

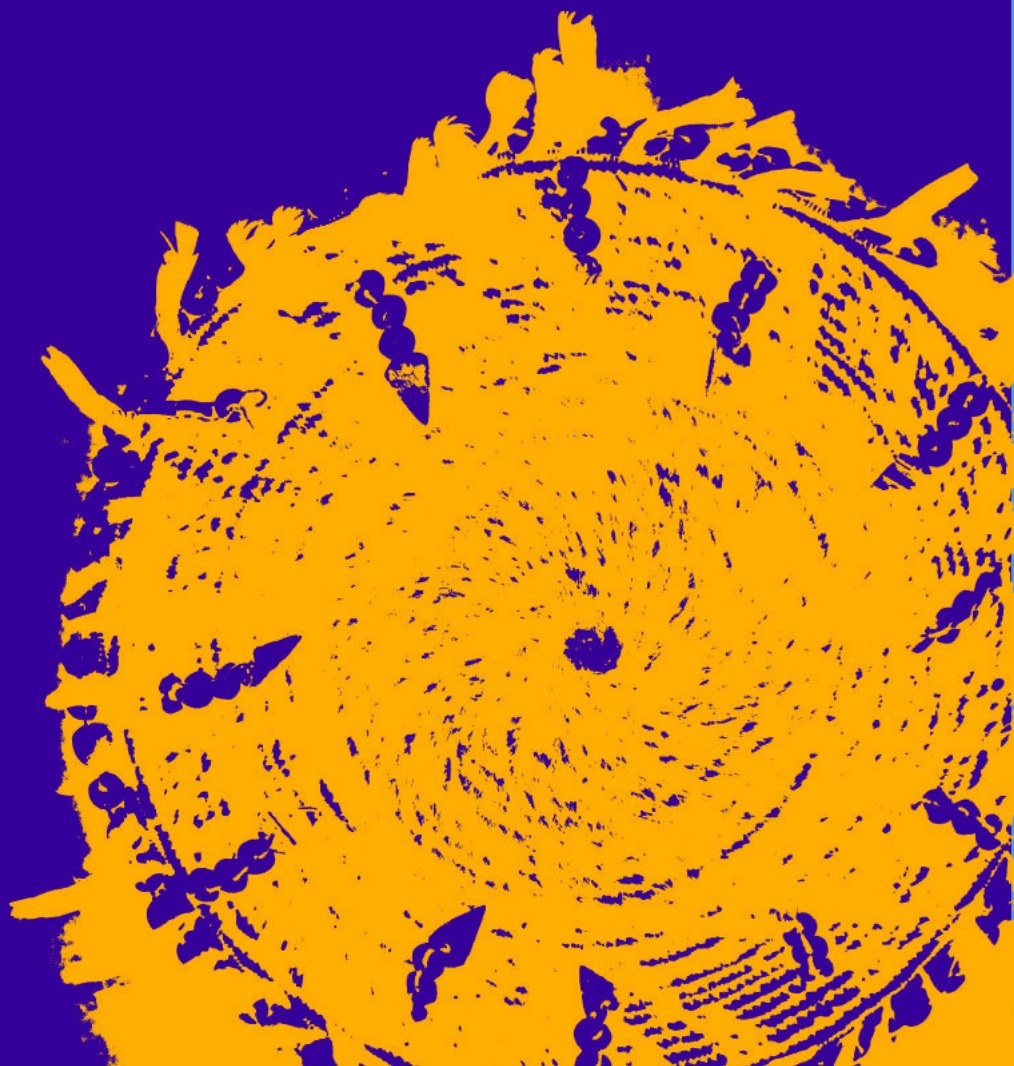
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Spiritual Well-Being in Healthcare

Some preliminary observations

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Sacred
Design Lab



Introduction

This paper argues for the consideration of spiritual well-being in healthcare settings as a contributor to physical and mental health. We define spiritual well-being across three key domains and propose that deficiencies in these areas negatively impact patient outcomes. We go on to suggest some of the reasons why spiritual well-being has not been more robustly explored as a component of overall health, and offer prompts to open a broader conversation about this topic within the healthcare sector. Finally, we share a brief case study from our own attempt to create a tool that could help healthcare professionals to assess and support spiritual well-being among those they serve.

Our goal with this short piece is to lay a foundation for further research and discussion among healthcare professionals across fields, as to what it might look like to validate and address spiritual health as an element of overall care.

1. A Preliminary Definition

Based on our research at Harvard Divinity School,¹ and following an 18-month investigation supported by Well Being Trust through investment from Providence Health, we propose the following working definition of spiritual well-being:

Spiritual well-being is a dynamic state of soul health, cultivated through ongoing experiences of belonging, becoming, and beyond.

- *Belonging*: Knowing and being known; loving and being loved²
- *Becoming*: Growing into the people we are called to be
- *Beyond*: Experiencing ourselves as part of something more

We have found that some will find framing around the soul attractive and respond to it intuitively. Others are eager for evidence. Still others are put off by a definition that rests on the notion of a spiritual essence. Like “spiritual,” the word “soul” is apt to be fraught in the (broadly) secular context of healthcare.

