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