



SACRED SPACES

# Spirituality - the missing link to resilience?

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ACES Health Champions Gathering

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# Breaking a Taboo



A person with long, wavy, light brown hair is shown in profile, looking down. They are wearing a dark, possibly black or dark grey, jacket over a white shirt. The background is dark and out of focus, with some vertical lines suggesting an indoor setting. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the person's hair and the texture of their clothing.

You are worthless.

# Resiliency



# This Talk is Divided into 4 Parts:

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1

**Defining our terms**

2

**Health Benefits**

3

**Religious Institutions**

4

**Clinical Practice**

# Poll Question

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Do you have spirituality in your  
own life?

# Religion

Formal, institutional, and outward expression of one's relationship with the sacred:

- Set of organized practices and rituals; structured belief system, moral codes, behavioral expectations
- Shared by and among those who are members of the institution (social support/community)
- Professionals within each religion act in positions of leadership and represent formal aspects of the institution.



# Spirituality

A broader more personal experience than religion, including:

- An inner search or quest for meaning and purpose
- Transcendence (humans are more than material existence)
- Connectedness (with others, nature or the divine)
- Values/personal beliefs





# Where's Our Country At?

~80% of Americans identify as religious or spiritual (Pew Center survey, 2017)

- 48% religious and spiritual (down from 59% in 2012)
- 27% spiritual but not religious (up from 19% in 2012)
- 18% neither religious nor spiritual
- 6% religious but not spiritual

94% of patients believe  
spiritual health = physical health in importance (Mayo Clinic)



# Poll Question

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Is resilience enhanced by spirituality?

# Lite Review on Religion & Spirituality

Associated with better health outcomes:

- Greater longevity
- Coping skills for major life stressors (e.g., natural disaster, physical/mental illness, bereavement, divorce, abuse) especially for those w/ fewest resources facing most uncontrollable of problems
- Lower risk of cardiovascular disease
- Health-related quality of life (even during terminal illness)
- Less anxiety, depression, and suicide
- Addressing spiritual needs may enhance recovery from illness
- Mantra-based meditation to a spiritual phrase

Youth

- Relates to faith, hope optimism, resilience, meaning, self-esteem, coherence, purpose
- Reduced smoking, drug, and alcohol use
- Better grades
- Better psychosocial adjustment
- First sexual experiences begin at a later stage.



# Poll Question

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Has child abuse in religion  
affected the role of spirituality?

# Sexual Abuse Tragedies and Houses of Worship

- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) report (2004)
  - 1950-2002 clergy CSA was “widespread,” 95% + of dioceses impacted
- Southern Baptist Convention report (2020)
  - Sexual abuse crisis
- Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to CSA
  - 4,000+ interviews with survivors of CSA in religious institutions, 1,691 religious inst
- Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse: England and Wales
  - Shocking failure of handling CSA in 38 religious organizations



