

Is There Room for Spirit in the Field of Chemical Dependency Treatment?

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What is spirituality? According to Webster's Dictionary, it is "sensitivity or attachment to religious values," or "the quality or state of being spiritual." This invites the question, "what does spiritual mean?" Webster defines it several ways:

- Relating to, consisting of, or affecting the spirit
- Of, or relating to sacred matters
- Concerned with religious values

The term spirituality may connote a particular meaning in the fields of theology or philosophy, but what does it mean in the field of chemical dependency? Clinicians, researchers, and administrators profess that chemical addiction is a disease that afflicts body, mind, and spirit. In our aim to include spirituality as one dimension of recovery, as exemplified in such named groups posted on the daily schedules in chemical dependency treatment programs, or as documented as a goal in a client's treatment plan, the question arises: what does spirituality really mean?

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To answer the question, I turned to a study by Christopher Cook (2004) from St. Chad's College in Durham, UK. In "Addiction and Spirituality," Cook examined how the term "spirituality" appeared in 265 books and papers on addiction published in the UK or US from 1981 to 2001. He wanted to clarify how researchers and clinicians employed this concept and to develop a common definition on which they might agree. Cook observed that only 12% of the publications explicitly defined the term spirituality. Forty-two percent of the publications did not define it at all. Although almost half (48%) of the books and papers made some reference to 12-Step spirituality, only a small percentage of them included references to any of the world's major faiths or religions. Cook concluded that the term spirituality reflects a wide diversity of use in the field, but there is no consensus about its meaning. He then offered his own working definition of spirituality: "Spirituality is a distinctive, potentially creative and universal dimension of human experience arising both within the inner subjective awareness of the individual and within communities, social groups, and traditions. It may be experienced as relationship with that which is intimately inner, immanent, and personal, within the self and others, and/or relationship with that which is wholly other, transcendent, and beyond the self. It is experienced as being of fundamental or ultimate importance and purpose in life, truth, and values" (Cook 2004, p. 548).

I also consulted an article by Christopher Ringwald (2003) titled "Spirituality: An Evidence-Based Practice for Treatment and Recovery." Ringwald describes spirituality as "that connection with some transcendent reality, truth, or meaning" (p. 32). He observes that spirituality can exist outside religion, and does not require a belief in God. Religion may contain various spiritual practices, but religious beliefs by themselves do not constitute spirituality. While Ringwald cites research which supports the role of spirituality or religion in achieving positive outcomes in addiction treatment, he observes a bias in research dollars solely dedicated to advancing the biochemical understanding of addiction. He also finds the application of the research on spirituality in clinical work with clients or patients wanting.

So what is a researcher or clinician to do? When we say we include spirituality as a component of recovery, what are we including? Transcendence? Meaning? Truth? Authenticity? Soul? Values? Relatedness? Consciousness? All of the above? None of the above? Is spirituality too complex to be operationally defined? If clinicians and researchers have no commonly accepted definition of spirituality, is it

any surprise that they would avoid the topic in their work, or apply it with difficulty?

One solution I offer to this dilemma is to consider the concept of "spirit" instead of spirituality. Spirit derives from the Latin word "spiritus". Spiritus comes from the Greek root "pneuma." Pneuma originates from the Hebrew word "ruach." All refer to the fundamental reality of breath. A consideration of selected scriptures from some of the world's major spiritual traditions illustrates this point.

In the Hebrew Scriptures ruach is defined literally as "the breath of God" and manifests itself from the very beginning of the Creation story. Genesis 1:2 portrays ruach as "A wind from God that swept over the face of the waters." Ruach is further exemplified in Genesis 2:7: "Yahweh fashioned the first human being from the dust from the soil. Then he breathed into his nostrils a breath of life."

In the Christian scriptures spirit primarily refers to the Holy Spirit, the third personality of the Trinity, but it can have other meanings. In John's Gospel, Jesus converses with Nicodemus: "You must be born from above, the wind blows wherever it pleases; you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes. This is how it is with all those who are born of the Spirit" (John 3:7-8). On the evening of the Resurrection Jesus appears to his disciples and announces, "Peace be with you. . . After saying this he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:21-22). Spirit also manifests dramatically as wind and fire at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

Spirit in the Quran translates from the Arabic word "ruh" and includes: "But he fashioned him in due proportion, and breathed into him something of His Spirit. And He gave you (the faculties of) hearing and sight and feeling (and understanding); little thanks do you give" (Quran 32:9). And "When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him My Spirit, fall you down in obeisance unto him" (Quran 38:72).

