

# **AUTISM: A Spiritual Care Perspective**

## **11th Annual Chattanooga Autism Conference**

September 18 -19, 2020

Virtual Conference via Zoom

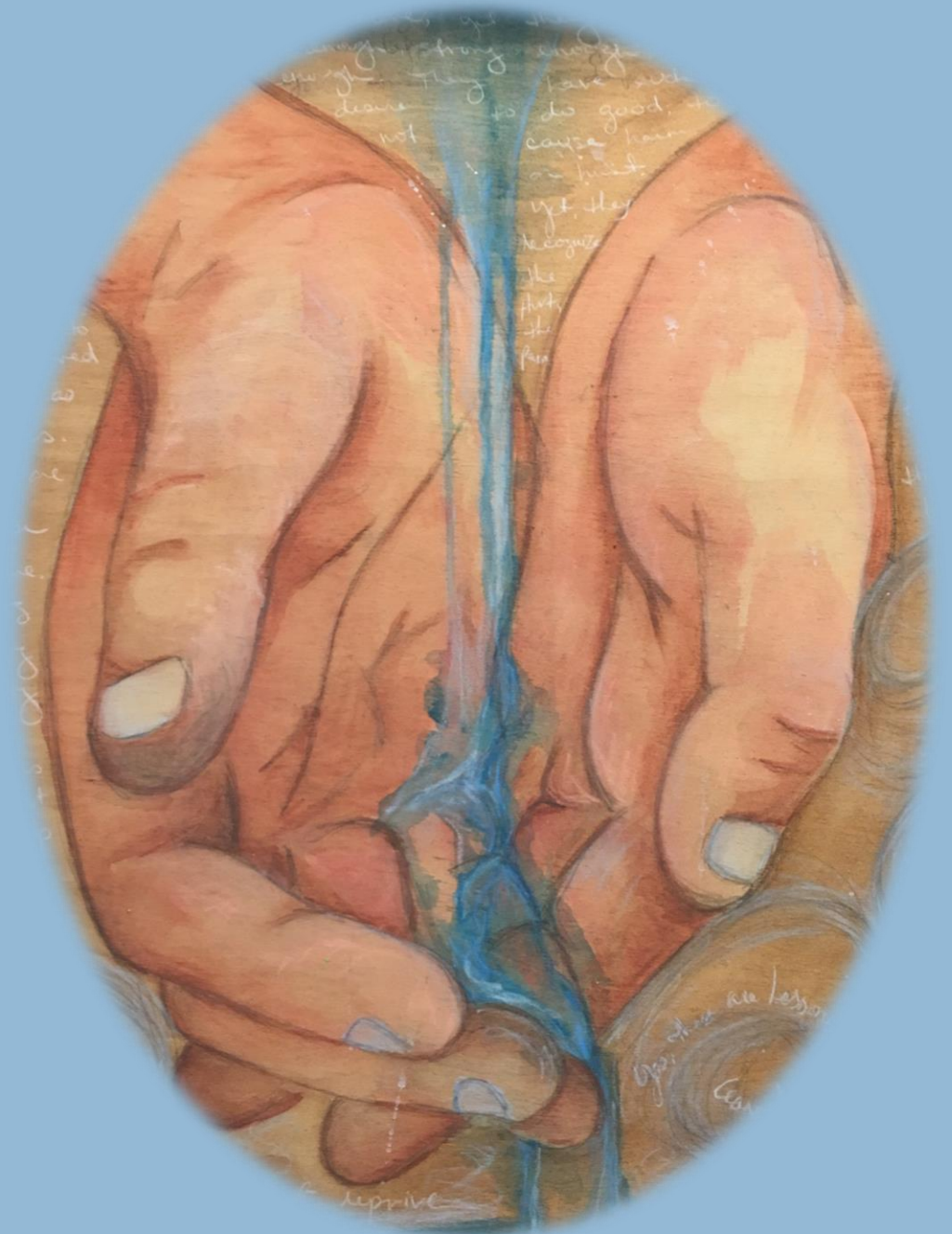
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# Learning Objectives