At Sacred Design Lab, we have tracked language, wisdom, and belief about the soul across time and traditions. Our intent is not to argue for one perspective or another, but simply to contend that “soul” is the best word we have found to evoke what we mean, namely, the

¹ See *How We Gather*, *Something More*, and *Care of Souls*. <https://sacred.design/insights>.

² This phrase is adapted from the work of Killian Noe, founder of [Recovery Café Network](https://recoverycafe.org).

dimension of human experience that recognizes and responds to meaning, connection, and purpose.

2. The Need

The unmet need for belonging, becoming, and beyond is impacting health outcomes across America.

Belonging

It has now been widely documented that loneliness and social isolation have devastating impacts on health, including an increased risk for early mortality, dementia, heart disease, and stroke, as well as higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide.³

Meanwhile, America is experiencing a protracted crisis of isolation, greatly exacerbated by social distancing due to COVID-19.⁴ Surgeon General Vivek Murthy describes it as a “loneliness epidemic.”⁵ Yet social well-being strategies, while vital, are not enough to get at the full experience of belonging, which has dimensions that include connection to authentic self, continuity of relationships over time, claiming and being claimed by community, strong ties to heritage, lineage and place, a sense of peoplehood, and the feeling of being part of a larger story.

Becoming

This dimension of spiritual well-being touches on purpose and our ability to pursue it. Growing into the people we are called to be requires listening for where we are needed, addressing what stands in the way of our personal and collective growth, and cultivating each other’s commitment to tending our inner gifts, sharing them in community, and receiving the gifts of others.

³ See Julianne Holt-Lunstad et al in 2015: [Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for mortality: a meta-analytic review](#), this 2019 *Scientific American* article on [the detrimental impact of loneliness on national health](#), and this 2020 report from the CDC that loneliness and social isolation are linked to serious health conditions and [health care system interventions are key](#).

⁴ See this 2019 [report on the Loneliness Epidemic](#) from the US Department of Health and Human Services and this 2020 article on the [Double Pandemic of Social Isolation and COVID-19](#) in Health Affairs.

⁵ [Former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy on the Loneliness Epidemic in Health](#), AARP, 2020.

A recent study showed that over the period from 2006 to 2010, people with a stronger life purpose were less likely to die of any cause, and even less likely to die of heart, circulatory, and blood conditions.⁶ (When comparing individuals in the lowest life purpose group with individuals in the highest group, the hazard ratio was 3.15; 95% CI, 2.07-4.77; $P < .001$ for trend.)⁷ Another meta-analysis found that having purpose in life can lower your mortality risk by about 17 percent.⁸

Over the last three generations, America has become more stressed, depressed, and purposeless. Generation Z is the most stressed out group in America, according to the American Psychological Association's 2020 report.⁹ Three-quarters said they felt so tired in the past two weeks that they "sat around and did nothing." Suicide is Gen Z's second-leading cause of death, which is worse than the rates for Millennials at that age.¹⁰ But mental health strategies alone have so far proven insufficient to combat this growing trend.

Beyond

Experiencing ourselves as part of something more contributes to overall meaning in life: to feel connected to--and live for--something beyond ourselves. From our research into existing well-being scales (described in Part IV), it appears that this dimension of well-being has been studied the least, and yet connection to the beyond, whether that is through the natural world, the transcendent, or other experiences that elicit a feeling of being fully big and fully small, is a vital component of overall health. Research shows that people who believe their existence has meaning have lower levels of cortisol and more favorable gene expression related to inflammation.¹¹ The awe we feel when touched by beauty has also been linked with lower levels of cytokines, associated with type-2 diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, Alzheimer's disease, and clinical depression.¹² And hope has been linked to reduced risk of all cause-mortality, fewer chronic conditions, lower risk of cancer, and lower psychological distress.¹³

⁶ From [What's Your Sense of Purpose](#) in American Heart Association News, 2019.

⁷ [Association Between Life Purpose and Mortality Among US Adults Older Than 50 Years](#) by Aliya Alimujiang, MPH; Ashley Wiensch, MPH; Jonathan Boss, MS; et al, 2019.

⁸ [Purpose in Life and Its Relationship to All-Cause Mortality and Cardiovascular Events: A Meta-Analysis](#) by Randy Cohen, MD, MS, Chirag Bavishi, MD, MPH, and Alan Rozanski, MD, 2020.

⁹ [Gen Z Is the Most Stressed Out Group in America, Poll Finds](#), Newsweek, 2020.

¹⁰ [Suicide is Gen Z's second-leading cause of death, and it's a worse epidemic than anything millennials faced at that age](#), Business Insider, 2019.

¹¹ [A functional genomic perspective on human well-being](#) by Barbara L. Fredrickson, Karen M. Grewen, Kimberly A. Coffey, Sara B. Algoe, Ann M. Firestone, Jesusa M. G. Arevalo, Jeffrey Ma, and Steven W. Cole, 2013.

¹² [Positive affect and markers of inflammation: Discrete positive emotions predict lower levels of inflammatory cytokines](#) by J. E. Stellar, N. John-Henderson, C. L. Anderson, A. M. Gordon, G. D. McNeil, and D. Keltner, 2015.