Native American references to spirit are more ethereal and based on oral tradition. According to Donald Panther-Yates (2001) "Indians don't divide the world into the natural and the supernatural. They don't distinguish between the physical and the metaphysical. The visible and the invisible have the same order of being. Mind and body, matter and spirit, these are non-Indian dichotomies. To an Indian everything is spirit, and all spirit is one. All things are related. Wind is just another word for spirit. In my own language, that word is shah."

The philosopher and sage Patanjali (400-300 BCE) codified the practice of classical yoga and science in the 195 yoga sutras and in the 8

limbed path of Ashtanga yoga. "Yoga is the suppression of the modifications of the mind" (Sutra 1:2). Pranayama, defined as regulation of the breath or life force, is one of the eight limbs. The concept of life force is directly related to a fundamental awareness of breath: "By exhaling and restraining the breath the mind is calmed" (Sutra 1:34).

What do we find in common among these ancient texts regarding spirit? That spirit is fundamentally BREATH and ENERGY. To encounter one's spirit means to experience breath and creative energy. This means we encounter spirit through our bodies, and that spirit resides there. As the Kripalu yogis say, "I am not just this body, but the embodied spirit itself." Spirit in turn connects to one's beliefs, values and actions. They form a practice to transcend the limits of the human ego and to connect to a larger reality. Therefore, rather than referring to spirituality in nebulous generalities, I would propose staying close to the root word "spirit," and using the term "spiritual practice" to describe this dimension of recovery from addiction. Spiritual practice is operational, i.e., it conveys one's beliefs, values, and practices in action. Practice means we do it over and over for its own merit; we may not necessarily arrive at a finished product in this lifetime, although we aim with integrity. Spiritual practice refers to embodied, living, breathing experience, not vague, abstract generalizations. Whether the academic and clinical worlds will accept this notion of spirituality is another question. While Cook's (2004) working definition of spirituality may indicate a useful place to begin a dialogue, and Ringwald's (2003) observations offer a challenge to both researchers and clinicians, no one in the literature appears as yet to be talking about breath or energy. How ironic that one sometimes hears the word "spirits" as a colloquialism for alcoholic beverages.

So, while we wait to see how the term spirituality evolves in the field, we can do a few helpful things in the interim:

- Teach clients how to breathe correctly. Most people engage shallow clavicular breaths rather than full diaphragmatic breaths. Routine clavicular breathing promotes retention of carbon dioxide and waste material in the lower two thirds of the lungs, leading to lethargy and stress. Full diaphragmatic breathing leads to an experience of the relaxation response (as documented in the literature by Herbert Benson, MD) and others.
- Engage the body in recovery. This means inviting clients to move their bodies and experience energy and breath every day, and pro-

viding alternatives to the body's remaining in a stationary and sitting position in verbal therapy all day in treatment programs.

- Value quality nutrition to support and increase energy in the body. Promote the use of fresh, organic, and minimally processed food and beverages, consumed in moderate portions, in marked contrast to the type and quantity in the typical American diet. Also, reinforce sufficient intake of fluids to achieve optimal hydration and to flush chemical toxins from the body.
- Use the term spirituality with a qualifier or modifier: i.e., this client's 12-Step spirituality, that person's yogic spirituality, or this client's Judaic spirituality, which informs and assists her/his recovery in this or that particular way.
- Develop ease and openness in discussing clients' spiritual experiences. Ask clients directly about their past or current spiritual beliefs, values, and practices at the beginning of treatment. Help clients articulate how these things can promote recovery and incorporate them into their treatment plans.
- Increase our interdisciplinary dialogue with our pastors, ministers, rabbis, imams, gurus, and others to learn about and deepen our knowledge of spiritual reality and how we may use this knowledge to promote recovery.
- Ask ourselves, as Paul describes in Galatians 5:22-23, whether these activities result in greater love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, all indicators of spirit.

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