

## SPIRITUALITY: ROOTS & ROUTES

A lecture presented by Gerry Burke, Age Concern England, at a conference led by the Sonas aPc and GOLD (Growing Older, Living Deeper) organisations, Dublin, March 2007

I have to make acknowledgement for many of the ideas in this presentation to work by others I have encountered in my reading and meetings: people who are careful in research, sensitive to need and clear about their objectives. I have been particularly helped in preparing this presentation by a recent book, entitled 'Something There' by David Hay (Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 2006). It is a wonderful title summing-up the approach of many people in Britain and other parts of the North Atlantic/Western world towards the intangible, the inexpressible, the transcendent, the spiritual. I am not going to offer you a literature review or a ramble around current thinking. This you may have done for yourselves already. I am going to offer you my own reflective summary. I hope it will hit the mark for some of you at least.

### Part 1: Roots

The great Jesuit theologian of the last century, Karl Rahner, once wrote:

*"Even if the term God were ever to be forgotten, even then in the decisive moments of our lives we should still be encompassed by this nameless mystery of our existence ... Even supposing that those realities which we call religions were totally to disappear ... The transcendental, inherent in human life, is such that we would still reach out towards that mystery which lies outside our control."*

The first part of my presentation is about 'roots'. What is this idea of spirituality all about? Is there something there which we can all talk about in a meaningful way? Or is all this talk of the spiritual a relic of a bygone age of belief with no place in the secular world we now inhabit.

I came across a review recently by John Paley of the Department of Nursing & Midwifery at the University of Stirling in Scotland. The book he reviewed is called: *Making Sense of Spirituality in Nursing & Health Care Practice* by Wilfred McSherry. The review was in the March issue of 'Health & Social Care in the Community'. I read this: 'Like most of the writers who have contributed to this literature in the past decade, McSherry wants to persuade us that spirituality is universal, applying to everybody irrespective of their faith or lack of it; and in order to achieve this, he is prepared to stretch the term well beyond its historical anchorage in religion. Spirituality, from this perspective, comprises not just belief in a deity but also meaning and purpose, hopes, fears and expectations, self-awareness, creativity, values and beliefs, harmonious relationships, security and love, attitudes and behaviours, and one's view of the world; which, as one sociologist of religion has observed, pretty much confines the non-spiritual to a 'concern with fitted kitchen units and grouting (Bruce S (2002), *God is Dead: Secularisation in the West*, Blackwell, Oxford)'. This is what a lot of people outside the spirituality world think. We do ourselves no favours, if we believe that there is something called 'spiritual', if we do not approach it in a rigorous and intellectually respectable fashion. This is especially important for someone like me, working to develop a non-religious approach for a bunch of secular charities and a degree of incomprehension from professional colleagues.

### Who are you?

A good place to start is by asking a question: Who are you? Given an opportunity to ask this of our neighbour it is likely that we will cover these elements in our response: identity, meaning and awareness.

<i>Identity:</i>	as an individual and as belonging to the human community
<i>Meaning:</i>	of our life and of Life
<i>Awareness</i>	often inexpressible hope or fear

In thinking about ourselves and the world in which we live, it is inevitable that we think first about ourselves: ourselves as individuals, but individuals who have a relationship with those around us and with events. What sort of a person am I? Where did I come from? Who are these people around me? What do they think of me? Why do I like some people and not others? How am I affected by daily events?

This leads easily to thinking about meaning: is there a point to me being alive or am I *just* alive? Where did life come from and where is it going? Is this life all we've got or is it part of a wider kind of creation?

And this leads to a sense of heightened awareness, being in touch with levels of feelings and attitude which go beyond the immediate. Many shy away from this level. It can be a level of great hope and great fear.

## **Identity**

It is probably true to say that until comparatively recent times most people found their identity in their community: family, clan, city, village, even country. The big change came with what we call in the West, the Enlightenment, in the 17th and 18th centuries.