¹³ [The role of Hope in subsequent health and well-being for older adults: An outcome-wide longitudinal approach](#) by Katelyn N.G. Long, Eric S. Kim, Ying Chen, Matthew F. Wilson, Everett L. Worthington Jr, and Tyler J. VanderWeele, 2020.

Yet hope, wonder, and meaning are under threat. Despair has been increasing in the United States for decades, resulting in declines in health, life expectancy, and well-being across demographics.¹⁴ “Deaths of despair”—suicide, drug and alcohol poisoning, and alcoholic liver disease—present a core public health problem nationwide.

Connection, purpose, and meaning all contribute to physical and overall health. And yet, our healthcare systems are not broadly set up to support these dimensions of well-being. As a result, the healthcare sector is overburdened by treating the physical symptoms of our disconnection from ourselves, each other, and something more.

3. Why Not Spiritual Well-Being?

At Sacred Design Lab, we have spent six years supporting innovative efforts to combat the crisis of spiritual disconnection in America, in which people are cut off from fulfilling experiences of belonging, becoming and beyond. As we have tracked the health impacts of this crisis, we have become increasingly convinced that healthcare systems have a vital role to play in contributing to spiritual well-being. Yet there is an imbalance in the healthcare field: research, discourse, and strategies are weighted towards physical, mental, and, to some extent, social well-being, while little is being done to support the spiritual well-being of the nation.

Why is this? And what might be done about it?

Religious Roots

First, it is worth noting that many, if not most, healthcare systems have religious roots, some of which remain in name only, and others in mission as well. For the most part, however, healthcare has followed a similar trajectory to education in secularizing over time. Meanwhile, the religious landscape in the United States has undergone dramatic changes over the last 50 years, with fewer and fewer Americans identifying with a religious tradition every generation.¹⁵ One result of the disaffiliation trend is greater pressure on secular institutions to fulfill what might have once been deemed “religious” roles, such as addressing the very soul needs named in this paper. As Americans participate less and less in organized religion, they carry more and more unmet need for the kinds of services religion once provided: everything from intergenerational community to space and time to reflect on their place in the universe.

¹⁴ [America's Declining Well-Being, Health, and Life Expectancy: Not Just a White Problem](#) by Peter A. Muennig, MD, MPH, Megan Reynolds, PhD, David S. Fink, MPH, Zafar Zafari, PhD, and Arline T. Geronimus, ScD, 2018.

¹⁵ [In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace: An update on America's changing religious landscape](#), Pew Research Center, 2019.

Beyond employing chaplains and other pastoral caregivers, who as of 2015 were still in only 70% of US hospitals, should healthcare systems play a more substantial part in responding to this unmet need?¹⁶ Might it be, in some way, a return to their roots?

Risks and Resistance

A growing number of caregivers say yes.¹⁷ But despite the potential benefits, there are many ready points of resistance to integrating spiritual well-being more fully into healthcare settings. For instance:

- “Spirituality is a private matter. It would be inappropriate to discuss with patients.”
- “Religious identity, belief, and practice are legally protected and should not be factors in healthcare.”
- “Chaplains already do this. We’re covered.”
- “This mostly pertains to hospice and palliative care, which we provide.”
- “Any intervention would need to be empirically proven first.”
- “Aren’t we throwing open the door to proselytizing?”
- “Spiritual well-being is important but it’s not our job.”

All of these and more are valid concerns that would need to be explored in any conversation about the prospect of taking spiritual well-being seriously as a component of overall health, and strategies, systems, and policies would need to be developed to address these concerns on an ongoing basis.

And yet, if we allow these concerns to be the last word, we risk losing out on a vital force for health—not to mention cost savings in healthcare.¹⁸ Belonging, becoming, and beyond, when activated in the human spirit, act as an innate engine for healing that can have transformative outcomes. We do not purport to understand how this works scientifically, but we also cannot deny that something real seems to be happening when people tap into this tremendous source of healing within themselves.

Methodology

Finally, there is the problem of methodology. Even if the questions above were satisfactorily addressed, how would we begin to support spiritual well-being in healthcare settings?

¹⁶ [Is There a Chaplain in the House? Hospitals Integrate Spiritual Care](#), Association of American Medical Colleges, 2017.

¹⁷ Read about a series of caregiver convenings on this topic in [Improving the spiritual dimension of whole person care: reaching national and international consensus](#) by Christina M Puchalski, Robert Vitillo, Sharon K Hull, and Nancy Reller, 2014.

¹⁸ See one take on cost-saving potentials in [Valuing the Spiritual](#) by Eric J. Hall and Richard A. Powell, 2021.

We propose to start by looking outside of the current paradigm. The spiritual dimensions of well-being require interventions that derive from beyond the physical, mental, or even social health professions. We encourage a turn toward the spiritual resources and practices embedded within the world's religious and wisdom traditions to address these needs.

This is not to suggest adopting such interventions wholesale. While religious systems are our most significant distribution network for spiritual well-being strategies, they are also so diversified that their component parts cannot be accessed or understood outside of context. Therefore, spiritual well-being work will require a host of trustworthy interlocutors to translate and reimagine spiritual resources and practices from within wisdom traditions into healthcare settings, to serve new people in new ways.

