



EDITORIAL

SPIRITUALITY & MENTAL HEALTH

Mental Health is now the world's top health concern. It has overtaken cancer, in a global Ipsos survey, rising from 27% in 2018 to 45% in 2024 by respondents in 31 countries. The epidemic was there for several decades for experts to see. Anxiety, stress and depression - **the common mental health disorders shot up significantly among all age groups globally.** The phenomenon is universal and the reasons are many. Some of them are excessive reliance on science and technology, industrialization, growth of materialism, migration, loss of faith in religion and spirituality and the degeneration of the mind, moral values, ethics and character.



Since civilization, spirituality has always taught us good things about life-how to find meaning and purpose, how to evolve, how to connect with nature and live in harmony, how to transcend yourself to a higher goal. **The scientific revolution in the 16th and 17th centuries, made people radically shift away from religion and spirituality.** Science prided itself on empirical observation, experimentation, and mathematical calculation of matter whereas spirituality seemed to deal with the immaterial, the mind or the spirit, which seemed mysterious and extraordinary. **Scientific evidence based on research became the new GOD while things like spirituality became esoteric and scorned.**

The conflicting relationship between **spirituality and science evolved** during the twentieth and twenty-first century when **cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and medicine began experimenting with spiritual experiences in scientific laboratories.** Indian sages settled in the West and Buddhist monks subjected themselves to research in Yoga, meditation, prayer, chanting and other spiritual practices. The results were insightful and promising. They observed significant changes in the brain leading to emotional regulation, self-awareness, stress response, attention, and compassion. **Ancient spiritual practices that were looked down upon with skepticism were now accepted with the new found 'evidence -based data'!**

Elizabeth Blackburn, a molecular biologist and a Nobel prize awardee, together with psychologist Elissa Epel **showed how psychology intersects with biology** in a powerful way! **Her path-breaking research proposes that chronic stress can have measurable effects on the body and the biological aging process.** This generated thousands of research studies on the influence of mindfulness, meaning and purpose, positive thinking, exercise, sleep, healthy coping mechanisms, supportive relationships on mental wellbeing and cellular health. **It influenced the areas of health psychology, behavioral medicine, stress research, mind-body medicine, and psychoneuroimmunology.**

Modern spirituality is secular in nature, and the benefits are plenty and measurable. It plays an important role in dealing with life's challenges and especially during chronic stress, illness, grief and life transitions. It reduces anxiety, depression, builds emotional resilience, creates community and belonging, encourages self-reflection and personal growth, promotes compassion and kindness and promotes pro-social behavior and service above self. **It is a valuable resource for mental health.** Hence in psychology we follow the **'Bio-psycho-social-spiritual' model of mental health.**

However, it is important to emphasize that **nobody is immune to mental disorders.** Like any other physical illness, mental illness of a severe nature, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorders, severe depression, obsessive

compulsive disorders and the likes can affect anyone. **In such situations professional psychiatric medical treatment is imperative along with psychological therapy.** Having said that, let me assert that an emotionally mature person with a spiritual resilience **will cope better with the illness, have greater compliance with treatment and recover faster.** Hence, a mature and healthy personality supports recovery and rehabilitation.

In short, spirituality protects you from minor mental disturbances as it helps you cope with challenges and also supports recovery but does not immunize you from mental health disorders. The difference is important to understand.

-Rita Aggarwal
Editor.

CHAITANYA COUNSELLING CENTRE'S COFFEE CLUB DARPAN: CONVERSATIONS ON MUSIC AND MENTAL HEALTH

A fun interactive session was organised under Darpan- the coffee club, a wing of Chaitanya Counselling Centre (a project by the RCN) on 14th May, 2026 at the Rotary Centre, in collaboration with the Ladies Committee of the club. It was facilitated by Rtr Devika Gokhale, psychologist at Chaitanya Counselling Centre. The session explored how music and lyrics subtly influence our emotions, beliefs, relationships, and societal expectations- especially around womanhood, perfection and emotional expression. Through meaningful discussions, and shared musical experiences, participants were encouraged to look beyond the songs and connect with the deeper messages carried within them. The space fostered openness, introspection and connection over conversation, allowing ladies to relate personal experiences with the themes explored. The session created a warm and thoughtful environment where participants could reflect on how music has shaped parts of their identity and emotional world, making it a deeply resonant and enriching experience for everyone present.



