

Spirituality, Healing and Science

Mallarika Sarkar (Das)

A growing body of literature suggests a positive connection between spirituality and physical health. Despite the strong research evidence that spirituality and health are positively correlated, spirituality has been regarded within mainstream medicine as largely irrelevant to the work of clinical team. In keeping with the growing scientific interest in spirituality and complementary treatments, this article attempts to explore the interface of science, spirituality and healing. The present article addresses the importance of the inclusion of the spiritual history in order to bring about faster healing of the individuals.

Keywords: spirituality, religion, health, healing, alternative treatments, spiritual counseling, psychotherapy.

Meaning of spirituality

The term 'spirituality' is hard to define. It is derived from the Latin word 'spiritus' which means 'breath'. Benor (2006) has defined 'spiritual' as the 'transpersonal awareness arising spontaneously or through meditative and other practices, beyond ordinary explanations, and to which are attributed an inspiring and guiding meaningfulness, often attributed to a Deity'. Spirituality thus refers to the belief of the people in a power which is greater than the human beings; it is personal in nature as each individual experiences spirituality in their own ways; it leads to the creation of higher consciousness and helps man transcend himself/herself into some other world where he/she can find utmost peace; it provides men with the meaning of life and gives them the strength to find against all anomalous situation. Suffice it is to say that 'spirituality' has been described as 'being' where the deeply personal meets the universal; a sacred realm of human experience. A fundamental part of spirituality is thus the thought that all can bond themselves up with and become united with the power present in the universe and its associated mysteries. It profoundly

affects lives of the humans and allows for the growth of a robust sense, which makes him/her realize that life is an essential part, is a gift that must be maintained properly, looked after and cared for.

Religion and spirituality: the two different realms

Many a times, people consider religion and spirituality to be synonymous, but there is a fundamental difference between the two. It is often by recognizing the difference between religion and spirituality that one can begin to understand what spirituality means to different people. By spirituality we often mean a presence that transcends the individual sense of self. But it should be noted at the very outset that spirituality is not religion. By religion we mean a codified system of beliefs, practices and behaviours that usually take place in a community but not necessarily concerned with the attempt to gain direct experience of the transcendent. The concept of spirituality is inclusive and affects everybody irrespective of the person being in some religion or being an atheist, but unlike spirituality, religion is potentially divisive and adopted only by some. It is always possible that religion may or may not include a sense of the spiritual and spiritual individuals may or may not be religious. As Alan Shelton had put that spirituality is not material in nature therefore, one cannot provide others with proof of being spiritual in nature. It is men themselves who can experience spirituality. It is subjective in nature rather than objective. Therefore, to be spiritual means to rise above the temptations of the body and senses to realize the final truth, and to be religious means to observe rituals and rites.

Exploring the relationship between health and spirituality

Physical wellbeing of an individual is always one of the most desired wishes of any individual. If an individual is physically active he/she can perform his/her social tasks spontaneously and receives appreciation for his work in the society, but once he/she suffers from any kind of pathology or ailment he/she cannot perform his/her tasks properly. Therefore, physical health always occupies the first position in the wish list of any individual. There is enough literature which suggests a positive connection between health and

spirituality. Yet these studies evoke sharp criticism. Perhaps the most frequent criticism is that these studies are metaphysical, radically violating the accepted canons of science, which place them outside the domain of empirical sciences. But however there are evidences that suggest a positive connection between spirituality and health. Neuroscientists have examined how the brain functions during reported spiritual experiences finding that certain neurotransmitters and specific areas of the brain are involved. In keeping with the growing scientific interest in spirituality and complementary and alternative treatments, prayer has garnered particular attention among some behavioral scientists. Thus, the role of spirituality and healing are scientifically proved to be effective tools to promote a healthy lifestyle among the human beings. People nowadays suffer from many kinds of pathologies such as cancer, aids, and many other incurable ailments. A physician too provides people with empathy and respects their spiritual belief when they suffer from any kind of health hazard. Spirituality promotes the concept of meditation, which invariably leads to the wellbeing of the body-mind-spirit of the individual. Health care professionals must be convinced and knowledgeable with the process of spiritual care giving. There are many diseases from which individuals suffer for which biomedicine cannot be the sole solution of providing healing. Religion and spiritual involvement promotes the following things in a health care system:

- a. Affects medical decision-making among the individuals.
- b. Promotes conflicting beliefs in medical care. A few Christian groups believes that instead of taking drugs or receiving medical treatments, it is rather better to pray for healing or perform other religious rituals.

