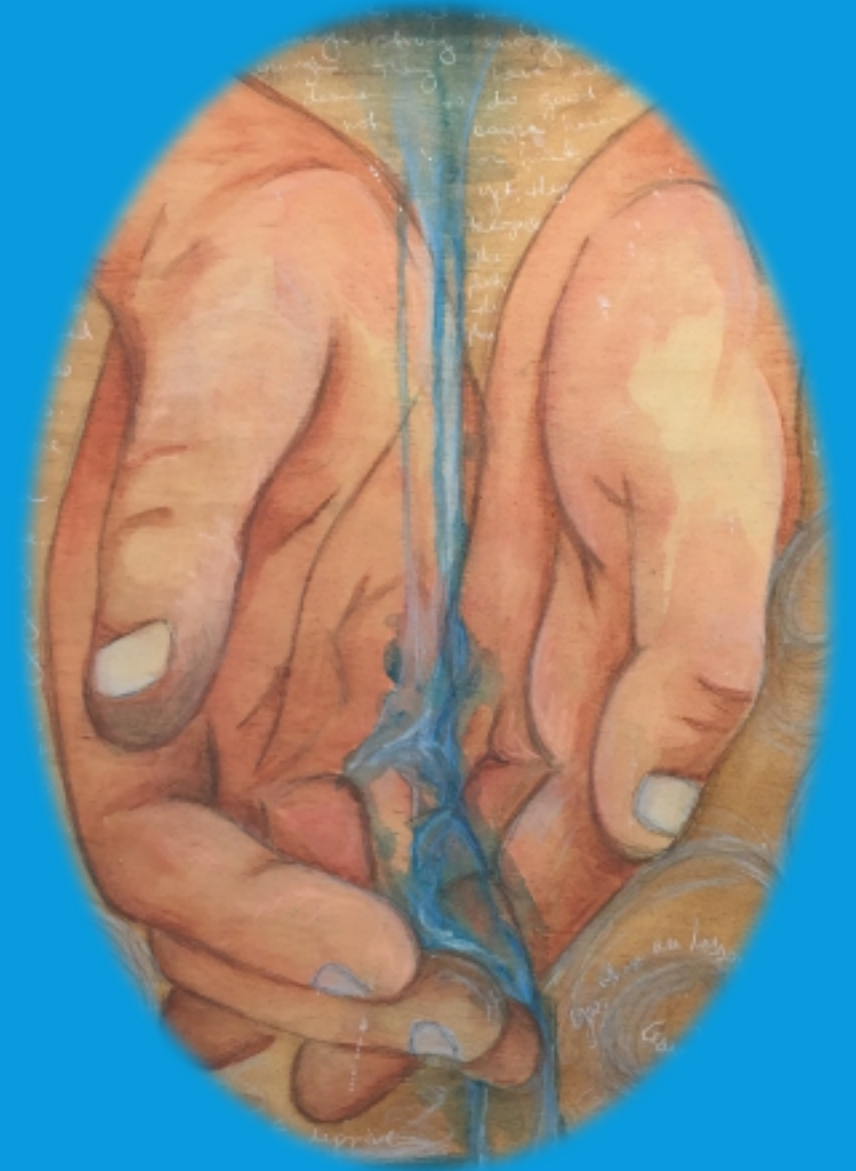


AUTISM AND AGING:

A Spiritual Care Perspective

**4th Annual Adult Symposium
July 24th and 25th, 2020
Virtual Conference via Zoom**

**Melvin R. Rodgers, 2, D.Min.
Association of Professional Chaplains (APC)
Association of Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE)
Board Certified Chaplain (BCC)**



LEARNING OBJECTIVES



- **Define Spiritual Care and its implications for persons on the autism spectrum**
- **Explore some spiritual challenges faced by persons on the autism spectrum with respect to aging**
- **Explore some spiritual resources available to persons on the autism spectrum**
- **Offer a framework for healthy aging and/or spiritual wellbeing**



A - Pearl of Great Price

A Personal Diagnosis



AUTISM SPECTRUM

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, 2019)



Problems with:

- **Social**
- **Emotional**
- **Communication skills**
- **About 1 in 59 has been identified with ASD**