Our team at Sacred Design Lab made a preliminary effort to do just that. Below is a brief case study to illustrate some of what we learned.

4. Case Study: Assessing Spiritual Well-Being

As a first step toward approaching spiritual well-being in healthcare, we see an opportunity to introduce spiritual well-being assessments into caregiving scenarios and to resource providers with interventions to recommend based on patient responses. In 2020, thanks to a grant from Well Being Trust, Sacred Design Lab conducted a pilot of a spiritual well-being assessment toward this end.

Our research purpose was two-fold:

1. Can we create a questionnaire that will accurately assess spiritual health in the three areas of belonging, becoming, and beyond, and resource participants to make meaningful personal progress in each of these areas?
2. Can we create a questionnaire that gives participants an experience of spiritual well-being while taking it?

In designing our instrument, we researched more than 90 existing well-being scales used in academic research, and we closely reviewed 15 of the most widely used and tested scales that seemed most related to the concepts of belonging, becoming, and beyond. We also sought inspiration from a smaller set of instruments designed less for scientific research and more to benefit practitioners and participants, such as the Enneagram, StrengthsFinder, and the Intercultural Development Inventory. Based on insights from this research—including our sense of what was missing—we then developed our own questionnaire with the following principles and aims:

- We aim for our items to be heartening, resonant, and personally significant. We aim for the items to inspire and to prompt reflection, not just to collect information.

- We aim to create a tool that goes in-depth on spiritual well-being across a diversity of participants and groups. We ambitiously aim for the tool to work as well for deeply religious people as it does for atheists, non-theists, and 'nones'.
- We aim to create a tool that provides useful, practical, non-threatening feedback. More than measuring performance, the purpose is to prompt reflection and provide insights that people can carry forward into their lives.

Over 1,000 respondents took our assessment in the latter months of 2020. It had 80 questions that covered the three areas of belonging, becoming, and beyond, as well as overall spiritual well-being. After taking it, participants were given a response based on their score, ranging from “spiritually struggling” to “spiritually flourishing.” This was accompanied by a resource entitled Pathways to Spiritual Well Being, with recommended resources and practices--translated from religious and wisdom traditions--for enhancing spiritual well-being at any stage.¹⁹

Our most valuable feedback on the assessment came from focus groups of those who had taken it. Responses were overwhelmingly positive and affirmed that the experience was meaningful and productive. A reflective sample of comments include:

- *“I remember calling my best friend while I was taking it, sharing with her that it felt like a way to assess where I am in my spiritual growth.”*
- *“I was impressed at the breadth and depth of it. The way it affirmed how multilayered spiritual well-being is or might be, and all the different ways into spiritual well-being. I thought it was a rather elegant way to capture different dimensions.”*
- *“I felt mostly affirmed, good, like I’m on the right track. I got “spiritually journeying”...I thought I might be earlier. I had the sense that if I continue on this track, it will only help my mental health. I feel like my spirituality and mental health are intertwined.”*

And in response to the Pathways to Spiritual Well Being document:

- *“The tip sheet was very helpful. A spiritual rubric. Where I’m at today might not be where I’m at in a week. If I’m spiritually struggling now, that doesn’t mean I will always be. It was helpful to see the suggestion of stages, where you can go or where you might come from, broken down in categories.”*
- *“I got the pdf and thought it was really helpful. A ton of great exercises, quite dense. I did appreciate that things were actionable - there were calls to action as opposed to just a calibration of “you’re here, now what.”*

¹⁹ See [Pathways to Spiritual Well Being](#) by Sacred Design Lab, which is also enclosed in the Appendix.

- *“I loved it. Like 50 different actions! You could dedicate a week to each! I’m a very methodical type person, I might actually do them all. Even to look back at spiritually struggling and ask, have I really done this? Do I have a strong foundation? Then I want to do the 201 level of reflection - go beyond the prompts themselves to doing the layers of reflection they suggest.”*

While our effort was small and preliminary, it pointed toward openings for subsequent research. Additional questions we are eager for others to explore include:

1. Which items contribute the most, and least, to spiritual well-being? (Or which items feel most important to people?)
2. How does this measure correlate with other existing measures? (Comparing spiritual well-being and other outcomes).
3. What are the instrument’s psychometric properties? (Validity, reliability, etc.).
4. Does the instrument prove useful in different political, religious, racial and geographic environments? (We aimed to create a tool that explored spiritual well-being across a diversity of identities, but our data set was limited.)
5. To what extent does the survey, or the Pathways document, stay with respondents in the following days, weeks and months? Can we measure impact over time?
6. What would be included in a short form of the instrument, reducing it to its most essential items so that it can be used more readily?

While providers would likely consider an 80-question instrument as too cumbersome for diagnostic use in healthcare settings, we believe this barrier can be overcome through further experimentation. First, there is great potential for patients to use some or all of the questions in combination with the Pathways to Spiritual Wellbeing document. Whether offered for personal or small group reflection, the questions offer stimulating prompts for exploration, conversation, and meaning-making. For more diagnostic use, we suggest replicating the questions as a subset (for example, questions on belonging or beyond), or as single reflection questions.²⁰ Possible standalone questions (framed as statements on a five-point scale), which had the highest correlation to overall score, include:

- *My life as a whole has meaning*
- *I can find strength and comfort, even in the midst of difficulties*
- *I feel part of a larger story*
- *In the midst of everyday tasks, I can feel connected to something bigger than myself*

²⁰ See Appendix for a full list of assessment questions.

