



Spirituality in Hospice Care

Reference: Pilgrim's Hospice Society—Edmonton, Alberta—www.pilgrimshospice.ca

Realizing that life is likely to end soon may stimulate a desire to “put first things first”, to reach out to what is valuable. It may also give rise to feelings of being unable or unworthy to do so. Individuals also experience feelings of anger at the unfairness of what is happening, and desolate feelings of meaninglessness. This is the essence of spiritual pain.

While some people have strong links with religious beliefs and practices which provide support at a deep individual level, spirituality can be defined much more broadly.

Spirituality is the whole area of thought concerning moral values throughout life. It is the strength which comes from the very core of our being, a strength that we always suspected was there, but never knew what to call it or how it developed. It is the glue that keeps one together. It is the truth of being frightened, but knowing that one can go on in spite of the fear.

The effects of disease on the body are visible, recognizable.

Less obvious, are the effects on the human spirit,

though the scars can be just as real as the scars of surgery.

Spiritual needs are encompassed by the following:

- ◆ The need for meaning & purpose in life.
- ◆ The need to give love.
- ◆ The need to receive love.
- ◆ The need for hope.

The search for spirituality is personal and may be heightened as one confronts death. The nearness of death creates a desire to identify and strengthen what is of value in one's life. It is often a time when there is a need to find meaning in one's life, to find hope and acceptance. It is important to find a place of comfort and peace.

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Donations make Hospice support possible to the over 800 people who need it every year.

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Spiritual Journeys

You may want to think about the following to help with your spiritual journey:

- ♥ You may need solitude and silence for prayer, meditation and reflection.
- ♥ You may wish to share your thoughts on life and death or your feelings of loneliness, your hopes and dreams and your reflections with others.
- ♥ You may wish to create a sacred space for yourself with meaningful items such as soft pillows, candles, favourite pictures, spiritual and religious symbols, etc.
- ♥ You may want to explore your inner thoughts and beliefs in a personal journal.

As you nurture your spirit, you may find that:

- ♥ You are living more deeply than ever before.
- ♥ You feel you are growing as a person.
- ♥ Your priorities are very clear.
- ♥ You feel a sense of peace, purpose and deep love.

The volunteers and staff at Hospice are here to help you:

- ◆ Look at what is most important to you.
- ◆ Explore your options and make informed choices.
- ◆ Accept your feelings and actions in a non-judgmental way.
- ◆ Attend to unfinished business
- ◆ Find hope, peace and comfort.
- ◆ Live life to the fullest.

Spiritual and Emotional Transitions

“Journeys” – A Series of Seven Booklets on Dying At Home, Booklet #3

You are making an important journey of transition from life to death. The challenge is to make the transition as meaningful as possible – emotionally and spiritually. Sometimes that is a difficult task. If you are experiencing feelings of hopelessness to the point of not wanting to live any longer, your physical, emotional or spiritual needs are probably not being met. If you are feeling lost or alone, do speak to someone you trust. Better pain management, medication for anxiety and depression and more emotional and spiritual support are available to you.

This can be a time to reflect on your past and get some enjoyment from memories and from the pleasures of the moment. To make this important journey of transition from life to death emotionally meaningful, you may want to think about the following:

- Feelings about life and death can be confusing, but can lead to a new understanding of life.
- Feelings of fear, anger, hope, despair, guilt and self-pity are natural and should be shared with others.
- Your desire for comfort, intimacy and sexual expression will endure.

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- You can benefit from a community of support from family, friends, spiritual caregivers, medical personnel and your hospice palliative care team.
- You can recognize special relationships and events through letters, tapes or video recordings.
- Hope is possible even when you are nearing the end of your journey.
- Your transition from life to death will be yours – only you can do it.

To make this journey of transition spiritually meaningful, you may want to think about the following:

- Perhaps you need solitude and silence for prayer and meditation.
- Perhaps you need others to acknowledge and accept this need.
- You may wish to share your reflections on death and dying with others.
- Control may be a big issue for you – for example, choosing when to let go, thus acknowledging the power of the mind and the will to live.
- You may wish to create a sacred space for yourself with meaningful items such as soft pillows, candles, favorite pictures and spiritual and religious symbols.
- You may want to explore your inner thoughts and beliefs in a personal journal.
- You may want to communicate your wishes about funeral arrangements with your spiritual caregiver, close family or friends.
- You may want to be alone, or you may want to share your feelings of loneliness, hopes and dreams with the people of your choice as you enter another world.

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