- Discuss aspects related to my personal journey with Autism and Spirituality
- Offer a definition of Religion and Spirituality
- Discuss some current and historical literature related to Autism
- Offer a Spiritual Assessments Model for persons on the Autism Spectrum
- Discuss some Spiritual Resources available for persons on the Autism Spectrum



# A Personal Journey

- **Feelings**
- **Thoughts**
- **Losing my voice**
- **Finding my voice**
- **Fears**
- **Desires**
- **Needs**



- **Calming**
- **Peaceful**
- **Creativity**
- **Dreams**
- **Energy**
- **Solitude**
- **Rhythm**



- Peaceful
- Comfort
- Being held
- Safe
- Solitude

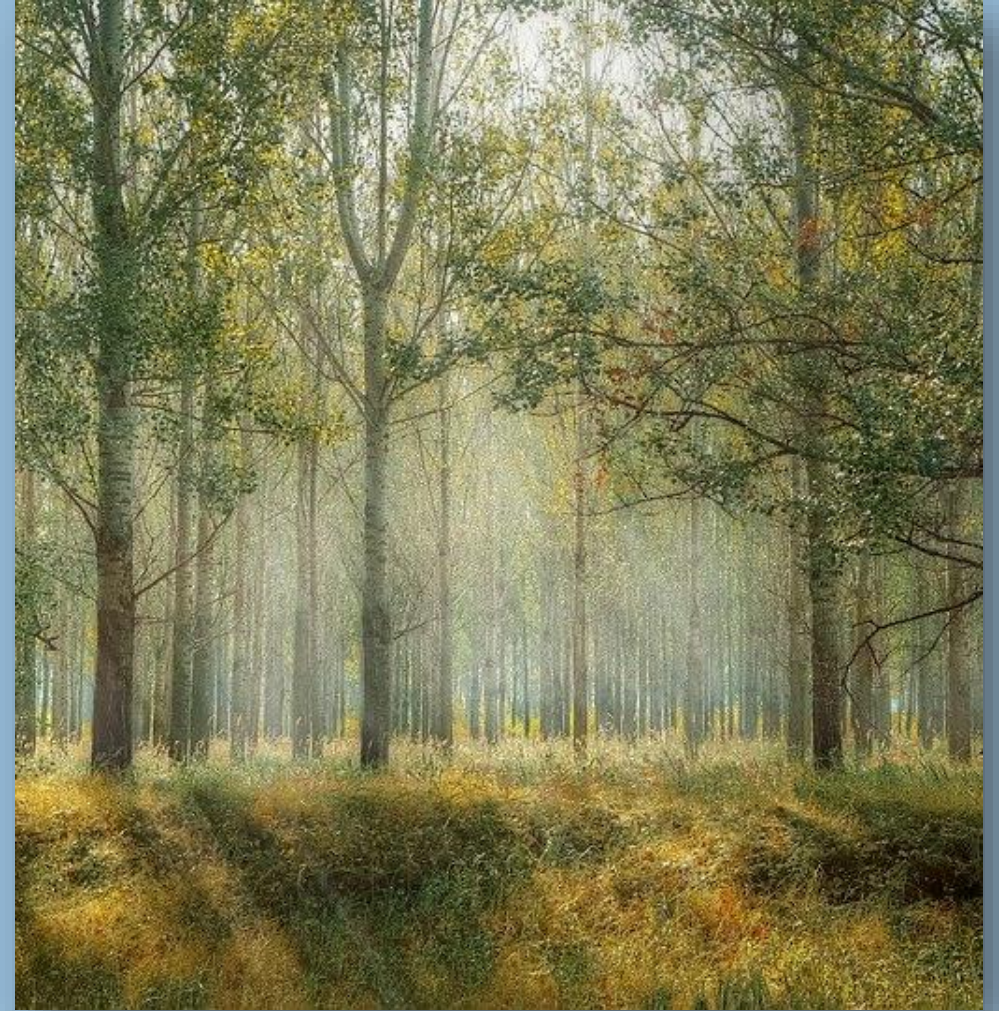




- **Being held**
- **Safe**
- **Peaceful**
- **Solitude**
- **Comfort**

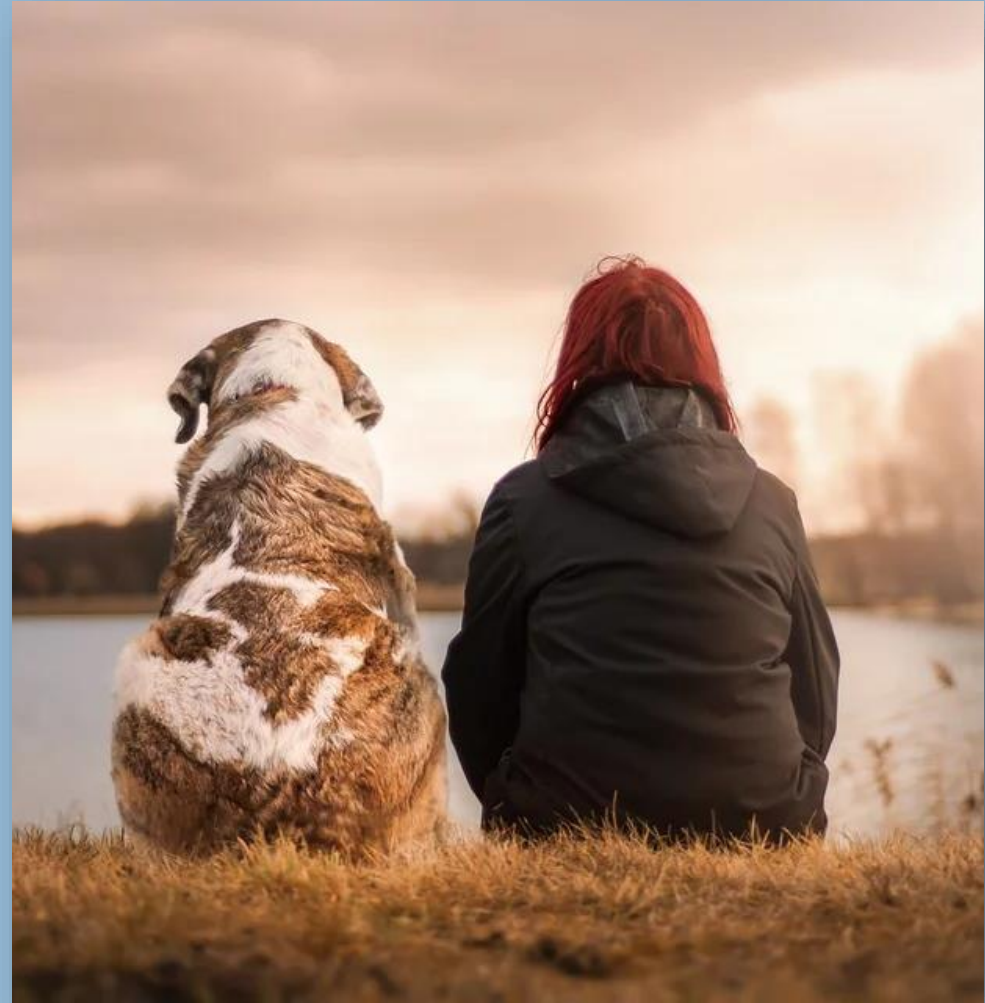


- Creativity
- Imagination
- Mystery
- Wandering/Roaming
- Timeless
- Space-less
- Peaceful
- Connection
- Feeling understood
- Security
- Belonging
- Freedom
- Harmony





- **Life**
- **Connection**
- **Relationships**
- **Communication**
- **Trust**
- **Love**
- **Communion**
- **Calming**
- **Safe**



- **Meaning**
- **Hope**
- **Life**
- **Waiting**
- **Calming**
- **Connection**
- **Mystery**



