Spirituality, Religion, and Aging Illuminations for Therapeutic Practice

Holly Nelson-Becker

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This highly integrative book was written for students, professionals in aging, ministers, and older adults themselves. Readers will gain the knowledge and skills they need to assess, engage, and address the spiritual and religious needs of older persons. Taking a fresh approach that breaks new ground in the field, the author discusses eight major world religions and covers values and ethics, theories, interventions, health and caregiving, depression and anxiety, dementia, and the end of life. Meditations and exercises throughout the book allow readers to expand and explore their personal understanding of spirituality. Referencing the latest research, the book includes assessments and skill-based tools designed to help practitioners enhance the mental health of older people.

**KEY FEATURES:**

- **An integrated, interdisciplinary approach** prepares future mental health professionals to work on teams and bring the best of their disciplinary knowledge to contexts of transdisciplinary practice.
- **A standard chapter format** helps readers develop a deeper understanding of spirituality and religion in aging and includes questions for discussion; a suggested meditation; exercises; related websites; and recommended readings.
- **Important core information on aging** includes necessary foundational gerontological content and the latest concepts and published research in spirituality and religion within aging communities.
- **Seven fully developed case studies** help students consider important issues in working with clients’ spiritual and religious beliefs, values, and practices.
- **Detailed examples of clinical strategies** prepare mental health professionals to support personal strengths and help clients cope with spiritual struggles.
### New Directions

**Clinical Aspects of Later-Life Spiritual Journeys**

**Summary**

**Questions for Discussion**

**Introduction to Meditation Exercises**

**Meditation: Breath**

**Exploring Your Spirituality: Introduction**

**Exploring Your Spirituality: Basic Questions**

**Exploring Your Spirituality: Connect With Nature**

**Websites**

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**Chapter 2 • Defining Religion and Spirituality: Professional and Practical Philosophies**

**Shifting Foundations**

**Religion and Spirituality: What Do They Mean?**

**Who or What Is God?**

**Professional Definitions of Religion**

**Background of Spirituality and Its Relevance for Aging**

**Other Aspects: Existential Well-Being, Spiritual Well-Being, Spiritual Suffering, and Spiritual Care**

**Spirituality, Standards of Care, and the Professions**

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| **Spiritual and Existentialist/Humanist Ethics** |
| **Nonviolence and Interreligious Harmony**     |
| **Ethical Theory for Practice in Brief**       |
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| **Boundaries in Ethical Practice**             |
| **End-of-Life Ethics**                         |
| **End-of-Life Case**                           |
| **Intergenerational Ethics**                   |
Theory Integration

Summary

Case Study: Letha Bainbridge

Questions for Discussion

Meditation: The Tree That Was Planted the Day You Were Born

Exploring Your Spirituality: Developing a Spiritual History

Exploring Your Spirituality: Defining a Peak Experience

Websites

Recommended Reading

Chapter 5 • Religion and Older Adults

Judaism

Christianity

American Indian Religion/Spirituality

Islam

Hinduism

Buddhism

Confucianism

Daoism

Integration of Religious Philosophies and Aging
PART II • PRACTICE DIMENSIONS OF SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION IN AGING

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Clinical Assessment Protocols

Rapid Assessment Instrument Protocols

Spiritual Distress Assessment

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Exploring Your Spirituality: Emotional Mindfulness

Exploring Your Spirituality: Composition of the Place

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Chapter 7 • Religious and Spiritual Interventions With Clients

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Section 2: Mid-Range Interventions of Care

Section 3: Micro-Level Individual Spiritual Care Activities

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Meditation: Bringing Yourself Together

Exploring Your Spirituality: The Labyrinth

Exploring Your Spirituality: Building Intentional Spiritual Places

Websites

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Chapter 8 • Spirituality, Religion, and Health

Definitions of Health

Aging and the Body: Failing Health

Historical Views on Religion and Health

From Holistic Historical Renderings to Modern Cultural Health Considerations

Suffering

Views of Health From Religious Perspectives

Research on the Intersections Between Religion and Health

Caregiving

Prayers, Rituals, and Symbols

Hope, Meaning/Purpose, and Mental Health

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Exploring Your Spirituality: Touch

Exploring Your Spirituality: Taste and Savoring

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The Nature of Dying

Spirituality at the End of Life: Historical Context

Older Adults in Hospice Care

Modern Palliative and Hospice Care

National Consensus Project Guidelines

A Spiritual Care Model

Spiritual Care at the End of Life: Spiritual Practices

Communication at the End of Life

Summary

Questions for Discussion

Assignment: Spirituality, Religion, and Loss

Meditation: Refreshing the Senses
### Exploring Your Spirituality: Creating Your Own Obituary— An Opportunity for Reflection