INTEGRATING SPIRITUALITY IN CLINICAL PRACTICE

In the corridors of hospitals and the quiet rooms of therapy, we are trained to ask about symptoms, sleep, appetite, and medication. Rarely are we taught to ask: **"What gives your life meaning?"** or **"What sustains you in your darkest moments?"** Yet for millions of patients, the answer to these questions lies squarely in the realm of spirituality — and ignoring it may mean missing one of **the most powerful resources available for healing**. As mental health professionals, acknowledging **this dimension is not a departure from science — it is an expansion of care**.

Before we can integrate spirituality into clinical practice, we must first understand what it is, and more importantly, what it is not. Spirituality is often conflated with religion, but the two are distinct. Religion is an organised, institutionalised system of beliefs, rituals, and practices shared by a community. Spirituality, on the other hand, is deeply personal — it is an individual's search for meaning, purpose, connection, and transcendence. A person can be deeply spiritual without belonging to any religion, and equally, religious practice does not automatically reflect spiritual wellbeing. This foundational clarity is essential for every clinician before attempting to explore this domain with clients.

The World Health Organization defines health as not merely the absence of disease but a state of complete *physical, mental, and social wellbeing*. Many scholars now argue that spiritual well being deserves equal standing in this definition. **Evidence consistently shows that patients with strong spiritual beliefs cope better with chronic illness, recover more meaningfully from trauma, show greater treatment adherence, and report higher quality of life — even in the face of terminal diagnoses**. To dismiss this as anecdotal is to ignore a growing and rigorous body of research that has accumulated over decades across cultures and clinical settings.

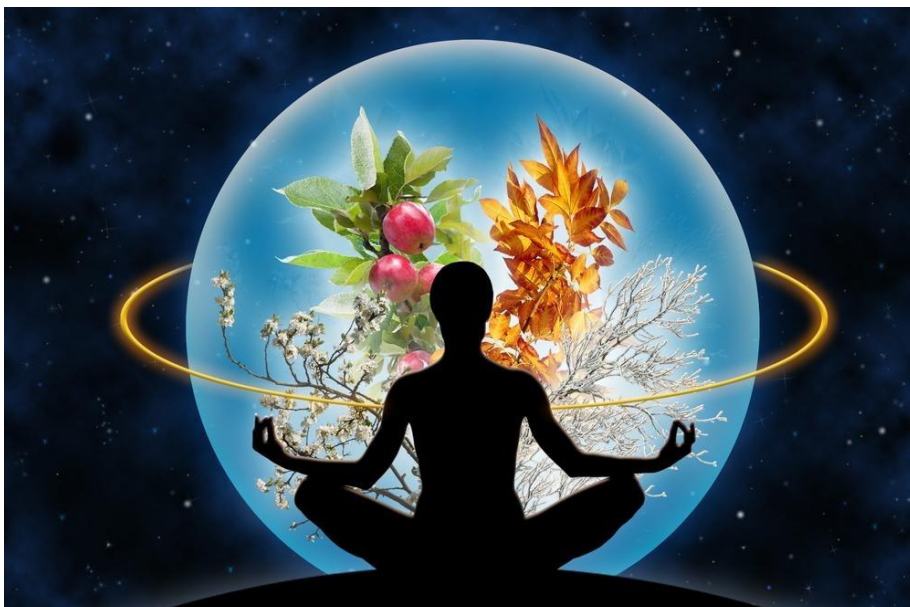
Despite the evidence, many mental health professionals remain reluctant to explore spirituality with clients. Concerns about overstepping boundaries or appearing unscientific are common. But frameworks such as the **biopsychosocial-spiritual model** have evolved to explicitly acknowledge spirituality as a legitimate domain of clinical inquiry. Integrating it does not require a therapist to be religious themselves; it begins with curiosity and competence.

A simple spiritual history, such as **the FICA tool (Faith, Importance, Community, Address in care)**, can be incorporated into routine assessment. Practices such as mindfulness, gratitude journaling, forgiveness work, and meaning-making therapy — all rooted in spiritual wisdom, are already evidence-based tools within our clinical repertoire.

In a country as spiritually diverse as India, cultural humility is paramount. A patient's relationship with prayer, karma, dharma, or devotional practice is not superstition — it is often their most sophisticated coping mechanism. Our role is not to evaluate the theology, but to understand the function it serves. **Spirituality, when integrated thoughtfully, does not compromise clinical rigour. It completes it**

- Dr. Varsha Singh

Assistant Professor Christ University, Bengaluru.



