

# Chapter 10



Religion, Spirituality, and  
Well-Being

# A Sense of Meaning and Purpose

## Definitions

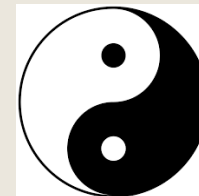
- Spirituality
  - *Personal or group search for sacred in life*
- Religion
  - *Search for sacred within traditional context (e.g., formal religious institution)*
- Both refer to a need to relate to something greater than oneself and often require transcendence

# A Sense of Meaning and Purpose

*Vertical transcendence:*  
fostering  
relationship with  
higher being  
e.g., Judeo-Christian  
God

*Horizontal transcendence:*  
forming a relationship with  
a force that is more  
immanent in the world, less  
often a spiritual being

e.g., Tao: the absolute principle  
underlying the universe,  
combining within itself the  
principles of yin and yang and  
signifying the way, or code of  
behavior, that is in harmony  
with the natural order



# A Sense of Meaning and Purpose

## Religion and Subjective Well-Being

- Greater religiousness—better mental health, higher subjective well-being
  - *Better emotional well-being*
  - *Lower rates of delinquency, alcoholism, drug abuse, and other social problems*
  - *Greater happiness, life satisfaction*
  - *Decrease death anxiety*

# A Sense of Meaning and Purpose

## Religion and Subjective Well-Being

- Greater religiousness—better mental health, higher subjective well-being
- Mediators
  - *Women, African American, and older show stronger relationship between religiousness and well-being*
- Public religious participation or active involvement in religious activities are key
- May be that allegiance to a belief system is the core psychological process involved

# A Sense of Meaning and Purpose

## Religion and Health

- Greater religiousness—fewer illness, lower rates for cancer and heart attacks, recover more quickly from illness/surgery, greater tolerance for pain
- Why? Lower BP, better immune functioning, reduced stress and worry; “learned hardiness”
- Most important predictor of improved health status: ability of religion to provide a sense of meaning and purpose or sense of coherence
- Results stronger for women and for active participation

# A Sense of Meaning and Purpose

## Why is Religion Related to Well-Being?

- Provides social support
  - *From religious group members, from God*
  - *Major religions share 5 ethical directives*
    - “golden rule” do unto others
    - Better to give than receive
    - Express gratitude
    - Forgiveness encouraged
    - Discourage comparisons of self and others and encourage acceptance

# A Sense of Meaning and Purpose

## Why is Religion Related to Well-Being?

- Supports healthy lifestyles
  - *Prohibition of risky health behaviors*
- Promotes personality integration
  - *Mental traits—intelligence, emotions, impulses, volitions, native and acquired reactions organized and **integrated** into a unity*
- Promotes positive emotions
  - *Emotions: gratitude, forgiveness, awe, love, compassion, humility, sense of peace*



# A Sense of Meaning and Purpose

## Why is Religion Related to Well-Being?

- Provides unique coping strategies
  - *Provides hope*
  - *Offers reasons for stressors*
  - *Prayer*
- Provides sense of meaning and purpose
  - *Ultimate meaning (addressed in next section)*

# A Sense of Meaning and Purpose

## Meaning and Subjective Well-Being

- Sense of meaning in life predicts well-being (positive emotion, joy love, vitality), leads to healthier behaviors, acts as a buffer against negative effects of stress
- Meaning in life is major criterion for eudaimonia
- Presence of meaning related to increase well-being, but *search* for meaning decreases happiness
  - *"Search" for meaning indicates that it's missing*

# A Sense of Meaning and Purpose

## Types of Meaning

- Religion offers larger perspective on human life and gives explanations for unexpected events, offers hope
- Personal/situational meaning derived from elements of personal life
- Cosmic meaning or global meaning, extent to which human life fits into some overall coherent pattern
- Meaning is a process rather than a product

# A Sense of Meaning and Purpose

Ways to Create Meaning: Greater Harmony, Coherence, and Congruence

- Greater meaning created when there is increased harmony, coherence, and congruence among the various aspects of our identity and life goals
- Religious attitude can pull elements of life into a consistent direction
- Creating meaning is a process of reducing discrepancy between our current situation and global meaning
  - *Process accomplished by renewing sense of control, predictability, and order, or restoring belief that benevolence, justice, and fairness exist in some way in both humanity and cosmos*

