

# SOUL (WHOLE) HEALTH: How Spirit Inspires Our Overall Well-Being

Spirituality has long been linked with healing from physical health problems. In fact, ancient cultures didn't separate spirituality from health at all in the way we do today. At the earliest points in history, healers were priests and ministers before they ever became physicians and most "treatments" were spiritually-based in their delivery, not primarily physically-based as they are currently. Unfortunately, most of our modern medical treatment couldn't be further from a spiritual experience.

There are numerous studies in medical research that illustrate the importance of spiritual and religious beliefs in healing from various health problems. But little is written concerning how our spirit—or soul—interacts with our health to create overall wholeness.

In working with hundreds of clients over the last 22 years, I have come to believe that there is a complex interplay between our overall health and our soul. This interplay represents the interaction between our human condition (the everyday struggles we encounter and our emotional and physical reactions to them) and our soul (our deepest and wisest core). Illness—or our lack of health—can be seen as a clear indication that something is wrong or unbalanced in the core of our overall well-being. In other words, often our health problems can be considered as a message from our soul that we are not tending to our most inner needs. Thus, our bodies become the barometer for our soul's health, not vice versa.

This complex relationship is described in what I call the Soul Health Model. The soul is depicted as an ever-evolving tree. Much like the growth of a tree, the soul's evolution depends on the health of the 'elements' available to it and only occurs when the humanly elements of our existence are balanced and fulfilled. Therefore, in order for an individual to reach unimpeded growth, they must con-

sciously maintain a healthy balance of these humanly elements. This is not an easy feat given that our human condition so easily gets in the way. As the human condition overwhelms us, it is less and less likely that the message of our souls can be interpreted through our needs within the key areas of life. However, through physical, emotional, and other forms of "illness" or "dis-ease" (a lack of contentedness), our souls attempt to get our attention in order to bring us back into balance to restore a sense of overall wholeness.

As depicted in the Soul Health Model (see illustration) the branches of the tree represent 10 primary areas of the human condition that must be in balance both for the soul to grow and evolve—and for us to feel like we are

flourishing in our everyday human lives. Each branch is only one key to our overall sense of wholeness or "Soul Health". These include Physical, Psychological, Interpersonal/Communication, Financial, Intellectual/Occupational, Environmental, Sexual, Fun & Leisure, Social, and Spiritual.

Each branch is but one bridge between the human condition and the soul. The entirety of the tree represents the interplay between these two aspects of our existence and illustrates the impact on the rest of our human condition when one or more branches are not healthy. The model emphasizes that when one branch is 'broken' it is impossible for the rest of the tree to remain unaffected. Even one unhealthy branch can have a traumatic impact on the soul's overall health.

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**Figure 1. The Soul Health Model illustrates the complex interplay between the Human Condition and our Soul. Similar to a tree, our soul "reaches" toward its optimal growth and is dependent on key available elements. The "elements" of the Human Condition provide for the soul's growth. When just one branch is broken, the rest of the tree suffers, and in this case, the soul's growth is impeded.**

In an injured or "sick" tree, the tree inherently knows what it needs in order to either "heal" the broken section of the tree or send enough energy to the rest of the tree to maintain the best overall integrity possible given the injury. This is an automatic process—one that is programmed within the DNA or "life" of the tree so that it will survive and even thrive beyond

the impact of the injury. Unfortunately, humans often don't respond in this way. In essence, we are less conscious of what we need than the tree is. Because our lives are so much more complex than that of a tree, we often miss the cues for when one or more of our "branches" is being threatened. So, our overall health can suffer if we remain unaware of the entirety of our needs as well as the complexity between the key aspects of our lives that impact our wholeness.

### The 10 Branches of Health

As noted, each "branch" of health represents one of the key aspects of the human condition that impacts health. Following are brief descriptions of each branch:

**Physical:** Lack of disease and/or ill health. This includes nutrition, sleep, physical fitness, mobility, energy and overall physical health.

**Psychological:** Lack of "dis-ease" or lack of discontent. Overall sense of well-being, emotional health, self-esteem, lack of depression, anxiety or other psychological disturbance.

**Social:** Represents the "warm bodies" in our lives. This includes family, friends, pets, neighbors, co-workers, clergy, and any other form of contact with others.

**Interpersonal:** Includes the types of interactions we have with these warm bodies. This includes healthy boundaries, good communication, differentiation from others (autonomy), a healthy "inter-dependence" (balanced give and take relationships). Just because we have others to interact with in life, it doesn't mean our interactions are healthy.

