

## KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

**Health:** The **World Health Organization** defines “health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or injury”. According to this definition, emphasis has been put on the fact that health is not simply the absence of unwanted as well as negative traits in the human body such as illness or injury, but it also needs the existence of positive elements such as feelings of well-being and features which are social and psychological as well as physical. In the words of Rene Dubos, health means the ability to function properly. This perspective of Dubos stresses on the significant facets of disease and illness and above all their social outcomes. The **health behavior** of an individual signifies the belief of an individual regarding his health and it involves the taking up of behavior in order to prevent disease from inflicting into the human body. It is the health behavior of the individuals which includes all kinds of habits, practices, activities and actions related to the pattern of a healthy lifestyle. As Albrecht (2011) notes that health is just a metaphor for well being. To him, to be healthy means “to be of sound mind and body; to be integrated; to be whole”.

**Illness:** Illness refers to a state or condition of suffering as a result of a disease or sickness (Cockerham 1995:149). In the sociological parlance, illness is a subjective state, connected to an individual's psychical consciousness of having a disease, symptoms, or pain and customizing his or her social behavior in turn of it. A person loses his synchronization with the normal pattern of the society once he/she falls ill. A person thus tries all means in order to get back into the daily pattern of life and work for the development of the social whole. No individual ever aims to be stigmatized as an ill patient in the society. The stigma many a times keep people from seeking help for their illness, thereby making the state of the individual worse than it needs to be. Therefore, whenever an individual falls ill, he/she starts to take up ways by which he can be healthy once again.

**Religion:** The word religion comes from the Latin root word which denotes to tie or hold together, to secure and have a grip over a group of people to create a system of beliefs and attitudes. Religion refers to those practices and institutions that deliver the social world with a comprehensive understanding and which bind individuals with authority into the existing social order. It is one of the most powerful, deep emotions and a highly influential body of belief in the human society. It shapes the relationships of individuals with one another thereby leading the society to have its development in the community level, institutional level, economic level and political level. Human actions are shaped by religious beliefs and values that is prevalent in the society. Religion is one of the prime attributes of the social life and social dimension is a significant part of religion.

**Spirituality:** Spirituality is different from religion. The word spirituality comes from the Hebrew root words which mean winds, breath air and all means which gives life. Spirituality takes in all facets of being a human and it is a way of encountering life. Spirituality is many a time defined as a fundamental dimension of the health and well-being of all individuals. It creates a link among the mind, body and spirit. The **spiritual dimension** is illustrated as a coalescing force within individuals. It is integrating and exceeds all other dimensions. This dimension is

furthermore portrayed as God-awareness, or related to a deity or supreme principles. It is apprehensive with the true meaning of life, individual insights of faith, and an individual's connection to the Ultimate Being.

**Healing:** Healing is a spiritual course of action that attends to the comprehensiveness of an individual. It crops up over time and continues throughout the individual's journey of life. It becomes a way of living that flows from, reflects, and nourishes an individual's spirit (Burkhardt & Nagai-Jacobson, 2002). Spiritual healing leads to the preservation of health, emphasizing meditation, specific movements of the body so that the physical condition of the individual is restored to its normal state. Medicine, in the modern century, can regain the health of the individuals back to its normal state but it does not have the ability to heal a patient. It is therefore religion which provides spiritual healing to its followers and gives the individuals strength to get back on the normal ways of life.

**Types of Healing:** *"Healing is a matter of time, but it is sometimes also a matter of opportunity."* – Hippocrates<sup>1</sup>

An individual can be physically fit by taking the help of biomedicine, but he/she can come back to the normal pattern of the society once he/she is healed from his heart. As Hippocrates noted that though healing is a matter of time, an individual must also possess the opportunity to be healed at the precise moment of his life. Healing through the spiritual line is one such means by which an individual can be healed over time. Healing methods and techniques have also been the matter of discussion in many divine perspectives. It's on the basis of these divine perspectives that different religions have different healing strategies for their followers. Following the chronological order, one can point out the different healing techniques that have been devised over the periods.

**Healing in different time periods:** Healing methods of individuals can be traced back following a sequential pattern across different time periods---

**Healing in the traditional period:** The practice of healing emerged traditionally since time unknown. There are different healing traditions that have emerged since the ancient period. There are varied healing perspectives which are provided by different religions of the world. A few notifiable healing methods in the traditional period are as follows---

- **Magic: Magic** refers to ways that edge with the paranormal and by which people can bring about a desired outcomes. James Frazer believed that magic is a pseudo science which involves direct action. Many other religious professionals, such as healers, use magic in their activities. Traditional magicians used to relate magic with religion and made efforts to heal the people through their magical tricks. James Frazer in his book *The Golden Bough* (1890) pointed out two types of magic—Homeopathic or imitative magic and Contagious magic. In Homeopathic magic, traditional herbal medicine is

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/h/hippocrate133222.html>

supported on the **doctrine of signatures**. Few people believe that God has endowed with these signatures so that people could make certain the use of particular plants in healing. For example, red clover head is used to treat problems of the blood; the fused leaves of the boneset plant are used, as the plant's name suggest, to heal broken bones (Stein, 2005). Contagious magic makes the notion that things which are once in contact are always in connect with each other. For example, people put ashes on their forehead when ill as the ashes are meant to heal the suffering of the individual.