- **Dreams**
- **Hopes**
- **Calmness**
- **Comfort**
- **Imagination**
- **Meaning**
- **Meditation**
- **Wandering**

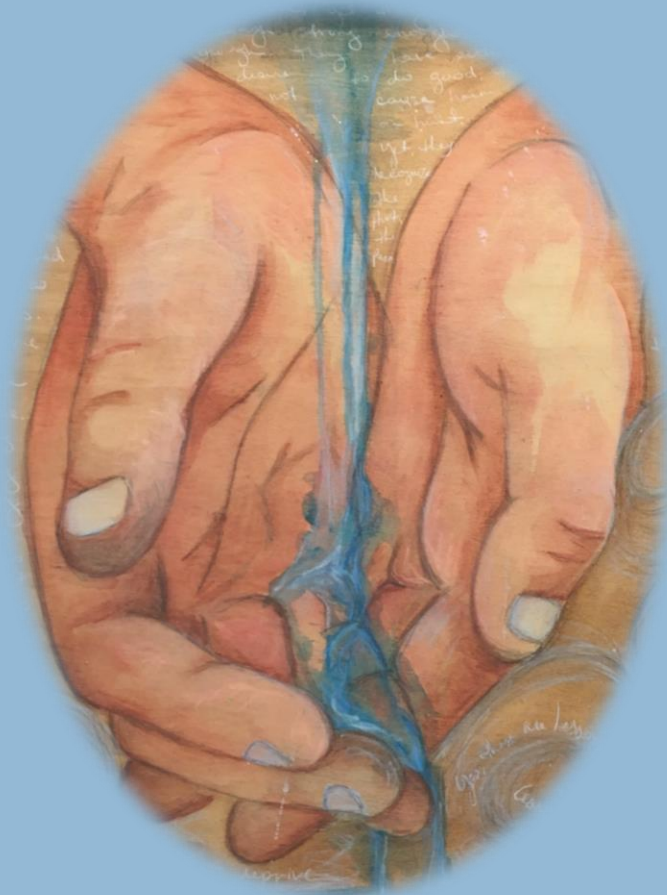


- Calming
- Smell
- Rhythm
- Serenity
- Peaceful
- Plants
- Life
- Harmony





# Autism





# The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2019)

## A Developmental Disability:

- Significant Social Challenges
- Communication
- Behavioral Challenges



# The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2020)

## Problems with:

- Social
- Emotional
- Communication Skills
- About 1 in 54 has been identified with ASD



# The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2019)

Signs of ASD begin during early childhood and typically last throughout a person's life.

- Have trouble relating to others
- No interest in other people
- Avoid eye contact



# The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

**Signs of ASD begin during early childhood and typically last throughout a person's life.**

- Repeat actions over and over
- Trouble adapting to changes in routine
- Trouble expressing needs with typical words or motions



# World Health Organization (WHO, 2019)

- In 2017, WHO reported that ASD affects 1 in 160 children
- ASD begins in childhood and remains throughout adulthood
- Impaired social behavior, communication and language





# Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM5)

- Deficits in social/emotional reciprocity
- Abnormal social approach
- Failure of normal back-and-forth conversation



# Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM5)

- Failure to initiate or respond to social interactions
- Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors
- Deficits in developing, maintaining and understanding relationships



# Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM5)

- Insistence on sameness
- Inflexible adherence to routine
- Ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behaviors
- Visual fascination with lights or movement



# The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2019)

“Signs of ASD begin during early childhood and typically last throughout a person’s life.”

“There is currently no cure for  
Autism Spectrum Disorder.”



# Asceticism in Ancient Mesopotamia and Syria: A Study of Autism in Antiquity

- The denial of physical or psychological desires in order to attain a spiritual ideal or goal.
- To induce some altered state of consciousness
- Roaming in the desert, possessing nothing, not even a cave
- Roaming around on the mountains and plateaus in severe cold and heat...

