

MENTAL WELLNESS

A Spiritual Journey

Finding Your Own Way to Healing
From Depression, Anxiety,
and Addictions

Hamdy El-Rayes, MBA, Ph.D.
Founder of H.R. Mental Wellness Centre

Praise for Mental Wellness: A Spiritual Journey

This book prescribes an important link that complements the process of healing from depression, anxiety, and addictions. Dr. El-Rayes offers a practical, comprehensive program that melds medical sciences, spirituality, and personal experience. I highly recommend this book for everyone seeking life purpose, meaning, and self-transcendence.

Samir Abdel-Barr, MD, DPM, MRCP(UK), FRCPC

I enjoyed this book and loved Dr. El-Rayes' definition of Mental Wellness: how it goes beyond mental health to shift the focus from illness to a holistic approach... an active life-long process of making choices that will guide you to reach your potential and live life to its fullest. Through following the guidelines herein, investing time in the exercises and excellent questions, as well as trusting your intuition and inner guidance, you will step onto a path of mental wellness, experience greater strength, fuller belief in yourself—and live a healthier, more empowered life. As the author stresses, “when you practice spirituality, life ceases to be a struggle; you seek to live a meaningful life and follow your heart.”

Melba Burns, Ph.D., author of *Romance Your Writer Within and Reawaken Your Passion to Write*. www.melbaburns.com

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Warning: Depression is dangerous and can be life threatening. Anyone who experiences depression needs to be under the care of a health care professional. The program described in this book do not replace ongoing treatment. To make any changes in your treatment, consult with you healthcare professional and have appropriate monitoring system in place.

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The names, characters, and details of individuals described and quoted in this book have been changed to protect their privacy.

Mental Wellness: A Spiritual Journey

Finding your own way to healing from depression, anxiety, and addictions

By Hamdy El-Rayes, MBA, Ph.D.

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They have unknowingly contributed to my personal and spiritual growth. They helped me to be more resilient and better at handling the difficult situations I encountered along my path. They also gave me the chance to practice my spiritual skills of forgiveness, acceptance, love, and surrender.

Hamdy El-Rayes
Vancouver, B.C.
February 2011

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Foreword

When I was asked by Dr. Hamdy El-Rayes to write a foreword for his book, “Mental Wellness: A Spiritual Journey,” I thought it was simply another publication meant to convince clinicians of the importance of incorporating spiritual practices and beliefs into clinical practice. I was pleasantly surprised that the focus of the entire book was integrating mental health and mental wellness in relation to spirituality.

The book has ample sections on self-disclosure and self-help; advice on how to discover self; understanding the difference between spirituality and religion; and how individual perceptions can become one’s own enemy.

The author shares his own personal experience with depression and his search for healing, and the connection between the two. He also offers practical solutions to foster the connection between mind, body, and spirit.

This book offers useful knowledge about integrating spirituality into the daily practice and knowledge base of health-care practitioners, as well as how to educate the general reader of the importance of this facet of human life.

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Introduction

Yes! You can heal from depression, anxiety, and addictions. You can free yourself from phobias and panic attacks, overcome self-defeating attitudes, put an end to personal conflicts, conquer procrastination, and unleash your potential for success. Those tasks are the impetus for writing this book, which will facilitate your self-transformation. You will discover the wonderful person you are, learn how to manage stress and turn your childhood issues from being obstacles into opportunities for growth, find your own way to spiritual growth, identify your life purpose, enjoy a meaningful and fulfilling life, and make a difference in the world.

Supported by scientific evidence and personal experience, this book provides an effective, systematic approach to healing. Everyone, including yourself, can use this book as a guide to exploring spirituality (which may be practiced by all humans, not just those who consider themselves religious), and as a tool to make our lives happier and more satisfying.

This book also offers psychiatrists, psychologists, and other health care professionals a guide to facilitate patients' healing.

Severe depression is 10 times more prevalent today than it was 50 years ago. It assaults women twice as often as men, and now it strikes a full decade earlier in life on average than it did a generation ago¹. Consequently, the economic cost of mental illness has been escalating. In Canada and the USA, the annual economic cost of mental illness is estimated to be more than \$33 billion and \$318 billion, respectively, with the single biggest factor being depression^{2, 2a}.

The program offered in this book can save the economy millions of dollars and rid patients of unnecessary pain and

suffering caused by lengthy episodes of depression and frequent relapses.

I hope that you find the material in this book rewarding, not only for yourself, but also for those with whom you interact.

Spirituality plays an important role in human experience, contributes to our view of the world, and influences our ability to heal from illness, both physical and mental. Being spiritual does not mean having to adhere to a particular set of religious beliefs. However, it does require the development and practice of some skills (see Chapters 2 and 6 for more details).