THE CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

(CDC, 2019)



Signs of ASD began during 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, 2019)



- **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 reports 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**



*There is currently no cure for Autism
Spectrum Disorder. (CDC, 2019)*

A “SURVIVAL” KIT



Camouflaging

Unwittingly Camouflaging

Retreating Inward

CAMOUFLAGING



“...Term used to describe behaviors that hide or mask aspects of oneself from other or to pass everyday social interactions.” (Cage, Troxell-Whitman, 2019)

“Camouflaging, has been proposed as a common experience for autistic people in their navigation of the non-autistic world” (Cage, Troxell-Whitman, 2019)

CAMOUFLAGING CONT.



The most theme of this study was “Fitting in and passing in a neurotypical world.”

Another theme of this study was, “avoiding retaliation and bullying by others”

Still another reason reported was, “concerns about impression made when not camouflaging.”

UNWITTINGLY CAMOUFLAGING



Unwittingly camouflaging, speaks to persons who have not been diagnosed with ASD yet are experiencing the same challenges as diagnosed persons.

- *Life can be defined by missed connections*
- *Confusion is a common theme*
- *There is a persistent lack of meaning*

UNWITTINGLY CAMOUFLAGING CONT.



- *Unwittingly camouflaging comes about when the person concludes that there is something wrong “with me”.*
- *So, the undiagnosed person observes others to learn how to be, think, talk, and/or feel.*

RETREAT INWARD



Retreat Inward is to abandon the quest for meaningful social interactions with other. This can include deep anguish and despair.

- **The creation of negative personal narrative**
- **Spiritual distress**
- **In this sense being alone is not a spiritual practice but a “masking” of social needs.**
- **As with any of the responses to social difficulties, self-medication is always “on the table”**

RETREAT INWARD, CONT.



- **To retreat inward often limits the flow of information needed to assess situations and individuals in a healthy manner**
- **It limits experience with nature, individuals, and it disrupts the awareness of the flow of time**
- **While one's own rhythm maybe pacified, there is no chance of social cohesion**



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 radial reunion of mind, body, and spirit. The byproduct of this mystical union is inner peace.

SPIRITUAL CARE, CONT.