# A Sense of Meaning and Purpose

Ways to Create Meaning: Be of Service to Others or Dedicate Oneself to a Worthy Cause

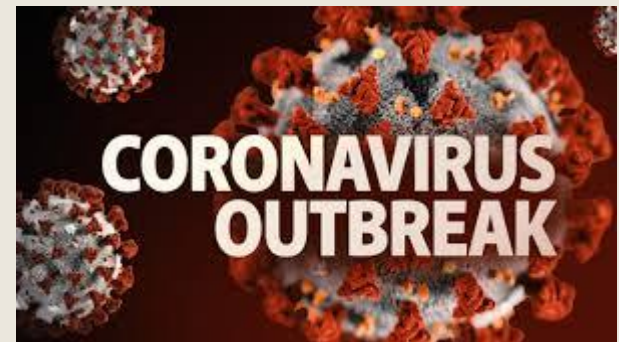
- By helping others we make a difference in the world
- Dedicating to cause larger than us can create a sense of meaning



# A Sense of Meaning and Purpose

## Ways to Create Meaning: Creativity

- Creation of something new gives life significance
- Scientific creativity also gives meaning and purpose
- Creativity can lead to self-discovery, creating new self-identity



# A Sense of Meaning and Purpose

Ways to Create Meaning: Live Life as Fully and Deeply as Possible

- Desire to experience life fully can provide sense of active participation and involvement
- Does not refer to obsessive effort to seek pleasure

# A Sense of Meaning and Purpose

## Ways to Create Meaning: Suffering

- Our approach to suffering determines experience of meaning in life
- Under difficulties, people reevaluate their lives and transform themselves
- Religions dictate that suffering stimulates spiritual growth

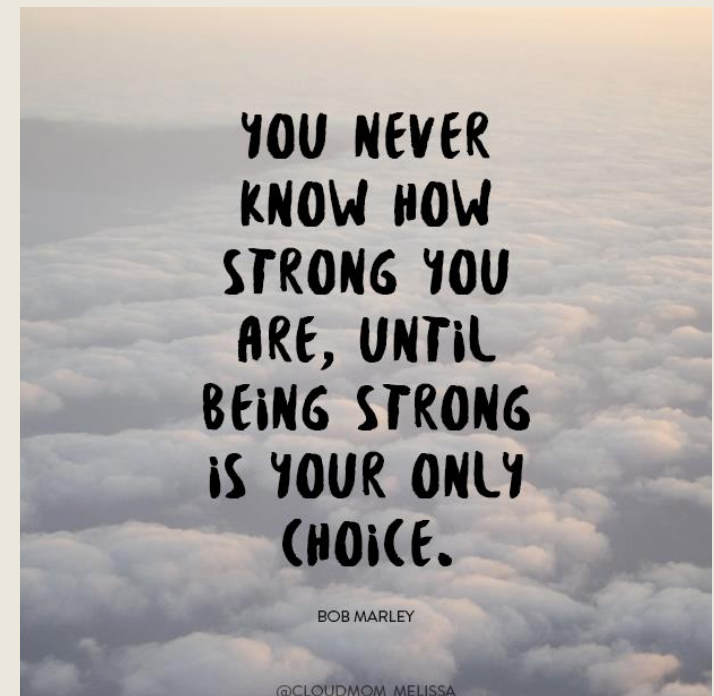




# A Sense of Meaning and Purpose

Ways to Create Meaning:  
Suffering: Potential Benefits

- Increased self-confidence
- Opportunities for enhanced interpersonal relationships
- Avenues for changing one's philosophy of life or style of creating meaning