- **Shamanism:** According to an American psychologist Stanley Krippner, shamans are "community-assigned magico-religious professionals who deliberately alter their consciousness in order to obtain information from the 'spirit world.' They use this knowledge and power to help and to heal members of their community, as well as the community as a whole."<sup>2</sup> Krippner depicts shamans as the initial physicians, diagnosticians, psychotherapists, religious functionaries, magicians, performing artists, and teller of tales. Shamans employ their spirit connections to bring about changes in the physical world, for the healing of individuals or the community. The shamans have the ability to modify their states of awareness, to arbitrate between the requirements of the spirit world as well as the physical world; lastly, shamans serve the needs of the community by providing healing to the members of the community.
- **Witchcraft:** Witchcraft was used as one of the ways by which healing was achieved by the men in the ancient period. The people associated with witchcraft arts used to tempt people who were sick towards their magical spells as it was believed by the people that such spells can heal the person of their pathology. For example, people used to go to the healers who used witchcraft as a medium to heal the sick. People were made to chant the following words to bring about healing—

***In the divine name of the Goddess  
Who breathes life into us all  
I consecrate and charge this candle  
As a magical tool for healing.<sup>3</sup>***

- **Folk healers:** Folk healers used to provide folk medicines to the people so that people could get back their health status and heal from the wound they are suffering from. Folk medicine is the combination of traditional healing practices and beliefs that engage herbal medicine, spirituality and manual therapies or exercises so that one can diagnose, treat or avert an ailment or illness from their lives. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that folk healers and use of folk medicines is mostly practiced by native regions and as much as 80% of the population in a few countries within Asia and Africa depend on it for their initial care. The folk healers uses traditional art of healing individuals by using varied herbal remedies. Many folk healers are considered by the people to possess the gift of being healers.

---

<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/explore-healing-practices/shamanism>

<sup>3</sup> Source:-- <http://witchesofthecraft.com/category/book-of-spells/healing-spells/>

## Healing in the medieval period

After the transition of the society towards the medieval period, the healing traditions also started to take a new shape. There were lots of other healing mechanisms which evolved with the rise of the medieval period. Society witnessed the development of different science of healing too (which is thriving even in this modern 21<sup>st</sup> century). A few medieval healing mechanisms which progressed in the society are as follows—

- **Ayurveda:** One of the most recognized scientific culture of healing is known as Ayurveda. Though it one of the oldest healing sciences, its development took place among the people in the medieval period. Ayurveda is the traditional Hindu science of medicine that is carried out in one form or another by 80% of people of the Indian origin. It is regarded as the “Mother of all Healing”.



**Fig: 1 Ayurveda**

- **Yoga:** Yoga is widely accepted as a part of healing, spirituality and meditation. It is a philosophy of the ancient and is regarded as a practice of well being of the individuals. It's through the practice of Yoga that one can have a command over one's mind. The mind is the final source from where concentration springs. Therefore, the ability to focus and discipline the mind is the work of the yoga. There are different forms of yoga and yogic postures which are believed to bring about healing among the individuals.
- **Reiki:** Reiki is a Japanese practice for stress diminution and relaxation that promotes healing. It is also known in the name of "laying on hands". The word "reiki can be intricately divided as "ray-key". Thus, it is an unseen "life force energy" which flows through the human beings which causes them to be alive. Reiki is an uncomplicated, accepted and protected method of spiritual healing as well as self-improvement that can be used by one and all.
- **Meditation:** Meditation promotes the concentration level of the human beings. It leads men to calm their minds and other body parts and have a deep rooted attentiveness towards particular objects. Meditation increases Prana or life energy. Meditation transforms violence and aggression among people to love and compassionate behavior towards each other.

***“In meditation, healing can happen. When the mind is calm, alert and totally contented, then it is like a laser beam – it is very powerful and healing can happen.”***



- **Tai chi:** Tai chi makes the movements of the human body parts as so gentle that the muscle isn't damaged. The human body produces similar chemicals as it does during normal exercise but as there is no damaged muscle that needs extra healing, the healing chemicals of the body can be made use of by the other parts of the body. The human bodies generate all the required medicine that is needed to heal itself. Normal exercise manufactures them and uses them up while it is Tai Chi releases the healing chemicals without using them up. It brings a sense of fulfillment among the individuals and provides him with the energy to work with his/her best efforts.