NEUROSCIENCE, MEDITATION AND PRAYER: THE INTERSECTION OF SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY

Prayer and meditation have been a part of every culture across the world since time immemorial. Whether it is Buddhists meditating on their minds, Hindus chanting their mantras, Christians praying, or Muslims practising their forms of dhikr, all humans have always tried hard to find a way to connect with their inner selves and to contemplate their surroundings in peace. Prayer and meditation have always had an aura of spirituality and religion around them, but now scientists, too, are taking into account the biological elements of these two phenomena. **All the scientific data prove that these two domains could provide complementary views of human wellbeing** (Newberg, A. B., 2014).

One person engages in daily prayer with all the rituals. While the second person prefers meditating and contemplating on the thoughts that arise. Both individuals satisfy similar emotional requirements, including regulation, meaning, safety and reduction of distress. From the point of view of neuroscience, certain common brain regions could be involved in both activities based on the results of imaging studies.

Contemplative practices were found to affect the brain in several imaging studies. In particular, **the reduction in the activity of the amygdala, the brain region responsible for fear, and an increase in the activity of the prefrontal cortex, responsible for emotional control, were observed in studies involving functional imaging** (Fox et al., 2016).

Furthermore, other research reveals the ability of the brain to exhibit **neuroplasticity**, that is, the brain's capacity to change or adapt following certain experiences. For instance, **according to (Hölzel et al., 2011), in an extensively referenced study, individuals who participated in an eight-week mindfulness training program showed physical brain changes in brain regions related to learning, memory, emotions, and awareness**. From such research, one would get the impression that the detrimental impacts of stress via mindfulness may not just entail relaxation but even affect our brain's structure.

Having provided counselling over several years and practised reflective practices, I have observed these same trends among individuals suffering from emotional problems. Both practices afford the individual the chance to have a psychological "holiday," thereby enabling him/her to move from being emotionally responsive due to activation of his/her fight-or-flight response into a controlled state.

Science through investigation and research can help us gain knowledge. Experience is individual to each of us, although it's probably best experienced scientifically.

Science cannot tell us the reality behind purposeful, transcendental, spiritual experiences of an individual's life. Someday, we will see science and spirituality combined, and it will teach us how to be at peace and mentally whole as human beings.

-Akansha Hirraani

Founder & Head Psychologist,

Calmfit Counselling (<https://calmfitcounselling.com/>)



THE ART OF IMPERMANENCE: A LIFESPAN OF SPIRITUAL WELLNESS

On a quiet day, we came to know the sad demise of a distant uncle. My grandmother murmured, "Thank God. He is no longer in pain." Her statement took me completely by surprise. "Aren't you sad?" I questioned. "Indeed I am." She smiled and gestured to the kolam at our entrance. Every morning we do, it will quickly get trodden by feet walking over, dispersed by the wind, and washed away by the rain.

Life is very similar. We bring people into our lives, love them, learn from them and walk alongside them for a time. Some will walk with us for longer while others will walk away sooner than we expect. Grieving is a part of human emotion. "Love is real.' However, it isn't possession," she paused.

"We are the trustees of this universe. None of us 'own' our loved ones, health, youth, wealth, nor even our lives, forever. **Suffocation by clinging to the ephemeral will always result in the experiencing of suffering. While love means we hold on, spirituality teaches us when to let go.**

Years later, I understood that all through life, we develop attachments to people, places, ambitions, possessions, and roles. **Psychological well-being relies on two critical human skills.** 1. Our ability to build and hold on to meaningful connections and 2. our ability to let go when it's time for them to change. It is perhaps in the delicate balance between these two skills that our spiritual wellness lies.

A baby instinctively seeks warmth, security and connection. Psychologists have acknowledged the secure attachment to primary caregivers as a significant predictor of psychological well-being later in life. **Perhaps spirituality is, first and foremost, about the feeling of belonging.** As children we expand bonds and connections. A favorite toy, a best friend, a beloved pet. Very soon with time and **with each lost possession, changing classroom, or separation from a dear friend becomes an early lesson about impermanence.**

In adolescence, we move beyond attachments to physical objects toward attachments centred on the development of our identity. One might be bound by an attachment to appearance, friendships, academic achievements, or the need to fit in. So much of adolescence is fraught with emotional turmoil **Spirituality can be a subtle guide to us that the essence of our being is more than any external achievement, appearance or milestone.**

Life in adulthood is often about deeper and more complex attachments to things, such as careers, families, relationships, dreams, belongings, responsibilities. Research evidence suggests that engaging with a sense of **spirituality can enable people to manage disturbances and to cultivate greater meaning, acceptance and resilience.**

In the final stages of life, we are expected to relinquish the attachments that gave us value and identity as our physical capacity dwindles and our roles change. Studies show that **spirituality can increase emotional well-being among elderly people, along with lower levels of loneliness and greater acceptance of their life stages.**

All through life, we hold and, at some point, make peace with our own journey. **Spirituality is a deepened capacity to love, knowing nothing is ours to keep eternally.** Perhaps spirituality itself is in understanding when each one turns out to be a manifestation of love.