Several years ago, I used this program to help myself heal from anxiety and depression. Because of its success, I felt it was my calling to dedicate my life to helping others. I established and funded my charitable organization, the El-Rayes Foundation, to help those who suffer from these illnesses. For five years now, this program has successfully helped thousands of people, both in self-help support groups and one-on-one coaching. The program, which complements medical services, is designed to integrate body, mind, and spirit.

Although it plays a very important role in healing from depression and anxiety, mainstream psychotherapy has ignored spirituality for more than three centuries because of a deliberate disconnection between spirituality and medicine. During the past 350 years, the medical field's perception of spirituality has gone through four stages.

Stage I – Dualism – Separation of the body and mind

In the 17th century, the French philosopher René Descartes developed a research technique that is now known as “the scientific method.” Based on this, he theorized that the body and mind are two separate entities. The material body would follow the laws of physics and its physical properties could be measured (temperature, blood pressure, etc). Consequently, the body could be subjected to scientific research. On the other

hand, Descartes believed that the mind, as a non-material entity, would not follow the laws of physics.

In the years after Descartes formulated this concept, known as “dualism,” medical researchers studied and developed treatments for illnesses that inflict the physical body. However, spirituality was dismissed as unscientific, and therefore unworthy of serious consideration. Consequently, the interaction between the body and mind, and the mind’s effect on human health and well-being, were not investigated.

Stage II – Religion as a symptom of mental illness

During the 20th century, Sigmund Freud was very influential in distancing mental-health professionals from incorporating spirituality into their treatment of mental illness, and he influenced an entire generation of intellectuals in North America.

Although of Jewish descent, Freud was an atheist. Religion, he believed, was an expression of underlying psychological neuroses and distress. In a letter to Carl Jung³, he wrote: “... the ultimate basis of man’s need for religion is infantile helplessness ... After infancy, he [man] cannot conceive of a world without parents and makes for himself a just God and a kindly nature, the two worst anthropomorphic [human-like] falsifications he could have imagined.”

In another instance, he reduced religion to a psychic phenomenon comparable to the delusional obsessions of neurotics⁴.

For many years, Freudian theory and practice dominated not only psychotherapy, but also education, child rearing, literature, and social philosophy. Freudian ideas became those most commonly advocated by the intellectual leaders of the United States⁴.

Freud’s influence on psychiatrists was enormous. In the mid-1970s, the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry (GAP), an

organization of nationally respected U.S. psychiatrists, described religion as a “borderline psychosis” (see p. 64). At the same time, some social scientists considered conservative religious/spiritual beliefs to be abnormal and rejected the truth of such beliefs⁶.

Further, recent research to evaluate the impact of psychotherapists’ training on their spiritual/religious beliefs has found that as many as 40 percent of psychoanalysts and 26 percent of non-psychoanalyst psychiatrists became atheists or agnostics during their studies, although they had been raised with religious beliefs. Researchers attributed the difference in the two specialties to the influence of their psychiatric training. Only psychoanalysts were taught Freud’s theories, which assert that the pursuit of a spiritual dimension in life is inherently pathological.

Freud’s theories caused a huge rift between the worldview of psychiatrists and psychoanalysts and that of the public. Gallup surveys of the U.S. population since the middle of the 20th century consistently indicate that some 95 percent of Americans believe in God or a Higher Power. However, surveys of psychiatrists and psychoanalysts show that many of them hold personal views that are notably less spiritual than those of the general population. These surveys have found that about five percent of Americans are atheistic or agnostic. In contrast, surveys from 1990 have found that 21 percent of psychiatrists and 28 percent of clinical psychologists were atheists or agnostics.

Moreover, Gallup polls indicate that 72 percent of the U.S. population say that their religious faith is the most important influence in their lives. Nevertheless, surveys of mental-health professionals found only 39 percent of psychiatrists and 33 percent of clinical psychologists agreed with this⁶.

In addition, a survey of American Psychiatric Association members, published in 2000, found that 42 percent of psychiatrists indicated that spirituality was not very important in

their lives. Compare this to the tiny percentage (12 percent) of the U.S. population who say spirituality is not very important to them. This suggests a continuing, and serious, difference between mental-health professionals and ordinary Americans regarding the role spirituality might play in daily life. Consequently, many mental-health professionals are dealing with patients whose spiritual views differ widely from their own.

