

## *Spirituality and Aging*

### Defining Generic Key Terms and Concepts

- **Differences between religion and spirituality:** Scientists participating in a conference on spirituality and health concluded that both religion and spirituality have a “sacred core” that involves “feelings, thought, experiences, and behaviours that arise from the search for the sacred”. (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001). Conference participants distinguished religion from spirituality by two criteria: People use religion for non sacred goals such as socialization, and religion employs rituals or prescribed behaviours. Religion is organized, formal, prescriptive, and community related. Spirituality is more personal and not prescriptive. Spirituality is felt. Religion is taught. Religions include doctrines. Spirituality is emotional.

### Characteristics Distinguishing Religion and Spirituality

Religion:	Spirituality:
Community focused	Individualistic
Observable, measurable, objective	Less visible and measurable, subjective
Formal, orthodox, organized	Less formal, less orthodox, less sympathetic
Behaviour oriented, outward practices	Emotion oriented, inward directed
Authoritarian in terms of behaviour	Not authoritarian, little accountability
doctrine separating good from evil	unifying, not doctrine oriented

- **Theory of Gerotranscendence:** Lars Tornstam offers this theory that argues for a distinctive path toward age-connected spirituality. He postulates that seniors are predisposed to consider the spiritual dimension, which includes a preoccupation with the interconnection among generations, the relation between life and death, and the mystery of life (1999)
- **Secondary functions of faith communities:** As an important secondary function, faith communities fulfill some social needs of their members. Generally, churches and synagogues do not see themselves as social agencies but rather as caring communities that provide a mixture of programs and services that address the spiritual, social, and survival needs of their members and others in the broader community (Tobin, Ellor, & Anderson-Ray, 1986).

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- **Characteristics of a life review:** In life reviews, participants hold the prism of their lives into the light of reflection. The process is often a spiritual one. They look at their past with fresh eyes and from a different angle. Reviewers savour their experiences, forgive themselves and others, and review what life has taught them. Reviewers revisit opportunities, both lost and embraced. Life reviews can be formal or informal, overt or silent. Reminiscence is about what *really* happened in a senior's life, not what could have happened. Reviewers face reality, sometimes for the first time. A review of choices made at critical junctures can call forth regret, disappointment or guilt. Life reviews touch the mysteries of life. Seniors who successfully complete life reviews may feel their whole life makes sense. Such seniors may feel surrounded by a peaceful aura or self satisfaction, fused with completion.

#### Additional Thought-Provoking Questions—

Several studies of religion, health and longevity have found that:

1. Both private spiritual activities and religious attendance are strongly associated with longevity and better health.
2. In another study, within a specific time frame, people who attend religious services weekly were less likely to die than infrequent attendees.
3. People who attended frequently were also more likely to make healthier choices such as quitting smoking, increasing exercising, and expanding social contacts.
4. Another study found that people with significant impairment in mobility were, in fact, more likely to be frequent attendees of religious services.
5. There is a positive correlation between spirituality and religion to mental health. Fundamental to this relationship is religion's role in helping seniors cope with life events.

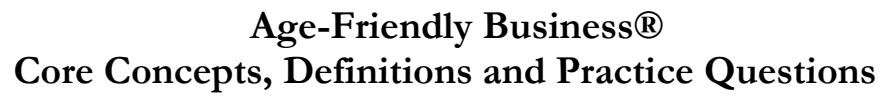
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#### Review Questions

1. Which term refers to, “the basic value around which all other values are focused, the central philosophy of life, whether religious, antireligious, or nonreligious – which guides a person’s conduct, the supernatural and nonmaterial dimensions of human nature” (Moberg, 1971)?
  - A. Religiosity
  - B. Spirituality
  - C. Orthodoxy
  - D. Reminiscence
2. Which of the following is NOT a characteristic that seniors often exhibit as they develop spiritually?
  - A. Finding meaning and purpose in life
  - B. Giving themselves permission to speak their truth even when it is unpopular
  - C. Becoming less attentive and more impatient
  - D. Placing an emphatic focus on connecting with others
3. Which statement about a life review is **FALSE**?
  - A. It allows seniors to forgive themselves and others
  - B. Reviewers focus on lessons and how mistakes often lead to new understanding about themselves and others
  - C. Reviewers revisit opportunities, both lost and embraced
  - D. It is always conducted in a formal manner



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#### Answer Guide to Review Questions:

Spirituality and Aging:

1. b
2. c
3. d