# Spiritual Injuries

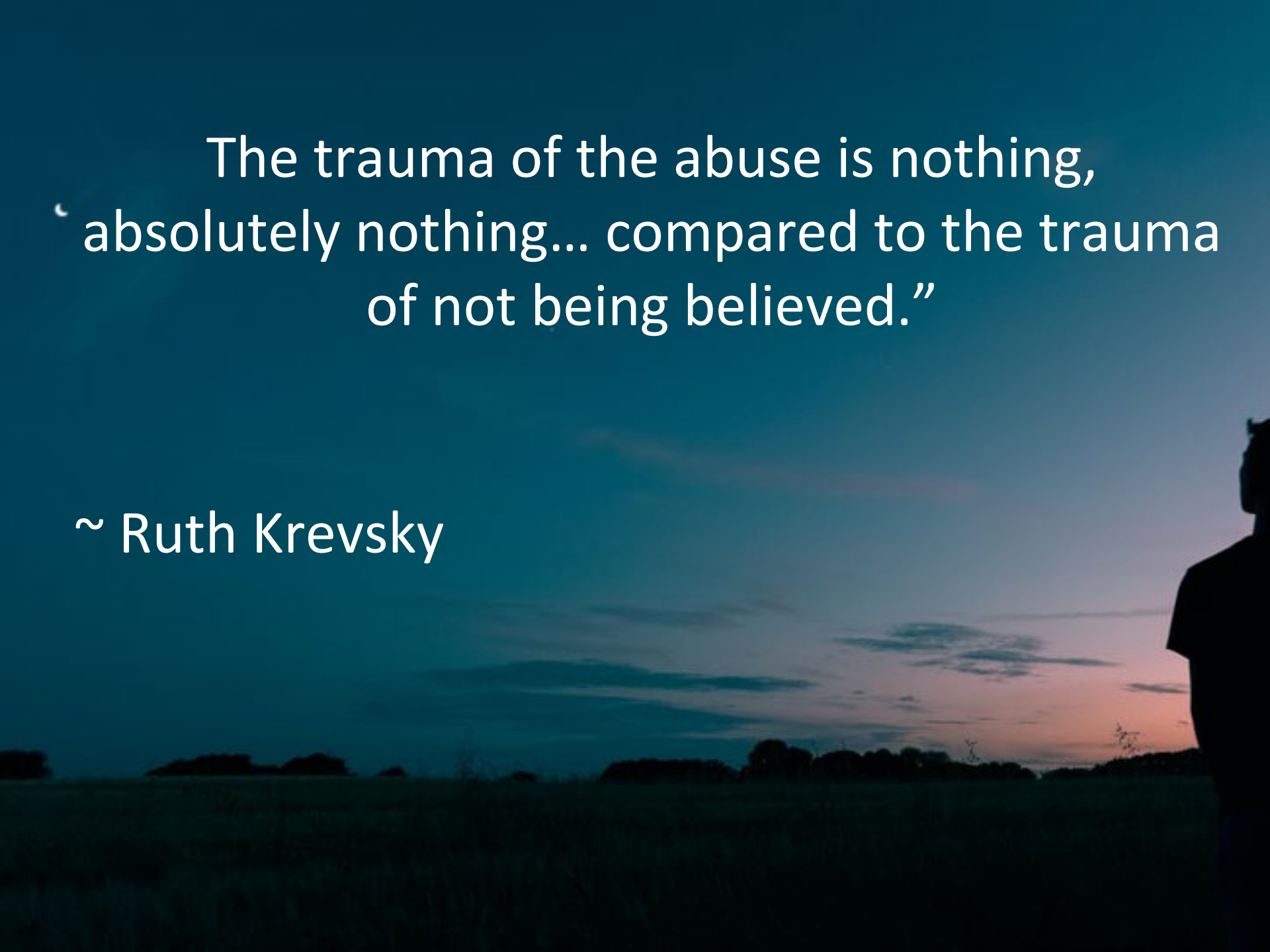
“As a result of the recent news about sexual abuse of young people by priests, have you, personally, questioned whether you would remain in the Catholic church?”  
(Gallup)

- 22% yes (2002, following Boston Globe’s expose)
- 37% (2019, following grand jury investigation into 6 Penn dioceses)
  
- **Spiritual Injuries include:**
  - Exacerbated PTSD
  - Difficulty maintaining religious or spiritual beliefs
  - Decreased engagement in religion and religious communities
  - Negative spiritual views (e.g., a higher power out to punish)
  - Troubling questions of faith (e.g., sexual purity or bad things happening to good people)
  - Feelings of intense guilt, anger, shame, increased depressive symptoms

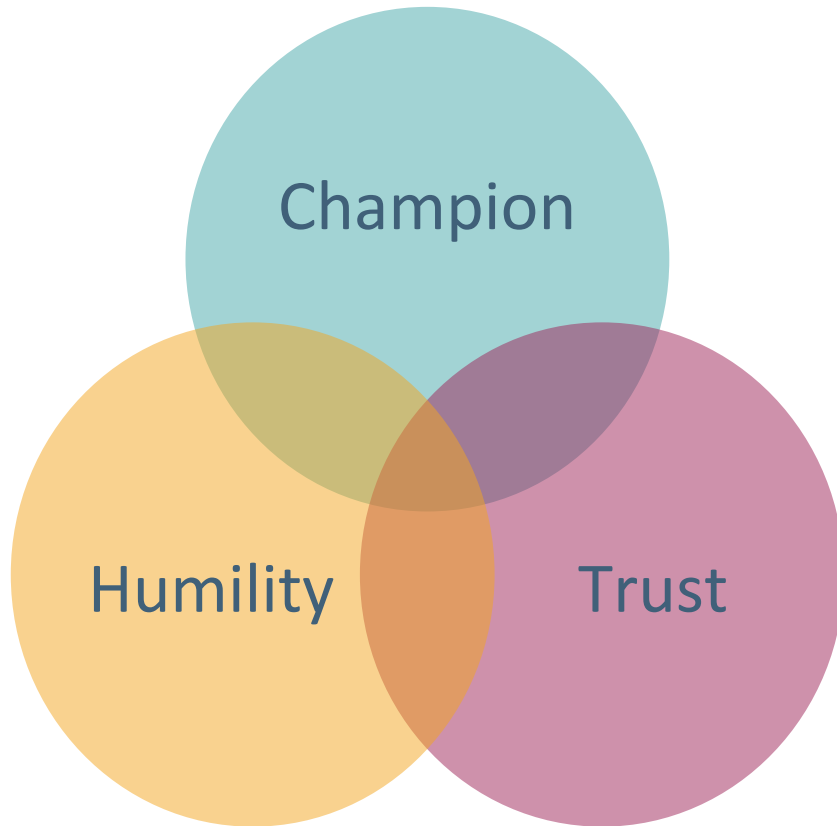


The trauma of the abuse is nothing,  
absolutely nothing... compared to the trauma  
of not being believed.”

