

# Spirituality

*by* Saraswathi N

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## Spirituality

- Dr Saraswathi N

The elderly population are faced with challenges due to various socio-economic issues such as population dynamics, urbanisation, migration, changes in social values including as family structure and relevant support system. In Indian context, having invested all their savings on education and the well-being of their children instead of saving for their old age, many older adults may find themselves at the crossroads having to live alone. Many are dependent on their children for needs, or live on their own or elderly care homes. As a consequence, loneliness, depression and other mental health issues are common among the elderly.

Ageing itself is a journey which includes spiritual dimension, which focuses on meaning in life, hope and purpose.

### What is spirituality?

It is a broad concept with different meaning for different people. Spirituality can be considered as sense or a belief that there is something greater than oneself. According to Cambridge Dictionary, Spirituality is defined as “the quality that involves deep feelings and beliefs of a religious nature, rather than the physical parts of life”. Some claim that it is about belief in God and so encourage actively participating in organized religion. For many others it is about spending time in nature, meditation or other experiences which helps them to get in touch with their spiritual self.

India is rich in terms of culture, tradition and heritage. As it is always described, the essence of India is “unity in diversity” with its multicultural, multilingual and multifaceted lifestyle. Despite the socio-cultural and religious differences, there’s a sense of inter-connectedness and togetherness among the people. Indian civilization is one of the oldest in the world, and is said to be rich storehouse of spiritual understanding. In fact, spirituality is the soul of India, and people from all over the world come to our country to explore spirituality. The meaning of “spirituality” varies from people to people. But in a general sense, spirituality means an understanding of our own self and the world around us. An important aspect of spirituality is guiding in finding the meaning and purpose in lives themselves. Whereas religion lays stress on customs, rites and rituals, spirituality mostly focuses on our inner life.

### Why one must adopt spirituality?

Lifestyle diseases like diabetes, hypertension, gastric problems, chronic pain conditions and mental stress are increasing day by day. More number of elderly people are suffering from these physical and mental health conditions.

Spirituality helps in reducing pain, understanding self and strengthening the mind, and preparing for a peaceful journey till the end.

#### **Spiritual needs of the elderly can include:**

- the **need** for meaning and purpose in life
- the **need** to love and feel loved
- the **need** to feel a sense of belonging
- the **need** to feel hope, peace and gratitude

Spirituality is believing that there is something greater than self and to understand that one needs to have a set of values, principles and morals and to apply them in day today life. Everybody experiences emotions in the journey of life. These emotions can be positive like happiness, hope, acceptance and forgiveness. But our life is not free from negative emotions which haunt us every day like fear, loss, frustrations, disappointments. So there is always a fluctuation between the two. During these fluctuations in life, we find that spirituality helps in balancing the emotions and prepares the individual to face any loss, grief or fears in life. Spirituality has the power and capability to make our decisions and choices easier, give us the resiliency to survive with grace and inner peace in the face of adversity. Having a spiritual element in our lives may even help reducing the suffering from a physical or mental health condition.

#### **Personal Reflection**

Take a moment to assess your own spiritual wellness by asking yourself the following questions.

1. What gives my life meaning and purpose?
2. What gives me hope?
3. How do I get through tough times? Where do I find comfort?
4. Am I tolerant of other people's views about life issues?
5. Do I make attempts to expand my awareness of different ethnic, racial and religious groups?
6. Do I make time for relaxation in my day?
7. Do my values guide my decisions and actions?
8. Using my experience, how do I make decisions?

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#### **Approach to the spiritual care**

Spiritual care should ideally encompass the whole lifestyle of a person. Lifestyle means the way in which we live and work. It includes the way we eat, dress, talk, think and behave in public and private lives.

- Ahaar (Eating) - What we eat, how much we eat and how we eat?

- Vihaar (Relaxation) - The way in which we engage ourselves in relaxation, entertainment and leisure time activities.
- Vichaar (Thought) - Our mental make-up, emotional control, attitude and outlook to life.
- Vyavhaar (Action) - What we actually behave or practice in public and private life.

### **Ahaar: Food is God**

Do you eat well? What do you eat? How much do you eat and how do you eat?