(Annus, 2018)





# A Study of Autism in Antiquity

- Solitude is one of the most effective emotional restoratives for someone with autism.
- Being alone can be a very effective way of calming down from anxiety (Attwood,2007:56)
- The ancient ascetics learned the needs of their bodies, they exposed themselves to severe cold, heat, rain, wind and snow.

(Amar Annus, 2018)



# Ascetic Life

- A liking for everyday routine
- The love of repetition
- Insistence on sameness
- Rigid behavior
- Seclusion in a cell, which separated them from the world

(Amar Annus, 2018)



# Ascetic Life

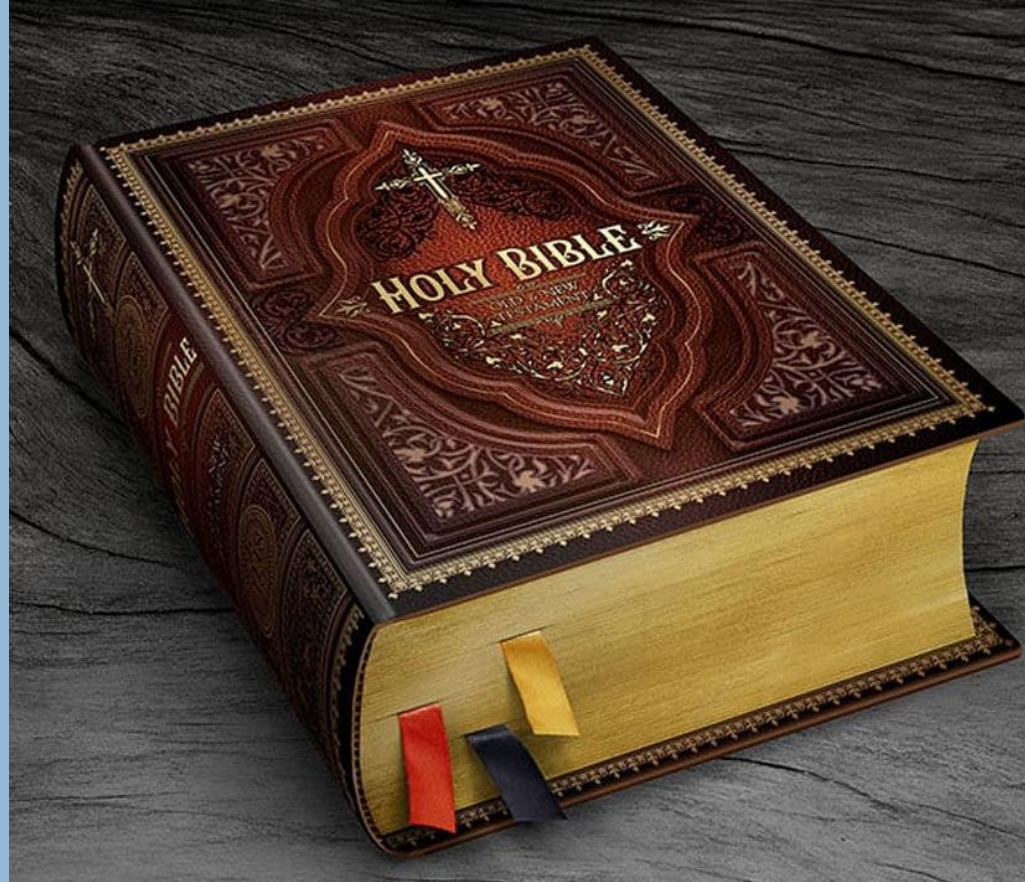
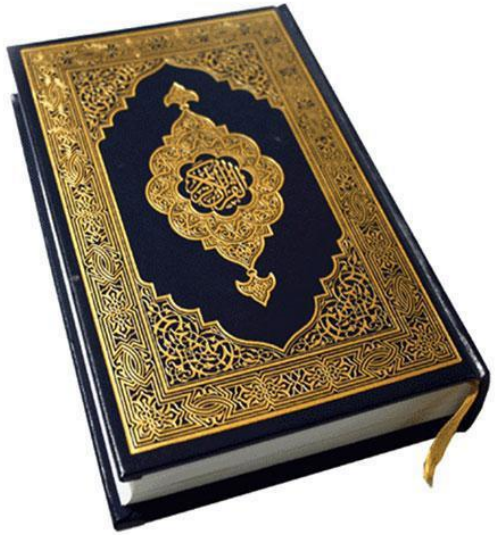
- Ascetic monasticism emerged with an impulse from nature.
- Monastic culture and autism became completely intertwined.
- Ascetic behaviors can be plausibly explained by the
- Prevalence of autistic traits in the population.