~ Ruth Krevsky



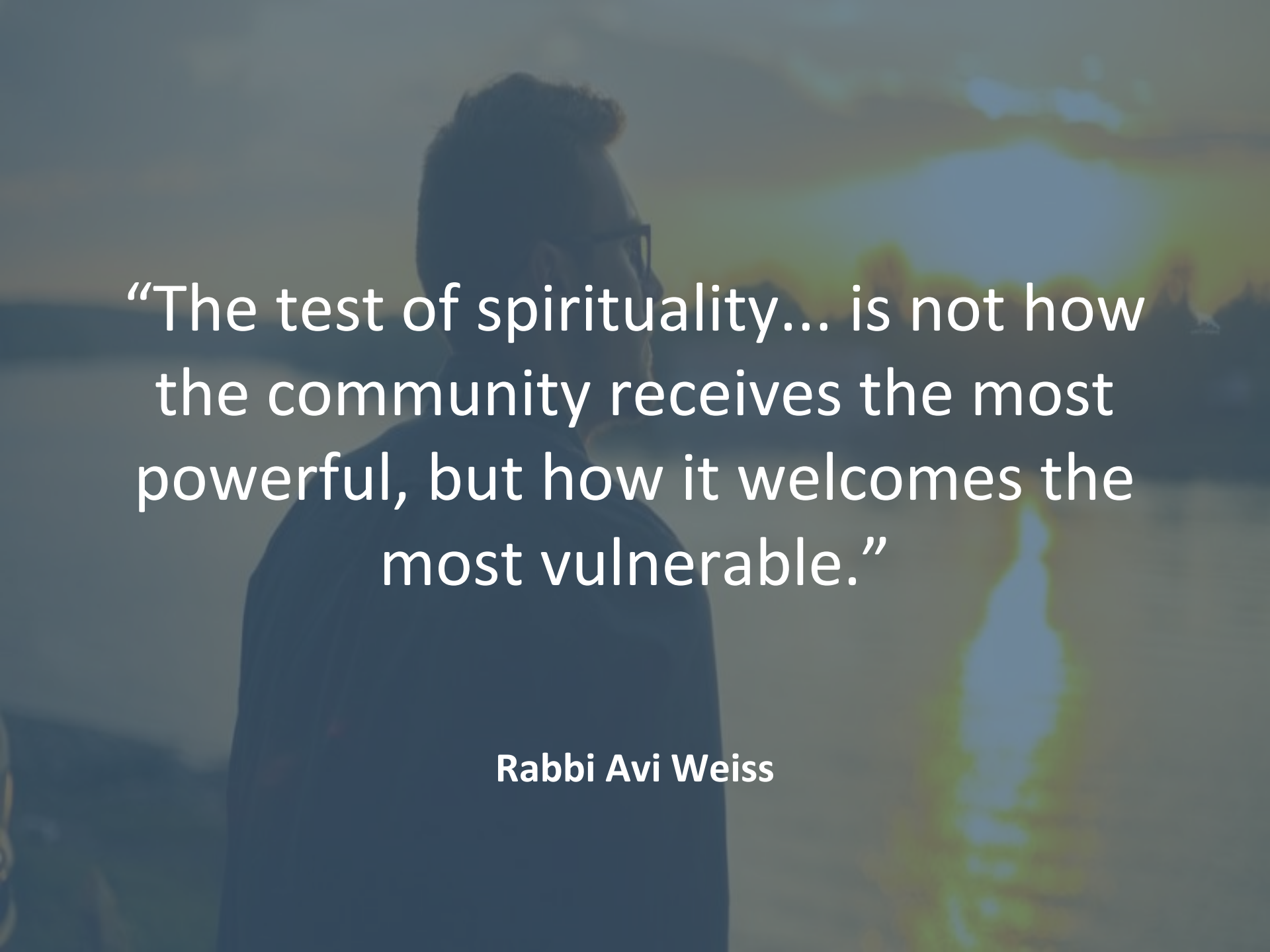
# It Doesn't Need to Be this Way



- Turn to clergy in trauma
- A new lens
- Visiting victim





A silhouette of a man with glasses looking out over a sunset or sunrise over water. The background is a soft, hazy landscape with a bright light source on the horizon, creating a warm glow. The man is in the foreground, looking towards the right.