*The Enlightenment: the search for scientific rationality, for an effective economy and for political franchise*

The break-up of Christendom, as both a concept and a reality, at the time of the Reformation in Europe led to a great freedom in philosophy, theology, scientific enquiry, political experiment and social organisation. The world as people in Europe had known it for centuries was also growing bigger through voyages of discovery. Different societies, with their different ways of doing things and thinking about life, were pressing upon the relatively closed mind of the European intellectual. Thinkers began to seek scientific explanations for what they saw; and reason rather than faith was seen as the touchstone for truth. The opportunities offered by new worlds and new markets shattered the ancient systems of trade by placing emphasis on supply and demand (the beginnings of capitalism) rather than on production according to need.

The growing power of the centrally organised nation states and the growth of what we would now call the middle class or the bourgeoisie, those without inherited authority or feudal allegiance, gave rise to a desire for effective involvement in government. Political power shifted. Ideas of democracy and the rights of every human to have control over their lives caused massive disruption in social organisation and relationships.

*The triumph and the travail of the new order*

It took a long time for all these ideas to be translated into something meaningful and practical and to permeate to every part of society. It is a process still in being and going through yet more changes. Some societies like it; others hate it for religious or cultural reasons; others want it but have to go through their own struggles.

The travail of the new order is that it causes constant flux. The triumph is that it puts the individual at the pinnacle of every effort to change and improve our world.

## *Individualism*

Individualism has been given an authority in relation to every aspect of life. Margaret Thatcher, the British Prime Minister, was not inventing something especially new when she said: "There is no such thing as society, only individuals and families". The evidence for this emphasis is all round us. People are fleeing from reliance on community. Decisions are made for the self first (including those most closely identified with us). A presumption in favour of community in terms of rules, behaviour, expectation and sanction can no longer be made. This has its extreme version in the United States but is slowly taking over even the very community-based societies of older Europe and is beginning to change societies in the developing world. It cannot be ignored in our search for meaning.

## Meaning

- What gives anything its importance?
- In material things: usefulness; exchange; durability
- In humans: emotional/intellectual satisfaction; commitment; life-enhancing activity

It is not difficult to deal with the meaning of 'meaning'. In material things we expect them to be in a sense, and to use the very modern phrase, fit for purpose. In humans it is more challenging and depends to large degree on the particular individual and their circumstances but it slops over into relationships and decision-making. Morality operates here. Taking some issues at the top of the 'talking agenda': life choices, choice of partner (or none), adherence to modes of behaviour (or not), decisions about how human life begins and ends – these are all available for debate. The overriding question, often, is not: 'by an objective standard, is this or that right' but 'is it right for me?' This has had a dramatic effect on how we perceive ourselves and are aware of ourselves in the world.

## Awareness

- Here & now: no before, no future, only the moment
- Mystery: why is there something, not nothing?
- Value: intense immediacy of the important

Very young children live in the here and now. They see a smiling face or an angry face and they deal with it by laughing or crying. Simple. From the age of about six, we are told, this approach to the world around us changes and changes rapidly. We begin to understand that we have a history, because we can remember. We know that there is a tomorrow and can plan for it. We move from reaction to reflection. Part of that reflection is being able to ask questions and to ask the most basic: why am I here at all? Where was I before? Where am I going? We move from a level of here and now to a level of mystery, in the best sense. And it is in relation to the 'mystery' of being that we develop a sense of value. Individuals, seeking what is good and right for them, working out the meaning of their lives and reaching points of being able to say: this is important; for this I would do extraordinary things. I would go to the ends of the earth. I would kill. I would be killed. I can love. And love exclusively.