# A Sense of Meaning and Purpose

## Ways to Create Meaning: Religious Experiences

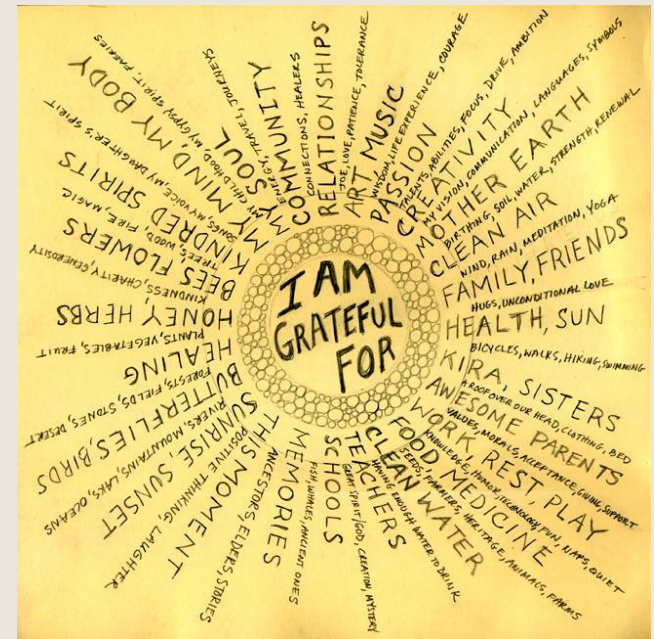
- Profound experiences increase sense of meaning in life



# The Sacred Emotions

## Gratitude and Appreciation

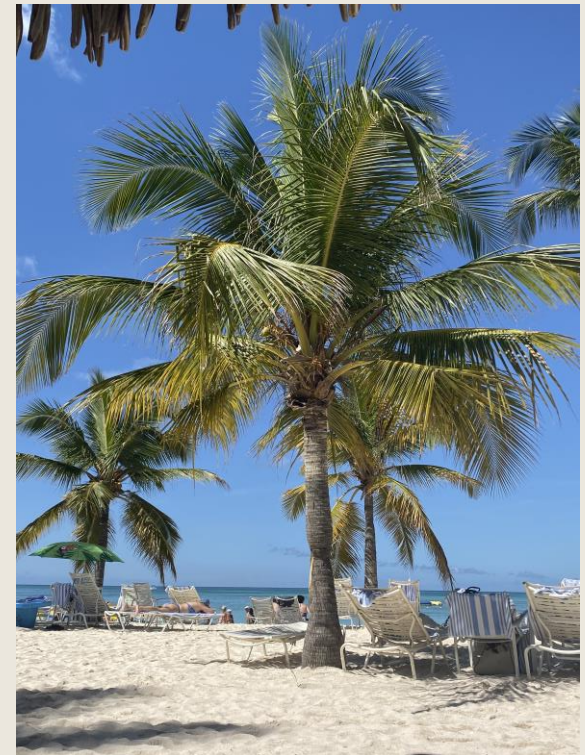
- Gratitude is greatest of virtues and parent of others (Cicero)
- Researchers are divided whether gratitude is emotion or attitude
- Grateful people tend to be happy people
- Gratitude can be nurtured through practice
  - *Gratitude letter*
  - *Gratitude journal*



# The Sacred Emotions

## Gratitude and Appreciation

- Gratitude can maintain and enhance personal relationships
- Gratitude related to greater life satisfaction, optimism, and more positive and less negative emotionality
- Gratefulness related to wanting to give back to others...can expand outward and benefit the world



# The Sacred Emotions

## Gratitude and Appreciation

- Appreciation helps notice people and life experiences and acknowledge their value...gifts
- Appreciation is a combination of awe and gratitude






# The Sacred Emotions

Gratitude can also  
come from non-human  
actions or events

*e.g., surviving a natural  
disaster*





*"Forgiveness is the fragrance that the violet  
sheds on the heel that has crushed it."*

*Mark Twain*

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# The Sacred Emotions

## Forgiveness

- Many definitions: consensus is that forgiveness is beneficial
- Without forgiveness, anger and resentment take over and can be a cycle of hostility and desire for revenge
- Research scenarios: Women more likely to forgive than men, children less willing to forgive than adult, older adults more likely “let bygones be bygones”



# The Sacred Emotions

## Forgiveness

- Aspects of Forgiveness
  - *Cognitive (changing negative judgments)*
  - *Emotional (overcoming resentment)*
  - *Behavioral (ending indifference)*
- Forgiveness means overcoming the hurt, resentment, and aggression that accompany being the target of abuse



