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## SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION: A COMMENTARY

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### ABSTRACT

*The present article provides a commentary on spiritual and religious concepts within the belief-cultural context of Iran, which can be used in countries with a similar context. Spirituality and subsequently spiritual health have no single definition as yet. It is essentially impossible to expect such a definition because it is abstract and depends on human-being, which can be seen differently in different cultures and ideologies. Hence, authors attempt to interpret the relevant data according to their own worldview, which will yield different definitions for these concepts. Although many components of these definitions overlap, the God-orientation component is often the point of difference in these definitions. According to the Islamic-Iranian definition, spirituality is the supreme dimension of human existence bestowed upon mankind to transcend and approach God. In definitions based on the divine religions especially Islam<sup>1</sup>, God-orientation is the focal point of the definition, like the definition presented in this article.*

**Keywords:** *Spiritual health, Spirituality, Religion, Islam, Iran.*

Spiritual health has recently been addressed as the need was felt and other domains of health could not meet that need. The current definition of health by the World Health Organization is therefore seriously criticized. The spiritual dimension of health and how it affects other dimensions are currently debated and investigated beyond the physical, psychological and social dimensions in recent scientific and research literature (Amiri, 2015). The subject of “spirituality and health” has witnessed an increase of 600% in articles (Lazenby et al., 2010), and it has entered medical sciences education in some countries (Memaryan et al., 2015).

No global consensus has been reached on the definition of spiritual health because the basis and ways of recognizing spiritual elements are widely different and this difference is caused by the different views toward human and his life (Memaryan, Rassouli and Mehrabi, 2016). However, as patients need spirituality and when spirituality is considered in health services, they better respond to treatment, and health outcomes are improved, researchers and health service providers from different contexts, cultures, and beliefs are interested in addressing the issue (Memaryan et al., 2016).

<sup>1</sup> "If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter He will be in the ranks of those who have lost (All spiritual good)." Quran surah Ali 'Imran: 85

Based on the indigenous definition of spirituality in the Iranian society, spirituality means supreme dimension of human existence bestowed upon mankind to Closeness to God (Allah) through transcendence. It refers to the beliefs, experiences, and phenomena associated with the transcendental aspects of human existence. Components of spirituality include relating to God, oneself, others, and nature. Accordingly, "spirituality" and "religion" are inseparable; not that they are the same, but that religion is necessary for the development and promotion of spirituality (Memaryan, Rassouli and Mehrabi, 2016).

Despite the highly diverse definitions of spirituality, they share many common points, including being specific to each person and being broader than religion. Almost all of them share the transcendental dimension of spirituality, search for meaning of life, and relating with oneself, others and nature, or a supreme being. However, the fundamental difference regarding spirituality in the Iranian context, i.e. God-orientation, makes our definition different (Memaryan, Rassouli and Mehrabi, 2016). Basically, belief in God, and relating to God affects our attitude toward ourselves, others, and nature; therefore, it can be considered beyond a component or the main influential factor along with other components.

Spirituality that has been formed based on faith in God and a divine belief system (religion) produces the following effects in life and human existence:

- A sense of meaning attached to creation and purposefulness of life
- The absolute and unique presence of God as a source of hope, power, and reliance
- Motivation to deal with problems, and forgiveness, sacrifice ....
- Observing ethical issues and committing behaviors based on God's commands (religious acts and rituals)
- Experiencing inner peace in hardships, meaning of life, meaning of death and continuation of life

Meanwhile, whatever links mankind with God or drives him toward God including the beauties of nature and art are considered manifestations of spirituality (Memaryan et al., 2013).

Spiritual health has different hierarchies, in which, according to the individual's capacities and capabilities, the insight, tendency and ability needed for human transcendence, which is approaching God, is provided (Memaryan and ghaempanah, 2016).

Given that religion is one of the main components of every culture (Hamidieh, 2016), religion can be regarded a series of beliefs and behaviors associated with tradition (Hill and Pargament, 2003). More generally, religion is a system of beliefs and behaviors that will lead to worship of, relationship with and proximity to God (Koenig, 2008). Hence, the way to Closeness to God (Allah) that is the higher order of spirituality is achieved through religiosity.

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