### Exploring Your Spirituality: Plan Your Memorial or Funeral Service

### Exploring Your Spirituality: A Meeting With Death

### Websites

### Recommended Reading

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**Chapter 12 • Integration**

**Integration of Religion and Spirituality With Professional Practice**

**Functions of Religion**

**Trends in Spirituality**

**A Practical Philosophy or Practical Theology**

**Spiritual Orientation Dissimilarity Between Client and Practitioner**

**Working With Spiritual Unease and Distress in Disasters**

**Evaluation**

**Interprofessional Practice and Spirituality**

**Self-Care and Mindfulness: Spiritual Awareness**

**Contemplative Practices for Renewal**

**Self-Compassion**

**A Personal Note on the Challenge of Spiritual Integration**

**Summary**
Questions for Discussion

Meditation: Color

Exploring Your Spirituality: Balance and Equipoise

Exploring Your Spirituality: Self-Integration

Websites

Recommended Reading

Chapter 13 • Lessons for Building Spiritual Resilience and Epilogue

Section 1: Lessons For Building Resilience

Section 2: Epilogue

Benediction

Parting Thoughts

Questions for Discussion

Assignment: Visioning

Meditation: A Meditation With Music—The Great Bell Chant

Meditation: A Meditation With Movement—Five Ages Dancing

Meditation: A Meditation Using Hands or Fingers

Meditation: MBSR Mindfulness Eight-Week Course

Exploring Your Spirituality: Working With Light

Exploring Your Spirituality: Participation and Reciprocity
Reviews:
"Professor Holly Nelson-Becker's groundbreaking book provides a holistic framework of knowledge, values, and clinical practices that promote gerontological practitioners' comfort and competence to address spirituality and religion. Her subtitle key word 'illuminations' is apropos. Nelson-Becker deftly integrates understandings from social work, nursing, psychology, counseling, health sciences, chaplaincy, and other fields to craft an interdisciplinary approach that is sensitive to the vulnerabilities and strengths of aging and dying that reveal, as she said, “openings for light.” She synergizes profound insights with practical daily life realities. She presents these insights with scientific acumen and poetic sensibility. All of this is supported by her extensive experience as a clinician, researcher, educator, and pastoral minister. The resulting approach to gerontological practice respects diverse religious and nonreligious expressions of clients’ spiritual journeys and supports the professional and spiritual growth of clinicians. I enthusiastically recommend this book."

Edward R. Canda, Director of the Spiritual Diversity Initiative
The University of Kansas School of Social Welfare

"Religion and spirituality play an important role in the lives of older adults. This book will be an important resource to aid helping professionals to become more aware of this fact and integrate this awareness in their work. The book will also be helpful to clergy and chaplains who frequently provide care to older adults and their loved one but rarely have any training in gerontology. The book includes helpful discussions of important topics including spiritual assessment, care for those with dementia and care at the end of life."

George Fitchett
Rush University Medical Center

“Spirituality is a vital part of aging and this book is a comprehensive resource providing both theoretical
and clinical insight to understand the complex aspects of spirituality for older people. The text is an outstanding guide for all disciplines.”

Betty Ferrell
City of Hope Medical Center

“In this essential and insightful book for our times, Holly Nelson-Becker draws upon current research and scholarship regarding spirituality, religion, and aging from a range of disciplines and shares stories, examples, and anecdotes from her own work with older adults and their families. Readers will appreciate this approach of bringing together findings from scientific research and insights from practice and presenting them in an easy to understand language and style. One of the key strengths of this book is its accessibility and applicability for practitioners. Although high-quality research is being conducted and published, oftentimes this work is not reaching health practitioners, social workers, and therapists who are serving older adults and their caregivers. This book has the potential to connect research and practice audiences around these important topics.

Given the continuing increase in the population of older adults from varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds and the spiritual and religious challenges they experience, the book includes a continuing discussion of diverse faith traditions and their implications for mental health practitioners. Another important strength of the book is its emphasis on active learning. Each chapter includes discussion questions, meditation exercises, spiritual exercises, and case studies aimed at engaging readers in using what they are learning. Internet and other resources are also included to help interested readers in obtaining additional information on topics of their interest. These pedagogical features further contribute to the books’ overall goal of preparing students and health care providers to address psychological and spiritual needs of older people from varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This text is a timely and relevant contribution to the growing body of work on spirituality, religion, and aging that has the potential to further knowledge, have meaningful impact for multiple audiences, and ultimately improve the lives of older adults.”

Chandra M. Mehrotra, PhD
The College of St. Scholastica