- *I have reliable ways to move from hurt to healing*
- *I generally feel a sense of inner peace*
- *I get to deepen my most important practices and commitments with others who share them*
- *I am connected to that which is beyond myself*
- *In my soul, all is well*

Depending on patient scores, providers could prescribe certain interventions and then reassess at regular intervals to track progress. Initial development of such interventions would require the kind of methodological work described in Section 3: Namely, bringing together leading practitioners in the fields of pastoral care, community leadership, chaplaincy, and other spiritual and religious professions to translate and reimagine spiritual resources and practices from within wisdom traditions into healthcare settings.

Beyond this pilot, we are eager to see what further instruments and interventions could be created and integrated into the doctor-patient relationship.²¹

5. Conclusion

How might healthcare systems take steps toward addressing the root causes of loneliness and despair, as a preventative measure to support greater physical health, longevity, and flourishing among Americans? And what stands in the way?

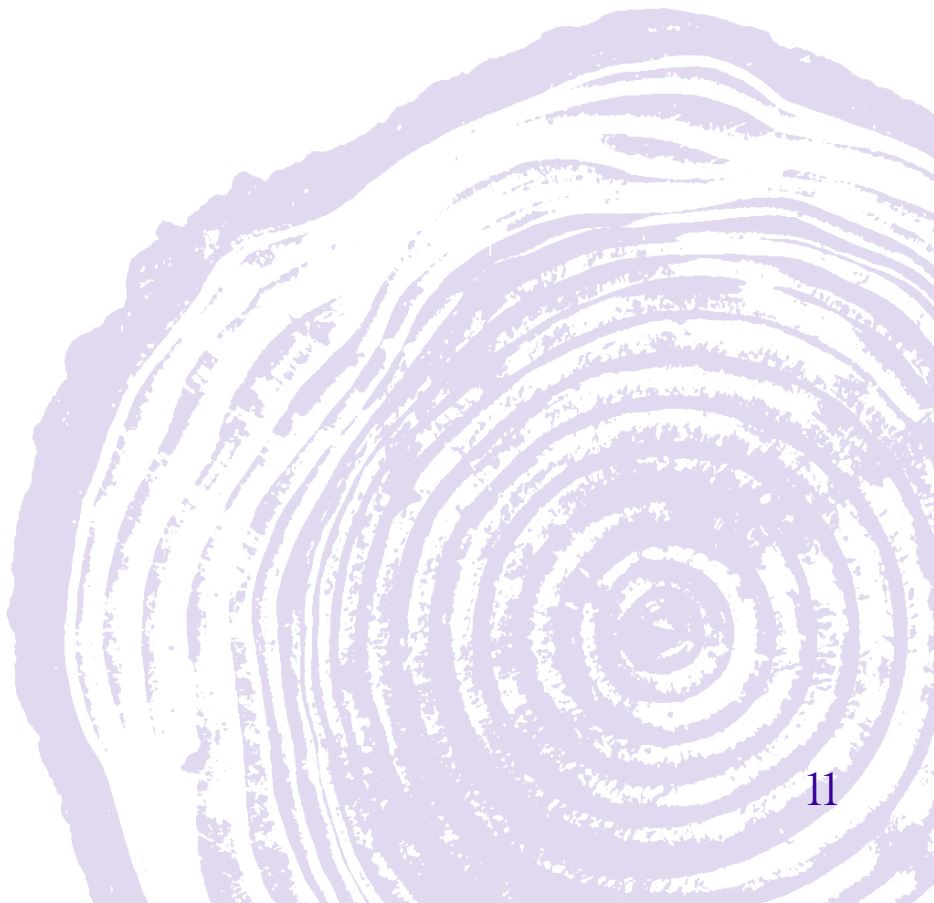
We hope this short paper has stimulated new imagination toward addressing these questions. As our purpose is ultimately to open a broader conversation about spiritual well-being within the healthcare industry, here are a few prompts for further discussion:

- Can well-being exist without spiritual well-being?
- Can healthcare settings do more to support spiritual well-being? Should they?
- If so, how might they begin to assess, diagnose, and resource patients?
- If not, might healthcare settings still have an intermediary role to play?
- What are the obstacles to implementing spiritual well-being strategies in healthcare and how might they be addressed?

²¹ This study provides a helpful point of entry regarding existing instruments and their limitations: [Questionnaires Measuring Patients' Spiritual Needs: A Narrative Literature Review](#) by Ruohollah Seddigh, Amir-Abbas Keshavarz-Akhlaghi, and Somayeh Azarnik, 2016.

- How would you begin to develop a context-sensitive plan to support spiritual well-being within your system?
- Who could help to move this conversation forward?

