spirituality
(Canda & Smith, 2001)
- The nature, value, and use of **SELF-DISCLOSURE**
- The role of **INTUITION** and its relationship to spirituality
- Practice **WISDOM**

How Should Social Workers Equip Themselves?

Post-Disaster (Recovery & Recuperation)

Focus on:

- Understanding and helping survivors to cope with the effects of PTSD
- Rebuilding family and group connections
- Community reconstruction
- Healing activities (journalling, letters, memorial services, etc.)

Implications for education and practice

- Encourage students and practitioners to work on their own spiritual empowerment/strength.
- Teach and practice wholistic assessments of clients to include equal attention to the spiritual.
- Greater interdisciplinary collaboration and coordination, including faith-based institutions.

Implications for education and practice

- Continuous reflection on issues related to concepts of human vulnerabilities, humility, resilience, altruism, intuition and wisdom especially in times of disaster.
- Include dealing with issues of spirituality and religion in curriculum on Disaster Preparation and Management.

“Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice;

*This above all: to thine ownself be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.”*

Shakespeare (Hamlet)



Thank You!