# The Sacred Emotions

## Forgiveness

- Forgiveness is NOT:
  - *Simply tolerating or forgetting an injustice*
  - *Using denial or suppression*
  - *Forgetting, denying, or minimizing the hurt*
  - *Condoning what was done*
- Allows us to move on from transgressions
- Forgiveness promotes well-being
- Should enhance shared humanity and may deepen a connection with others and increase one's compassion



# The Sacred Emotions

## Forgiveness: Phases of Forgiveness

- Uncovering phase
- Decision phase
- Work phase
- Deepening phase



# The Sacred Emotions

## Forgiveness: Phases of Forgiveness

- Uncovering phase
  - *How resentment, anger, hurt is exerting destructive impact on life*
- Decision phase
  - *Making a choice to try to forgive*
- Work phase
  - *Reframe incident, accept hurt, try to find empathic understanding for why offender did what they did*
- Deepening phase
  - *Try to gain deeper sense of meaning*

# Forgiveness

## Cognitive-Affective Transformation (Tangney and Colleagues)

- Freely choosing to “cancel the debt” & give up the need for revenge
- Giving up negative emotions is key
- Removing self from the victim role

# The Sacred Emotions

## Forgiveness: Self-forgiveness

- Role of blame and guilt
- “I did a bad thing.”
- Involves taking responsibility for bad act or actions, then let go and move forward
- We must take responsibility for our behavior and also make amends to the other person
- Then, let go of self-absorption and self-criticism

# The Sacred Emotions

## Compassion and Empathy

- Ability to connect deeply with others
- Compassion, empathy, and altruism often go together
- Empathy helps build positive relationships
- In Buddhist tradition, two hallmarks of well-being are compassion and wisdom

“A life not lived for  
others is not a life.”  
— Mother Teresa

**Joseph Ranseth**

*Speaker, Author, Transformationist*





# The Sacred Emotions

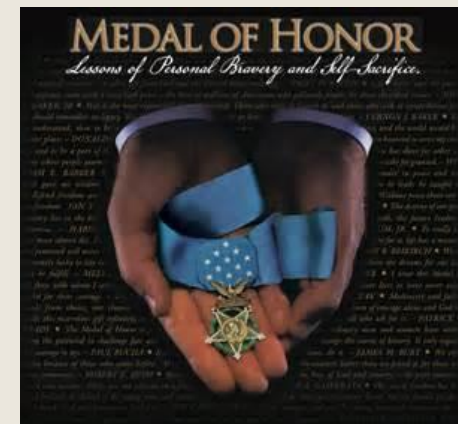
## Self-compassion

- Being kind toward oneself is better way to change behavior
- Self-compassion makes us happier, optimistic, wiser
- Self-compassion adults had greater motivation for self-improvement

# Altruism



- ❖ Behavior aimed at benefitting another person
- ❖ Volunteerism - a related concept



# Congressional Medal of Honor

- USA highest military honor
- Awarded for personal acts of valor that go above and beyond the call of duty
- Awarded by the President
- 3 versions: 1 for Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, 1 for Army, 1 for Air Force
- Created in 1861 during Civil War
- 3508 recipients of the Medal of Honor.
  - Today there are 71 Living Recipients of the Medal of Honor.
- March 25<sup>th</sup> National Medal of Honor Day
- <http://www.cmohs.org/>



# Altruism

- ❖ Motivated by:
  - ❖ *Personal egotism*
  - ❖ *Empathy...desire to benefit another*
- ❖ Other suggested motivations:
  - ❖ *Collectivism: valuing group over self*
  - ❖ *Principalism: moral integrity*



# 3 Types of Altruism

- Reciprocity-based
  - *Usually egotistic because perform a helping behavior in the hope that the other will help you*
- Care-based
  - *Help because of feelings of empathy for recipient*
- Kin-based

# DOING GOOD DOES YOU GOOD

Evidence shows that helping others can have a positive effect on your own mental health and wellbeing.