“The test of spirituality... is not how the community receives the most powerful, but how it welcomes the most vulnerable.”

**Rabbi Avi Weiss**

# Poll Question

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Do you discuss spirituality with patients?

# Religion Intersects Directly With Treatment

- Prevention of COVID-19 removed critical supports/safeguards
- Sexual health
  - Assumptions about fidelity or sexual exploration
  - Physician may be the only one having these conversations, engage parent (Heart Women Girls, Our Whole Lives)
  - 90% of abuse is by parent or family member, Honor thy father or mother
- Recs must account for reality: Running or Dietary laws
- Abuse reporting (Berkovits, 2017; Hutchinson, 2015)
- Eating Disorders
  - Ramadan, Yom Kippur, Ash Wednesday
- OCD/Scrupulosity
  - Bug checking, ritual bath, Passover cleaning
- Prohibitions against taking medication or vaccines
- Spare the rod, spoil the child (Vieth)



A man with a goatee and glasses, wearing a blue and white striped short-sleeved shirt and light-colored pants, stands in front of a large, multi-story building with classical architectural features like columns and a pediment. The scene is outdoors with green trees in the background. The image has a dark, semi-transparent overlay.

**When it comes to religion and spirituality,  
no one is neutral.**

**~ Dr. Kenneth Pargament**

# What Blocks Might we Face?

- Practice in a biomedical model
- Lack of training
- Importance to patients underestimated
- Personal beliefs
  - Academics are more likely to be agnostic or have negative views especially towards conservative religions (college experience)
- Time constraints
- Lack of confidence
- Ethical concerns about privacy



# Tools for Assessing Spiritual History

- **HOPE Questions for Spiritual Assessment**
- **FACT Spiritual Assessment Tool**
- **FICA Spiritual History Tool**
- **Open Invite**



# Sample Questions

## Direct

- Are you part of a spiritual or religious community?
- Do you have spiritual beliefs that help you cope with stress?

## General

- What are your sources of hope, strength, comfort, and peace?

## Supportive

- How might I address your spiritual needs?
- Are there resources in your faith community you would like me to help mobilize on your behalf?



# Things You Can Do

## Generally

- Take spiritual history or open dialogue when providing ongoing care
- Understand dual nature; Be on the lookout for spiritual injuries
- Train in faith communities, ask them to train you & your staff
- Build connections with faith communities in advance
- Tip sheets for cultivating spirituality

## Specifically

- Bring in a chaplain
- Chapels, mediation rooms, quiet rooms
- Provide access to religious and spiritual objects
- Incorporate spirituality into medical/mental health care (prayer)
- Coordinate care with spiritual advisor (need release)





# Tip Sheets for Cultivating Spirituality

- Spend a few min a day in meditation or prayer.
- For 5 min a day, think about things you can do to improve the world or your community.
- Spend time in nature, taking in the world around you.
- For 5 min a day, relax and think about the purpose of life, and where you fit in.
- Read a religious, spiritual or uplifting book
- Listen to music or join a choir.
- Attend a religious service daily or weekly.

Adapted from Dr. Jonathan Haidt from the University of Virginia



# Poll Question

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Would you feel comfortable discussing spirituality with your patient?

# Suggested Reading

**What Role do Religion and Spirituality Play in Mental Health? (Pargament, K. 2013)**

[www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2013/03/religion-spirituality](http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2013/03/religion-spirituality)

**Religious Involvement, Spirituality, and Medicine: Implications for Clinical Practice (Mueller et al. 2001)**

Mayo Clinic: <https://doi.org/10.4065/76.12.1225>

**Religiosity, Spirituality, & Trauma Recovery in the Lives of Children and Adolescents (Bryant-Davis, 2012)**

<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2012-20632-003>

**Changes in Personal Religion/Spirituality During and After Childhood Abuse: A Review (Walker, 2009)**

<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2012-20632-003>

**Ritual Well:** <https://ritualwell.org/healing-hard-times>

**From Sticks to Flowers: Guidelines for Child Protection Professionals (Vieth, V., 2014)**

[www.zeroabuseproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/NCPTC-From-Sticks-to-Flowers-2.pdf](http://www.zeroabuseproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/NCPTC-From-Sticks-to-Flowers-2.pdf)

**Institutional Abuse in the Jewish Community (Berkovits, 2017)**

<https://traditiononline.org/institutional-abuse-in-the-jewish-community-by-shira-m-berkovits/>



*Creating Sacred Spaces. Together.*



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[www.JewishSacredSpaces.org](http://www.JewishSacredSpaces.org)