The Hay book I mentioned earlier records some research on the spiritual dimension carried out in the city of Nottingham, in England, chosen as a type of the rest of the country. The research was conducted with both adults and children and great efforts were made, through the questions and the inevitable focus group discussions, to define the enquiry as about *spirituality* and not about religious belief. This is where Hay gets his title. Young and old struggled with words but were able, all of them, to talk about 'something there', which they did not insist was God or a divine presence – but was certainly beyond day by day experience. It was at the level of awareness that people felt both most comfortable and discomfited. They talked about what is of value. This is where I find the spiritual.

## The spiritual

- The level at which we work on and work out our awareness
- The expression and achievement of awareness through relationship
- The acceptance of this experience as part of our biological make-up: the 'God gene', the 'holistic survival' gene

Working on and working out our awareness and our decisions about value: this goes way beyond fuzzy notions to do with feelings. Yoga and the gym are worthwhile activities, for some; meditation and prayer are beneficial; for some; painting or listening to music are uplifting, for some. They, in my view, are not what we mean by the spiritual although they contribute to it. The spiritual is our awareness of ourselves before and after we engage in activities we enjoy or find good for us.

It is difficult to see how this awareness can be expressed or achieved alone. Even the Carthusian monk, seeking awareness in a solitary cell, belongs to a community of like-minded people. Even

the hermit has to find or be given food and clothing. This is a total experience at the deepest level of our being, often inexpressible – which is why it is so difficult to provide the scientific evidence the sceptic might seek.

Some writers use the phrases ‘the God gene’ or the ‘holistic survival gene’ because the evidence of enquiries like the one in Nottingham and in the work of psychiatry, for example, is that we all have a part of our make-up which is like a biological survival kit enabling us to operate at this deeper level. It is evident in very young children and can then be hidden. It is used by religions to develop their understandings and compelling faith. It is retrieved often by people at moments of great crisis. It is certainly present as death approaches.

### **Spirituality and solidarity**

Spirituality needs to be placed firmly into the context of the real world. The spiritual does not operate outside of us; the spiritual is part of our biological being. This assertion means that we are called to solidarity with others in seeking meaning in life; it is not a solitary occupation. At the same time, it is an area of enormous sensitivity. Yeats said it better than most when he wrote: “tread softly lest you tread on my dreams”. When we deal with the individual at their own level of awareness we can make no predictions and no presumptions. It is difficult. We may have no common language. We may be fearful of our own inadequacy. It is not an open door unlike the dressing of a wound when help is offered and accepted quickly and without thinking. Religion can help or hinder, and in many parts of the western world has become a stumbling block to people being able to seek awareness about themselves and the world. The world is very busy – but this is not a modern development. The crowded tenements and farmhouses of the past, the scratching for a living, the long walk for water of so many in our modern world do not allow much time for restfulness of heart and mind. The fight for survival of our ancestors has not ceased, just changed. How, therefore, do we create rest?

### **The contemplative life**

- We are natural contemplatives
  - We crave simplicity
  - We recoil from complexity
- BUT
- We need guidance
  - We need opportunity
  - We need experience

To say that all humans are natural contemplatives might cause some to blink and look again. I think it is true and is the secret to bringing spirituality back into the mainstream. To recognise our essentially contemplative nature opens the door. We can sit in shared silence. We can work without words. We can love just with our eyes. It goes on all the time. But we don't talk about it and don't do anything with this, our greatest gift as humans. I remember once taking a group of young people on a countryside camp away from London, many years ago. I was doing the washing up after supper when I suddenly noticed a silence. A gang of boisterous youngsters and silence: it didn't seem right! I went outside the tent and saw a dozen completely motionless city kids staring, without moving, at the night sky. One lad said to me: what are all those dots in the sky? They knew about stars and planets, of course – but they had never really had the time or opportunity to look up and just stare and of course, living in London, knew only lots of light pollution. They saw the stars, in their abundance and magnificence – for the first time. And they revelled in the simplicity. They were wordless. Contemplation.