Stage III – Evidence against Descartes’ dual model in medicine

Over the past 25 years, medical research has recognized that Descartes’ dual model, which was formulated in the 17th century, was faulty. Recent research indicates that spirituality has a significant impact on patients’ mental and physical health. Spirituality is linked to lower rates of depression, and has been shown to be a source of strength in coping with the stress of mental and serious physical illnesses, in preventing and recovering from addictions and depression, and in reducing the risk of suicide, as well as potentially increasing longevity^{7,8}.

The demonstrated link between spirituality and better medical outcomes led to the formation of the Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group at the U.K.’s Royal College of Psychiatrists. This group promotes knowledge of current research linking spirituality with improved physical and mental health.

Stage IV – Psychiatry and patients’ spiritual beliefs in the 21st century

Until the end of the 20th century, official psychiatry largely ignored the relevance of spirituality in patients’ lives⁶. However, this climate has been changing. Many mental-health professionals now realize how important it is that they understand religious diversity and spirituality. Some of them already incorporate it into their practice.

In 1992, only three medical schools offered courses on religion/spirituality and medicine. By 2006, more than 141 medical schools in the U.S. and Canada offered some variation of spirituality-in-medicine course work⁷.

In addition, in 1995, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) revised its Practice Guidelines for the Psychiatric Evaluation of Adults to include information to aid clinicians in developing sensitivity to their patients' spiritual and religious beliefs. Clinicians are now urged to assess patients' spiritual beliefs and practices with the same care that they use to assess their strengths and limitations⁶. However, spirituality still remains a peripheral issue for many mental-health professionals, although it has proved of central importance in healing people who are struggling with the pain and confusion of depression, anxiety and other mental- health issues.

Many mental-health professionals steer away from spirituality in therapy because they do not appreciate the benefits of spirituality and its effect on their patients' world-view. You cannot deeply appreciate spirituality and its influence on healing and personal growth unless you have practiced it yourself.

Lack of spirituality in a psychiatrist or therapist may stand in the way of helping his/her patients heal, because these practitioners, directly or indirectly, affect their patients' views of the world. Patients are helped when they see their therapist as a model to follow.

Mental health and healing

This book addresses the process of healing from depression and anxiety. Mental health focuses on pathology and ridding the patient of symptoms. If you do not have symptoms of a mental illness, you are assumed mentally healthy. If you have symptoms of depression/anxiety, medication may help you eradicate the symptoms.

However, a person does not become truly well merely by being symptom-free. Medication neither resolves the underlying issues that triggered the depression, nor helps the individual develop skills to prevent relapse. For this reason, more than 50 percent of those who have suffered a major depressive episode eventually develop another.

True healing concerns the integration of spiritual skills in a person's life and extends beyond the absence of disease, elevating the patient to *mental wellness*, a much higher level of mental health. Healing incorporates practices that lead to personal growth and a degree of contentment, joy, inner peace, maturity, and social functioning, as well as a sense of purpose and meaning.

Chapter 1

Mental wellness and how to achieve it

This book focuses on how to achieve optimal mental wellness—to heal from any mood disorder such as depression or anxiety; to discover your talents and gifts and use them effectively to make a difference in the world; to find your life purpose; and to put yourself on the path to self-actualization to become the very best you.

The difference between mental wellness and mental health

To begin this interesting journey, we need to distinguish between mental health and mental wellness. Mental health is conventionally defined as the absence of a major mental-health condition, as described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders¹.

According to this definition, individuals are deemed mentally healthy if they are not suffering from psychological dysfunction or impairment, such as anxiety or depression. Such a definition is very limited, as it only addresses the physical malfunction of

¹ Known as the DSM, published by the American Psychiatric Association, this manual provides a common language and standard criteria for the classification of mental disorders.

the brain and ignores the important mutual interaction of the body and the mind.

Mental wellness, on the other hand, goes beyond the concept of mental health. It presents a shift in focus away from illness to a holistic approach that emphasizes a view of the entire being and the ability to reach the pinnacle of psychological health—self-actualization.

Mental health is a static state of being—you are either mentally healthy or mentally ill. Mental wellness, on the other hand, is an active life-long process of making choices in order to reach your potential and live your life to its fullest. It is a conscious pursuit of spiritual growth, life purpose, and self-actualization.

Mental wellness: Healing from and preventing illnesses

The proactive pursuit of mental wellness leads to healing from depression and anxiety and contributes to improving your physical health and well-being. It also enhances your self-worth, self-acceptance, the quality of your ties to others, and your spiritual growth. In pursuing mental wellness, you choose to undertake projects that give value to your personal life and significantly contribute to your mental health and well-being.

