

Spirituality, Religion & Pain



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Goals of the Workshop

- **To examine the contribution of spiritual views to pain experience**
- **To identify research & practice questions in this area**
- **To provide an opportunity for people who live with chronic pain to comment about their spirituality in the context of their pain experience**



What is suffering?

“Suffering is the perception of serious threat or damage to the self, and it emerges when a discrepancy develops between what one expected of one’s self and what one does or is.” (Chapman & Gavrin, 1999, p. 2233)

Ladonna

“Life without ballet. What could I do? Who would I be? Would anyone love me if I couldn’t dance? Would I be desirable, if I had no gift to offer, no special talent?... My identity as a ballerina had provided me with a sense of belonging and understanding of my place in the world. Without that identity, I felt lost. It took me years to realize that in losing my identity I had not lost who I am. Perhaps I would have, had I not found a new way to manifest the essential qualities of my original gift... The gift was not simply the physical ability to execute the steps. Rather it was the ability to bring to life an expression of great emotion. That gift remains mine.” (Kielhofner, pp. 134-135)

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- **Suffering provokes significant questioning**
 - **Why do I suffer?**
 - **Who am I? What is my life going to be like?**
 - **What is the meaning or the purpose of my life?**

Definitions of Spirituality

– theistic, sacred, secular

1. relationship to God, a spiritual being, a higher power;
2. not of the self, a reality greater than the self;
3. transcendence or connectedness unrelated to a belief in a higher being;
4. existential, not of the material world;
5. meaning and purpose in life;
6. life force of the person, integrating aspect of the person
7. summative (definitions that combine 3-6)



Unruh et al. (2002) Spirituality unplugged: A review of Contentions and commonalities, and a resolution



What is spirituality?

- process of personal questioning about the origin and purpose of human life
- Questioning about ultimate truths



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- *How was the world created?*
 - *What is the origin of life?*
 - *Is there life after death?*
 - *How do we account for the presence of good and evil in the world?*
 - *Is there a supreme being or a higher intelligence over all life?*
 - *Why do bad things happen to people?*
 - *What are our obligations to each other and the world around us?*

 - *Why do I suffer?*
 - *How can I live with my (pain) and still have a meaningful and productive life?*

Some Spiritual Frameworks

Empiricist

Agnostic

Humanist

Theistic

A-theistic

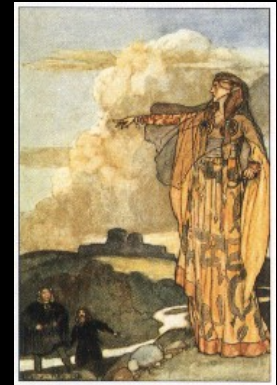
Religious

Spirituality & Historical Views of Pain

- Ancient Egyptian explanations about the origin of pain & suffering were embedded in religious views
- Supernatural entities cause & maintain pain & disease according to goodness or evil of the person
- Punishment of sin & transgression is dominant theme in explanation about pain

McGrath & Unruh (1987) (chapter on history of pain in childhood)

Unruh (1992) Voices from the past: Ancient views of pain in childhood



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- **Pain relief was achieved in part by appealing to gods, God – incantations, religious rites, sacrificial offerings, prayer, exorcism of demons, amulets and so on**
 - **Religious leaders were healers**

Galen (130-200 A.D.)

“Just as agriculture promises nourishment to healthy bodies, so does the art of medicine promise health to the sick. Nowhere is this knowledge lacking, for the most uncivilized nations have knowledge of herbs, and other things to hand for the aiding of wounds and diseasesDiseases were (in olden times) ascribed to the anger of immortal gods, and from them help used to be sought”

“All diseases of Christians are to be ascribed to demons, chiefly do they torment the fresh baptized, yea even the guiltless newborn infant.”

**St. Augustine
in Haggard, 1929, p. 298**



The Holy Salve –

from Lacnunga, a physician's handbook, 1000 A.D.

And thus shall the butter be made for the holy salve: let the butter be churned from a cow of all one colour, so that she be all red or all white without markings; and if thou have not butter enough, wash other butter very clean and mix with it. And shred up all plants together very small; and hallow water with font-hallowing; and put a bowl of it in the butter. Then take a stick and make four prongs to it. Write on the face of the prongs these holy names: Matthew, Luke, Mark, John. Then stir the butter with the stick, the whole vessel.

Do thou sing over it these psalms:

‘Beati Immaculati’, each section thrice over it, that is, the names of the saints and ‘Deus Meus et Pater’ and ‘In Principio’ and let this charm be sung over it: ‘Acre Arcre Arnem Nona Aernem Beoora Aernem: Nidren Arcun Cunao Ele Harassan Fidine’. Sing this nine times, and put thy spittle on the plants and blow on them and lay them by the bowl and afterwards let a mass-priest hallow them. Let him sing these prayers over them: “Holy Lord, Omnipotent Father, Eternal God: by the laying on of my hands may the enemy, the Devil,

depart from the hairs, from the head, from the eyes, from the nose, from the lips, from the tongue, from the undertongue, from the neck, from the breast, from the feet, from the heels, from the whole framework of his members, so that the Devil may have no power over him, neither in his speech nor in his silence, neither in his sleeping nor in his waking, neither by day or by night, neither in resting nor in running, neither in seeing nor in sleeping, neither in writing or in reading; So be it in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who redeemed us with His Holy Blood, Who liveth with the Father and Reigneth God, world without end. Amen (quoted in Cartwright, 1977, p.12)

In the Christian World

- 1215 sickness caused by sin, physician's first duty to summon a priest (Fourth Lateran Council)
- 16th century, physician must swear to stop treating the patient if hasn't confessed after 3 days
- 18th century, Catholic physicians forbidden to practice if they treated patients who had not confessed their sins

Kelsey (1973), Kinsley (1996)

Introduction of Anesthesia

- Ether & chloroform intoxicants
- Medical dangers
- Reduced patient's autonomy
- Risked abuse
- Potentially covered physician's bungling
- Discrimination & prejudice was possible

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- **Pain necessary part of life force, necessary to healing**
 - **Pain spiritually uplifting**
 - **To relieve pain was to do the work of the devil**
 - **Humankind was born through pain & sorrow of childbirth**
 - **Children delivered painlessly refused baptism**

Atkinson - first president of the American Dental Association

“I think anesthesia is of the devil, and I cannot give my sanction to any Satanic influence which derives a man of the capacity to recognize the law! I wish there was no such thing as anesthesia! I do not think men should be prevented from passing through what God intended them to endure.”