When we talk of spirituality we get complicated when what we need is simplicity. But, in a world as complex as ours, where we are often robbed of the opportunity to just stand and stare, where the customs and practice of contemplation have been moved to the margins of memory, we need new guides. The alternative therapies and new substitute religions have understood this; the traditional religions of the West have forgotten that this needs to be at the heart of what they proclaim.

## Questions

- Is it true? Are we all contemplatives?
- Is it possible to be spiritual without religious belief?
- Is it worth worrying about it?
- Have religions missed a trick?
- Who now can guide and shape?
- Has anybody done anything recently?

I was at a dinner party recently and my neighbour asked me what I did for a living. She found it fascinating that anyone would be paid to explore the spiritual and said that she had never for a minute felt the need to think about these things. During the main course she started up the conversation again – and said, on reflection, that she realised she had but had never thought of it as 'spiritual'. We had a good chat and I wished, yet again, that I could invent a new word which would give us access to the ideas which are called spiritual, without any other baggage, religious or not.

I don't have ready answers to the questions I have posed. They are questions which must be asked in any serious discussion of the spiritual, whether or not they are asked in a secular or a religious context. There will be some who will dispute the notion of contemplation as at the heart of the spiritual, or will wish to find a different way to express it. Some will find it easy to speak of the spiritual divorced from religious belief; others will find it difficult. Some, like my dinner companion, will just not think about the spiritual but may, when given the opportunity, recognise that 'something is there' without in any way compromising their rejection of religious belief. The flight from religious belief in the Western world sends out a challenge to religions but, for whatever reason, they seem to have lost their ability to respond. If the response of traditional teachers and leaders is missing, who is going to help people if they ask questions about meaning and purpose in their lives?

Age Concern is engaged in asking these questions and looking for ways to respond.

**The spiritual side of life is a dynamic force that is not only deeply embedded in our thoughts and ideas, but also experienced in our being human.**

**Understanding spirituality is, therefore, a rational intellectual activity, a creative act involving the imagination, a contemplative exercise and a means of grasping the quintessence of life."**

***Mark Cobb, 'The Dying Soul: Spiritual Care at the end of life', OU Press, 2001***

## Part 2: Routes

**For the majority of people, who do not belong to a religious or philosophical group, opportunities to speak about spirituality in any but the most superficial way are rare. Talk about spirituality in the past revolved around prayer or worship; now people speak rather of gardening or meditation.**

**Gillian White, Talking about Spirituality in Health Care Practice, 2006**

What is Age Concern doing? I begin, as I have to, from our strictly secular perspective. This fits well with trying to understand spirituality as a human possession, not just the private business of religions. As I tried to indicate earlier, the common understanding and language of spirituality with which many people were familiar in the western world has almost disappeared. It was described in an article I came across as the disappearance of a 'transcendental register' – a bit of a mouthful meaning that God-talk/Church-talk/supernatural attitudes are no longer part of ordinary communication between people, except to a limited degree; and then usually in cultures and societies which have not yet completely abandoned formal religious practice. When I began this work, I decided to seek some kind of definition of the word spirituality so that I could offer a route into discussion and exploration for my colleagues. I also thought it would be a good idea to seek views, even at an early and unformed stage, from people within Age Concern.

Here is a selection of the responses to a survey I conducted.

- "Don't understand the questions"
- "Alternative therapy treatments"
- "Vicar comes in at Christmas"
- "Want no truck with religion"
- "Too busy"

It would be interesting to do another one, now, to see if the five newsletters and other literature sent around have had any noticeable effect. I suspect not. If I am asked what reactions have been like, I try to describe it like this: mild interest, complicated by busy lives, distracted by suspicion informed by fear, overlaid with a patina of politeness; in other words – bit of a brick wall.

More people, however, are now aware that something is happening and those who do have an interest, without prejudice, are keen to take ideas forward. All of us though tend to get stuck on defining the term spiritual or spirituality.