Supporting people's spiritual lives is challenging, if for no other reason than the necessary resources derive from a different paradigm than that which is typically considered trustworthy in a medical context. Yet, despite the challenges, we believe there could be great value in engaging this sister paradigm. Given the negative impacts of omitting spiritual well-being as a consideration in healthcare, we are eager for further research, discussion, and experimentation on this subject to take hold across the industry, helping to seed a more fulsome vision and approach to care going forward.



About Sacred Design Lab

We design for the human soul.

Sacred Design Lab is a soul-centered research and development lab. We're devoted to understanding and designing for 21st-century spiritual well-being. We translate ancient wisdom and practices to help our partners develop products, programs, and experiences that ground people's social and spiritual lives. We specialize in translating across generations, sectors, and paradigms.

Our Clients



OBAMA
FOUNDATION

IDEO



Our Partners



HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL



JIM JOSEPH
FOUNDATION
Shimon ben Joseph



Sample Thought Leadership (all available at sacred.design/insights):

Design for the Human Soul (2019) articulates a new approach to design, focusing on the ways that unmet soul needs shape our time. The more we go hungry for meaning, connection and purpose, the more we act from isolation and despair. This plays out in the way we live, love, work, and lead. The problem is soul-deep. So, too, must be our response.

How We Gather (2015) maps the emerging landscape of Millennial communities that are fulfilling the functions that religious congregations used to fill. Grounded in six recurring themes - community, personal transformation, social transformation, purpose-finding, creativity, and accountability - this report has been called the most important non-theological text being read in seminaries today.

Something More (2016) builds on the analysis of *How We Gather* but looks at new communities at the edge of religious traditions, namely those still claiming an affiliation.

Faithful (2017) Written especially for denominational leaders across traditions, Faithful considers destabilizing tensions between improving existing models of congregational ministry and re-organizing around emerging leaders and models of religious life.

Care of Souls (2018) our capstone report, brings together four years of research and practice to illustrate seven necessary innovative community leadership roles for this moment. The Gatherer, Healer, Venturer, Elder, Steward, Seer and Maker unbundle and remix the roles of traditional religious leadership and invite the reader to live into new categories of religious life.

Principals

Angie Thurston, a graduate of Brown University and Harvard Divinity School, is the creator of the Formation Project, a startup offering spiritual development to unaffiliated and spiritually marginalized people by connecting the inner life of spirit to the outer life of social change. She is a Ministry Innovation Fellow at Harvard Divinity School.

Casper ter Kuile is a graduate of both the Kennedy School and Divinity School of Harvard University. He is co-host and co-founder of *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text* (a podcast with 75,000 downloads per episode, and a largely secular and spiritual but not religious audience). His book The Power of Ritual, was released by HarperOne in 2020. Casper is a Ministry Innovation Fellow at Harvard Divinity School.

Rev. Sue Phillips, a graduate of Colgate University and the Episcopal Divinity School, has served as a denominational executive for the Unitarian Universalist Association and as Director of Strategy for the Impact Lab at the On Being Project. She is a Ministry Innovation Fellow at Harvard Divinity School.



Appendix

Full list of questions, as presented in the Sacred Design Lab Spiritual Well-Being Assessment.

Let's begin with some questions about belonging.

Does this statement describe you?

Yes!

Mostly

Somewhat

Not really

No

Do the following statements describe you?

1. I regularly express how much I love the people close to me, with or without words.
2. I have relationships that help me feel alive and energized.
3. I get to be myself in my closest relationships.
4. There are a few people who really know me and love me.
5. I set healthy limits on what I can offer other people.
6. I regularly take time for rest and relaxation.

7. In general, I am kind to myself.
8. I can think of at least three people who I could call at any time when I need support.
9. To those close to me, I can openly admit the things I'm struggling with.
10. In my closest relationships, I show up when it matters most.
11. I have meaningful opportunities to gather, mourn, and celebrate with loved ones.
12. I foster relationships in my neighborhood and local community.
13. I have important relationships with people much younger and much older than me.
14. I have important relationships with people from beyond my own race and class.
15. I feel connected to family, as I define it.
16. I feel connected to nature, plants, and animals.
17. I feel a sense of home with the land, ocean, or mountains.
18. I feel connected to my language, foods, and customs.
19. I feel part of a bigger circle that goes beyond my own family, community, and neighborhood.
20. I feel seen and accepted outside of my community.
21. I tend to feel compassion for people, even though I do not know them.

22. In general, I do what it takes to resolve tensions in my relationships.
23. In my heart, I know I belong.
24. My people are there for each other.

Thank you! Next up, some questions about how you experience becoming the person you want to be.

Do the following statements describe you?

1. I feel purposeful in my life.
2. I am becoming the person I long to be.
3. I have habits and rituals that make a noticeable positive difference in my life.
4. When I want to learn something that matters to me, I find a way.
5. I get to deepen my most important practices and commitments with others who share them.
6. I have opportunities to share what I have learned about life.
7. The more I learn, the more I realize I still have to learn.
8. I regularly take time for creativity and play.
9. I regularly find joy in song, dance, or music.
10. I take others under my wing to check in about their progress, struggles, and successes.

