
Standing on Sacred Ground: Integrating Spirituality and Mental Health

Rabbi Elisa Goldberg



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Last session we discussed....

- 1) Definitions of spirituality
- 1) Difference between spirituality and religion
- 1) Research on impact of spirituality on mental health
- 1) Wrote our own definitions of spirituality



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Reflections

- 1) Did you discuss your definition of spirituality with someone else?
- 1) Did you do anything differently with your clients?
- 1) Were you already addressing issues of spirituality in your practice?



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Forms of Spiritual Expression

Behavior Rituals, lifecycles, holidays, charity,
good deeds

Belonging Community, culture, history

Belief Faith, meaning, theology



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Stages of Faith by James Fowler (1981)

- ✧ Based on theories of psychological development for children and adults
- ✧ Faith as a verb - Process of becoming
- ✧ Hierarchical progression through stages
- ✧ Just a framework, not a judgment
 - ✧ Most people don't move through all stages
 - ✧ Adults find stage that provides fullest meaning



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Primal or Undifferentiated (Birth to 2 years)

- ✧ Characterized by an early learning of the safety of their environment
 - Consistent nurture -> development of a sense of trust and safety about the universe and the divine.
 - Negative experience -> develop distrust with the universe and the divine.
- ✧ Transition to the next stage begins with integration of thought and languages which facilitates the use of symbols in speech and play.



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Intuitive – Projective (Pre-school age)

The Stage of Innocence

- Characterized by fluidity of thought patterns
- Reflection of parental faith
- Religion learned through experiences, stories, imagination and powerful images



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Mythic – Literal (Ages 6-11)

The Literalist

- Strong belief in the justice and reciprocity of the universe
- Deities usually understood anthropomorphically
- Interested in rules
- Metaphors and symbolic language often taken literally
- Faith broadens, but still reflective of parental belief
- Love stories and religious imagery



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Synthetic – Conventional (Adolescence)

The Loyalist

- Centrality of community, peer relations, and being part of group
- Characterized by conformity to religious authority
- Conflicts with one's beliefs are ignored because of fear of threat from inconsistencies.



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Individuative – Reflective (Late adolescence, young adult)

The Critic

- Characterized by questions, doubt, struggle, and exploration
- Takes personal responsibility for one's own faith and feelings
- Openness to a new complexity of faith
- Increased awareness of conflicts in one's belief
- Often takes the form of experimentation and a rejection of tradition



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Conjunctive (Adult, over 30)

The Seer

- Integration of previous stages, including resolution of conflict in beliefs
- May be catalyzed by mid-life crisis or life transition
- Able to acknowledge paradox and the inherent mystery at the heart of religious life
- Develops personal understanding of inherited systems
- Open to spiritual growth through other traditions, while still rooted in one's own belief system
- Faith becomes central dimension of life



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Universalizing - Enlightenment

The Saint

- Very few individuals ever reach this level
- Total commitment to the ongoing presence of God
- Complete obedience to God's will
- Treats all people with universal principles of love and justice
- Our prophets – Moses, Ghandi, Dr. King, Rabbi Heschel



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Spiritual and/or Religious Countertransference

- 1) Refers to the full range of conscious and unconscious emotional and spiritual responses induced in a clinician when working with the spiritual issues of their client.
- 1) These responses relate to the clinician's issues and conflicts as well as to the issues and conflicts of the client.
- 2) The clinician's self-awareness and processing of spiritual countertransference is crucial for effective & ethical treatment especially with clients dealing with significant spiritual/moral distress.



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Questions for Reflection on Spiritual Countertransference

Personal Reflection

How have you experienced spirituality as a personal source of strength/resilience and conflict/injury?

Client Impact

What happens when you don't like, believe, or approve of a client's spirituality?

Tools for addressing Countertransference

What practices have been most helpful to you in dealing with your spiritual countertransference?



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What Nourishes Your Spirit?

- ✓ Reading sacred and inspirational literature
- ✓ Practicing forgiveness of yourself and others
- ✓ Listening to or making music
- ✓ Deep reflection, meditation, and prayer
- ✓ Participating in groups that involve trust and cooperation (i.e., sports)
- ✓ Observing the Sabbath: stopping doing and enjoy being.
- ✓ Engaging in dance or other types of spiritual expression
- ✓ Involving yourself in acts of kindness to others
- ✓ Spending time in nature
- ✓ Being creative: painting, knitting, cooking, gardening, carving.....
- ✓ Sharing your spiritual journey with others



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To think about until we meet again....

- ① Add your response to “What Nourishes Your Spirit” to our group google doc - <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-IAYWp2waGRIMYPD4IqFb8h46vFXWP42AbU9XqEJq58/edit?usp=sharing>
- ① Send us tools you are already using to address spirituality – send to Shosh at SLovettGraff@reconstructingjudaism.org
- ② Reflect on what we’ve discussed last two sessions. How does it align with what you already doing in your work? Based on what you learned today, what might you do differently?



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Closing Reflection from Talking to God, by Naomi Levy

Teach us, God, to treasure the differences that distinguish one person from another. Fill us with the strength to overcome senseless fear and hatred.

Open our hearts to the radiance that shines forth from every human soul. Inspire us to shed our apathy; remind us that it is our obligation to be responsible for one another.

Open our ears to the cries of all who are in need of assistance. Give us the courage to combat prejudice and intolerance wherever they exist.

Teach us to see each other through Your eyes, God. In Your eyes all people are equally loved, equally precious.

Bless us all, with compassion, with kindness, and with peace. Amen.



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For more information or questions
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