*My life has no purpose, no direction, no aim, no meaning, and yet I'm happy. I can't figure it out. What am I doing right?' Charles Schultz, Snoopy Cartoonist*

The negative view of the famous cartoonist goes to an extreme not many would share, but it is not a bad start. I think I've encountered at least 100 definitions. Some are complex and peculiar to academic circles. Others are weak and too broad. These make sense to me.

*Spirituality is that which gives meaning to life and allows us to participate in the larger whole. Spirituality has to do with those intangibles that are nonetheless of vital importance to most human beings: values, relationships, and the discovery of meaning and purpose in life.*

*Albert Jewell*

*The spiritual is the part of living experience which cannot be immediately captured in words and images but which expresses the deepest longings of every human for the fulfilment of emotional and intellectual aspiration.*

*Gerry Burke*

*Spirituality, today, is like an ache in the soul, a longing for more than meets the eye.*

*Michael Downey*

I like this last one. It is so simple and speaks to our world of uncertainty and doubt.

## **The sacred v. the secular**

Spirituality, as defined above and as more generously considered, is a human possession; it is not owned by religions, although it is an essential component of the religious approach. Spirituality in secular terms is centred on human beings not on divinities. It is important to stress this as part of an Age Concern approach. We are a federation of secular charities and we deal with every individual and every individual's view of our place in the universe.

For most people in my own society, the battle between the sacred and the secular has been won.

- Shared awareness lost
- Top down values (faith communities)
- Bottom up values (personal)
- Language of values
- Spirituality as play: myths and make-believe
- Much knowledge, little understanding

I live in a society where, except at moments of great national or individual crisis, the spiritual in the shape of religion or as a day-by-day concept plays little part in people's lives. Before the developments associated with the Enlightenment, and over the last three centuries, the awareness of which I spoke earlier was a shared awareness. I guess to some extent, still, it is present in countries like Ireland, though diminishing. There has been a move from values determined by religious leaders (and others such as philosophers, political leaders) to values determined by the individual (top down replaced by bottom up). The language which was used to describe what is important or immutable has gone from daily speech. People just don't know what to say to each other when they move to this deeper level. Spirituality (or the expression and achievement of awareness) has, therefore, moved to the life-choice agenda (spirituality as play) with some emphasis on remembered folk-religion and whatever a sensitive or (sometimes) a charlatan can think up. Spirituality as play is not bad, it's just not satisfying. People know about all sorts of ways of taking time out or how religions behave without any understanding of why.

## **The young v. the old**

- Believing without belonging
- Erosion of accepting attitude
- Growth in questioning ability
- Inheritance/loss of religious language
- Religious v. spiritual
- Diversity and equality

The phrase 'believing without belonging' was coined by Grace Davie, a writer on religion in Britain and Europe, to describe the strange relationship of people in Britain with organised religion – largely of the Church of England variety. It is probably not confined to Britain. It is as true of older people as of the young and not religiously minded. It is sometimes suggested that older people unlike younger people have a more accepting attitude towards received truth and do not question as much. From my personal experience, and it seems to be a researched phenomenon also, I don't think this is true. If anything, older people ask more questions and more meaningfully; we have a lifetime of experience on which to hang our questions, our misgivings, our doubts, our scepticism. This gives the lie to ageism in regard to belief. Where there *is* a difference, though, is in the language with which older people and younger people can express their actual beliefs or their attempts to discuss them.

Most people in Britain over 60 grew up in a culture where contact with the Bible and the traditions of Christianity were still prevalent. This is no longer the case. Communication between the generations is a dilemma. Younger carers just don't have the lingo either to understand what might be said to them about need or to respond in an intelligible way – at the older person's level. A piece of research in London, supported by Age Concern, is confirming that older people think about spirituality in religious terms whilst most of those working with them think of spiritual as non-religious. The growth of Islam and Hinduism, and now African and Christian Orthodox beliefs and

cultures is a feature of our society with very, very little knowledge of the beliefs and customs available to the indigenous population. The experience is not unfamiliar of recent years in Ireland.