**Healing in the Modern world:** Modern century witnesses enormous inventions. Though the concept of secularism is thriving among many individuals, one cannot deny the fact that the link between religion and healing has not been denied by majority of individuals. People are still carrying out research activities to show how religion leads a person to be healed during his/her time of distress. Two of the most common healing techniques that are still witnessed in the modern world are as follows—

- **The concept of Spiritualism:** The main focus of spiritualism is to promote an individual's personal experience with God. Spiritualism is a science, philosophy and religion in itself. The concept of spirituality is inclusive and affects everybody. Spiritualism provides mental solace to individuals by which healing energy is propitiated into the human beings. It produces an energy within them which makes them to have the zeal to strive in life.
- **Ritual Healing:** Though ritual healing is a traditional concept but it has flourished in the modern century. It involves a wide range of ceremonies and materials, depending on the culture, and may be used to treat physical, mental, or emotional problems. People use means in order to heal themselves from the suffering they are going through. In this modern era of capitalism, people face deep rooted alienation. They lose their personal life and become involved in the rat race. Therefore, concentration on their health is moving down the ladder. When these individuals fall sick and when the medical science fails to provide them with treatment then its ritual healing that acts as the alternative to the individuals.

**The concept of care giving and care givers:** Care giving is the practice of providing support and care to the near and dear ones. Care giving behaviors aims at lowering the partner's suffering and supporting his or her coping attempts in situations of danger or challenge. Care giving may also include providing emotional support that is emotions of care, warmth, compassion, and support and/or instrumental support such as provision of knowledge, suggestion and so on. It enhances the psychological well being of the people. It is an intended and a well-intentioned support of the individuals to the sufferers. On the other hand, care givers are those institutions in the society that provides healing to the individuals so that they can play their role in the society. Many a times the care givers too need healing. So the process is vice versa in nature. The care receivers are the person who stays in distressed situations and it is

the care givers who open their hands to those people in need of them. In Healing, religion acts as the care giver while the followers become the care receivers. The carer's position of spiritual closeness with a sufferer is mostly one of soothe, but it can bring suffering and many a times burdensome responsibilities.

## **The concept of Mental Health**

### ***Mental health is much more than the absence of mental illness***

--Whiteside (1998)

Mental health is an affirmative concept related to the social and emotional wellbeing of individuals and communities. The term 'social and emotional wellbeing' reflects the view of one's mental health. A mental health problem also interferes with a person's cognitive, emotional or social abilities, but this problem of being mentally ill can be treated holding the path of religion. Healing of an individual leads a man to be mentally fit and stable. It makes his presence felt in the society. Thus, if a person's mental health is not in its proper position then the individual can never function properly in the society. Thus, healing is one of the coping mechanisms by which a person can retain his mental health.

**Spiritual healing as an alternative medicine:** Spiritual healing provides healing to the individuals so that his/her body, mind and spirit can work accordingly. Faith healing provides soothe to the minds of the individuals. Prayer, meditation, yoga, believing in the existence of God is believed to be the ways to recover people from their distressed condition. When bio medicine fails it is the path of spiritualism that provides men with an alternative. It heals the individuals from within, thereby channelizing all the body fluids properly and relieving the person from their grief-stricken condition.

**Difference between health, healing and religion :** The World Health Organization defines health as the complete physical, mental and social well being of an individual and not merely the absence of disease. Health is a way we feel that affects how we relate to each other. It is a factor that holds great import in perceived life satisfaction, notably among older adults (Palmore, 1995), and is defined as "the condition of being sound in body, mind, or spirit" (p. 558, Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary). Healing is a word whose root is "wholeness." It is a response to the challenges of life. "To heal often means to make sense of a patient's life and death" (Kinsley, 1996, p. 195). (Cited, Tirrito, 2003). Religion on the other hand is an organized collection of beliefs, cultural systems and world views of the people. Religion is universal in nature. Different religions have different methods and practices in order to heal a person and make them have their normal health back. Therefore, religion, healing and health are different from each other as each domain deals with different sector.

## References:

Albrecht, Gary. "The Sociology of Health and Illness." *The SAGE Handbook of Sociology*. 2006. SAGE Publications. 19 Mar. 2011.

Burkhardt, M.A., & Nagai-Jacobson, M.G. *Spirituality: Living Our Connectedness*. Albany, NY: Delmar Thomson Learning 2002.

Cockerham, William C, Alfred Rutten, and Thomas Abel. "Conceptualizing Health Lifestyles: Moving Beyond Weber." Paper presented to the American Sociological Association meetings, Washington, DC, August 1995.

Culliford, L., *Healing from Within: Spirituality and Mental Health*, In M McClure (ed), Partners in Care Resource Pack, London, Gaskell 2005.

Frazer G J, *The Golden Bough*, MacMillan Press Edition, UK, 1890.

Kinsley, D. *Health, healing and religion: A cross-cultural perspective*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall 1996.

Palmore, E. Successful aging. In G. Maddox (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of aging* (2nd ed., pp. 914–915). New York: Springer Publishing 1995.

Stein P., & Stein, R, *The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft*, Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2005.

Tirrito, T., Cascio, C. *Religious Organizations in Community Services: A Social Work Perspective*, Springer Publishing Company, 2003.

Turner, B., "The Sociology of Religion." *The SAGE Handbook of Sociology*. SAGE Publications 2006.

Webster's Ninth New collegiate dictionary (9th ed.). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster 1987.

Whiteside, P. *The Little Book of Happiness*. London: Rider Books, 1998.