C.S. Lewis (1940)

“Until the evil man finds evil unmistakably present in his existence in the form of pain he is enclosed in illusion. Once pain has roused him he knows that he is in some way or other ‘up against’ the real universe; he either rebels with the possibility of a clearer issue and deeper repentance at some later stage, or else makes some attempt at an adjustment, which, if pursued, will lead him to religion ... No doubt pain as God’s megaphone is a terrible instrument; it may lead to final and unwanted rebellion. But it gives the only opportunity the bad man can have for amendment.”

Sauerbruch & Wenke (1963)

- **Eventual acceptance fundamentally challenged attitudes about pain**
- **No longer willing to adapt to pain**
- **Expectation that all pain can be relieved**
- **Helpless in situations where pain cannot be eliminated**

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- **Anesthesia also challenged long held views about the nature of pain and suffering**
 - **Pain as punishment & retribution for sin and wrong doing?**

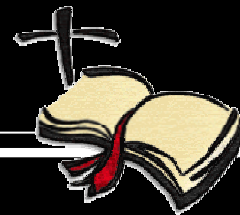
Anglican Book of Common Prayer 1928- 1978



“Wherefore, whatsoever your sickness is, know you certainly that it is God’s visitation ... to try your patience for the example of others, ... or else be sent unto you to correct and amend in you whatsoever doth offend the eyes of your heavenly father...” (<http://justus.anglican.org>).

Anglican Book of Common Prayer (1979) (US)

Lord Jesus Christ, by your patience in suffering you hallowed earthly pain and gave us the example of obedience to your Father's will: Be near me in my time of weakness and pain; sustain me by your grace, that my strength and courage may not fail; heal me according to your will; and help me always to believe that what happens to me here is of little account if you hold me in eternal life, my Lord and my God. Amen.



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- **Focus is not on punishment & retribution**
 - **God understands what it means to suffer**
 - **God will comfort & be with the sufferer**
 - **God will strengthen**
 - **God will heal if that is his will**

O'Rourke (1992)

“Suffering, especially suffering during the last moments of life, has a special place in God’s saving plan: it is in fact a sharing in Christ’s passion and a union with the redeeming sacrifice which he offered in obedience to the Father’s will. Medication, coma, reduce opportunity to share or experience in this way. Nevertheless, the church recognized the ideal cannot be a general rule .. would be imprudent to impose a heroic way as a general rule.”

“If possible, a person should have the opportunity ‘to moderate the use of pain killers, in order to accept voluntarily at least part of their sufferings and thus associate themselves in a conscious way with the suffering of Christ’”.

Cusick (2003) APS Bulletin 13(5)

- Pain as punishment
- Pain as opportunity for transcendence
- Pain as test
- Pain as atonement
- Pain as gaining or regaining control

(Mary Baker Eddy “When your belief in pain ceases, the pain stops; for matter has no intelligence of its own. The full understanding that God is Mind, and that matter is but a belief, enables you to control pain.)

Possible misconceptions for people with strong religious views

- 1) do not take pain medication (or don't take enough of it) for fear of becoming addicted;
- 2) pain should be dealt with only in spiritual terms, and taking medication for pain relief is relying on something other than God;
- 3) pain should not be relieved because it results in spiritual growth; and
- 4) if you still have pain, then your faith is not strong enough.

Koenig (2003)

Limited research about pain & spirituality in the pain literature

Spirituality & coping with pain or outcomes

- Bush et al. (1999)
- Dunn & Horgas (2004) (older adults & chronic pain)
- Keefe et al. (2001) (pts with RA)
- Risdon et al. (2003) (acceptance of pain)
- Harrison et al. (2005) (pts with sickle cell)
- Rippentrop et al. (2005) (chronic musculoskeletal pain)

Spirituality & Therapy

- Abbott et al. (2001) (spiritual healing for chronic pain, RCT)
- Ashby & Lenhart (1994) (prayer)
- Low (1997) (rel orientation & pain management)
- Matthews et al. (2000) intercessory prayer & RA

Research & Practice Questions

- Do the world religions have different ways of understanding pain?
- Does spirituality affect values & beliefs about pain?
- For what proportion of pain patients does spirituality matter in the management of pain?
- What are the implications of spiritual views on pain management?
- Are spiritual views a benefit or a hindrance to living with chronic pain?
- What do patients with chronic pain & spiritual views want from health care providers?
- What is the biological & psychological experience of people who use pain for spiritual ends?

Books about Spirituality & Pain

- Lewis (1940) *The Problem of Pain*
- Brena (1972) *Pain and Religion: A psychophysiological study*
- Scarry (1985) *The body in pain: the making and unmaking of the world*
- Kinsley (1996) *Health, Healing and Religion: A Cross-Cultural perspective*
- Glucklich (2001) *Sacred Pain: Hurting the body for the sake of the soul*
- Koenig (2003) *Chronic Pain: Biomedical and Spiritual Approaches*