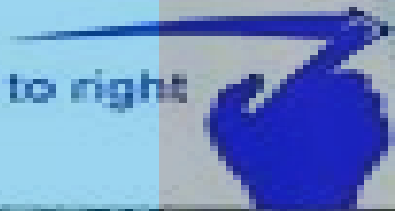


- **Providing meaning**
- **Undermining Suffering**
- **Spawning hope**

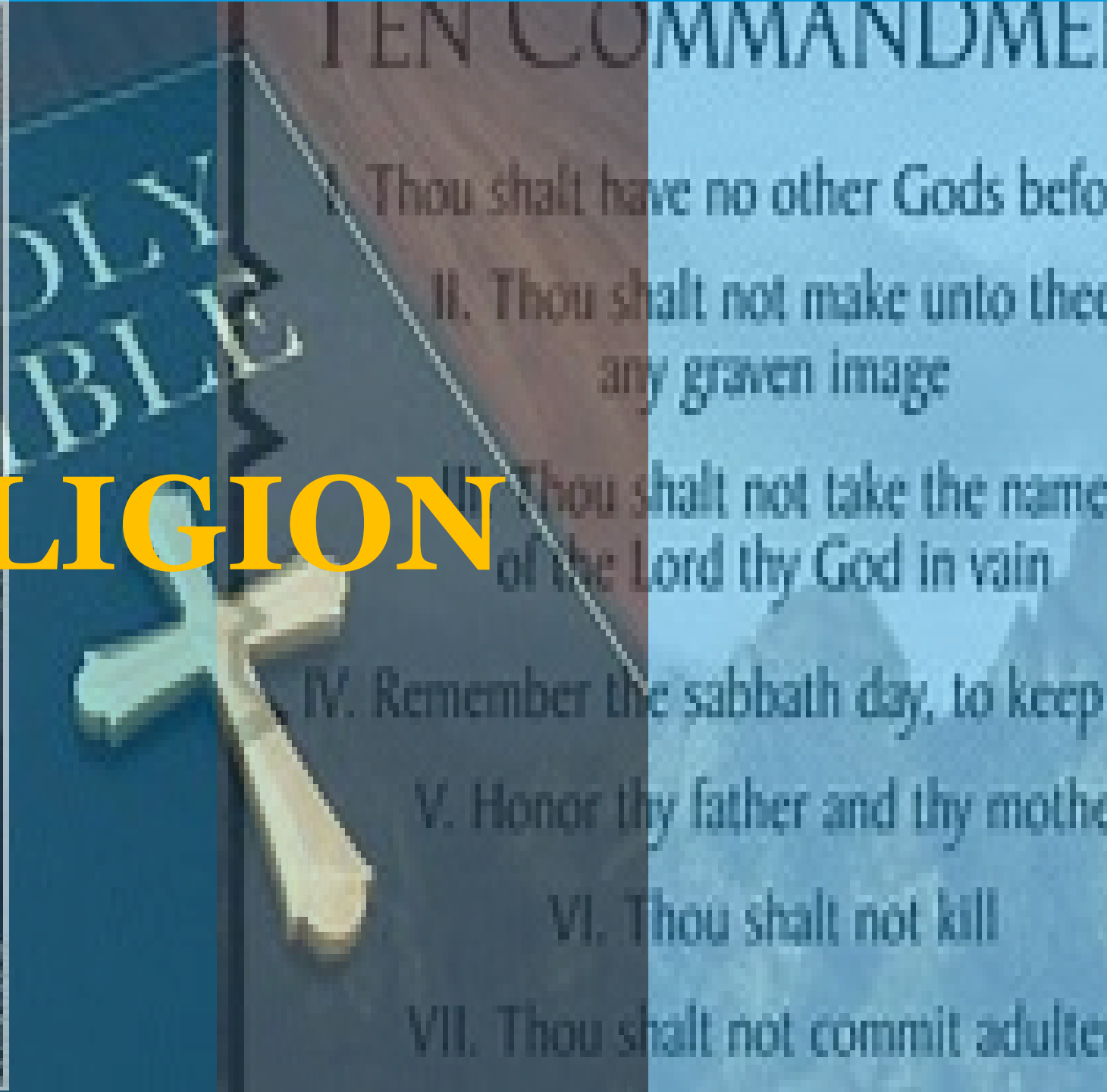
Holy Quran



Swipe left to right



RELIGION



TEN COMMANDMENTS

I. Thou shalt have no other Gods before me

II. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image

III. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain

IV. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it

V. Honor thy father and thy mother

VI. Thou shalt not kill

VII. Thou shalt not commit adultery

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 of the divine or sacred.”**
(Burke, 2006)

RELIGION CONT.



**“Belief in supernatural power, force, or being, accompanied by efforts to get into and remaining favorable relationship with it or them.”
(Moberg, 2001)**

“a system of beliefs and values that explain the mysterious and the unknown or answers theological questions (those dealing with meaning, final or ultimate cause, and purpose.” (Moberg, 2001)

“Prosocial” (Annus, Amar, 2018)



SPIRITUALITY

SPIRITUALITY...



“...The core of one’s being-the source of one’s humanity-a way of being and experiencing life that comes through a transcendent dimension-ultimate meaning-an awareness of something greater than oneself(sacred, divine, God, higher power, energy force)-experiential appreciation of beauty, love, nature-relationships-gives purpose.”

(Ferrell, Puchalski, 2010)

SPIRITUALITY, CONT.



“...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, the universe, and ultimate reality.” (Puchalski, 2006)

“...is often a broad concept, referring to the human search for a sense of meaning, purpose, and morality in the context of relationships with self, others, the universe, and ultimate reality.” (Joint Commission, 2005)

“...at its most basic level, [spirituality] 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 CHALLENGES

Finding a Sense of Belonging/Community



- **Challenged without being humiliated**
- **Corrected without being degraded**
- **Embraced without being crippled**



Community is “...a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals”
(Marian Webster Dictionary)



“It takes a village to raise a child”
(African Proverb)



**“If a child is not embraced by the village; he will burn it down
to feel its warmth.”**
(African Proverb)

A Sense of Community/Belonging



Acceptance

Empathic understanding

Positive Regard

(Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling, 1990)



- **A sense of belonging/Community is not merely being in the presence of others; its being “present” in the presence of others.**
- **It is place of safety, direction, and assurance**
- **There is a calming experience that comes from a sense of belonging/community**



Nurturing

Provides a context of meaning and values.

disciplining the unfolding of human potential

(Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling, 1990)



SPIRITUAL RESORUCES



Resilience!