A deeply felt life purpose and a keen desire for spiritual growth, along with other aspects of well-being, can prevent relapses of depression by enabling your body to remain stable in response to stressors. Living meaningfully enables your body and mind to work together to enjoy health and wellness. A life purpose enhances your physical health and your body's function, as well as its physical fitness. This contributes to a stronger immune system, which in turn helps your body to cope with stressors and improve your brain function.

Following the program described in this book will enable you to become an independent thinker, adept at managing your life. You will be better able to share, give of your time generously,

accept yourself and others, find your own life purpose, grow spiritually, and make your life a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth. You will also begin to engage in causes that extend beyond your self-interest and support the growth and development of others, as well as improving your environment. You will learn to make a unique contribution to society, pass your skills and gifts to others, and have a positive influence on the lives of many people.

An overview of the process to achieve mental wellness

Human beings have evolved intellectually. Unfortunately, this has come at the expense of our instincts and our ability to connect with our authentic selves. We need to recover and use intuition as our rudder to make better choices and pursue a more satisfying life.

We have been led to believe that success and happiness are measured by the material wealth we accumulate and the power we attain. By buying into this idea, we lose our *self* in the process. In order to succeed, some people compromise their values, and it may take them a lifetime to discover that they were barking up the wrong tree. Others may seek distractions and busy-ness, or numb their feelings by drinking, using illicit drugs, over-eating, or other addictive behaviors.

Several recent studies have shown that when accumulating material wealth or power is our primary focus, this can lead to depression, anxiety, addictions, and an unsatisfying life. Material wealth and power should not be goals—they should be the outcome of pursuing a meaningful life. Pursuing a cause that is bigger than yourself, your career, and your ambitions can significantly contribute to your happiness and life satisfaction.

Nothing is more affirming than learning from someone who has already walked the path ahead and reaped the rewards that come with it. This book is designed to be such a guide. It offers a systematic approach to healing from depression and anxiety

based on my personal experience, supported by evidence-based practices and a review of six decades of medical scientific research, as well as traditional practices of Eastern spirituality and ancient philosophy that have enriched the human race over thousands of years. Support for this approach can be observed in the work of many researchers, including Abraham Maslow (the father of humanistic psychology), Victor Frankl (the developer of Logotherapy), and Aaron Beck (the father of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy), as well as spiritual leaders such as Rumi, the Muslim Sufi, and others.

This book was written to meet your needs at various stages of your life. Regardless of your age and the state you are in at this moment, you can adopt a new life-style that heals you from depression and anxiety. Despite your unique personal life experiences, you will relate to some of the situations my clients and I have experienced, and the path described here will empower and guide you to a rich and enjoyable life journey. This path will help you connect with your life force, reach the heights of your wisdom, enjoy life as it was meant to be, and attain lasting happiness, abundance, and a meaningful, fulfilling life.

To heal yourself, you must get rid of habits that hinder your progress, and develop skills that help you move forward in your life. You may already know most of what you need to do to move forward. However, for various reasons, you have not been able to put your knowledge into practice. You may have read many self-help books and attended seminars and workshops. You may have found them interesting, since each had something to offer, but later realized they were of little help in bringing about the desired outcome. You were excited about what you learned, but shortly thereafter were distracted by urgent tasks and went back to your old ways. On the other hand, you may have lacked some knowledge to reach your desired outcomes, or not have been ready to take action.

Some old habits may stand in your way to healing and it can be a daunting task to unlearn them. However, this book will help you put what you have learned into practice and show you a path that will make your life meaningful, rewarding, and satisfying. Change is difficult, but you will find the process much easier to follow as you proceed. Nevertheless, as in every transition in life, you will walk through uncharted territories. Sometimes you may feel you are alone, and feel anxious, even fearful, but stay the course and you will find your rewards.

Following this program will also help you to: manage stress, learn more about yourself, and discover the wonderful person you are; discover your authentic self; find your own way to lasting happiness, a fulfilling life, and financial abundance; find meaning and purpose for your life; and make a difference in the world.

Highlights of the following chapters

This section highlights what the following chapters discuss. Chapter 2 prepares you for your spiritual journey. You will learn about stress, its effects on your well-being, and effective stress-management techniques. This chapter describes kinds of stresses and their physical and psychological impacts, as well as various relaxation techniques that play a strong role in healing. These techniques include deep breathing, meditation, and mindful-living. However, other activities to release stress, such as exercise, listening to, or playing music, and proper diet are also important and need to be an integral part of your life.

Chapter 3 introduces spirituality for the religious, the non-religious, and the atheist in a clear, meaningful way that will help you reach your human potential and become the best and happiest you. In this chapter, I emphasize the elements of spirituality that helped me heal from depression and anxiety, as well as the importance of spirituality as an integral part of our being, and of its role in healing our souls. This chapter also discusses the difference between religion and spirituality, and

offers a definition of spirituality that is a common denominator amongst all human beings, regardless of their beliefs.

