



Facing Key Spiritual Care Issues

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Spiritual Distress in Chronic Illnesses

- **Inevitable and understandable**
- **Arises independently of religiosity or piety**
- **Inherently personal**
- **Affects perspectives on belief and faith**
- **Affects hope**
- **Affects coping**

Five Key Issues Underlying Spiritual Distress

- 1. Why me?**
- 2. Is suffering somehow necessary or useful?**
- 3. What do I do with my emotions toward the Divine?**
- 4. Where is the miracle?**
- 5. How may I live on the journey?**

Why me?

- **Universally asked**
- **Leads to conclusion that our nature/actions warrant Divine judgment and/or retribution**
- **Diminishes the compassionate nature of the Divine (mercy, grace, love, protector, etc.)**
- **Obscures the question of “Why others?” (Is the Divine arbitrary and capricious?)**

Is suffering somehow necessary or useful?

- Suffering may be useful by heightening our sensitivity to and appreciation of life
- Important to distinguish between challenges and suffering; challenges come with opportunities to manage or overcome, while suffering may not
- If suffering is necessary, why do some not suffer?
- The fundamental or ultimate purpose of the Divine is that there be more life rather than less (a consequence of suffering)
- If suffering is necessary to “make us better,” how do we explain it in innocent and vulnerable populations?

What do I do with my emotions toward the Divine?

- May I be angry, disappointed, disillusioned, frustrated, etc. with the Divine?**
- We are created with emotions, perhaps with creative purposes**
- Expressing emotions may yield honest communications with the Divine**
- Expressing emotions may yield insight**
- The Divine may understand our emotions as our offering of blessings**

Where is the miracle?

- ❖ **Is possible**
- ❖ **Initiated solely by the Divine**
- ❖ **Does happen but not often**
- ❖ **Not contingent upon anything (who we are, what we believe, do, or say, or space or time)**

How may I live on the journey?

- **Reconsider the linear journey of life**
- **On the journey, “hope” means while all this may be true, there is more ahead - what counts is being on the way**
- **But as long as we are on the journey, where we are is not important or sacred, and we miss the fullness of now**
- **If on the journey is all there is, the difference between hope and denial may be hard to discern**

(“Walking in Place,” Barbara Brown Taylor, Christian Century, 2/7/2006)