Britain is a diverse society where everyone has a right to be what they want to be under equality legislation and many take full advantage. It is causing major problems: where conscience and law collide.

Spiritual issues tend to get lost in the welter of excitement generated by these clashes of culture. It is becoming difficult to have restful conversations on the deeper matters without getting tangled in the difficulties of understanding religions or cultures with different backgrounds and approaches. And then there is the large number of people with no faith. There's too much demanding and not enough listening. It doesn't make for an easy start.

### **Where to start?**

- The art of persuasion - hard graft and the signs of the times
- People - self; staff/volunteers; 'community'
- Time and space - making it and seeking it

The line I have adopted in dealing with my own colleagues is that the groaning shelves of bookshops under the heading Mind, Body & Spirit are telling us something. Cardinal Hume, the late Archbishop of Westminster, used to say that people in England were hungry for God. I am not sure about God but I am sure about people recognising 'something there'. It is not easy. People's suspicions about the word spiritual provide a pretty thick and high barrier. I have had the strange experience of being at meetings with energetic and hard-nosed colleagues, well-used to fighting battles for their own project, adopting an almost hushed tone of respect when it comes to my own project. The hushed tone is reticence and reluctance – they don't want to hurt me! They would like to have a go but recognise they are dealing with a subject which has 'delicate' overtones. It is quite disconcerting. It is hard work.

The only way to make progress is to begin where people are: to try to open up oneself and other staff and volunteers to the need in ourselves for 'awareness' of who we are and what we are trying to do with our lives. The hardest people to get at are older people – because the only way in is through the staff/volunteer gatekeepers. Making time and offering space is one route.

### **Expectation**

I have suggested various ways for my colleagues to think about this in recent newsletters and especially in offering a statement of expectation which could be adopted by individual Age Concerns (indeed, it need not be confined to them).

Age Concern..... recognises that, from time to time, people may wish, if they have a chance, to put right wrongs, to settle their minds, to find a place (even if not acceptance) for evil and suffering, and to remember and celebrate the good they have experienced. It will support older people and those who work with them in situations when they wish to reflect on their own lives, and will seek ways of making space and time available, in its buildings and activities, for reflection in private or in common celebration.

It will seek opportunities to include space and time for this reflection in its activities through consultation and planning, and will identify training suitable for its staff and volunteers. It will make arrangements for the involvement of those representing a person's life approach or religious belief, if requested.

For many, this is such a new area of activity that putting together resource support is probably the next major task.

## Resources

This is a list of where to go for help.

- Books and visuals
- Information highways
- Practitioners and practice
- History and traditions
- Sharing human experience
- Experiment and challenge

I don't want to go through this laboriously as it is fairly self-evident stuff. There are tons of books – a useful shortlist is attached to the end of this paper. There are some very good videos/DVDs (for example, those produced in England by MHA Care Group and Croydon Mind). The internet is a goldmine – you can keep up to date with both the latest crazy ideas and the good ones on Amazon if nothing else! People working in universities are happy to talk. Raiding the history of spirituality and looking at the traditions represented in our own and other cultures is really worthwhile. Being willing to experiment and challenge is an essential feature of any worthwhile voluntary body, and it is important to accept that not everyone will be happy with ideas being proposed, just because I say they are good!

I have listed here some of the practical suggestions I have made for normal activity within a voluntary body such as ours. They are not earth shattering or new. And we do this kind of thing in all sorts of other ways.