In addition, Chapter 3 looks at the scientific evidence showing how spirituality affects our physical and mental health, and the way it contributes to our happiness and life satisfaction. As your consciousness of spirituality grows, you will realize that happiness is derived from within, by feeling good about who you are at a core level, and by sharing your authentic self with the world.

Chapter 4 will guide you to discover the wonderful person you are. Your personal growth begins with a deepened awareness of your true identity and a desire to return to your authentic self. You will learn to identify and honor your values in your thoughts, words, and actions, forming a solid foundation that will direct you to lasting happiness and a fulfilling life. You will also identify your unique personal talents, gifts, and experience, which will guide you on your own path. This individual path will enable you to tap into your intuitive wisdom, which will guide you to a better understanding of the value of attending to your spirituality. You will discover that creating positive change is empowering, and by sharing your authentic self with others, you grow and prosper.

Identifying and honoring your uniqueness enables you to accept yourself and respect the uniqueness of others; gives you peace of mind; and improves your physical and mental health, self-esteem, and self-worth. It also enables you to get rid of qualities that hinder your growth, such as envy and jealousy. You will learn to collaborate and seek win-win solutions, rather than compete for a win-lose outcome, and you will consequently realize that there is more to you than you thought.

In Chapter 5, I give an account of my spiritual journey, showing you how it refined my character and prepared me to lead a more purposeful life. My example will help you to recover your authentic self. Because transition from one state to another is sometimes extremely difficult, a coach who has been on the

path can help you identify your blind spots, hold you accountable to your identified goals, and make your journey more enjoyable and your goals easier and faster to achieve.

Pursuing your spiritual path will inspire you to build a better life for yourself and for those around you. Your success will come more easily because you are using your strength to do what you love. You will be able to use your gifts and talents to serve others and to make a difference in the world.

Chapter 6 emphasizes the importance of developing your spiritual skills, such as acceptance, surrender, kindness, love, service, gratitude, forgiveness, and humility. The practice of these skills is critical in ridding yourself of anxiety and depression, bringing peace and harmony into your life, enhancing your ability to cope with life's difficulties, and helping you to reach your fullest potential. In addition, this chapter reviews scientific studies that support these concepts.

As you journey, your perception of the world will change. You will find joy in living simply, as well as in giving your time and money to charitable causes. You will become more altruistic, and more secure and at peace with yourself and the world, despite any difficulties you may face.

In Chapter 7, you will learn to discover your life purpose. Living your life purpose means that you will live authentically at all times and share who you are and what you have. You will learn to define your life purpose and its link to your spiritual growth. You will come to understand the effect of our collective beliefs on the health of society, as well as the relationship between consumerism and mental illness. When you recover your authentic self and continue to enhance your spiritual skills, life directs you to what you are meant to do.

At the end of Chapter 7, I provide an account of how I progressed on my own path to achieve my life purpose, and the happiness this has brought me.

Chapter 8 looks at some ways to apply your newly discovered spiritual skills in daily life, outlining a systematic method by which you can manage your issues and address life's difficulties, identifying what you can change and what you have to accept. This chapter gives you the opportunity to examine life events that have been causing you pain since childhood and turn them into opportunities. This chapter also teaches you to live in the present and avoid worrying about the future or ruminating about the past, as well as how to develop a sense of financial security and seek work that uses your talents and gifts.

In Chapter 9, Abraham Maslow's theory of human motivation is reviewed and used to illustrate the effectiveness of my coaching program in helping individuals reach their potential. At the top of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs is self-actualization, which he considered the pinnacle of psychological health—reaching your potential. This state can only be attained by those who are motivated by growth and meaning, rather than by insecurities and the attempt to conform to what other people expect. Maslow believed that only two percent of the population could be self-actualizing. Nevertheless, by following the program introduced in this book, I believe that the opportunity is available for all of us to achieve this goal.

For best results, I suggest that, after reading each chapter, you take some time to examine how to apply the information to make your own life as wonderful as it could be.

Hope you enjoyed reading so far. Please order the book from [Amazon in your country](#). You can get a copy signed by the author by contacting H.R. Mental Wellness Centre at:

604-630-6865 (Price: \$22.33 + taxes + handling and shipping costs).

How to contact the author

Readers of this book are encouraged to contact the author with questions, comments, or ideas for future editions.

To get in touch with Dr. El-Rayes about his availability for speeches, seminars, individual or group coaching (in person or by phone), or facilitating groups, contact him by email at: Drrayes@mentalwellnessbc.ca

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