Mental Health  
Foundation



# Altruism – The Egotism Motive

- ❖ The motive to pursue some sort of personal gain or benefit through targeted behavior
- ❖ One of the most influential of all human motives



# Altruism – The Egotism Motive

- ❖ We care for others because it benefits us
- ❖ Many argue that all altruism is motivated by egotism
  - underlying personal benefit even if not intended



# Altruism – The Egotism Motive

- ❖ General forms of egotism: helping others can lead to:
  1. Public praise or material reward
  2. Avoid social or personal punishments for failing to help
  3. Lessen personal distress at seeing another's trauma

# Altruism – The Empathy Motive

- ❖ Empathy is an emotional response to the perceived plight of another person
  - ❖ *Feel what the other person is feeling*
  - ❖ *May entail a sense of tenderheartedness*



# Altruism

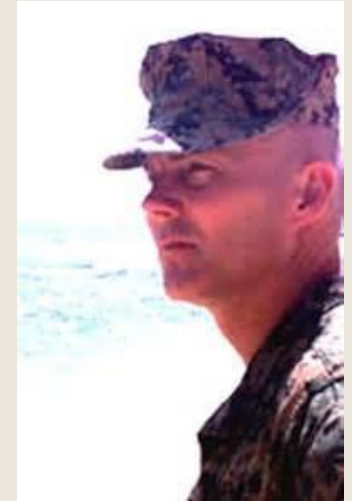
## ■ Jason Thomas

- *Was in Long Island*
- *Had been out of Marines*
- *Put on fatigues and drove to NYC*



## ■ Dave Karnes

- *Accountant; was in Wilton CT; left work*
- *23yr Marine veteran*
- *Drove to church and asked them to pray that God would lead him to survivors*
- *Reinlisted*



Will Jimeno and John Mccloughlin

[A Tribute to Heroes](#)

# The Sacred Emotions

## Humility

- Being humble allows us to
  - *Acknowledge mistakes*
  - *Openness to others' opinions and ideas*
  - *Appreciate ways people contribute to the world*
- Humility helps us to live life of quiet joy, satisfaction, wisdom, and contentment

# Religious Experiences

- Religious experiences may be intensely positive
- Positive emotions tend to accompany religious experiences
- Transcendent experiences make people feel they have entered higher state of consciousness

# Religious Experiences

## Elation and Awe

- Elation: experiences of momentary joy; our response to an act of moral beauty, such as witnessing an act of compassion
- St. Francis of Assisi
- Viewing these acts can produce positive emotions
- For some people, these moments reorient their lives



# St. Francis of Assisi

- In the year 1206, Giovanni Bernadone, the 23-year-old son of a wealthy merchant, went on a pilgrimage to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. He could not help noticing the contrast between the opulence and lavishness within—the brilliant mosaics, the spiral columns—and the poverty of the beggars sitting outside. He persuaded one of them to exchange clothes with him and spent the rest of the day in rags begging for alms. It was one of the first great empathy experiments in human history.
- This episode was a turning point in the young man's life. He soon founded a religious order whose brothers worked for the poor and the lepers, and who gave up their worldly goods to live in poverty like those they served.

<https://www.yesmagazine.org/health-happiness/2014/11/07/empathy-heroes-st-francis-john-howard-griffin-patricia-moore/>

# Religious Experiences

## Elation and Awe

Awe: deep appreciative wonder

- Conditions that favor awe
  - *Time for reflection*
  - *Capacity to slow down*
  - *Capacity to savor the moment*
  - *Focus on what one loves*
  - *Capacity to see big picture*
  - *Ability to trust in the unknowable*



# Religious Experiences



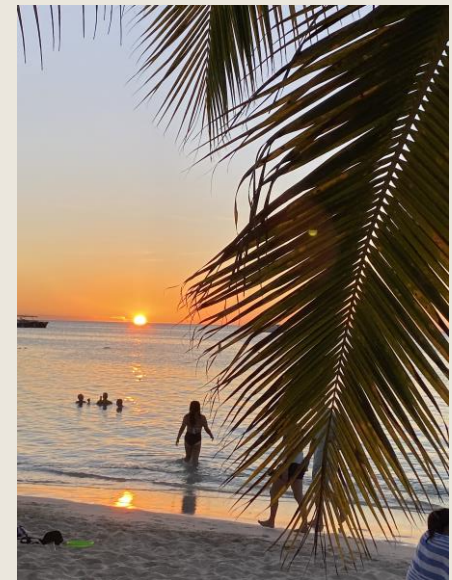
## Wonder

- Closely related to awe, linked with qualities of imagination, surprise, and aesthetics
- Opening of heart to joy, gratitude, and love
- Regarded as a key to heights of human personality