(Amar Annus, 2018)



# Religion

Holy Quran





# Religion Is...

*“a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things...”*  
(McGuire, 1987)

*“a system of organized beliefs and worship that persons practice.”*  
(Emblen, 1992)

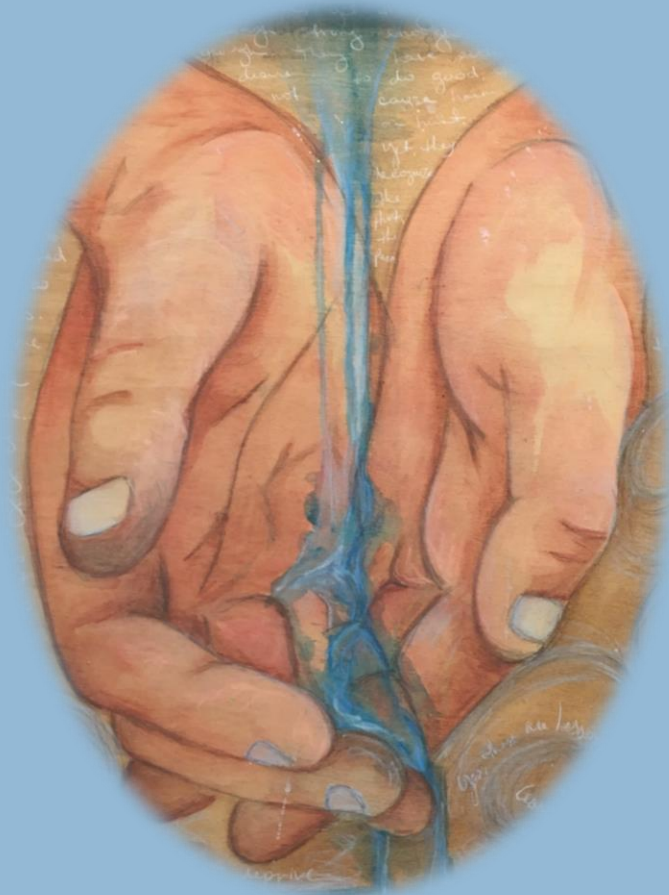
*“the externals of one’s belief system: church, prayer, tradition, rites, and rituals among others.”*  
(Joint Commission, 2005)

*“thought of as the institution, and participation in those institutions, in which the members have shared ideology o the divine or sacred.”*  
(Burke, 2006)





# Spirituality



# Spirituality...

*“speaks to what gives ultimate meaning and purpose to one’s life. It is that part of people that seeks healing and reconciliation with self and others.”*

(Puchalski, 2006)

*“is often a broad concept, referring to the human search for a sense of meaning, purpose, and morality in the context of relationship with self, others, the universe, and ultimate reality.”*