Is what Hope looks like



Resilience, “The capacity to maintain effective psychological and behavioral adjustment in the face of factors that normally put individuals at risk for poor adjustment...”

(Penguin Dictionary of Psychology, 1985, 2009)

“an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.”

(Merriam Webster Dictionary)

“The ability to be happy, successful, est. again after something difficult has happened.”

(Cambridge Dictionary)



A Study - Resilience and Autism Spectrum Disorder: Applying Developmental Psychopathology to Optimal Outcomes

(Juhi Kaboski, Christina G. McDonnell & Kristin Valentino, 2017)

Keywords: Autism spectrum disorder-Developmental psychopathology-Optimal Outcomes-
Recovery-Resilience



“Resilience is primarily defined as a process that is dynamic and modifiable, wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite exposure to significant risk.”

“...or the capacity of a dynamic system to withstand or recover from significant threats to its stability, viability, or development.”

“...Little work has explored the possible resilient development process in adulthood.”

(J. Kaboski, C. McDonnell & K. Valentino, 2017)

A Study- Resilience in autism: Research and Practice Prospects

(Meng_Chuan Lai, Peter Szatmari, 2019)



“Resilience has been conceptualized in child development literature as a process of interactive adaptation in which the child has been exposed to adversity but manages to demonstrate a relatively good outcome despite the risk experiences.”

(M, Lai, P Szatmari, 1029)



- **“It is therefore interesting to note how little research has focused on resilience in autistic people.**
- **“There is much more on resilience on parents of autistic children.”**
- **” Resilience is a dynamic process. (Rutter, 2012). Studying and applying it requires a lifespan perspective that considers key transition periods including that from youth to adulthood
(M. Lai, P. Szatmari)**

AUTISM SPECTRUM AND JUNG'S SEVEN TASKS OF AGING



When I first encountered Jung's Seven Tasks of Aging, I thought I was "normal". So, by "unwittingly camouflaging" I was able to obtain a degree of resonance with his work. Now, I reflect with the awareness of being on the autism spectrum.

Task No 1: *Facing the Reality of Aging and Dying.*

Look in the Mirror Often

Experience your Body Regularly

Be Still several times a Day

Task No 2: *Life Review.*

Listen with the mind, body and Spirit

Validate your own feelings Often

Celebrate as a routine Experience

Task no 3: *Define Life Realistically.*

Give yourself permission to Grieve

Grace is Yours

Forgiveness as a faithful Companion



Task No 4: *Letting Go of the Ego.*

Reflect on the Source of your Motivations

Keep loving

Keep setting healthy Boundaries



Task No. 5: *Find a New Rooting in the Self.*

Your instincts are not always correct; but they should never be ignored

Hope Without Shame

Search with Courage

Task No. 6: *Determining the Meaning of One's Life.*

Seek Greater Integration

Commune with Nature Often

Trust your Instincts

Task No. 7: *Rebirth-Dying With Life.*

Re-Discover the Joy of “Being”

Re-Develop the ability to Laugh Alone

Re-Discover the Freedom of Playing Alone



SUMMARY



Autism, A Developmental Disability
Significant Social Challenges
Behavioral Challenges
Communication Challenges

Signs of ASD began during childhood and typically last throughout a person's life

Trouble adapting in changes in routine

“There is currently no cure for ASD”

Camouflaging, unwittingly camouflaging, Retreating inward

Spiritual Care (Meaning Comfort)

Religion (The externals of one's life)

Spirituality (The Core of one's being-Ultimate Meaning)

Spiritual Challenges (Finding a Sense of Belonging/Community)

“If a child is not embraced by the village; he will burn it down to feel its warmth.” (African Proverb)

Resilience (The ability to recover from or adjust to misfortune or change)

Autism and Jung's Seven Tasks of Aging

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