Love teaches us to hold; spirituality teaches us when to let go.

-Dr Sripriya Shaji PhD

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THE QUIET LANGUAGE OF HEALING

In hospital rooms across the world, people wait beside machines and medicines. Some hold a doctor's hand. Others hold prayer beads. Both are searching for the same thing: healing. In quiet homes and therapy centres, too, people fight invisible battles every day: anxiety, grief, loneliness, burnout, or illness. While medicine treats the body, **many people also hold on to something less visible, such as hope, faith, or simply the belief that tomorrow may feel lighter than today.**

Modern psychology increasingly recognizes the **importance of hope in mental health.** Hope is not blind optimism or denying pain. It is the belief that healing or change is still possible, even during difficult moments. For many people, that belief becomes the strength to keep going and seek support.

Faith can also offer emotional grounding during difficult times. For some, it is prayer or trust in God. For others, it is trust in therapy, time, loved ones, or the body's ability to recover. Practices such as prayer, meditation, or silence can calm the nervous system and help people feel less overwhelmed.

Research on the placebo effect suggests that belief can influence healing in surprising ways. Patients sometimes experience real physical improvement simply because they trust that they are receiving care. While this does not mean faith alone cures illness, it highlights how deeply connected the mind and body are.

Ideas such as **Polyvagal Theory** also explore this connection in a way many people can relate to in everyday life. Most people have experienced how stress, fear, or emotional exhaustion can affect the body; causing headaches, sleeplessness, fatigue, or a racing heartbeat. In the same way, feelings of safety, comfort, and emotional support can help the body relax. Polyvagal Theory suggests that the nervous system responds strongly to these feelings of trust and connection. **When people feel calm, supported by loved ones, spiritually grounded, or simply reassured that they are not alone, the body may slowly shift out of survival mode and become more capable of rest, emotional balance, and recovery.**

This is closely linked to **interoception**, i.e. the awareness of internal body sensations such as breathing, heartbeat, or emotional discomfort. Studies suggest that people who learn to notice and regulate these inner signals often experience lower anxiety and greater emotional balance. Practices like meditation, prayer, and mindful breathing can help people reconnect with themselves and listen to the body with greater attention and compassion.

Healing may not always begin with removing pain, but with listening to the body, the mind, and the quiet belief that recovery is possible. Science treats illness, while hope and faith help people endure the journey of healing.

**-Anjali Anil Salani
Therapist**

SPIRITUALITY AND POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Two concepts that emerge as powerful resources for personal growth are positive psychology and spirituality. While they may seem like different approaches, they often meet at a common destination- helping people live a meaningful and fulfilling life.

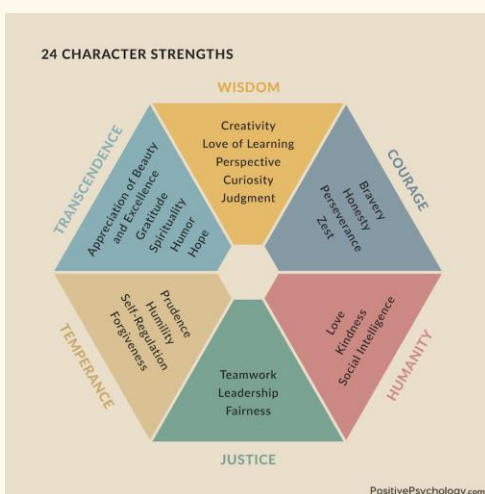
Spirituality has been an age-old concept since decades. **Positive psychology** is a newer branch in psychology, pioneered by **Martin Seligman**. While other branches in psychology may focus on mental health illnesses and what caused them, positive psychology focuses on the strengths and resources individuals have. In positive psychology, spirituality is seen as a personal journey finding meaning, purpose and connection to something greater than oneself. **It is considered a key character strength out of the 24 character strengths given by Seligman across six core virtues.**

The six core virtues given by Seligman are- Wisdom, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance and Transcendence. He puts **Spirituality under Transcendence**, which includes the **capacity to look beyond one's own ego and personal concerns to connect with a larger purpose, others or the universe.** Other character strengths included under Transcendence are- Appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, Humor and Hope.