- *Responsibilities*: it is important to recognise that workers will not all have the same level of responsibility or competence, and therefore there need to be clear guidelines for seeking help and support at more senior levels
- *Listening*: an easy way to start exploring spiritual need with those we support is through the normal mechanisms of assessment; a number of model questionnaires are available
- *Reflection*: many workers in voluntary bodies are familiar with the idea of reflection from their cultural or religious connections; including opportunities for reflecting on their own sense of awareness in worker-training is not difficult
- *Celebrating*: offering opportunities to workers and the older people they are supporting to have occasional celebrations (e.g. connected to the seasons) is a great way of bringing people together in reflective mode
- *Involving*: people who have lost contact with a cultural or religious activity have a right to ask for contact to be renewed and it ought to be on a list of priority questions when a support service starts
- *Remembering*: assisting people to remember their life stories is an easy way of enhancing their sense of worth, so long as it is handled properly; ideas such as the 'biography box' or 'video diary' can form part of regular activity.

## Training

When confronted by a plethora of resources many people will run for cover – or training as it is also called. Training in spirituality is almost entirely a matter of recognising that spirituality is a journey. It is a journey, first, into our own selves and it is a journey we must make alongside others. Awareness-seeking is often a time for fear and hesitation because it is unfamiliar territory but fears and hesitations which can be challenged. Reactions to talk of the spiritual are founded often on ignorance and prejudice. These can be confronted. Spiritual support and care is an essential feature of work with those needing support and care, in exactly the proportion that it is a component of being human. Having said all that: gaining confidence in spiritual care demands a new form of training and I'm not sure who is going to do it. I have been impressed by the approach in a recent book called *Talking about spirituality in health care practice: A resource for the multi-professional health care team* by Gillian White (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2006). This records actual attempts to get professionals to talk about spirituality; it does not minimize the challenge but records some significant success. Not everyone will be able to agree with the writer's style or approach; that does not matter. We need more of this.

## Reflection

In trying to make the practice of spiritual care meaningful to my own colleagues I have chosen the route of 'Reflection'. It is a practical route and can be common to all, created or opportunistic as situations arise: the example I often use is of those times when a carer is offering personal service (e.g. toe nail cutting). When people are challenged by mental or physical disability – there's a wealth of new material available from many organisations.

I want to end by engaging you in a moment or two of secular reflection: reflection on who we are, and how we got to this time and place; reflection on what we have been able to give our world, through friendships and families, talents and work; reflection on what we are bringing to each other still; reflection on those parts of our lives we want to share, and those we keep to ourselves.

Every Age Concern has been invited to conduct what I have called Secular Soul Celebrations based on the seasons of the year. The format is simple and straightforward – music, readings, stories from those present, silence, visuals (such as flowers). I have said to my colleagues that all the talk in the world will not give people a spiritual experience – we have to engage with each other in moments of reflection, we have to make space for each us to be aware of ourselves. This is one of the readings I have used.

### *BLIND AND SEEING*

We differ, blind and seeing, one from another, not in our senses but in the use we make of them, in the imagination and courage with which we seek wisdom beyond our senses. It is more difficult to teach an ignorant seeing person to think than it is to teach an intelligent blind person to see the grandeur of Niagara Falls. I have walked with people whose eyes are full of light but who see nothing in wood, sea or sky, nothing in the city streets, nothing in books. What a witless masquerade is this seeing! It were better to sail for ever in the night of blindness, with sense and feeling and mind, than to be thus content with the mere act of seeing. They have the sunset, the morning skies, the purple of distant hills, yet their souls voyage through this enchanted world with a barren stare.

*From 'The World We Live In' by Helen Keller who had no sight, hearing or speech*

In a sense we have been making a journey by engaging with this presentation, looking at spirituality and well-being, as part of being human. Here are a wonderful few lines from a Jewish prayer used in Liberal synagogues:

*The road is so beautiful, said the lad.  
The road is so hard, says the youth.  
The road is so long, says the man.  
The old man sits on the roadside to rest.  
Sunset colours his beard a reddish gold.  
Grass gleams at his feet with evening dew.  
A late bird sings unbidden.*

*Will you remember how long the road was, and how beautiful?*

And so finally, to words I find are a clarion call to action:

