

Spirituality: A beacon of light in troubled times | Claudia Psaila

One's spirituality – meaning-making, sense of purpose, values, connection with others, nature and higher power/God – can be religiously inspired but it can also be secular or non-religious

13 March 2022, 3:01pm

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A lesson that we have learnt over the past two years is that life is fragile. The pandemic created a huge disruption to our daily lives. What we normally take as 'given': our relationships, work, health, education etc. were threatened.

This sort of upheaval is also experienced on individual levels when something out of the ordinary happens, such as a terrible accident, the loss of a person we love, or serious ill-health. Communities can also be affected by such distressful disruptions, such as natural disasters, violent crime, injustice, poverty and so on. Such experiences shatter the status quo and threaten our sense of safety and security.

At times like these, what we 'know' and what we take for granted, is shaken: our sense of comfort, inner stability, worldview, assumptions, values and beliefs. This can be a very scary and disturbing time where we suddenly question everything. So, what is going to anchor us during these times? How are we going to cope, survive and thrive? How can these experiences also be a time of new discoveries, opportunities and personal growth?

Research has found that what can ground us is our spirituality. There is no universal definition of spirituality although many agree that spirituality is a multi-dimensional and personal construct. Canda and Furman (2010) explain that "spirituality refers to a universal quality of human beings and their cultures related to the quest for meaning, purpose, morality, transcendence, well-being, and profound relationships with ourselves, others and ultimate reality." The latter dimensions are found in most definitions of spirituality.

In recent times, across the Western world, the term spirituality has gained popularity, particularly because it has been divorced from the concept of 'religion'. We have seen a drop in church attendance and an increase in voices that criticise and challenge religions. This is due, in part, to individual and societal clashes and conflicts with religion.

Take as an example, hurtful and offensive comments towards LGBTIQ+ people by religious individuals. Such experiences upset and anger individuals and communities.

People may generalise such comments and attribute them to the religion that these individuals represent causing them to question whether they can embrace or subscribe to a religion that is hurtful, rejecting and condemning.

These doubts may turn into an anxiety-provoking crisis for individuals for whom their religion is very important and is a part of their identity. The very source of their inner strength and social network can be shaken to the core.

For this reason, and others, some persons decide to leave their religion. Such experiences may initiate an internal searching process in people where they conclude that they are spiritual but not religious or that they believe in God but do not want to belong to a religion. For others, a distinction between the institutional aspects of religion

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We do not have to throw away the baby with the bathwater.

Spirituality, whichever way a person defines it, can still be a lens with which to view the world. It can still be a resource (whether internally or relationally) that anchors and sustains us in difficult times; a beacon of light guiding us and giving us hope in troubled times.