During difficult times, spirituality can offer comfort and perspective, while positive psychology provides evidence-based strategies to build resilience and emotional well-being. The journey toward well-being is deeply personal, but positive psychology and spirituality remind us that growth is not only about becoming better- it is also about becoming more connected and aware.

-Devika Gokhale

Counselling Psychologist, Nagpur



ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN COPING WITH STRESS, ANXIETY, DEPRESSION AND HEALTH CONDITIONS

People have viewed spirituality as a fundamental aspect of human existence. This research aims to elucidate the concept of spirituality and its correlation with mental health. An increasing number of individuals are contemplating the role of spirituality in enhancing mental health and societal well-being in the future. Spiritual and religious beliefs significantly impact mental and physical health.

In recent times I lost my mentor, my father and it was very difficult for me to cope up with all going on around me. Yes emotionally I was broke and weak but connecting spiritually with my deity did help me in overcoming my irreparable loss.

Spirituality serves as a vital coping mechanism for mental and physical well-being by providing meaning, hope, and community. It utilizes practices like meditation, prayer, and mindfulness to calm the nervous system, lower the risk of mood disorders, and help individuals endure chronic illness or trauma

Common Spiritual Coping Strategies-

- Mindfulness & Contemplation:** Fosters inner peace and emotional regulation.
- Prayer & Rituals:** Offers emotional release and serves as an anchor during stressful situations.
- Community & Connection:** Engagement in spiritual or religious groups provides robust social support, which decreases loneliness and the risk of suicidal ideation.
- Gratitude & Forgiveness:** Shifts cognitive focus from negative stressors to positive, empowering emotions.

A Balanced Approach- While spirituality is an immense protective factor, it can also present conflicts if a person experiences unmet spiritual needs, guilt, or religious trauma. Experts recommend using spirituality in tandem with evidence-based medicine and psychotherapy for optimal results.

-Ar. Nivedita Singh



THE MEANING OF RELIGION VS SPIRITUALITY

Do you remember "The Jumbo Drawing & Coloring" books many of us used as children? Some pages contained numbered dots scattered across the sheet, and as we connected 1...2...3..., a complete image slowly appeared. The process was guided, structured, and predictable because the picture already existed—we simply followed the instructions to reveal it.

Now compare this to an elementary drawing class where the teacher asked you to "draw whatever you want." There were no numbered dots, no fixed outcome, and no single correct answer. The drawing came from imagination, emotions, and personal expression.

This reflects the difference between religion and spirituality. **Religion often follows a defined set of beliefs, rituals, and guidelines**, much like connecting dots in a sequence to form a pre-designed image. **Spirituality, on the other hand, encourages individuals to understand themselves through personal experience, reflection, and inner awareness.**

Religion, an organized system of beliefs and practices followed by a community, through prayers, festivals, sacred texts, and rituals, creates a sense of belonging and stability. **For centuries, religions have helped shape cultures and societies by teaching values such as compassion, forgiveness, gratitude, and service toward others.**

Spirituality, however, focuses more on the inner journey of an individual. It does not emphasize external rituals as much as self-awareness, peace, and connection with oneself or beyond. Practices such as meditation, mindfulness, yoga, and reflection are often associated with spirituality because they help individuals understand their emotions and develop inner calm.

In modern society, the terms "religion" and "spirituality" are frequently used interchangeably, yet they represent different ways of seeking meaning and fulfillment. Both attempt to answer some of humanity's deepest questions:

- Who am I and why do I exist?
- What gives life meaning?
- How should I live?

While they approach these questions differently, both help people cope emotionally and morally with life's challenges.

Today's fast-moving world often leaves people feeling stressed, anxious, and disconnected. **Religion continues to unite communities and preserve cultural values, while spirituality has become increasingly important for mental and emotional well-being.** Many people seek moments of silence, mindfulness, and self-reflection to reconnect with themselves amid the pressures of contemporary life.

Although religion and spirituality are different, they are not necessarily opposites. Religion provides structure and collective wisdom, while spirituality offers personal meaning and inner connection. **Ultimately, both represent humanity's timeless search for peace, purpose, and a deeper understanding of life.**

-Kruti Rathi Psychologist