**Financial:** Ample financial resources to meet our basic needs. This includes spending within our limits, lack of major debt, healthy ideas about the use of money.

**Intellectual/Occupational:** Mental stimulation regardless of gainful employment. Basically this means that you are not intellectually bored. This may include mental challenge in daily tasks, curiosity about life, knowledge acquisition, etc.

**Environmental:** Clean, safe, and healthy surroundings. This includes climate, air quality, sound control, clutter and any external factors which impact health. This also includes the "emotional environment" surrounding a person (corporate stress, family tension, etc.).

**Spiritual:** Sense of inner peace and/or belief in higher power. Having a health spiritual branch doesn't necessarily include the practice of religion. However, it does include regular participation in "centering" techniques such as prayer, meditation, ritual, as well as an unconditional and nonjudgmental mindset toward the world and others.

**Sexual:** Appropriate participation in sexual activity. No unresolved sexual trauma. This includes healthy sexual boundaries and understanding of appropriate sexual activity. This also involves an ability to see sexual activity as an intimate act, not an action just to fill basic needs.

**Fun/Leisure:** Ongoing activities which aid in relaxation and decompression from stress. This includes activities that invoke appropriate laughter and lightheartedness, as well as both physical and emotional release from everyday stresses.

The branches of the tree are so interconnected, that if one branch is damaged or imbalanced, the rest of the branches are

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directly affected—there is no escaping it. For instance, in our current economy, the financial stress of someone who has been laid off from their job will eventually impact all of the branches of the tree. The individual will immediately experience stress (psychological), which in turn can create health problems (physical), cause them to isolate from friendly activities (social) to conserve money (financial), cause fights between them and their spouse (interpersonal), cause lowered libido (sexual), affect the person's faith or belief system about life events (spiritual), and so on. It is impossible for the entirety of the tree to be unaffected when even one branch is damaged.

### Our Soul's Health and Evolution

In the illustration of the Soul Health Model, the trunk of the tree houses the soul and is depicted by hands reaching upward toward our most natural state—our soul's expansive evolution. Only when the tree is in full balance can the soul truly blossom. So, when we experience frustration or discomfort about our life events, it is our soul's way of getting our attention to inform us that something

is amiss—something is darkening our view and keeping us from fully blooming. It is when our soul's growth is impeded that we feel emotional or physical discomfort and leave us feeling far away from a sense of thriving.

Our soul is much like the "life" of the tree. It inherently knows what we need in order to thrive, but as humans we get mired in our everyday life—our human condition—to the point that we often ignore these vital cues. As humans, we have been conditioned to think and feel a certain way, often much to the detriment of our wholeness, which is a direct insult to the necessities for our soul. It is through understanding the complex interplay between our overall health or "wholeness" and the inner voice of our soul that can bring the fullest and richest experience as humans. If we are meant to evolve, we must balance the 10 key aspects of our human condition with the inner voice of our soul to find complete health.

No one can deny that there have been times when we feel as if something is missing or just not quite right in our lives. Once again, this is our soul's way of telling us to take some time to reflect

and evaluate if our lives are really going in the direction that they are supposed to. Whether it is that a relationship doesn't feel quite right, something is missing in our work life, our health is "off" a bit, or other cues, these are all our soul's way of telling us to get the elements of our life either "cleaned out" or "filled up" depending on the need.

If you do a full assessment of each branch of the tree, it is likely that there are sections that need some "pruning", while others need to be fortified for more growth and "fullness" of the tree. Also, if your tree doesn't feel firmly rooted, it might be that some foundational work needs to be done to create a better sense of knowing yourself and your values better or perhaps you are lacking a feeling of being "grounded" or balanced in your life overall. This usually means that either your sense of self—who you are and what your values are—needs work or that you have too much going on in life and aren't fully anchored to your own priorities. Deep down, we generally know that something is amiss, we just don't know how to access whatever it is to "fix" our own personal tree of life.

The challenge with modern medicine is that when we seek medical care, the practitioner generally only has time to screen for one or two aspects of the human condition--- if we are lucky. If medical providers don't assess all branches of health, they miss critical information about a "whole person" approach. They can easily overlook key information about true healing and typically aren't even aware of the impact on our overall soul's evolution. Therefore, it is important for us to take charge of our own health and understand the complete interplay between the 10 key aspects of our human health and the deep inner knowing we each have. Only then will we reach our optimal health.

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