11. I regularly take time to reflect on my experiences.
12. I am more at home with myself than I used to be.
13. I have important rituals in my life to help mark moments of transition, celebration, or sadness.
14. I take unpopular stands to defend my principles and what's right.
15. I am discovering and expressing who I really am.
16. I invite others to help me keep my commitments.
17. I can be aware of the places where I fall short in life without being overly self-critical.
18. Sometimes I feel like a teacher and sometimes like a student.
19. I have reliable ways to move from hurt to healing.
20. I have practices that help me connect to my body.
21. Instead of harshly judging others, I try to understand them and my responses to their actions.
22. I look for ways to serve others, regardless of whether I get credit for it.
23. My own challenges motivate me to show up for others in their struggles.
24. I find meaning in care-giving to others in my life.
25. My daily actions and decisions are grounded in my deepest commitments.
26. My people lift each other up.

Thank you! Next up, some questions about how you experience being part of something bigger than yourself.

Do the following statements describe you?

1. I am connected to that which is beyond myself.
2. I've had a transcendent experience that continues to inform the direction of my life.
3. I seek out places that feel sacred.
4. I seek out experiences of awe and wonder.
5. I seek out conversations that orient around meaning, purpose, and connection to something more.
6. In the midst of everyday tasks, I can feel connected to something bigger than myself.
7. I feel connected to stories from a long time ago.
8. I identify with my ancestry.
9. I feel connected to tradition(s) that help(s) me make meaning of my life.
10. There are wise people in my life who I turn to for guidance.
11. I mentor and accompany younger people in important life questions.
12. There are people like me who I look up to and who inspire me.

13. I feel part of a larger story.
14. I rely on stories and strategies of resilience from people who have survived similar experiences.
15. I have hope for a flourishing future for my people.
16. I have ways of exploring life's big questions.
17. I regularly redirect my attention to my heart and body.
18. I can find strength and comfort, even in the midst of difficulties.
19. I long to be closer to something larger than myself.
20. I feel grateful for something every day.
21. I am curious in the face of paradox and mystery.
22. I am open to things that are beyond my current understanding.

Nearly finished! A few final questions about your overall spiritual well-being.

Do the following statements describe you?

1. In my soul, all is well.
2. My life as a whole has meaning.
3. Even considering how big the universe is, I can say that my life matters.

4. Looking at my life as a whole, things seem clear to me.
5. I generally feel a sense of inner peace.
6. I generally feel that my relationships are harmonious.
7. My relationships are more important to me than fame, wealth, or achievement.
8. I actively contribute to the well-being of others.

That's it! Thank you for completing the assessment.

[Pathways to Spiritual Well-Being document](#)

See following pages.

Sacred Design Lab

Pathways to Spiritual Well Being

We invite you to reflect on the suggestions that follow. Look for the column that matches your state of spiritual well being and see if there are things you want to try. After that, feel free to explore!

Learn more about Sacred Design Lab at sacred.design



Belonging

	Spiritually Struggling	Spiritually Exploring	Spiritually Journeying	Spiritually Deepening	Spiritually Flourishing
Within yourself	Make a list of times when you have felt most like yourself. Now notice patterns on the list: Were you alone or with other people? What were you doing? What were you like?	For five minutes, try out a practice that focuses on self-awareness, like meditation. You can download an app or just practice sitting still and noticing your breath going in and out. Could you make space for this every day?	Take a personality assessment such as the Enneagram and read your profile. What resonates? What does it help you to understand about yourself?	Ask one or more people to join you on an intentional self-discovery process. Consider creating or attending a retreat or workshop that focuses on understanding the self.	Engage in a multi-day experience of silence and solitude. Try to do this at least once a year.
With others	What is something vulnerable you feel safe sharing with a trusted friend or family member, which it would help you to get off your chest?	Intentionally tell the people who are most important in your life what they mean to you. You might say it aloud or write it in a card or an email.	Take the risk of reaching out to someone you've been wanting to get to know better, especially if they're outside your usual circles. Ask them to share a meal (which could be virtual) and share stories.	Join a small group for regular authentic sharing and mutual support and accountability. Lean into your vulnerability and focus on generously listening to others as they share.	Make a proactive effort to welcome a newcomer or stranger. This might be in your town or neighborhood, or within a community of which you're a part.
With something more	Try and remember one or two moments when you felt part of something bigger than yourself. Where were you? What was happening? Could you do something like it again?	Spend an hour singing, dancing, or playing a sport with other people. Afterward, note down how you feel different than you did before. Do this a few more times and see if you notice a pattern.	Find a way to serve your neighbors this week. That could be through a volunteer organization, or just by shoveling snow, babysitting, or something else that fits your situation.	Learn about the histories of people who've lived where you live, or the people you come from. How are you connected to them through the land, stories, and wisdom that has been passed down?	Creatively tell the story of your community through art or music, reminding others of what makes your neighborhood or ancestry worth celebrating.