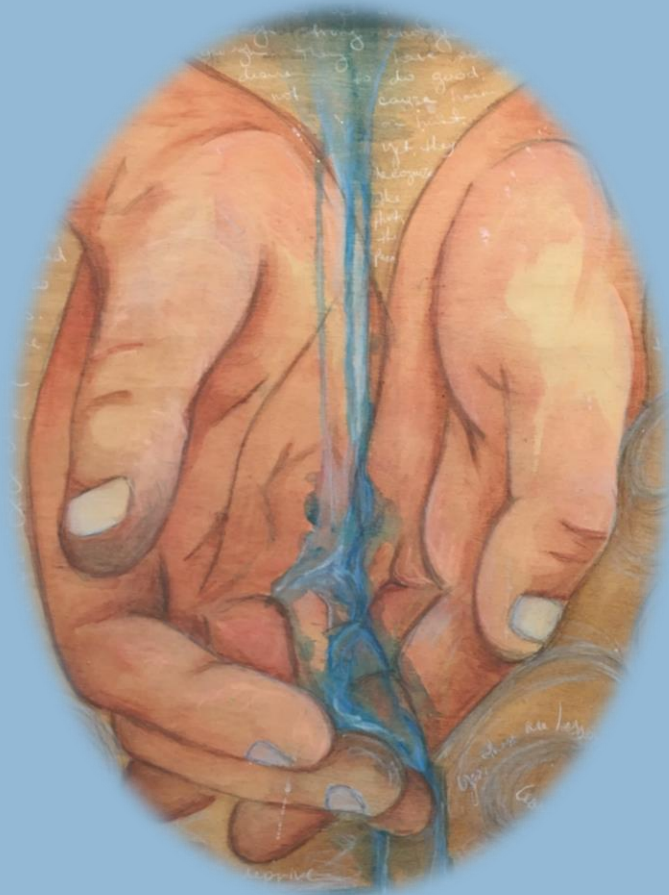
(Joint Commission, 2005)

*“at its most basic level, can be seen as the very essence of who we all are as human beings. It is that dimension that brings meaning to our lives.”*

(Frankl, 1963)



# Spiritual Care



# Spiritual Care Is...

*...the establishment of a relationship that gives attention to the internal experience of a person or persons.*

*Moreover, the aim of this relationship is healing which is characterized by the radical reunion of mind, body and spirit. The byproduct of this mystical union is inner peace.*



# Spiritual Care Is...

*...to embark upon an internal journey that has many twists and turns along the way. The spiritual care provider is often silent but always “present”.*



# Palliative Care

*When all the tests are done, the lab results are in, surgery is not an option, therefore cure is off the table. The patient and/or family then ask, what's next?*



# Interdisciplinary vs Multidisciplinary



# Five Domains of Pain for Palliative Care

The five domains of pain for palliative care are to be assessed accurately upon admission for effective care to be initiated and maintained.

- Physical
- Social
- Family
- Psychological
- Spiritual





# Five Domains of Pain for Autism Care

The five domains of pain for autism care are to be assessed from an interdisciplinary perspective. As with palliative care, an effective method of assessment is essential to quality care for persons on the autism spectrum. Also consistent with palliative care, is the need for care to be “wholistic/whole person”, mind, body and spirit.



# Five Domains of Pain for Autism Care

- **Physical**—Medical issues
- **Social**—Rejection, Abuse, Communication, Poverty, Criminal Justice System, Sexuality, Homelessness
- **Family**—Fear, Guilt, Helplessness, Shame, Anger, Despair
- **Psychological**—Depression, Bipolar, ADHD, Grief, Addiction
- **Spiritual**—Despair, Abandonment, Hopelessness, Anguish, loneliness, Distress, Hurt, Loss, Confusion, Fear, Rejection, Soul Pain, Anxiety, Meaning, Grief



# The P.A.G.A.N. Model

A Spiritual Assessment Model for Persons on the Autism Spectrum

- PAIN
- AWARENESS
- GRIEF
- ASSERTIVENESS
- NATURE



# The P.A.G.A.N. Model

A Spiritual Assessment Model for Persons on the Autism Spectrum

## PAIN

Spiritual pain/Soul pain/ existential suffering related to autism care is in part a crisis in meaning. The pain can be rooted in social/family interactions, inability to communicate feelings or thoughts effectively or feelings resulting from feelings of being disconnected with society.



# The P.A.G.A.N. Model

## A Spiritual Assessment Model for Persons on the Autism Spectrum

### AWARENESS

Many persons on the autism spectrum can reach a high level of awareness. Therefore, we seek to understand the level of awareness and seek to build on it as part of spiritual growth. So, to encourage and facilitate awareness of self and others is critical to healing. Awareness here includes both cognitive and emotional.