**Ultimately each individual makes his or her own spiritual journey and the provision of spiritual care can be understood as walking with someone on that journey. When they provide spiritual care....support staff may find themselves joining that journey as companions, not spiritual guides. They will acknowledge and respect each individual's life journey, and may provide support and companionship on the way.**

**Instead of shouting to a worker: "Don't just stand there, do something!" – in fact, what many people would love to hear is: "Don't do something, just stand there!". There aren't any rule books for that – except being human.**

*From 'Talking about Spirituality in Health Care Practice', Gillian White, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2006*

## BOOKS: to help you think and plan

There are more and more books available dealing with spirituality as a credible concept, in secular terms, and spiritual care as a practical option within health and social services. The following is a short list, to get you started, of those which attempt to speak to those involved in the provision of care. Although some approach the subject from the religious perspective, all take into account the nature of our diverse society and acknowledge the underlying principles of spirituality as an expression of being human. Books and texts approaching the subject from a specifically religious perspective are numerous and easily accessible.

### Ageing, Spirituality & Well-being

Albert Jewell, Ed

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2004

ISBN 1-84310-167-X

*Explores how having a purpose in life and continual spiritual growth are vital elements in the well-being of older people.*

### Aging and Spirituality

David O Moberg, Ed

The Haworth Pastoral Press, New York, 2001

ISBN 0-7890-0939-0

*A comprehensive guide to theory, research and practical aspects of broad spirituality.*

### Humanism, An Introduction

Jim Herrick

Rationalist Press Association, UK, 2003

ISBN 0-301-00301-7

*Humanist approaches to values and meaning in life, including what is called spiritual.*

### Is Nothing Sacred?

Ben Rogers, Ed

Routledge, London and New York, 2004

ISBN 0-415-30484-9

*Is it still meaningful to talk of things being sacred or is the idea a relic of a bygone religious age?*

### Pioneering The Third Age: The Church in an ageing population

Rob Merchant

Paternoster Press, UK, 2003

ISBN 1-84227-177-6

*Examines current and future issues facing older people and the church from a gerontological, theological and practical perspective.*

### Reflections on Spirituality & Health

Stephen G Wright

Whurr Publishing, London, 2005

ISBN 1-86156-468-6

*Is spirituality of any relevance to the work of carers? How do we address the spiritual needs of staff? Some interesting new approaches.*

### Religion, Spirituality & Ageing: A Social Work Perspective

HR Moody, Ed

Haworth Press Inc, New York, 2005

ISBN 0-7890-2499-3

*Research and practice in a variety of social work settings.*

### Religion & Spirituality

Bernard Moss

Russell House Publishing, UK, 2005

ISBN 1-903855-57-8

*An exploration of how social work and training for social work can accommodate the spiritual dimension.*

### Spirituality & Ageing

Albert Jewell, Ed

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 1999

ISBN 1-85302-631-X

*A resource for carers looking for a holistic and more reflective approach in their work with older people.*

### Secular Lives, Sacred Hearts: The role of the Church in a time of no religion

Alan Billings

S.P.C.K, London, 2004

ISBN 0-281-05704-4

*The experience of an Anglican priest who has worked in the inner city and in a rural area.*

### Spiritual Growth & Care in the Fourth Age of Life

Elizabeth McKinley

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2006-11-28

ISBN 1-84310-231-5

*Provides tools for assessing the spiritual needs of older people and guidelines on how to facilitate spiritual reminiscence and transcendence, and how to support frail older people in the dying process.*

### Talking about Spirituality in Health Care Practice

Gillian White

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2006-11-28

ISBN 1-84310-305-2

*Provides guidelines for multi-professional health care teams to explore the relevance of spirituality and to integrate it into their work.*

### The Spiritual Dimension of Ageing

Elizabeth MacKinlay

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2001

ISBN 1-84310-008-8

*What gives a frail and isolated or institutionalised older person their sense of wholeness and self? What makes later life meaningful?*