Indeed, the acceptance of the role of spirituality in modern medicine is underway. Evidence suggests that those who follow a spiritual path in their life live several years longer than those who do not follow such path, and that they experience a lower incidence of almost all major diseases. Therefore, the health care professionals must respect the belief system of their patients and must not allow their own biased viewpoints to be imposed upon their patients as that may bring about an adverse result. Therefore, spiritually developed people are proved to have a greater zeal or quality to survive.

The effectiveness of alternative/complementary therapies

Until recently, the Western medical world looked upon allopath as the primary therapy for any illness. But today there is a growing trend of using a variety of alternative therapies. Increasing concern of the people regarding the adverse affects of the biomedicine on the patients while treating them, are making them to choose for an alternative by which they can achieve healing on the basis of their faith with minimal side effects. There are many factors like the socio-cultural and personal (health status, belief, attitude, motivation, etc.), underlying a person's decision to use alternative therapies. One cannot sum up the causes for the growing popularity of the alternative medicine but it can be divided into three main divisions (Pal, 2002) -

- i. Dissatisfaction:** Patients are dissatisfied with conventional treatment because it has been ineffective, has produced adverse side effects, or is seen as impersonal, too technologically oriented, and/or too costly.
- ii. Need for personal control:** Patients seek alternative therapies because they see them as less authoritarian with more personal autonomy and control over their health care decisions.
- iii. Philosophical congruence:** Alternative therapies are attractive because they are seen as more compatible with patients' values, world-view, spiritual/religious philosophy or beliefs regarding the nature and meaning of health and illness.

Therefore, the rise of popularity of the Alternative Medicine in the modern 21st century is enormous. People in spite of being scientific in temper do realize that alternative medicines are also beneficial as they meet their healing purpose as well as their spiritual purpose.

Spiritual counseling and psychotherapy

Psychotherapy and Spirituality are well connected with each other. The psychotherapists of the modern century are taking up the notion of spirituality so that they can connect well with their clients

and promote a better bond of trust. In this way the patients open up and the therapists themselves can treat their clients preserving their religiosity and spirituality.

McCullough (1999) promoted the fact that patients who are spiritual in nature can be treated well if the spiritual course of action to heal them is undertaken. Patients who practice spiritual rituals are believed to talk more about spiritual or religious matters (Rose, Westefeld & Ansley, 2001).

Thus, spirituality provides calmness, serenity as well as tranquility in the minds of the patients thereby affecting their health status. It helps them to heal from within. It creates a strong bond between the patient and the counselor. They feel confident on the methods of counseling and thus the goal of healing the clients is achieved by the counselors.

Spiritual healing in the hospitals

The recognition of the involvement of spirituality in healing has grown significantly over the past several decades. Recent studies have shown a statistically significant relationship between the religious involvement and the better mental health. According to World Health Organization (WHO): 'Patients and physicians have begun to realize the values of elements such as faith, hope and compassion in the healing processes. There are mainly two reasons for the involvement of spirituality as an aid to healing. First, spiritual concern helps us to cope with the challenge with the disease; it often makes us feel better, despite the illness. Second, strengthening our spiritual connection may alter the biological process of disease. As a result of these discoveries, medical schools, often recognized to be the domain of science, now include courses on religion, spirituality and health in their curriculum (Micozzi, 2006). Medical students are beginning to examine their own spirituality as well as that of their clients to learn how to take into consideration a spiritual history, and to communicate better with clients about their spiritual concerns.

Conclusion

Spirituality, healing and science can be looked into as three inter-

related fields even in modern time. Even in this age of science in 21st century, people seek for alternative health systems, as they do not depend entirely on the biomedicine. Spirituality invokes healing within an individual, which helps rapid recuperation of man in the society. Health and spirituality of people in the society are very much connected to each other and the former impacts upon the latter positively. Alongside the advances in science spirituality can help faster healing of individuals.

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