Becoming

	Spiritually Struggling	Spiritually Exploring	Spiritually Journeying	Spiritually Deepening	Spiritually Flourishing
Purpose	What is one thing you could watch, listen to, or read that feels connected to your sense of purpose? Pick something that you're drawn to, whether or not it would make sense to anyone else.	Who do you admire for the way they've lived their life? Learn more about them - by watching, listening to, or reading things, or even interviewing them if possible. Reflect on how their purpose is connected to your own.	Find an elder in your life - someone wise who you look up to, regardless of age. Ask that person to have a "purpose meeting" with you once a month for six months, where you reflect on your sense of purpose. By the end of this season, write down a personal purpose statement.	What are the personal practices and rituals that help you to align your everyday decisions and actions with your sense of purpose? Consult the traditions and teachers in your life to develop a deeper practice of reflecting on alignment with purpose.	Who are the two or three people that you can accompany as they find their purpose? Create a more intentional rhythm to check in with them, always making sure that you have your own people to accompany you too.
Healing	Take half an hour by yourself to reflect. First think of something painful that you have healed from. How did you do it? Now think of something you still want to heal from. What is one thing you could do to get started?	What is your healing support system? List the people, resources, and practices in your life that you can turn to for support with healing. What's missing that you want to add?	Who in your life has healed from an experience like yours? Reach out to them for a conversation and reflect on how their wisdom might apply to you.	What is the hard thing you've been waiting to do, which will take courage but will contribute to collective healing and liberation? Is now the time to get involved in a community effort? What is standing in your way?	How can you put your own healing journey in service of others who are in pain? Prioritize lifting up others who have experienced suffering like your own.
Seeking	Reserve a 30-minute window this week for exploring a big question you have about life - something you've always wondered about. Where can you go to learn more about this?	Who is living their life in a way you admire? How did they get to be that way? Find out more about their journey and key decisions they made, and ask yourself how you might apply their wisdom.	What steps might you take to find at least one teacher or guide to support your spiritual life, as well as one or more communities of peers to journey alongside?	How is your own spiritual journey leading you to serve others? What stands in the way of you giving your gifts? Make it a priority to work through any obstacles to sharing what you have to give.	How are you teaching what you have learned about spiritual flourishing? Make sure you have regular opportunities to teach and share your learning, which will guarantee your own discovery process never ends.

Beyond

	Spiritually Struggling	Spiritually Exploring	Spiritually Journeying	Spiritually Deepening	Spiritually Flourishing
Awe, wonder & transcendence	Listen to a favorite piece of music and close your eyes. Allow yourself to get lost in the music. How would you describe this experience?	Think about a time you felt awe or wonder. Where were you? Who were you with? What did it feel like? Could you do it again?	Spend an hour in a park, forest, or other outdoor space. Consciously notice how your body responds to your environment. Reflect on your body's connection to the community of living things.	Develop a regular practice of reading and reflecting on a text that's meaningful to you, perhaps poetry or scripture. Try returning to the same piece several times in a row and watch how your understanding unfolds.	Devote time and energy to engaging your favorite spiritual practice every day. Hold celebrations with loved ones to mark each year that you have lived this way, and recommit to another year.
Possibility, imagination & hope	Think of a friend who has made intentional changes in their life for the better. How do they talk about these changes? How might changes like that be possible in your life?	How might you move through discouragement and cultivate hope? Call someone whom you admire for their courage and hopefulness. Ask them how they get unstuck when they encounter obstacles.	Who or what inspires you most? Devote an intentional hour to diving deeper into that source of inspiration, be it through video, images, writing, music, conversation, practices, or oral history.	Invite a group of friends to share stories about possibility, imagination, and hope. Ask them to identify sources of inspiration for them and reflect on how they connect with that inspiration in their everyday lives.	Create a toolbox of stories, songs, texts, and wisdom that stimulates your sense of hope and imagination that flourishing is possible. Seek out others who are struggling and offer to help resource and accompany them on their journey.
Peoplehood & ancestry	Who do you consider to be "your people"? Think of specific people, like grandparents, people from your neighborhood, or chosen family. Why and how are you connected to them?	Ask an auntie, abuela, cousin, or grandparent for a family recipe. Take a picture or video while you're making it and send it back to them. Even better, serve it to people you love!	Think of someone from among your people who carries great stories and wisdom. Spend more time with them and begin to remember their stories - whether by writing them down, recording them, or retelling them.	Invite an elder from among your people to spend an hour telling you stories. Ask them how they feel connected to people who came before and who will come after. Invite them to share wisdom that has been passed from previous generations.	Intentionally bring together different generations to share a meal, create something together, or serve your greater community. Come prepared with a few great questions to get people sharing stories about their lives.

Spiritual Well Being

	Spiritually Struggling	Spiritually Exploring	Spiritually Journeying	Spiritually Deepening	Spiritually Flourishing
Spiritual well being as a whole	Spend a moment thinking about someone who is struggling - perhaps with health, money, or something else. Imagine yourself sending them loving energy and good wishes. Is there anything else you could do?	Think about a group in your life - do you have a men's group, women's group, book club, or gaming group? Think about a ritual you could create to celebrate your group's anniversaries.	Who are your creative collaborators? What do you do to support and nurture those relationships? Consider creating a covenant for your partnership or team to help navigate the highs and lows of working together.	How might you develop a more intentional rhythm of life, which allows for deepening connection to yourself, other people, the natural world, and something more?	Invite others to join with you in spiritual practices, conversations, and gatherings. Take leadership in cultivating community around spiritual well being for the others in your life.