# Religious Experiences

## Wonder

- Experiences categorized into three distinct groupings
  - *Physical (objects, processes within nature; Grand Canyon, sunset)*
  - *Personal (interactions with people or their work; infant)*
  - *Metaphysical (intense musing on meaning; think about earth's creation)*



# Religious Experiences

## Peak-Experiences (Maslow)

- Brief moments of intense experience
- Involve intense joy, wonder, appreciation
- Experience connection to larger spiritual reality
- Elements of peak-experiences could become almost permanent aspects of daily experience
- Resacralization--restoring sense of sacred to ordinary world

# Religious Experiences

## Conversion

- Occasionally, religious experiences lead to transformation (St. Francis of Assisi)
- Reorients person's life in different direction
- Highly personal and almost impossible to induce

# Contemplative Spirituality

## Transpersonal Psychology

- Spiritual experiences deserve serious scientific attention
- Transpersonal psychotherapy aims at daily experience of liberation or enlightenment
- Accepts first-person narrative accounts of spiritual experiences

# Contemplative Spirituality

## Mysticism

- These experiences show reality different from everyday experience
- Experience is typically ineffable
- Involves sense that profound knowledge has been revealed
- Experienced beyond understanding of time and space

# Contemplative Religious Traditions

## Monastic Christianity

- Most easily recognized in Catholic monastic practices
- Centering prayer is alternative to MBCT

# Contemplative Religious Traditions

## Kabbalah

- Mystical tradition of Judaism
- Has insights concerning human personality and personal growth
- Connected the Kabbalah to meditation and transcendent experience



# Contemplative Religious Traditions

## Buddhism

- Considers change as irrefutable truth of human existence
- Despite this, we crave stability and complete end to worry
- This is the cause of unhappiness, Buddhism asserts

# Contemplative Religious Traditions

## Buddhism: Nirvana and Enlightenment

- Happiness can be found in meditative practice
- Nirvana translates to “extinction of thirst”
- To realize Nirvana is to be released from all needs and desires

# Contemplative Religious Traditions

## Meditation in Spiritual Traditions

- Two basic styles
  - *Vipassana or insight meditation*
  - *Concentration meditation*

# Mysticism and the Brain

## Neurotheology

- Brain activity in Tibetan Buddhist monks was recorded during meditation
- Found recognizable patterns of brain activity
- Among people tested, a Tibetan monk had the most intense shift toward the brain pattern

# Mysticism and the Brain

## An Unusual Route to Transcendent Experiences

- Jill Bolte Taylor suffered a stroke that affected left hemisphere of her brain
- Left hemisphere functions of rationality, analysis, and language were silenced
- “I felt a sense of euphoria as I lost the boundaries of my body,” she said

# Mysticism and the Brain

## Entheogens and Religious Experiences

- Substances used to foster religious experiences are called entheogens
- Certain drugs induced these experiences
- Mind-altering drugs offer intriguing research opportunity

# Psychological Theories of Religious Maturity

## Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religiousness

- Extrinsic religiosity
- Intrinsic religiosity

# Psychological Theories of Religious Maturity

## Stages of Religious Cognition

- Fowler's six stages move from simple to complex notions of faith
- Stage transitions allow believers to see contradictions of their faith
- The last stage is universalizing faith



# Psychological Theories of Religious Maturity

## Psychodynamic Perspectives on Religion

- Explain processes of creating mature spirituality
- Healthy and unhealthy religiousness can be distinguished by one's relationship to unconscious

# Psychological Theories of Religious Maturity

## Psychodynamic Perspectives on Religion: Carl Jung on Religion and Spirituality

- Spirituality is rooted in need to connect with something larger
- We must increase awareness of specific archetypes in collective unconscious
- Meaningful way to express understanding is through images, symbols, or rituals

# Psychological Theories of Religious Maturity

## Perspectives on Morality and Ethics

- Moral behavior depended on strong ego to control innate forces
- Physiological and cognitive factors combine to influence moral behavior
- People had better morality when around clean environments