# The P.A.G.A.N. Model

## A Spiritual Assessment Model for Persons on the Autism Spectrum

### GRIEF

An understanding of grief and its importance for persons on the autism spectrum cannot be overstated. There may be the tendency to complicate the grief process due to repetitive behavior, need for sameness, and limited social interactions.



# The P.A.G.A.N. Model

## A Spiritual Assessment Model for Persons on the Autism Spectrum

### ASSERTIVENESS

Assertiveness rests between two extremes: passive and aggressive behavior. Difficulty with social interactions can create a tendency to be rather passive in social situations. In some cases, aggressive communication and/or behavior can be fueled by ineffective communication skills. Not to be overlooked is the focus on establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries.



# The P.A.G.A.N. Model

## A Spiritual Assessment Model for Persons on the Autism Spectrum

### NATURE

It is possible to undervalue our relationship and connection with nature in modern society. Even though plants, sun, water, soil and animals are intertwined with our daily life. So, to be intentional about this relationship contributes to our overall well-being.





# Spiritual Resources

Repetitive behavior, Desire for sameness, Solitude, Rituals, Internal focus, Sensitivity, Long suffering, Resilience, Creativity, Love, Meditation, Honesty, Devotion, Wandering/Roaming, Hope, Humility, Seekers, Nature, Sensory, Divinity, Inner Strength, Conviction, Integrity, Intuition, Caring, Acceptance, Interior Silence, Stillness



# Summary

## **A Personal Journey**

*Rocking, Roaming, Places of comfort,  
Repetitive behavior, Nature*

## **Religion**

*Institution, System of Beliefs, Rituals, Supernatural Being,  
Externals of one's life, Prosocial*

## **Spirituality**

*Ultimate meaning, Inward, being rather than doing,  
Nature, A Journey, Solitude,*



# Summary

***Ascetism, Autism and Nature*** intertwined, roaming,  
aloneness, sameness, repetitive behaviors, rituals

***Domains of Pain:*** Physical, Social, family,  
Psychological, Spiritual



# Summary

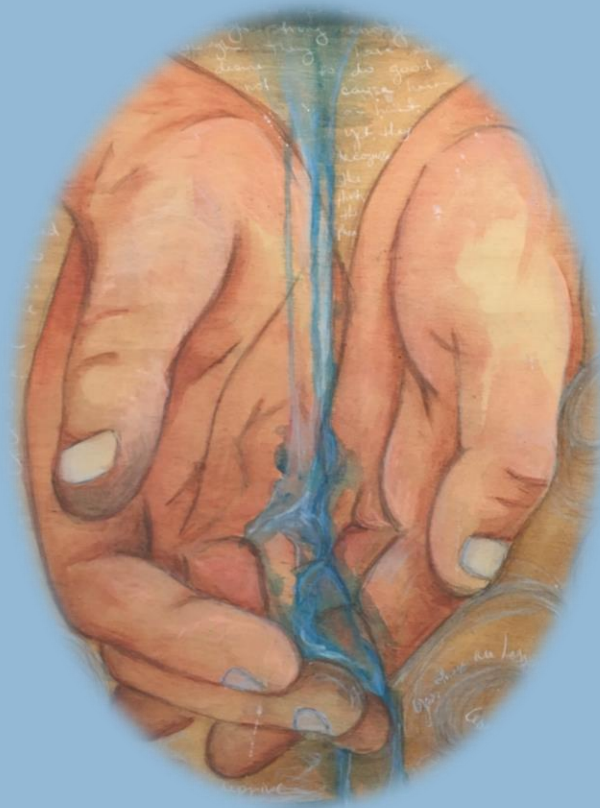
***Spiritual Assessment Model:***

*Pain/Awareness/Grief/Assertiveness/ Natu*

***Spiritual Resources:*** sameness, rituals, internal focus, resilience, creativity, meditation, love, devotion, repetitive behavior, commitment, hope, seeking



# Discussion



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