Reflect on your routine and decide for yourself. The ancient Indian Yoga goes to the extent of classifying people in three categories: Satvic, Rajassic and Tamassic based on the food and lifestyle.

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### **Vihaar: Work up, Rest and Relaxation**

Sedentary lifestyle is the culprit behind several problems.

While regular walking, gym, acrobatics and a host of exercises are of great benefit in building the body, the practice of Yoga and meditation are especially helpful in keeping the body fit as well as in combating stress.

Do you exercise regularly and pursue some kind of physical activity?

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Do you take adequate rest? Do you sleep well?

How do you enjoy your leisure time? Take away time from TV sets. You may like to engage in a variety of hobbies.

Chanting of Mantras or any other religious prayers, listening to devotional or classical music, especially early morning is a blissful experience. Participation in activities like Satsang, Bhajans, discourses by religious leaders are helpful in utilizing your leisure in a meaningful manner. Cultivation of hobbies such as music, painting, photography, gardening, keeping pets are some good hobbies to keep you engaged, active and happy.

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### **Vichaar (Thought): Sound mind in a sound body**

Spirituality can help you to cultivate 'a sound mind in a sound body'. How can you possess good mental health? How can you feel free from worry and tension? Cultivate emotional control.

- Are you short tempered?
- Are you upset when others criticise you?
- Are you too ambitious? Unwilling to accept defeat?
- Are you aggressive, neutral, or shy?

### **Vyavhaar – Practice makes perfect!**

Selfless engagement in social service is a way of practicing spirituality. Whenever any opportunity of service to your friends, relatives or any needy person arises don't look back. Give whatever service you can do within your limits. Discover the true joy of loving, caring and sharing. any good deed will bounce back in good form.

## **2 Practice Spiritual Wellness**

When striving to develop and practice your own spiritual wellness, it is best to find the technique and approach that works for you; similar to the other dimensions of wellness, there is no "one size fits all" approach.

Your journey to spiritual wellness may involve the following:

- Practicing meditation or yoga (one can learn a technique and practice)
- Praying or taking part in organized religion
- Spending quiet time alone pondering the meaning of life
- Serving community,
- spending time in nature,
- appreciating music and the art

## **5 Nature related Spiritual Care - Nourish the spirit with nature.**

- Listen & watch birds outdoors
- Visit farm animals
- Pet baby animals
- Sit under a majestic tree
- Visit the shore to watch and listen to the waves
- Watch the stars under the night sky

## **5 Rest related Spiritual Care**

- Slow walk or wheelchair stroll around the garden
- Sitting in silence
- Holding hands

## **Benefits**

1. Spirituality can act as a way of life to live in peace with oneself and the surroundings.
2. The attitude of the elderly is fostered to find inner peace with a happy and meaningful life.
3. Spirituality improves quality of life

4. Spirituality helps in maintaining social relationship which in turn reduces loneliness and depression.
5. Spirituality maintains and improves physical and mental health.

Elderly people have spiritual needs apart from the other requirements towards healthy ageing. It is essential that they are engaged in spiritual practices in their day-to-day life to derive their meaning and purpose, exploring their selves, looking to the answers of fundamental questions of their lives by the means of spirituality.

There are four cornerstones of developing spirituality for promoting good health:

- Sadhana (rigorous pursuit and practice)
- Satsang (company of likeminded people, aided by your role model or Guru)
- Seva (Selfless service)
- Surrender to Almighty

Strategy for promoting good health should follow a holistic approach. It is here that spirituality can really offer help. It holds that highest quality of health is a feasible approach. You should consider fitness of body, mind and spirit as one integrated concept. Taking care of your health is extremely important because unless you address this you can't attain higher values of life.

### **Mindfulness**

It is the basic ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we are doing and not to be influenced by what is going on around us. It is about neither dwelling in the past nor worrying about future. Though this quality is present in everybody we have to learn how to access it and cultivate it. Mindfulness recognizes and cultivates the best quality as human beings.

when we are mindful, stress is reduced, insight and awareness are enhanced. Attachment and animosity can be reduced by practicing regularly.

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